Directed storytelling

What is it?

This technique involves asking each participant to tell you a story about a time they did or experienced something. Through the storytelling approach, the participant is likely to identify what they found positive about their experience, problems they encountered, and any points of interest to them. Your role is to guide their story, to pull out more information by asking open questions. One of the benefits of this approach is that it's very quick and straightforward to carry out, and minimal props are needed.

Things you need

- Willing participants
- Consent forms - available as part of the toolkit
- A basis for the story: 'Please tell me a story about…'
- A pen and notepad to take notes (or a voice recorder)
- Optional - a colleague to assist you by taking notes

How to do it

1. Start by asking each participant to tell you a story about something, e.g. 'Please tell me a story about the last time you used SharePoint.'

2. During their story, prompt them to give more details about particular aspects by asking them open questions based on:
   a. Why…?
   b. What…?
   c. When…?
   d. Where…?
   e. How…?

   Avoid any leading questions that are overtly positive or negative, e.g. 'Did you like the form?' or 'That page is a bit long, isn't it?' Be careful not to ask too many questions because the storyteller should be free to digress and talk about anything that occurs to them. If they wander off topic altogether though, it's fine to remind them to continue telling their story.

3. Throughout the storytelling, make notes about anything they say that seems relevant. For example, if they tell you they enjoyed something or found it user friendly, that's worth jotting down because the information could be used to improve related things. Even more importantly, record if someone says that they didn't like something or found it difficult. Problems people encounter are potential areas to make changes for the better. After listening to several participants telling stories about the same thing, compare your notes from each of them and draw out any themes. Use these to make decisions about what to change.