



EDUCATIONAL MODULE

Transformative interviewing

In a nutshell

This training session is meant to 1) learn about different forms of listening and how this relates to (transformative) change and 2) to learn to act as a (temporal) change agent in a (food) system by means of conducting (transdisciplinary) research

Food 2030 focus



What for?

To work with my community on transforming the food system



For whom?

Educators; Facilitators



How long?

#90 minutes

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Something to share?

Leave us a comment about this tool on the [FIT4FOOD2030 Knowledge Hub](#).

This tool was developed as part of the FIT4FOOD2030 project; find this tool and many more on the [FIT4FOOD2030 Knowledge Hub](#).

Date of creation: January 2020

Athena Institute (2020). Transformative Interviewing.

What will you gain from this?

This training session is meant to 1) learn about different forms of listening and how this relates to (transformative) change and 2) to learn to act as a (temporal) change agent in a (food) system by means of conducting (transdisciplinary) research

Objectives of this training session are to learn:

- about different forms of listening and how this relates to (transformative) change'
- to act as a (temporal) change agent in a (food) system by means of conducting (transdisciplinary) research.



TRANSFORMATIVE INTERVIEWING

In this training session, participants learn to act as a (temporal) change agent in a (food) system by means of conducting (transdisciplinary) research. While doing research, one can shape interactions with stakeholders in such a way that they incite (transformative) change within, among or between stakeholders in the system, including the self (alias the participant as a researcher).

Various types of research have transformative capacities, for example action research, participatory observation and reflexive monitoring¹. In such research, researchers become part of a particular community or network and can organize 'interventions' that shape or transform (practices in) the community or network.

One tangible tool for such a change agent-like researcher is 'transformative interviewing'. The term does not exist as such in scholarly literature, but we can deduce it from the RMA kind-of interviewing techniques, and Theory U principles for transformative change². In the former, interviewers ask interviewees to reflect on performed tasks, identify key learning points in relation to originally set objectives, and set goals for the next steps in performing a particular task³. The latter, Theory U, pleads for a specific form of communication (in particular 'generative listening') to support transformative change. In the exercises below, participants explore transformative interviewing by discovering communication principles in line with Theory U.

¹ Mierlo, van, B., Regeer, B. J., Amstel, van, M., Arkesteijn, M., Beekman, V., Bunders - Aelen, J. G. F., ... Leeuwis, C. (2010). *Reflexive monitoring in action. A guide for monitoring system innovation projects*. oosterwijk: BOXPress.

² U.Lab (2015): Transforming business, society, and self. Source Book.

³ See an example in e.g., Van der Meij et al. (2016).

Thematic area

Food systems: all theme's related to it

Target audience

(Young) researchers or non-academic professionals

Age of participants

Minimum of 17 years old.

Number of participants

Preferably around 20

Number of facilitators

1 or 2

Prior knowledge required for participation

It is beneficial if you have some knowledge with regard to:

- major food system related challenges;
- the complexity around food system transformation;
- conducting ('regular') interviews.

GETTING PREPARED

Scenario

This workshop could be integrated within a relevant course at higher education institutes or knowledge institutions. It could also be integrated within training programmes for non-academic professionals (e.g. within an organisation or company).

It is best to use a closed space that allows to talk in pairs, preferably nearby some 'green space' to walk in during parts of the training.



Materials

- Computer with internet connection
- Whiteboard or flipchart
- Markers

Flow

Preparation: Ask participants to watch two videos before the session:

- Otto Scharmer on [four levels](#) of listening (8 min)
- Otto Scharmer on [generative listening](#) (13 min)

STEP 1

20 min

Reflect with the participants on the four levels of listening as explained in the videos. Example reflection questions include: *Did you ever hear about different levels of listening before? How would you describe the different levels of listening in your own words? How would you describe the main differences of the four levels of listening in your own words? To what extent do you think you adopt these different levels of listening in your own life? When and why? Etc.*

The major differences are as follows (also see Appendix 1 for an overview):

- Downloading: Listening from your own habits and to what you already know, in order to reconfirm this. We usually notice ourselves saying or thinking ‘of course’, ‘right’, and ‘ahuh’ in this level of listening.
- Factual listening: Noting new information that differs from what you already know/expect. This can be noticed when you think ‘oh?’, or ‘really?’.
- Empathizing: Listening from the other person’s perspective and feeling an emotional connection. Key reactions on this level are ‘ahhww, poor you!’, or ‘yeah, super nice!’.
- Generative listening: Connecting to an emerging future and possibilities that link to who you really are. On this level, excitement in terms of ‘wow!’ or new visions of the person you are talking with, or new visions of yourself, may arise. Most importantly, generative listening covers a way of listening that is closer to ‘sensing’ what your conversation partner aspires, and helping this person through questioning, listening and/or acting in such a way that the person can further shape these aspirations. Like the conductor of the orchestra senses what his solo-singer is capable of (even without the singer himself being aware of it), and shapes further conditions for the singer to further realize his capability.

