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User-centred research

User-centered research helps you gain empathy for the people you are designing for. In the circular economy, you are not only designing for a customer or user, but also for a range of people who may sit within your extended value chain. It will help gain a better understanding of what's important to people each step of the way for the product or service you are creating.

STEPS

- 1** Start by defining all of the individuals that sit within your value chain. This should include your potential users. Who are the people you envision benefitting the most from this product?
- 2** Next, create a set of questions of what you'd like to learn. Most importantly, see if you can come up with questions that look to understand their needs. What do they experience? What could make their lives easier? etc. For tips, head to the Interview Best Practices guide and prepare for your conversations.
- 3** Set up a time to speak with these individuals. It's best if you can meet them in their environment to gain a better understanding of their world. (If you are meeting a user, can you meet them in their home or workspace? If you are talking with a manufacturer, can you meet at the factory? Or if you are meeting with
- someone who might reuse your material, can you meet them in their workspace, or a recycler in their plant?)
- 4** When you speak with these individuals, capture what they say so you can remember them to discuss with your team. Take photos too of things you find interesting or inspiring.
- 5** Once you've done all of your interviews, spend some time with your team capturing your learnings and insights. Take turns telling the stories of what you've heard. (Ask yourselves—what surprised you? How might what you learned affect what you design? What ideas might these learnings inspire?)
- 6** Finally, now you have your main user needs, also think about what circularity could offer around this product or service, and pair them to user needs before heading into brainstorming.



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Key principles of user-centred research

Empathy

Empathy lies at the heart of human centred design. It's an effort to understand people, their needs, why they do things a certain way and what is meaningful to them – within the context of your design challenge.

Observation

Observing what people do and how they interact with their environment gives you clues about what they think and feel. It also helps you learn about what they need. By watching people, you can capture physical manifestations of their experiences – what they do and say. Because sometimes the two are different. In fact, some of the most powerful insights can come from noticing a conflict between what someone says and what they actually do.

In-depth conversation

Thoughts and values govern our lives but they aren't always obvious to those who hold them. A good conversation is key and when you're interviewing someone, see if you can get them to reflect on why they feel and act a certain way. Even if you can only engage with a few people for a few hours it can teach you many actionable insights.

Prompts and 'sacrificial' concepts

Sometimes it helps to sketch up a few wild ideas to show to people, even if they're not fully formed. They can help open up conversations by giving people something to react to – whether it be uncovering concerns such as privacy, inconvenience or price - and are good learnings to get early on. If you're able to have a conversation in someone's home or workplace try to use objects and artifacts to prompt deeper questions.

Learning from extremes

When you're looking for people to interview, think about who might be the outliers of your target group - those with extreme behaviours at either end of the spectrum can sometimes give you an indication of some of the more broader behaviours that'll be present in the future.

Synthesis

To move from empathy, observation through to insights and opportunities you'll need to process and unpack the things you hear and see. Get together with your team, share stories from the field and observations, visualise what you can, on post its, maps, through pictures etc. Bucket the information that seems related or similar to start spotting common themes across what you've heard from different people. These insights will help you form a solid base for creating innovative solutions that are rooted in human needs and behaviours. See if you can translate all these insights into some clear, compelling design challenges that your team can work from.



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Interview Guide

Having good conversations is key to understanding your current or potential users – here's a simple guide to get you started.

① **LET THE CONVERSATION FLOW**
Let the person you're speaking to lead you to what's important to them. Use your pre-determined questions as a topic checklist to ensure you have covered everything.

② **MEET THE PERSON IN THEIR CONTEXT**
Whenever possible, meet with your users in their context. For example, you should meet your customers in their homes or environment where they would use your product or service and meet suppliers and potential future users of materials in their business setting.

③ **RESEARCH IS DONE BEST IN A TEAM**
Ideally two to three people will attend each observation. It's difficult to take notes, snap great photos, and maintain a good level of conversation at the same time. Before heading out, decide which role each person will play.

LEAD
To help the observation feel like a conversation, designate one person to lead. The lead will be the primary speaker and guide the conversation.

PHOTOGRAPHER
Remember to ask permission before taking any photographs and make sure they know how the photos will be used. It's good practice to keep it to share only with the project team working on your concept.

NOTETAKER
The nominated note taker should try and capture a full set of notes. Write in the voice of the participant. Don't be tempted to interpret the meaning during the interview – be true to their intent. Aim to get direct quotes wherever possible.



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Interview Structure

Building an interview structure

① **WHAT'S YOUR GOAL?**
Begin with an explanation of who you are and what your goals are. Keep your goals simple and open-ended.

② **TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF?**
Make the participant feel comfortable and see them as an expert in the topic you are exploring. As well as understanding how they might use your product or service or the materials in future, understand how they live their lives or operate their business to explore potential areas to leverage with new ideas.

③ **CAN YOU SHOW ME?**
Seeing how people behave may be different from what they express in an interview situation and can give you further potential clues to build ideas. Ask them to show you the relevant actions, tools and spaces relevant to your product/service, so you can see how they do things currently. Try prompts like:
“Walk us through your routine for...” or “Tell us about the last time something went...”

Try to record what people are actually saying, rather than interpreting in the moment.

④ **DIGGING DEEPER - TELL ME WHY?**

Now you can get more specific about the problem you are trying to solve. Ask open-ended questions about your topic area, and be sure to follow up with, “Can you tell me why that is important?” as often as you can. Focus more on learning about the participant and/or their business, to understand their real values and needs.

⑤ **THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME**
End by asking the participant if there are any last ideas, thoughts or questions to help your thinking. Be sure to thank the participant for his or her time.