



IN THEIR SHOES

EMPATHY-BASED RESEARCH PLAYBOOK

Practical empathy techniques to build consumer closeness



“If there is any one secret of success, it lies in the ability to get the other person’s point of view and see things from his angle as well as your own”

- *Henry Ford*



EMPATHY IS NOT ONLY AN AMAZING HUMAN ABILITY, IT'S ALSO THE FUTURE OF CONSUMER INSIGHT

EMPATHY TURNS DATA INTO INSIGHT. HERE'S A PLAYBOOK TO HELP YOU DO IT.

Empathy is a remarkable human ability. Empathy allows us to step imaginatively into the shoes of another person to see and feel the world from their perspective. In doing so, empathy provides us with emotional insight into how it feels to be someone else.

It turns out that empathy is also the #1 prerequisite for innovation success. A Nielsen analysis of 61,000 SKUs representing more than 12,000 new launches since 2011 found that 3 in 4 consumer product launches fail within a year.¹ This analysis also identified the number one rule for innovation success. Successful innovation is the result of "walking in the shoes of the consumer to uncover key demand-driven insights".

As innovation and research becomes increasingly dominated by quantitative data analytics and algorithms, market researchers need empathy more than ever to see the humans behind the numbers.

So, we've put together this playbook of practical empathy-based activities to help you research and innovate better from a consumer perspective.

WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED EMPATHY?

Empathy is our ability to see and feel things from someone else's perspective. It's an interpersonal skill that produces emotional insight into what it feels like to be someone else. In short, empathy is our ability for emotional insight.

Psychologists believe empathy depends on two things; our automatic tendency to mirror the

emotions of others and our cognitive ability to see the world from their point of view.² Emotional mirroring and perspective-taking work together to produce empathy, our capacity for emotional insight. Although some people are naturally more empathic than others, empathy is a skill that can be trained and improved.



“The value that I really learned to appreciate deeply and which I talk about a great deal is empathy. I don’t think it is simply a “nice to have” but I believe it is at the centre of the agenda for innovation here at Microsoft”

- Satya Nadalla
CEO Microsoft



EMPATHY PLAYBOOK AT A GLANCE

THIS PLAYBOOK IS A CURATED SOURCE OF PRACTICAL EMPATHY-BASED ACTIVITIES, CALLED “PLAYS,” THAT YOU CAN USE TO BUILD CONSUMER CLOSENESS.

This empathy-based research playbook will show you how to use empathy to generate consumer insight and promote consumer closeness.

This playbook contains a set of practical activities, called “plays” that activate empathy by promoting perspective-taking and emotional mirroring. In doing so, these plays generate emotional insight by helping you understand the feelings people are experiencing.

The plays themselves are taken from the worlds of psychology, design, therapy, medicine and

investigative journalism, where empathy-based research has long been used for insight generation.

Although this research playbook is intended primarily for researchers, empathy techniques can be used across a business for insight generation.

Whether you want to use empathy to generate insight into the emotional world of consumers, stakeholders, experts, partners or other audiences, this playbook will show you how to do it.

PICK A PLAY

1 THE E.M.P.A.T.H.Y PLAY
Activating empathy - p7

5 THE EMPATHY HIRE PLAY
Bringing empathy inside - p21

2 THE WORD ASSOCIATION PLAY
Emotive associations - p11

6 THE EMPATHY INTERVIEW PLAY
Up close and personal - p25

3 THE IMMERSION PLAY
The gold standard - p13

7 THE EMPATHY MAP PLAY
Mapping meaning - p29

4 THE PROJECTION PLAY
The power of imagination - p19

8 THE EMPATHY GENERATOR PLAY
Bringing insight to life - p31



EMPATHY ECONOMICS

Empathy-based research can help reduce a costly “empathy deficit” in business and facilitate consumer closeness.

#1 CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTOR

A Nielsen analysis of 12,000+ product launches concludes that breakthrough innovation success depends on empathy generated by “walking in the shoes of the consumer to uncover key demand-driven insights”³

\$300m is the typical annual cost of the empathy deficit to global brands as they struggle to understand and address consumer needs, experiences and expectations.⁴

\$300m

-69 NPS

The empathy deficit is costing brands an average of 69 Net Promoter Score points.⁵

The empathy deficit means that while 80% of brand executives believe their brand offers the best experience, only 8% of their consumers agree.⁶

80:8 rule

30%

The empathy deficit makes sense given new psychometric evidence that shows marketers scoring poorly on empathy tests. Only 30% of marketers are proficient in seeing things from someone else’s perspective.⁷

1. THE E.M.P.A.T.H.Y PLAY



WHEN YOU NEED EMOTIONAL INSIGHT, ACTIVATE YOUR POWERS OF EMPATHY FIRST.

The *E.M.P.A.T.H.Y* play involves applying a set of simple tricks from professional empathy training based on an E.M.P.A.T.H.Y mnemonic.⁸

The play works by optimising your personal capacity to see and feel things from somebody else's perspective. In healthcare professions, running this play has been associated with increased patient satisfaction.

