

## 1. Explorative interviews

### Why explorative interviews?

We as experts have a bias in which we tend to think for end-users about what they might see or experience as important. Past research further narrows our perspective into different determining factors and so called relevant barriers and drivers of change in relation to end-users. Our bias is often translated into surveys and structured interviews with questions that lead to answers that confirm our bias. Therefore, we recommend to start with more qualitative interviewing where there is much greater interest in the interviewee's point of view. This could unravel what end-users see as relevant and important, and show you in much more detail how and when vacuum toilets, showers and food grinders are actually used in practice.

To sum up, the aim of explorative interviewing is to access the point of view of the respondent using the respondent's frame of reference rather than the researcher's pre-structured frame. Explorative interviews thus usually set out to uncover the meanings that the respondent constructs about aspects in the social and material world.

The outcomes of the interviews will provide input for the surveys and follow-up interviews (e.g. how to structure, asking certain questions etc.). Furthermore, it gives an opportunity for stakeholders involved into the demonstration projects to really understand how people are (inter)acting, and responding on the different technologies. As a side benefit the interviewers gain experience with different types of social (scientific) research practices. As such they are in a better position to communicate about the value, possibilities and pitfalls of these methods in their own organisation and/or in pilot projects in the future.

### Some general rules for explorative interviews:

1. The interviewer uses at most an **aide-mémoire (checklist of items)** as a brief set of prompts to him- or herself to deal with a certain range of topics. In the case of SENSE this are topics related to sanitary systems, in house waste management, water use, cleaning etc.
2. There may be just a single question that the interviewer asks, and the interviewee is then allowed to respond freely, with the interviewer simply responding to points that seem worthy of being followed up. Explorative interviewing tends to be very similar in character to a **conversation**.

*Example question: Could you tell (and show) me something about the [sanitary system] in your house? What comes to mind first when you think about...*

3. Questions of probes should build upon what the respondent says, even if at times they seem to be **straying off the topic**. This is because the interviewer may have artificially restricted the topic in his/her mind and the openness of the explorative interview permits exploration of areas not formerly considered.

*Example question: You mentioned that you clean your toilet every week, can you tell (or perhaps show) me how your cleaning ritual goes? Is it different as before you moved in? And if so, how come?*

*Try not to judge (too much), but say something like: hm, that's interesting! Could you tell me a bit more about that? How does that work?*

*Try to lighten the mood, smile and make a small joke once in a while. A very formal approach might scare off the interviewee, especially when talking about rather intimate/delicate practices like using the toilet, showering etc.*

*Copy the language that the interviewee is using. So if someone is talking about 'the loo' instead of 'the vacuum toilet', start using that term as well. It shows them that you are listening, and it helps to understand how they think about it.*

4. However, the interviewer may need to direct the conversation back to the main topic if the discussion seems to be going off at a tangent.
5. Part of the explorative interview is **observing** what an end-user does. Because, not all relevant aspects (such as specific behaviour) are explicitly said. Nevertheless, the interviewer can ask questions when certain behaviour is noticed to clarify and/or describe specific behaviour.

*Example question: I see you close the toilet lid before flushing, is there a reason behind this? [...] Why do you feel this way?*

6. By **following the interviewee** throughout his/her house (or, if not possible, describe the process) it is easier to identify specific behaviour and patterns while having a more natural conversation – in comparison by sitting at a table or interviewing via phone.
7. It has to be said that explorative interviews are **more difficult to conduct** in comparison to structured interviews as the interviewer usually needs to be (1) well versed with the underlying topic (this is the case when a partner of the local (water) organisation is conducting the interview or is one of the interviewers) but don't show it too much, it might hinder the goal to understand the interviewee's perspective and practices, (2) needs to stay alert to clues and nuances and (3) be prepared to respond to questions as well as ask them (end-users might ask questions as well).
8. Respondent's replies are, ideally, **recorded verbatim**, through short-hand or mechanically on some form of recording media. Specific behaviour that is not further clarified in the interview verbally field notes should be taken. It is also worthwhile to sit down right after the interview and write down first impressions: what struck me most? What does this mean for our approach?
9. When possible it would be recommended to conduct interviews with a **representative** from the **utility** (Waternet, DuCoop, NSVA, HamburgWasser, WML) and a **researcher** (UM, UvA, KWR, Weimar...).
10. Relevant outcomes – including rich detailed answers – should be written and translated into English and shared with KWR.

We suggest around **two or three explorative interviews** per demonstration project because technologies are implemented, designed and used in different ways in all projects. Therefore, the outcomes of these type of interviews are relevant for adjusting the surveys and follow-up interviews. If possible, try to find 'unusual suspects' (people that might not usually be so engaged in projects, or voice their opinion).