# "HOW MIGHT WE ...?" TRIGGER QUESTIONS FROM INSIGHTS AND USER STORIES

An excellent, systematic method[01] to prepare for ideation which bases ideas firmly on research and existing knowledge.

01 This version of the insights/trigger questions exercise is based on IDEO's 2009 Human Centered Design toolkit (*http://www.designkit.org/resources/1*), as evolved by Minds&Makers and others. All errors are ours.

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| **Duration** | It is common to spread these activities across several days and spend hours or a whole day on each phase. In a sprint, a shallow version can be done more quickly. A break is useful before the third phase (invite outside experts, and ask them to prepare first ideas at home without the influence of groupthink). |
| **Physical requirements** | You will need key insights, JBTD (jobs to be done) insights, or user stories. Keep raw data nearby in case it is needed. In each phase you will need enough space to present the data or results of the previous phase, as well as pens and paper. |
| **Energy level** | **Phase 1:** low to moderate<br>**Phase 2:** low to moderate<br>**Phase 3:** moderate to high |
| **Facilitators** | 1 or more |
| **Participants** | The different phases need different groups of people, although some people should take part in all phases.<br>**First phase** (trigger questions): up to 15 people, preferably ones who are familiar with the research data or service context.<br>**Second phase** (prioritization): 10 people or fewer who know the goals and strategy of your organization.<br>**Third phase** (ideation): up to 20 people – a mix of people from the previous phases and outsiders or experts who understand the fields suggested by the questions. |
| **Expected output** | After you've gone through the three phases, you will have many ideas firmly rooted in your research. |

Developing trigger questions from insights and user stories is a good way to convert research into a wide range of actionable ideas. Use this method when you have good research or experience to build on, or when you need to take a step back from ideas and return to the needs and opportunities behind them.

This method has several phases. First, you take key insights, JBTD insights, or user stories, developed from research data (see #TiSDD 5.3, *Methods of data visualization, synthesis, and analysis*) and use them to generate trigger questions. Then you group these questions and decide which ones are most useful. In a final step, you generate multiple answers to these questions.

## Step-by-step guide

### 1 Phase 1: Developing trigger questions

— Start with the insights or user stories developed in your research activities. For example, you might have a key insight which looks like this:

**KEY INSIGHTS**

Alan
persona, character, role

wants to eat less chocolate
action, situation

because it makes him fat
aim, need, outcome

but it makes him feel safe.
restriction, obstacle, friction

— Look at the individual parts of the insight or user story, and convert them into design challenges in the form of questions. "How might we …?" questions are especially useful.

For example, the insight about Alan suggests these trigger questions:

***How might we** help Alan eat less chocolate?*
***How might we** help Alan lose weight?*
***How might we** help Alan feel safe?*

Thinking a little further, we might also develop questions like:

***How might we** help Alan feel happy at his current weight?*
***How might we** help Alan stay healthy?*
***How might we** help Alan look great?*
***How might we** help Alan know when he is really hungry, and when he is comfort eating?*

— Try "laddering" insights for depth. For example, if your insight is "Alan wants to eat fewer cookies because he wants to lose weight …" follow this with "Alan wants to lose weight because …" Then take the answer to this question and feed it into a third insight, and so on. In each stage, the "because" statement of one insight becomes the "what" statement of a new one. You will soon come to the limits of your data, which could lead you to some more research.

— Sort and group the trigger questions into useful clusters. These clusters or "opportunity areas" might be given names, or a few good questions might be chosen to represent the cluster.

## 2 Phase 2: Prioritize and select

— Invite people who know the goals and strategy of your organization, as well as people who were part of the research project or who have useful experience. Display the clusters of trigger questions in a way which helps people build up an overview and see connections. You might want to have selected search results available nearby, in case some of the clusters are challenged or participants ask, "Where does that come from?"

— Discuss, sort, and prioritize the clusters. Which ones should be worked on first? Which ones are off-strategy or off-brand?

## 3 Phase 3: Ideate

— Look closely at the questions within the selected clusters, and consider what specialists you might need to invite. For example, if one cluster contains questions about helping people change their behavior, you might invite psychologists or coaches. Also invite people who might be involved in the later implementation of the ideas you will generate – like IT specialists or frontline staff. Of course, you will also need representatives of the research team or others with useful experience.

— Start with your prioritized clusters and the trigger questions inside them.

— Take an individual question and try to generate as many answers as possible for that question. (Use 10 plus 10, brainwriting, or whatever method fits the question best.)

— Repeat until you have enough ideas or the quantity becomes unmanageable.

— Now take your ideas into an idea selection step.

## Method notes

- Almost anything can provide inspiration – but insights and user stories generated from one research project are not always applicable to another project. If in doubt, consult a research specialist.

- “How might we …?” questions are useful if they allow a broad spectrum of answers. Sometimes participants are tempted to smuggle potential solutions into the trigger questions. For example, “How might we help young people balance food intake and exercise?” is a very useful question, but “How might we give young people a motion tracker and connected food tracking app?” has a very limited range of answers. Aim for the first type of question.

- Encourage participants to look beyond the obvious. As usual, the first ideas are the obvious ones. When it starts to get difficult, there is a potential for real novelty. ◂


A Generating some first “How might we …?” questions, based on the insights in the background.