RUNNING THE PLAY

You can run the *E.M.P.A.T.H.Y* play in face-to-face situations to activate and enhance your capacity for emotional insight. Use one or more of these seven techniques.

- **E is for Eye Contact.** Make eye contact with the person you are with and notice the colour of their eyes. Our eyes reveal a wealth of information about what we are feeling, and by making an effort to check the eye colour of people you are talking to, you'll train yourself to make eye contact. Don't stare but use eye glances throughout a discussion.
- **M is for Muscles of Facial Expression.** Look at people's faces when listening or talking and

you'll find that your face may tend to automatically mimic their facial expressions.

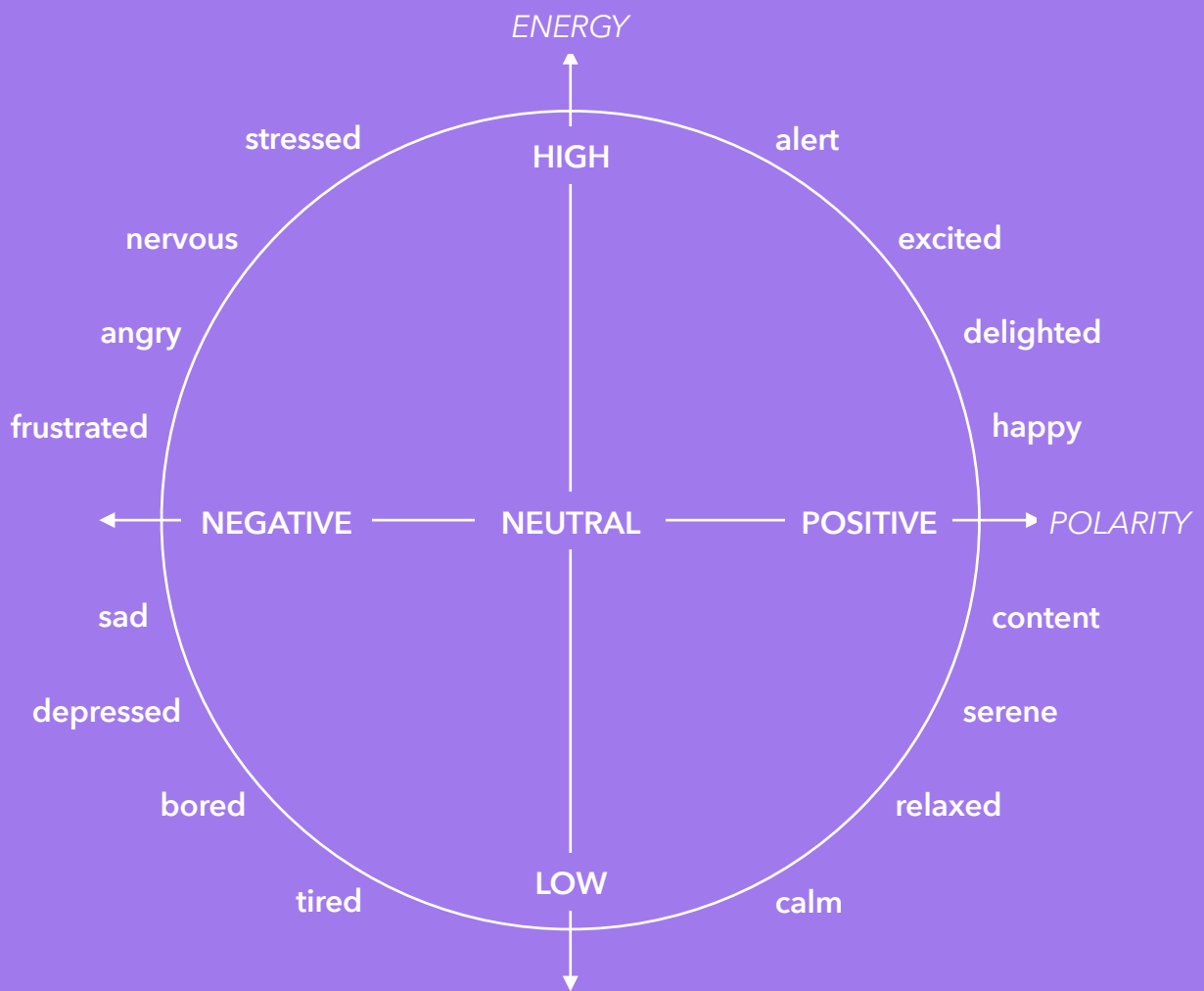
This can prompt an emotional response in your own body, as your emotions line up with the facial expressions you are unconsciously mimicking. The phenomenon is known as "emotional contagion" – and describes how we quite literally catch the emotions of others by looking at their faces.

- **P is for Posture.** Be sensitive to their posture and to your posture. It helps if you are facing them, leaning slightly forward, with your eyes at the same level. This creates a sense of equality, attentiveness and openness, and helps you be sensitive to non-verbal cues in their body language. You may find yourself naturally mirroring their posture throughout a discussion, and this may help you feel what they are feeling.
- **A is for Affect.** Try to identify and label the particular emotions you are sensing in the other person as they speak. To do this, it helps to build your own emotional vocabulary (beyond just feeling good vs bad, our emotional world is rich in nuance and

DO YOU SPEAK EMOTION?