In the next steps we further explore two concrete ‘generative listening’ exercises that can be used as a tool in transformative interviewing. Reflection on one’s own listening skills is the focal asset in the first exercise, creating a connection between personal drives and transformation, is central in the second.

STEP 2

20 min

The following exercise embraces the listening principles of Theory U and helps people to train in generative listening. Ask participants to pair with somebody they have not or hardly spoken with so far. The task is:

- Engage in a conversation on ideas about your personal role in changing research & innovation on food systems (note: It is advisable to provide participants with some relevant reading materials in advance of the training if this is a relative new topic for them). One participant takes the lead in speaking; the other is not responding but just listening. After ±5-10 min the other person takes a turn to speak. Best is to look at a point on the horizon (not at each other).
- After finishing this, use the listening self-observation template to monitor your listening skills (see appendix 2).

Facilitate a plenary dialogue with the participants to reflect on the exercise ('How did the participants experience the exercise?'). Motivate participants to repeat this exercise with a stakeholder with who(m) a connection is desirable, e.g. for doing research or for network expansion.

STEP 3

30 min

Instruct participants to pair with a (new) person. Take this person for a walk, e.g. outside in a green area. Either interview this person or engage in a dialogue about the following three questions:

- Who am I/who are you?
- Why am I doing my work/why are you doing your work? (work motivation)
- What would I/you need to fully realize my/your work motivation?

It is advisable to let one person speak at a time; the listener does not necessarily have to ask questions within one answering round (see previous exercise). This allows more openness for what is actually being said (and little worries about which deepening questions to pose). Furthermore, it is advisable to both look in the same direction/in front of you (and not in each other's eyes), to literally look at 'the future'. In case of rain, place two chairs in front of a window with a good view, and look outside (so you do not look in each other's eyes). This exercise can also be done as a self-reflection exercise, e.g. by journaling about your answers to the three questions for yourself. Such reflection can help change makers to keep their transformative network activities/actions connected to themselves. After the participants returned, facilitate a plenary conversation about the exercise ('How did the participants experience the exercise?'). Motivate participants to repeat this exercise with a stakeholder with who(m) a connection is desirable, e.g. for doing research or for network expansion.

STEP 4

10 min

The exercises performed so far during this session form the key to transformative interviewing.

Transformative interviewing: what does it mean for you and your work?

The mode that participants got into while performing the exercises is the mode one would like when interacting with stakeholders too. In addition to such listening, and holding simple conversations about questions such as 'Who am I/who are you? Why am I doing my work/why are you doing your work? What would I/you need to fully realize my/your work motivation?', the questions listed in Appendix 3 can be a suitable database to delve from for the set-up of transformative interviewing guides (derived from the Theory U MOOC Source Book⁴). In addition to covering (several of) such questions, generative listening will convert the interview into a transformative interview.

