



White Paper

INSIGHT-DRIVEN INNOVATION

Understand the What and Not the Why



A lot of firms in our industry claim they are in the “insights business.” In many respects, it is one of the most overused terms in our profession. The reason the insight is important: innovation that hinges on an insight has a much greater chance of commercial success. For clients, the lack of insights (i.e. when a body of research fails to prompt a clear action) is a huge source of frustration. Finding insights is not easy, but there are several reliable frameworks to make the process more productive.

Why is an insight like a refrigerator? Because the moment you look into it, the light comes on!

Jeremy Bullmore, Executive Director, WPP, London, U.K.

What Exactly is an Insight?

Many sources define an insight as a new fact or something not previously known, while others claim that an insight is an understanding of the “why” behind certain actions and behaviors. But we disagree with these definitions.

For us, an “insight” is far more than a collection of facts: it is a deep, intuitive understanding of people and their motivations. In our experience, a true insight is almost always centered around a “what”: what does this person really believe, what is driving their perceptions, and what would motivate and persuade them? Uncovering the “what” requires following a deliberate line of questioning and using interventions that promote a high state of storytelling among research participants.

Insights versus Feedback

Insights are rarely articulated directly, and not all feedback is automatically an insight. Oftentimes, the researcher must knit together bits and pieces of information across a single study or multiple studies. Sometimes the research team will hear or read a comment and the flash moment occurs that brings all the clues together.

When analyzing voice-of-customer feedback, we typically organize the content into one of six buckets: higher-order needs, insights, needs, opinions, solutions, and specifications. For us, there is a clear taxonomy of customer feedback (see next page), and it is important to understand these different types of feedback in order to use them effectively.

A focus on customer-recommended solutions and specifications will often yield incremental innovation. Needs statements (I wish..., I want..., What if...) are excellent inputs to brainstorming. Ideating around insights, however, increases the odds of generating new-to-world ideas. There is also growing evidence that concepts framed in an insight have a higher probability of commercialization success.

Taxonomy of Feedback

HIGHER-ORDER NEED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Think Maslow's Hierarchy (e.g. trust, respect, self-actualization, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easy to grasp, since we are all motivated by higher-order needs and have many of them in common Not specific and actionable to product development Some are not directly communicated but are obvious undercurrents Predictor of successful products but often understood retrospectively
INSIGHT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Eureka moment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deep intuitive understanding of a person or situation The "what" that is driving behavior Rarely articulated Requires an understanding of consumer, customer, and end-user behavior Knitted together from multiple sources Predictor of successful products
NEED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I wish that... Wouldn't it be great if... It is really bothersome when... Why doesn't someone... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Usually veiled in key words to listen for Can be very difficult for some to articulate Good springboards for ideation
OPINION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think... They are... He is / She is... In my experience... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easy for people to articulate Can be veiled needs couched in a personal point of view Oftentimes expressed as a barrier to something, which can be engineered into a need
SOLUTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We need more... We lack... This thing needs to... I'd change this... I'd like for this to do this... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often expressed as a lack of resources, features, or functionality, solutions are generally broad statements Shouldn't automatically take these at face value: understand the root need (i.e. what is driving the request for something more/different?)
SPECIFICATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Something that you can see, hear, touch, smell, taste, or measure in some way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For products currently on the market, users will readily recommend tweaks Always link these to a need: what is driving the request for something more/different?

Spotting the Insight

So, the million-dollar question is how do you get better at spotting the insights? The most common frameworks are detailed below.



Pinpoint the Accepted Beliefs

During qualitative research we often identify pervasive (though not necessarily accurate) beliefs that are outstanding input to ideation. The bias of innovation teams, however, is to discount these nuggets because the feedback is uninformed.

Don't do this, even if your first reaction is that the belief is outlandish, naïve, or scientifically impossible. Embracing the belief can give you a much broader playing field for innovation.



Look for a Paradox

The definition of paradox is a statement or circumstance that seems contradictory or absurd but is valid or true. Several years ago, we did a significant amount of work in smoking cessation products. This was also during the time we began to fully admit to the addictive nature of nicotine. We clearly remember the despair of patients who wanted to stop smoking and the somewhat callous attitude of physicians who often didn't believe that patients struggled so heavily to do so. This insight led to some breakthrough approaches in physician education to support the launch of a new-to-market smoking cessation product.



Force Analogies

Finding the similarities between two different things can also lead to startling insights. For example, what are the similarities between homeless people and business travelers? While business travelers are not pushing shopping carts, we do have all our possessions packed into rolling suitcases. Both groups do not have permanent shelter at one point in time and face great stress while handling the necessary activities of daily life. For a hospitality company, comparing business travelers to the homeless unleashed great empathy, and led to a series of low-cost / high-value guest services.



Follow the Money

While the sounds like a line from a crime drama, it proves just as useful for clients looking for new insights. There are only a few infallible motivators for humans (especially in a B2B context), and one of them is profit. As such, when analyzing feedback, one should apply a behavioral economics lens. For example, in a recent study, we were exploring the behavior of physicians who refer patients to one another. By understanding the dollar impact of different referral scenarios, we recognized their behavior

was both cooperation and competition. This insight allowed our client to better understand their customers' behavior in a way that was not previously recognized.

Generating great insights is hard to do, and it takes money and time to accomplish. The organizations best at identifying insights typically have a unique culture: they reward curiosity, they challenge what they already know, and they are paranoid about what they don't know.



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- Scope your innovation assignment
- Decide on priorities
- Develop preliminary opportunity areas based on past research/institutional knowledge
- Ideate with your team
- Develop a research learning plan to validate opportunities and ideas
- Build internal momentum and team alignment on priorities
- Build organizational capability