Human emotions are rich and nuanced, so it helps to have a good emotional vocabulary when researching different feelings that people experience. There are various emotional lexicons available, but the 'circumplex model of affect' is simple and popular in emotion science.⁹ It's not

exhaustive but it's helpful because it maps emotions on the two basic dimensions of how we feel; positivity/negativity (valence) and high/low energy (arousal). So even if the emotion is not listed below, the map can help you diagnose how you and how others feel.



Adapted from Posner, J., Russell, J. A., & Peterson, B. S. (2005). The circumplex model of affect: An integrative approach to affective neuroscience, cognitive development, and psychopathology. *Development and Psychopathology*, 17(3), 715-734.



diversity). Just as the world becomes more colourful the more words we have for colours, so too is it for our feelings.

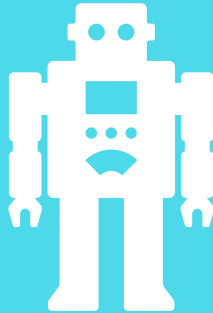
- **T is for Tone of Voice.** Be attentive to their tone of voice, including the pace, pitch, and rhythm of their speech. Tone of voice conveys about 40% of the nonverbal emotional content of what a person communicates and can be more revealing than the actual words used.
- **H is for Hear the Whole Person.** Set aside your own thoughts and judgements and really focus on what the individual is saying, imagining what it is like to be in their shoes. We often listen but don't actually hear what the other is expressing, because we are distracted, preparing our response or making judgements.
- **Y is for Your Response.** Be attentive to your own emotional and physiological responses. There is insight in your body's response to what you are hearing, and by attending to this, you may increase the flow of emotional contagion, and feel what the other is feeling.

The *E.M.P.A.T.H.Y* play takes time and practice to master. Start by picking the components with which you are most comfortable.

WHEN TO RUN THE PLAY

The *E.M.P.A.T.H.Y* play works well whenever you want to generate emotional insight into the feelings and motivations of a person you are with. It works best in one-to-one situations, such as an interview scenario with a consumer, colleague, expert or stakeholder.





DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF EMPATHY?

As an empathy technique, the word association game has been made famous by the sci-fi movie *Blade Runner*, which is an adaptation of Philip K Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

In *Blade Runner*, the "Voight-Kampff empathy test" uses word associations to determine whether a subject is a human or an android "replicant" - androids don't do empathy, in the movie at least!

Whilst the Voight-Kampff empathy test is fictitious, psychologists have long used word association tests to gain empathic understanding into the meanings and emotions of their clients and patients.

2. THE WORD ASSOCIATION PLAY



WHEN YOU WANT TO UNDERSTAND HOW SOMEONE REALLY FEELS ABOUT SOMETHING, TRY CAPTURING THE WORDS THEY ASSOCIATE WITH IT.

The *word association play* involves playing a simple word association game with someone to surface subjective meanings and hidden emotions. Simply ask them for the positive words, negative words and the emotions they associate with a situation, person, object or experience.

The *word association play* works because associations are not filtered or rationalised in the same way as responses to direct questioning.

Psychologists believe that the associative structure of human memory and emotions results in word associations that reveal the subjective meaning and emotional value of something for us.¹⁰

RUNNING THE PLAY

There are a number of ways to run the *word association play*, but they typically involve asking someone to state the first words that come to mind in response to a stated word, concept, or other stimulus. In an interview situation, consider using the following questions:

- *"Describe in single words, only the positive things that come to mind about... [focus of research]"*
- *"Now, describe in single words, only the negative things that come to mind about... [focus of research]"*
- *Finally, describe in single words, the feelings that come to mind about... [focus of research]"*

Analysis can be as simple as creating a mind map that shows the associations made around the target concept. Together, this associative network effectively defines the subjective meaning of the core concept. This simple word association map can be a powerful source of emotional insight (so much so that we created an entire business based on this technique).¹¹

WHEN TO RUN THE PLAY

The *word association play* works well as part of a qualitative research interview with a consumer, colleague, expert or stakeholder.

3. THE IMMERSION PLAY



TO UNDERSTAND HOW IT FEELS TO BE SOMEONE ELSE, SOMETIMES YOU NEED TO STEP INTO THEIR SHOES, LITERALLY.

The *immersion play* involves immersing yourself in a consumer situation, as a consumer. This immersion can range from several hours to several weeks or longer. The simple goal is to walk a mile in consumer shoes, and experience first-hand what it feels like from their perspective, in situ and in real life. It's about getting insider information by becoming an insider yourself.

The *immersion play* is the gold standard in empathy-based research because it provides an authentic first-person view of how it feels to be someone else. It's a form of participant self-observation where you experience a fresh perspective with associated emotions. The early pioneers of empathy-based research used this *immersion play* to great effect. And today, empathy immersion is becoming standard practice in lean innovation, and is popular with many leading brands including Nike and Disney.¹²

RUNNING THE PLAY

There are a number of ways to run the *immersion play*. What's key is to become immersed in a real rather than a simulated situation and to engage in that situation as a consumer rather than an

observer. And because empathy is about emotional insight, the key goal is to attend to your mood and emotional state.

