

Imaginal Surveys

Imaginal surveys involve soliciting the advice, opinions, or perspectives of other individuals through the medium of chairwork. This method is often useful in the context of problem-solving, challenging negative thoughts about the judgements of others ('mind-reading'), or encouraging creative thinking.

Process of dialogue:

1). The facilitator invites the individual to name several individuals whose opinions they would value.

Facilitator: "It sounds like getting some advice on this issue might be helpful. If you could ask two individuals – real or imagined, dead or alive – for their opinion on this matter, who would you ask?"

2). Chairs representing each person are introduced into the consulting room space.

Facilitator: "Let's imagine Person A is sat here [introduces a seat] and Person B is sat her [introduces a second seat]. Do you get a sense of their presence? How do they hold themselves in their chairs?"

3). The individual is asked to move into the chair of person A and adopt that individual's perspective.

Facilitator: "Let's begin with Person A. I'd like you to move to their chair as, as best you can, really step into their shoes."

4). The facilitator then proceeds to interview the individual-as-other. As with Interpersonal Interviews, the dialogue begins with concrete questions, before moving on to more exploratory lines of discussion.

Facilitator: "Nice to meet you, Person A. How old are you? What do you do? Why do you think this individual has asked you to join us today? What's your opinion or perspective on the issue they are struggling with?"

5). The same process of embodiment and interview is repeated with Person B.

Facilitation notes:

- Therapist should be mindful of which persons are selected for imaginal surveys. For example, the perspective of a critical parent might not be helpful in terms of testing out whether other people share the individual's negative automatic thoughts.

- To determine whether the 'other' is likely to offer a beneficial perspective, the facilitator can ask why this individual has been chosen and whether perspective is likely to be objective, productive, or supportive prior to the dialogue starting.

Further Reading

Pugh, M. (2019). A little less talk, a little more action: A dialogical approach to cognitive therapy. *The Cognitive Behaviour Therapist*, 12, 1-24.

Citation:

Pugh, M. & Bell, T. (2020). Imaginal surveys: Facilitation guidance. Retrieved from www.chairwork.co.uk.

For further chairwork guidelines and facilitation notes
visit www.chairwork.co.uk