



# Customer Discovery & Field Interviews

CAMEROON EDITION

SIU PBL WORKSHOP

Most startups don't fail because of bad technology — they fail because no one wanted what was built. This workshop will change how you think about customers forever. You won't just learn theory. You will go out, talk to real people, and come back with the truth.

THE HOOK

# Why Startups Fail: The Problem-Solution Mismatch

## The Painful Truth

CB Insights reports that **42% of startups fail** because there is no market need. Founders built something nobody asked for — because they never properly asked.

They had passion. They had a pitch. They had an investor deck. But they never had a real conversation with a real customer.

## The Big Lie of Customer Interviews

Founders do talk to customers — but they do it wrong. They ask: *"Would you use an app that...?"* and the customer says *"Yes, definitely!"* and nothing gets built that people actually pay for.

That "yes" is not data. It's politeness. Your job today is to learn the difference.



# The Difference Between a Wasted Hour and a Gold Mine

## Bad Interview

- "Would you use an app for sending money?" (hypothetical)
- "Do you think this is a problem?" (leading)
- "Wouldn't it be great if...?" (pitching)
- "How much would you pay for this?" (before any trust)

## Good Interview

- "Tell me about the last time you sent money to your family." (real behavior)
- "What happened? Walk me through it step by step." (story)
- "What was the most frustrating part?" (pain extraction)
- "How did you end up solving it in the end?" (workaround)

 The golden rule: **Never ask about the future. Always ask about the past.** Past behaviour is real. Future intentions are fiction.

# Understanding Who You're Talking To

Cameroon has its own social dynamics that will distort your interview data if you are not prepared. These are not obstacles — they are **context clues** that make your insights richer when you know how to read them.



## Politeness Bias

People will rarely say "no" directly. A Cameroonian interviewee may agree with everything you say out of respect. Look for hesitation, vague answers, and changed subjects — that's where the truth hides.



## Authority Bias

If you present yourself as a "university student with a project," people may give formal, impressive-sounding answers. Dress down. Position yourself as curious, not official.



## Economic Signalling

People regularly overstate their ability to pay — especially to strangers. "I can afford it" may mean "I could imagine affording it." Always anchor with past spending, not hypothetical budgets.

# What They Say vs. What They Mean

Use this translation table in the field. When you hear these phrases, dig deeper — don't accept the surface answer.

What They Say	What They Likely Mean	What To Do
"Yes, I would use that."	"I'm being polite and encouraging."	Ask: "When was the last time you needed something like this?"
"It's not really a problem."	"I've adapted and given up complaining."	Ask: "How do you handle it when it happens?"
"I can afford it, no problem."	"I want to appear capable."	Ask: "What did you spend on this last month?"
"My friends have the same issue."	"I'm generalising — may not be true."	Ask: "Can you give me a specific example from your own life?"
"The government should fix it."	"I've lost faith in solutions existing."	Ask: "What have YOU tried to do about it?"



## INTERVIEWER MINDSET

# You Are Not a Founder Today. You Are an Investigator.

### Curiosity Over Intelligence

Your job is not to be smart. It's to be genuinely curious. The best interviewers ask "why?" five times in a row without shame. Silence is your friend — let it breathe.

### Past Over Future

Every question must be anchored in what **already happened**. "Tell me about the last time..." unlocks real memory. "Would you ever..." unlocks imagination, not data.