As a "complete participant" form of participant observation, use these best practice tips to make the most of participatory immersion:

- Become familiar with the setting before going into the field
- Dress and act in character
- Act as a full participant, rather than as an observer
- Participate in short bursts, and then take time out to reflect
- Keep a (mood) diary as a running observation record
 - In your mood diary, answer these two questions at regular intervals
 - *Right now, how am I feeling?*
 - *What's going on that makes me feel this way?*



WHAT'S IT LIKE TO LIVE IN A SEWER?

The animation studio Pixar sends movie crews out on immersive field trips to experience what it feels like, first-hand, to be the characters they are creating.

For instance, to prepare for the *Cars* movie, the production team went on a month-long road trip to experience, first-hand, what it felt like to travel along America's oldest roads.

For *Ratatouille*, movie producer Brad Lewis apprenticed under Chef Thomas Keller in his three-Michelin star kitchen to learn what it felt like to work in a top restaurant.

The movie's production team even crawled through the Paris sewers, where much of the movie action takes place, to experience what living in a sewer feels like!

- Along with each entry, note down the time, place, what you are doing and who you are with
- As you become experienced with mood journaling, consider making entries directly as *emotional insights* in the following format “*Right now, I feel... [emotion] because... [personal understanding]*”
- Be attentive to the key drivers of your emotional state;
 - The difference between your expectations and experience
 - Your goals and whether they are being frustrated or facilitated
 - Your experience of autonomy (being in/out of control), relatedness (connectedness) and competence (mastery)
- Use photos, sound and video to record things that surprise or move you
- If possible, collect artefacts that have particular meaning or that have emotional significance

After your immersion, you can use the insights, data, media and artefacts that you collected to create a rich first-person perspective case study to illustrate what it feels like to be immersed in the consumer situation, as a consumer.

WHEN TO RUN THE PLAY

The *immersion play* is usually used early on in a project when you want to gain emotional insight into moods and motivations at play in a particular situation. Running this *immersion play* can provide a rich source of creative stimulus for advertising, branding and innovation projects.

IMMERSION PLAY PIONEERS

The *immersion play* has a long and distinguished history.¹³

Beatrice Webb. A Victorian social reformer who went undercover in 1887 to experience what it felt like, first-hand, to be a sweatshop worker in Victorian London. Her four-day immersive empathy experience was published and caused a public and political outcry that ultimately led to reform.

George Orwell. The novelist went undercover in 1927 to experience what it felt like, first-hand, to be homeless in Paris and London. His multiple immersive excursions lasted weeks at a time, which he used to write *Down and Out in Paris and London*.

John Howard Griffin. A white investigative journalist who went undercover in 1959 to experience what it felt like, first-hand, to be an African-American in the US deep south. Dying his skin black, he spent six weeks travelling and working in Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia and South Carolina. He used his immersion experience to write *Black Like Me*, which became a standard college textbook.

Patricia Moore. The designer known as “the mother of empathy”, went undercover between 1979 and 1982 to experience what it felt like, first-hand, to experience life as an elderly woman. Working with a professional make-up artist, she transformed herself by wearing clouded glasses that blurred her vision, earplugs that partially deafened her, and splints, braces, and bandages to reduce movement. Her experiences in the kitchen resulted in easy-open cereal packs and the OXO Smart-Grip range of kitchen utensils.



IMMERSION PLAY IN PRACTICE

TO GENERATE EMOTIONAL INSIGHT INTO THE CHANGING WORLD OF NIGHTLIFE, BRAND GENETICS WENT UNDERCOVER IN NIGHT CLUBS AROUND THE WORLD.

Working with a global drinks company, Brand Genetics used the *immersion play* to generate emotional insight into the changing world of nightlife.

Following a pre-immersion briefing by night club experts and professionals, our empathy immersion team was dispatched to different night clubs in top cities around the world. Each team member was assigned a particular club as an immersion venue.

Team members then joined a small group of regular clubbers who were happy to be accompanied on a night out. Throughout the evening, we acted as full participants in our groups (no stand-offish observational research). The goal was simple; to map our own emotional journey of the night, from beginning to end. To do this, we used smartphone mood journals, noting down how our feelings shifted over the course of the night,

including what seemed to cause these mood shifts. In particular, we noted high energy and low energy moments, along with positive and negative moments (see p8). We used smartphone to collect photos, sound and video to illustrate the changing vibe of the evening.

After immersion, the immersion team regrouped for a team debrief. Together, we created a set of rich first-person perspective emotional journey maps to illustrate what it feels like to be a clubber over the course of a night in top nightclubs around the world.

As a result of the immersion, our client has been able to use this emotional insight to help develop a new range of innovations designed to address the changing emotional needs of clubbers.