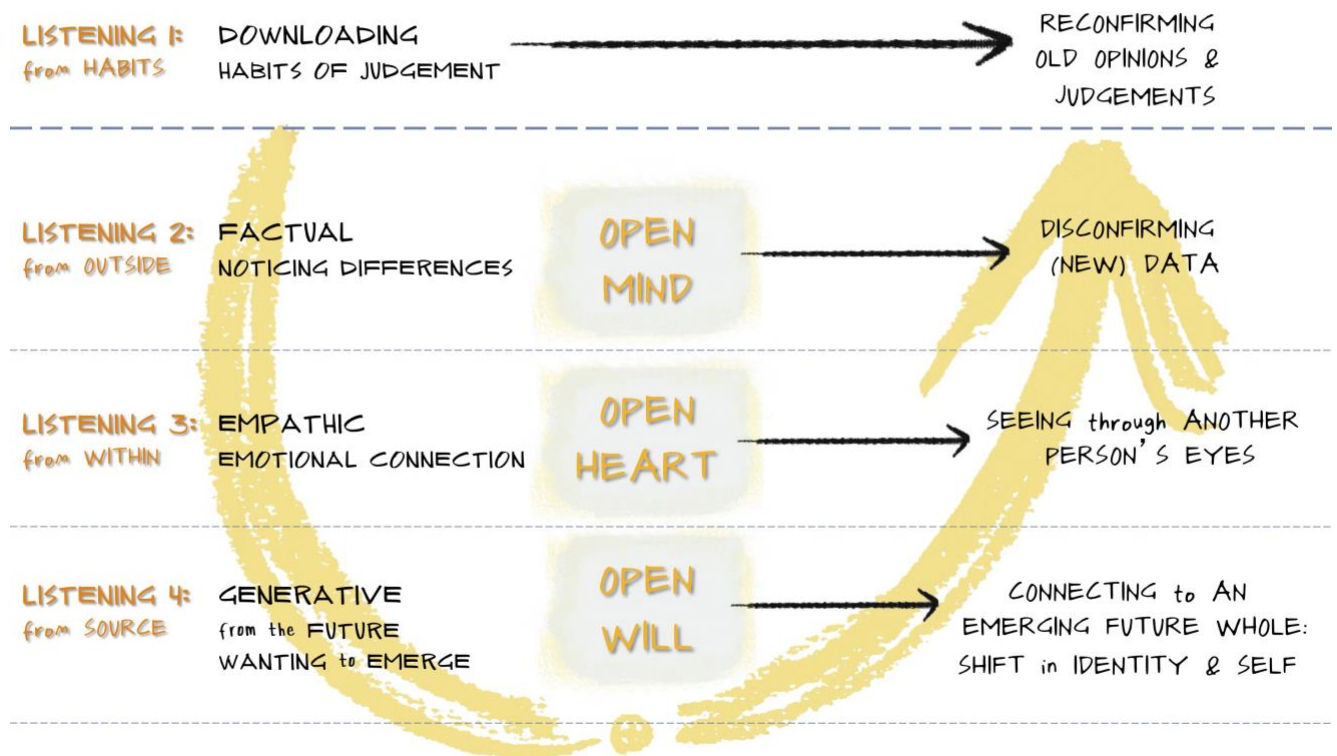
STEP 5

10 min

Ask participants to fill in an evaluation form to further improve the training. See appendix 3 for an example.

⁴ U.Lab: Transforming business, society, and self. Source Book (2015).

APPENDIX 1. FOUR TYPES OF LISTENING



Overview of four types of listening of Theory U, retrieved from Otto Scharmer.

APPENDIX 2. LEARNING SELF OBSERVATION TEMPLATE

SELF OBSERVATION SHEET

IN YOUR LISTENING, HOW MUCH (%) DID YOU APPLY...

DOWNLOADING

LISTENING FROM YOUR OWN HABITS
" " WHAT YOU ALREADY KNOW
TO (RE-)CONFIRM " " " "

FACTUAL LISTENING

NOTING NEW STUFF COMPARED TO WHAT
you KNEW/EXPECTED

EMPATHIZING

LISTENING FROM THE OTHER PERSON'S PERSPECTIVE
FEELING AN EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

GENERATIVE LISTENING

CONNECTING TO AN EMERGING FUTURE /
POSSIBILITIES THAT LINK TO WHO YOU REALLY ARE

[DERIVED FROM U-LAB, MIT]

APPENDIX 3. INSPIRING QUESTIONS FOR TRANSFORMATIVE INTERVIEWING

1. Over the past days and weeks, what did you notice about your (emerging) self?
2. Who have been your “Guardian Angels” (helpers) in your life’s journey so far?
3. Crack: Where do you feel the future in your life and work right now?
4. Frustration: What about your current work and/or personal life frustrates you the most?
5. Happiness: What are your most important sources of energy and happiness in your life and work?
6. Helicopter: Watch yourself from above (as if in a helicopter). What are you doing? What are you trying to do in this stage of your professional and personal journey? Helicopter II: Watch your collective journey from above: what are you trying to do collectively in the present stage of your collective journey?
7. Listen to your young self: Look at your current situation from the viewpoint of you as a young person, at the beginning of your journey: What does that young person have to say to you?
8. Footprint: Imagine you could fast-forward to the very last moments of your life, when it is time for you to pass on. Now look back on your life’s journey as a whole. What would you want to see at that moment? What footprint do you want to leave behind on the planet?
9. From that future point of view: What advice have you given to your current self?
10. Now return again to the present and crystallize what it is that you want to create: your vision and intention for the next 3-5 years. What vision and intention do you have for yourself and your work? What are some essential core elements of the future that you want to create in your personal, professional, and social life? Describe or draw as concretely as possible the images and elements that occur to you.
11. Letting-go: What would you have to let go of in order to bring your vision into reality? What is the old stuff that must die? What is the old skin (behaviours, assumptions, etc.) that you need to shed?
12. People: Who can help you make your highest future possibilities a reality? Who might be your core helpers and partners?
13. Action: If you were to take on the project of bringing your intention into reality, what practical first steps would you take over the next 3 days?



Coordinated by:



Partners



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