

INNOVATION THROUGH DISCOVERING UNARTICULATED NEEDS

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Imagine life of a commuter in 2010, before Uber came into the scene. There were plenty of taxis and taxi operators. However, often supply scarcity led to delays and higher fares. But that was the way of life she was used to. Based on her experience, and acceptance of that reality, she had built her own work-around strategies to overcome those hurdles. For example:

- Factoring in an additional 15 – 30 minutes to find a cab.
- Taking public transport
- Asking a friend for a lift
- Car pooling for regular home to work type journeys.

Her unmet need for *getting a cab when she needed it* (without advance planning, or having to pay a premium) probably receded to her sub-conscious mind. So, had we met her at that time, she would have possibly articulated some generic needs, such as:

- Clean, comfortable cabs
- Polite drivers
- Knowledgeable drivers, who know the city roads and landmarks
- Honest drivers, who won't charge unfair premiums
- **AND NOT:** *Guaranteed cab within 5 minutes, whenever and wherever I need one.*

But Uber did manage to uncover her unarticulated (probably unfelt?) needs to come up with its unique value proposition:

- Your cab within minutes, whenever or wherever you are.
- Prices lower than normal taxis, sometimes further discounted, or free.
- Feel as if you have your personal driver.
- We reward you for your loyalty
- Go cashless – no need to spend time to pay at the end of the journey
- No need to keep track of your spending, your invoice will be in your mailbox

What could have been Uber's approach to discovering these hidden, unarticulated needs? The pursuit of this question led me to some research done by Jeffrey Dyré & Hal Gregersen amongst 3,000 creative executives, which led to five "discovery skills" that distinguish innovators:

- **Associating:** Good at putting two seemingly disparate ideas together.
- **Questioning:** Always asking questions like children do. “What if”, “Why”, and “Why not” questions that do not accept status quo.
- **Observation:** Active observation of how people are behaving, over what they are saying.
- **Experimenting:** Eager to try new things and exploring new worlds
- **Networking:** Ability to talk and learn from other people, from backgrounds different from their own.

As consumer insights professionals, we could take a leaf out of these findings. We are already good at questioning and observation – perhaps we could focus more on discovering needs that are buried in the consumer’s sub-conscious. We should strive to develop other areas like associating, experimenting and networking if we are to earn a seat at the innovators’ high table.