“Creating truly helpful products starts
with empathy”

- *Ivy Ross*
VP Google

4. THE PROJECTION PLAY



IF YOU WANT TO UNDERSTAND HOW SOMEONE ELSE IS FEELING, SIMPLY USE YOUR IMAGINATION TO PROJECT YOURSELF INTO THEIR SHOES AND IMAGINE HOW YOU MIGHT FEEL IN THEIR SITUATION.

The *projection play* is an easy and effective way to make research more authentic, meaningful and emotionally insightful. It involves the researcher deliberately projecting themselves into the shoes of a consumer and imagining what it feels like to be that person in the situation they are researching.

The *projection play* works because perspective-taking lies at the heart of empathy. In scientific tests, deliberate perspective-taking has been shown to improve empathic understanding.¹⁴ Of course, if you are a market researcher, you may be familiar with using projective techniques. But in the *projection play*, the difference is that it's the researcher who's doing the projecting.

RUNNING THE PLAY

Running the *projection play* is simple. Before you facilitate research, run an ideation session, analyse results, write a debrief or even present to a client, take a moment for some imaginative projection:

- First, visualise this person in the situation you are exploring

- Now imagine yourself as that person in this situation
- Finally imagine the mood and emotions you might be experiencing

Whilst empathy operates automatically below the threshold of conscious control, we can activate and use our empathic ability deliberately. Perspective-taking through imaginative projection is a simple and effective way to do this.

WHEN TO RUN THE PLAY

The *projection play* can be run throughout the insight, innovation or creative process, whenever emotional insight is needed.

Whether it's using projective imagination to imagine yourself in consumer shoes, client shoes or colleague shoes, the *projection play* is a proven way to enhance your powers of empathy.



The best way to understand
what it feels like to be an
athlete is to be an athlete.
Which is why Nike employees
are often athletes who bring
empathy inside

5. THE EMPATHY HIRE PLAY



WHEN YOU NEED EMOTIONAL INSIGHT, BRING EMPATHY INSIDE.

The *empathy hire play* is about hiring colleagues and agencies with a high capacity for empathy.

This means two things.

First, the *empathy hire play* means hiring people who are naturally empathic, as measured in empathy aptitude tests and demonstrated in interviews or meetings.

Secondly, the *empathy hire play* can mean hiring people from your target market who can bring an insider's perspective to the business.

The *empathy hire play* works because some people are naturally more empathic than others. Empathy appears to be partly determined genetically, but it is also influenced by background and upbringing.¹⁵

Whatever the cause, empathic people have a greater capacity for emotional insight because they find it easier to see and feel things from someone else's perspective. This mental ability can be tested, using psychometric empathy tests such as the "EQ Test" (empathy quotient)¹⁶ and the "Eyes Test" which involves reading people's emotions by looking into their eyes, and is a validated sign of

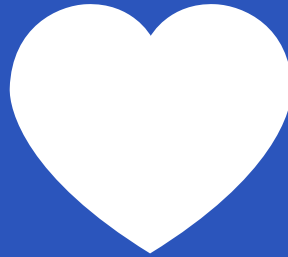
high empathic ability.¹⁷ Additionally, new AI software is available to assess empathy levels by analysing conversations.¹⁸

The *empathy hire* makes sense not only because you bring empathy into the business, but also because empathy is a core skill and predictor for successful career progression and leadership.¹⁹

RUNNING THE PLAY

Running the *empathy hire play* means assessing the empathic ability or potential of a future colleague or agency.

- When hiring a new colleague, consider adding an empathy test to any other aptitude tests you may use
- In competency-based interviews, include an activity that involves the applicant making the case for something they are against (perspective-taking)
- Use the Eyes Test to see if your potential hire can read emotions in people's eyes (see p23)



EMPATHY VS SYMPATHY

Empathy and sympathy are related but different phenomena.

Empathy is a *mental ability* that involves perspective-taking and emotional mirroring, whilst sympathy is an *emotional response* to someone's misfortune.

For example, you can feel empathy with someone who is feeling happy because you can see the world from their perspective and share in their happiness. On the other hand, sympathy involves feeling pity for someone, whatever they are feeling. Sympathy is quite literally pitiful.

The essential difference can be summed up by saying we feel empathy *with* someone but sympathy *for* someone. Empathy is *feeling with*, sympathy is *feeling for*.



- Whether you are hiring an agency or a new colleague, seek to recruit from your target market in order to get an insider's perspective
- If empathy is important, know that women tend to be more empathic than men¹⁶, and that empathy is linked to the personality trait of agreeableness (kind, friendly, helpful, tolerant, cooperative, warm and considerate)²⁰ and to reading fiction.²¹ Now you know what to look for in new hires!

WHEN TO RUN THE PLAY

As its name suggests, the *empathy hire play* works when you are looking to hire a new colleague or research agency.

EMPATHY EYES TEST

How empathic are you?

Our eyes are incredibly expressive, and our ability to read people's emotions in their eyes is closely linked to empathic ability. So consider using this quick, easy and free empathy "Eyes Test" to check the empathy potential of new hires.

How are these people feeling?



Amused - Bored - Contemplative -
Despondent - Decisive - Friendly -
Interested - Irritated - Playful - Relaxed -
Uneasy - Upset?

