

### Discovering Customer Needs

Meeting customer needs is what keeps your business going, yet understanding how your customers work and defining their needs are not always easy. Knowing customers well is vital to creating opportunities for innovation in your products and services. This tool suggests three ways that you and your team can learn about your customers.

#### Observation

Seeing and hearing how your customers work may be the best way to understand how your product or service helps them perform their jobs. Because you are close to your offerings to customers, you might be surprised at what you observe. Watching customers use your product or service in a way you haven't thought of might inspire you to think of new ideas to enhance their experience. As you observe, be as unobtrusive as possible so people don't become self-conscious and change their routines. You might ask for permission to record or videotape your observation. Note things like their work flow, common tasks, tools they use, and people on whom they rely. Then, you can bring back information to your team to gain their insights on innovation opportunities.

#### Worst Critic

What would your competitors say about your product or services? What would a former customer say? Sometimes, considering what your harshest critics might think can lead to innovative ideas. Lead a brainstorming meeting during which you ask your team members to be as harsh as possible, the goal being to uncover an innovation opportunity.

#### Customer Interviews

What better way to understand your customers' needs than to ask them? Most customers are happy to talk about their business and how you can help make it even better. The next two pages contain some thought-starter questions you can ask your customers during an interview. Remember, when you are interviewing, your goal is to gain a better understanding of the customer, so ask for specifics, listen intently, and do not speak for him or her or jump to conclusions. Do ask open-ended follow-up questions if you need more information or details.

## Customer Interview Questions

1. What do we do that you like most?
2. What do we do that helps you serve your customers?
3. What changes do you foresee that will require us to adapt as your partner?

