

Generative Interviews

Learning by being curious



In a generative interview, you'll interview people with the purpose of uncovering opportunities for innovation and for illuminating solutions to problems. Generative interviews are all about the discovery phase, when you still don't really know what problem you're trying to solve. You might have a general idea about what a problem is, in which case generative interviews can help you refine your understanding. Or, you may simply want to develop a product in a given space, and you need to generate ideas about what problems exist before you can imagine their solutions.



Target/Purpose

Target: Co-designing a community, space, event or organisation

Purpose: to learn from stakeholders and get new input & insights



Requirements

Questions and/or map of topics to cover



Output

Idea generation



Time

20-60 minutes

Step 1

Prepare: Define/revise questions and/or more general topic areas.
 Schedule interviews: If the interview will be conducted face-to-face, find a quiet space.
 Get information about the interviewee and her or his context.
 Prepare how you will capture the interview (notes, audio/video recording)

Step 2

Just before the interview, leave some time for you to ground yourself so you enter with a genuinely open mind and heart rather than pre-assumptions.

Step 3

Begin the interview. Use your interview questions/topic map as a guide, but allow yourself to depart from it to allow the conversation to develop its own direction. Be present to what is emerging.

Step 4

Take some time immediately after the interview to review: Reflect on your conversation and listen to yourself: what important questions come up for you now that you take out of this conversation and into your forward journey?

Step 5

Review all the information and data gathered during the interviews

Summarize results and ensure you capture all relevant insights.

Step 6

Make sure you send a note to thank all your interviewees, ideally by the following morning.

Resources:

- Dialogue interview tool, from Theory U applied: https://www.presencing.org/files/tools/PI_Tool_DialogueInterviews.pdf and outline of approach: <https://www.presencing.org/resource/tools/dialogue-interview-start>
- More on generative interviews and using topic maps: <https://builttoadapt.io/how-to-use-topic-maps-to-run-generative-user-interviews-fbbd9b74b554>

Successful cases:

- Example of generative and dialogue interview as part of a larger scale systems change project: <http://reospartners.com/wp-content/uploads/old/SustainableFoodLabCaseStudyv6.pdf>
- Interviews as part of the process building a community for social change: <https://medium.com/presencing-institute-blog/puzzle-project-acting-from-an-emerging-future-47ee2115d0ee>