If you have typical empathic ability ,
you will get three out of four correct
(answers at the back on p38).

The full *Reading the Mind in the Eyes*
empathy test contains 36 pairs of eyes,
and is freely available online.²²



6. THE EMPATHY INTERVIEW PLAY



IF YOU WANT TO UNDERSTAND HOW SOMEONE ELSE FEELS, TALK WITH THEM ABOUT THEIR FEELINGS.

The *empathy interview play* is a semi-structured individual in-depth interview (IDI) conducted face-to-face in which the interviewer uses probes, prompts and their own empathy to generate emotional insight into how someone feels in a particular situation.

With its roots in the empathic listening approach of psychologist Dr Carl Rogers, this play involves listening closely as the interviewee offers a detailed walkthrough of a recent experience, focusing on how they felt.²³ In short, this play is about generating an "emotional walkthrough".

The *empathy interview play* works because the face-to-face situation facilitates empathic understanding by allowing you to be receptive to non-verbal communication. Some research has found that only 7% of emotional content is expressed through the words we use (the so-called 7% rule).²⁴ The face-to-face situation of the *empathy interview play* allows you to pick up on important non-verbal body language.

The one-to-one nature of the *empathy interview play* also facilitates empathic understanding; we

have the empathic ability to project ourselves into the shoes of another, but only one person at a time.

RUNNING THE PLAY

There are multiple ways to run an empathy interview, but it can be helpful to use best practice tips for "IPA" interviews (not an interview over an IPA beer, but using the increasingly popular qualitative technique known as interpretive phenomenological analysis that focuses on recounting a "lived experience").²⁵

The goal is to structure the interview around a "lived experience", asking the interviewee to describe their experience in detail from start to finish, bringing it to life with subjective meanings, feelings and sense-making.

- Choose a private and safe space to conduct the interview
 - If it's possible to use the space where the original experience occurred, that's ideal
- Don't rush in; take time to put the interviewee at ease

“Today, organisations run the risk of overcompensating for the analogue past and completely focusing on big data analytics and data-driven insights – which indeed is a capability that needs to be built. And we’re investing a lot of time and effort in that. However, if you’re not careful you fall into what I call the *empathy gap*, which comes from over-focusing on what the data tells you. In most cases data tells a lot about what people do when they do it. It doesn’t tell you much about why they do it”

- *Stephan Gans*
Chief Insights and Analytics Officer,
PepsiCo

- Ask them to tell you about a recent experience they have had in their own words
- Consider asking them to come to the interview with an object, photo or memory that reminds them of their experience
- Capture the basics, what, when, where, how, why and who with
- After getting a general overview, take them back to the beginning of the experience and ask them to walk you through it step by step from start to finish
 - Listen, but use prompts and probes to explore their emotional journey
 - At each step or moment, ask
 - *“Right then, how were you feeling?”*
 - *“What was going on that made you feel this way?”*
 - Sense-check by playing back what you hear *“So you felt...[emotion] then because... [personal understanding]?”*
 - Probe to understand key drivers of their emotional state
 - Differences between their expectations and experience
 - Their goals and whether these were being frustrated or facilitated
 - Their personal experience of autonomy (being in/out of control), relatedness (connectedness) and competence (mastery)
- Be flexible - Allow the interviewee to guide the interview and focus on what mattered to them
- Body language - Monitor non-verbal behaviour, pay attention to the language they use to describe their feelings, and to how they made sense of their feelings and what was going on
- List and record - focus on listening and record the interview for later analysis, with their consent. If the interview takes place in situ, and you have permission, take pictures and video

When you're done interviewing, then it's standard qualitative (IPA) analysis. So, first transcribe the interview into the right-hand column of a two-column document. Then use the left-hand column for analysis, beginning with free text analysis to identify, connect, cluster and finally tabulate emergent themes. Then, write your analysis up as an individual case study with supporting media and verbatims. The simple goal is to create a real-life case study that is rich in emotional insight and that brings to life what it felt like to be the individual experiencing the "lived experience".

WHEN TO RUN THE PLAY

The *empathy interview play* works well prior to ideation or quantitative research. The immersion can provide a rich source of creative stimulus and emotional insight to build on or to investigate.

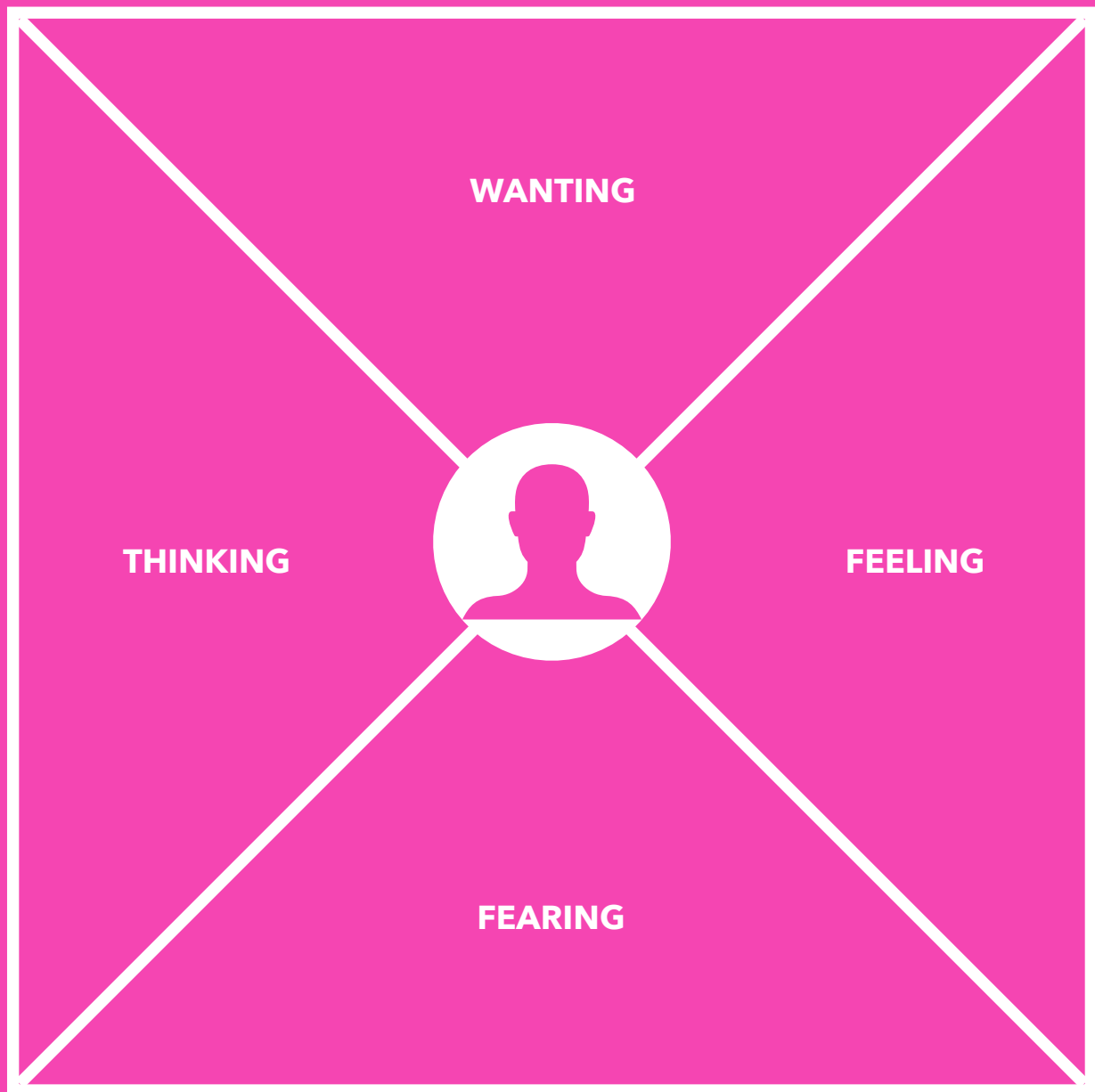
MINDFUL EMPATHY

Empathy is an awesome ability. It breaks down barriers by allowing us to step imaginatively into the shoes of another person and experience the world from their perspective.

But empathy has its limits. Being mindful of these limits will help you apply empathy to its best effect.²⁶

- Empathy is innumerate. We experience empathy with a person, not a population. This one-to-one limitation of empathy can blind us to the plight of the many in favour of the few
- Empathy is myopic. We tend to feel empathy with those who are close-by or similar to us. Future generations, far-off places and different lives are rarely the beneficiaries of empathy
- Empathy is emotional. When we feel what another is feeling, we can feel an emotional impulse to act immediately without pausing for rational reflection

EMPATHY MAP



7. THE EMPATHY MAP PLAY

TO UNDERSTAND HOW SOMEONE FEELS, MAP THE WORLD FROM THEIR PERSPECTIVE.

The *empathy map play* is a simple mapping exercise that forces you to think from someone else's perspective. In consumer research, this involves creating a consumer-centric map, quite literally.

The *empathy map play* works by facilitating perspective-taking. As you summarise their "perceptual world" of thoughts, feelings, actions and experiences, you begin to see and feel the world from their perspective.

RUNNING THE PLAY

To run the *empathy map play*, you can use one of the many empathy map templates that are freely available online.²⁷ Or you can create your own. To keep the map usable, stick to mapping four to five of the most pertinent experiential dimensions

- HEAR - What are they hearing from others, what words resonate?
- FEEL - What are they feeling, in terms of mood and emotions?
- THINK - What are they thinking in this situation?

- WANT - What do they want from the situation, what is the "job-to-be-done"?
- FEAR - What do they fear might happen?
- SAY - What are they saying about the situation, what words do they use?
- DO - What are they doing in the situation?

Although empathy maps have been used to describe aggregate or imaginary people, they were specifically designed for, and work best, when they summarise the first-person perspective of a real person.

WHEN TO RUN THE PLAY

The *empathy map play* is a useful tool whenever you quickly need to see something from someone else's perspective. This includes clients, colleagues, internal stakeholders, or indeed consumers. At Brand Genetics, we find client empathy maps particularly useful when writing proposals and reports because they help sensitise us to the motivations and meanings that lie behind a brief.

“The notion of empathy and human-centeredness is still not widely practiced in many corporations. Business people rarely navigate their own websites or watch how people use their products in a real-world setting. And if you do a word association with “business person,” the word “empathy” doesn’t come up much”

- *David Kelley*
Founder IDEO

8. THE EMPATHY GENERATOR PLAY



IF YOU WANT TO GENERATE EMPATHY, MAKE IT EXPERIENTIAL.

As a researcher, sometimes you want to create empathy in others, as well as use it yourself. The *empathy generator play* is about promoting consumer-closeness with colleagues and clients by staging empathy experiences designed to bridge the divide between company and consumers.

The *empathy generator play* works by bringing a consumer perspective inside in a way that moves your audience to see things from a consumer perspective. For example, PepsiCo runs a digital penpal programme between executives and target consumers.²⁸ Other alternatives include “empathy cafés” where staff meet consumers over a coffee and a conversational menu, or “co-creation” workshops and “empathy labs” where executives work alongside consumers to improve their products and services.²⁹

RUNNING THE PLAY

There is no cookie-cutter formula for running the *empathy generator play*. You are limited only by your imagination, budget and time. The simple goal is to bring a consumer perspective to life experientially. For example, to convince a sceptical Disney CEO of the merits of opening a Disney zoo,

the pitch presentation included walking a live 200kg Bengal tiger into the room. It worked, and work on Disney’s Animal Kingdom park began shortly after the experiential encounter.²⁸

As the value of empathy becomes increasingly appreciated in business and beyond, innovative new solutions are emerging to generate and promote empathy. We call it *EmpathyTech*.

- The Empathy Museum – a pop up museum in a giant shoebox that contains shoes and podcasts. During breaks, employees can borrow shoes to literally walk in the shoes of another whilst listening to a short podcast of the shoe owner’s experience³⁰
- The Short Story Station – a vending machine that dispenses one-minute short stories on recycled paper depicting the life of another³¹
- VR Empathy – a virtual experience by Eli Lilly to foster patient empathy among busy doctors. The VR experience offers doctors an immersive first-person experience of what it feels like to be diagnosed with a serious condition³²



WHEN TO RUN THE PLAY

The *empathy generator play* can be used to foster consumer-closeness on a day-to-day basis, but it can work particularly well when presenting findings or pitching ideas.



Catalysing empathy and consumer closeness with VR, short story machines, and pop-up empathy museums





EMPATHY GENERATOR PLAY IN PRACTICE

TO FOSTER CONSUMER CLOSENESS, BRAND GENETICS FACILITATES MEET-UPS BETWEEN BRAND TEAMS AND CONSUMERS

Working with a global drinks company, Brand Genetics is using the *empathy generator play* to help brand teams build consumer closeness. The play is essentially a buddy system, where we pair up a brand team with a small consumer group, and organise for them to meet face to face.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE CONSUMER KIND

We've been running this *empathy generator play* in two ways. Firstly, we've arranged for brand teams to meet up with their consumer buddies "on-location" in places where the brand is bought and consumed. This includes bars, restaurants, stores, and even in consumer homes. The aim is to provide the brand team with a reality check about how consumers interact with their brands in real life.

Although we sometimes organise one-to-one meet-ups, in this case we've been using small groups because we've found that this reduces social awkwardness. It also replicates the social group drinking experience. To facilitate interaction and empathy we provide brand team members with *conversation menus* to get things started.

The second way we run the *empathy generator play* is a mirror version. Instead of sending our brand teams to meet consumers, we invite consumers into the business. We do this by organising co-creation workshops where consumers work together with brand teams to improve an existing product or invent a new one. The true output of these sessions is not the ideas produced, but the empathy that is generated between our client and consumers.



“People will try to convince you that you should keep your empathy out of your career. Don’t accept this false premise.”

- *Tim Cook*
CEO Apple



IF YOU WANT TO USE THE **POWER OF EMPATHY** TO UNLOCK NEW GROWTH, TALK TO US AT BRAND GENETICS

WE USE EMPATHY TO IDENTIFY DEMAND-DRIVEN OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONSUMER BRANDS

Brand Genetics is a global insight and innovation consultancy with a human-first approach to catalysing growth.

We help brands understand their consumers using empathy. Our specialist research uncovers unspoken needs and hidden motivations. We reveal the truth about what people want now and what they will want next.

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ABOUT BRAND GENETICS

Brand Genetics catalyses growth by thinking human first.

We help our clients understand what people really want in order to identify new, scalable growth opportunities, and deliver positive impact for both businesses and consumers.

Our approach is simple. We use focused human-to-human techniques to uncover real human solutions

- working around the world to guide impactful strategy, innovation and creative.

In a world drowning in data, we believe in the power of true human connection to cut through, clarify and capture true opportunity.





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Answers to Eyes Test: Image 1 = Playful, Image 2 = Contemplative, Image 3 = Uneasy, Image 4 = Decisive.





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