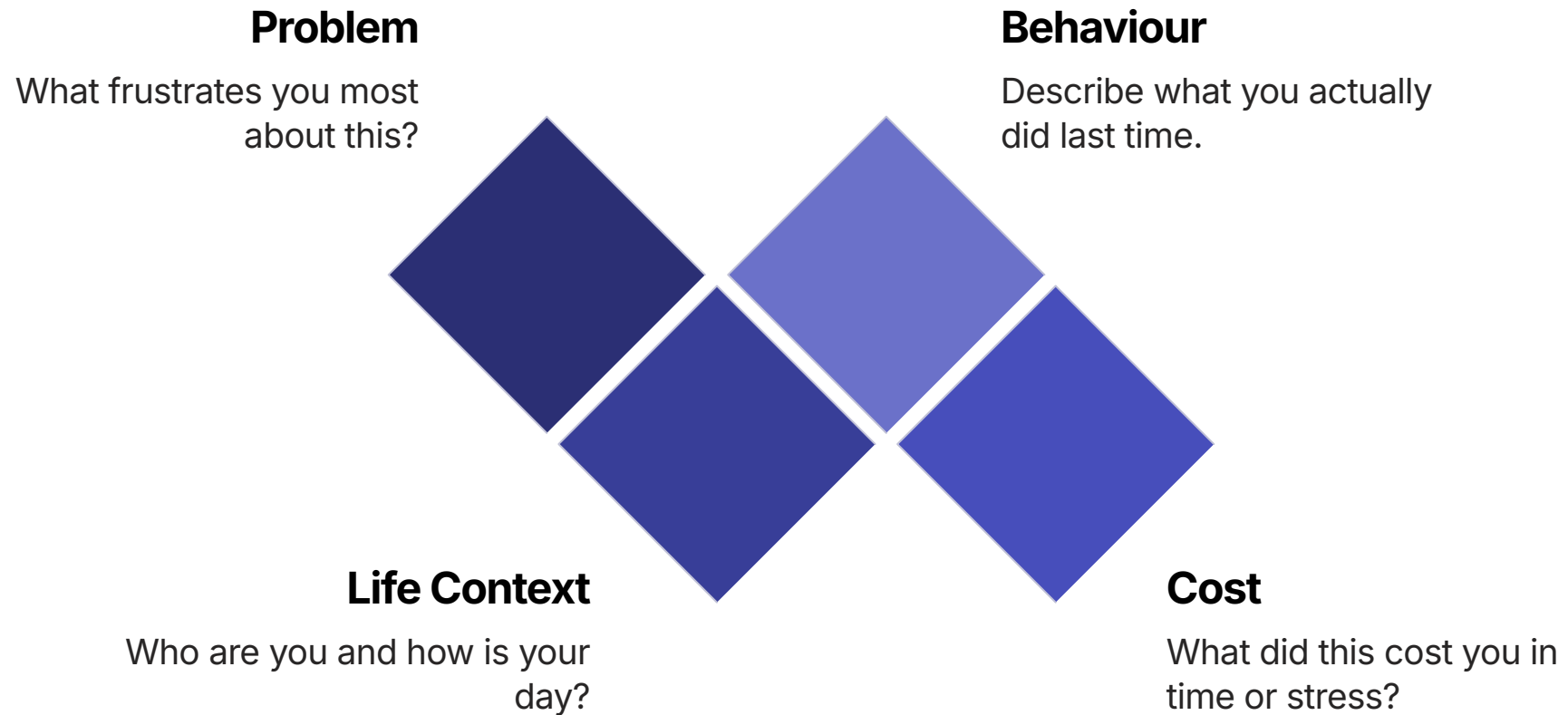
### Listen More Than You Speak

Your ratio should be **80% listening / 20% speaking**. If you're talking more than the customer, you're doing it wrong. Notes, not speeches.

"You don't build startups by thinking. You build them by listening — correctly."

# The Interview Structure: 4 Phases That Always Work

Follow this sequence in every interview. Each phase builds trust and extracts a different layer of insight. Never skip phases — context before pain, always.



01

## Life Context

*"Walk me through a typical day — how do you get to work? How do you pay for things?"*

03

## Behaviour

*"Tell me about the last time that happened. What exactly did you do?"*

02

## Problem

*"What is the most annoying or painful part of [topic] for you right now?"*

04

## Cost

*"How long did that take? Did you spend money? How did it make you feel?"*

# Opening Scripts: Douala & Yaoundé Edition

The first 60 seconds decide the quality of the entire interview. Use these real, localised openers to build instant rapport before asking anything substantial.

## En Français (Douala / Yaoundé)


*"Bonjour! Je m'appelle [Nom], je suis étudiant à SIU. On fait une étude sur comment les gens gèrent [transport/argent/santé] au quotidien. Pas de vente, pas de produit — juste votre expérience. Ça dure 10 minutes, est-ce que vous avez un moment?"*

*Suivi: "Parlez-moi de votre journée d'hier — comment vous avez commencé la matinée?"*

## In English (Anglophone regions)

*"Hi, good morning! My name is [Name], I'm a student at SIU. We're doing a study on how people deal with [transport/money/health] in daily life. No selling, no product — just your real experience. Got 10 minutes?"*

*Follow up: "Tell me about yesterday — how did your morning start?"*

 Always mention: no product, no selling. This one phrase instantly reduces defensiveness and increases honesty by 40%.

# Role Play Exercise: Bad Interview vs. Good Interview

This is a **live exercise**. Follow the instructions below precisely. The facilitator will call on pairs to perform both versions in front of the group.

## Round 1 — BAD Interview (5 min)

Student A is the interviewer. Student B is a Douala moto-taxi rider.

- Ask hypothetical questions only
- Pitch an app idea mid-interview
- Ask "would you pay 2,000 CFA for this?"
- Interrupt and agree with everything

**Class observers:** count how many leading questions are asked.

## Round 2 — GOOD Interview (7 min)

Same pair. Same topic. Different approach.

- Start with the opening script
- Ask about yesterday's real experience
- Use "tell me more" and silence
- Never mention a product or solution

**Class observers:** note one surprising thing you heard.

## Observer Role (Both Rounds)

You are the quality controller. Track:

- Number of hypothetical questions asked
- Number of times the interviewer spoke more than 15 seconds
- Did the interviewee reveal a real pain?
- Was there a moment of surprise or unexpected truth?

# Your Mission: Go Into the Field

This is not optional. The classroom is preparation. The street is where the real work happens. Here is your field brief.

1

## Where to Go

Local markets (Marché Mokolo, Marché Central), bus stations, moto-taxi ranks, small shops, phone repair stalls, university canteens, neighbourhood health clinics.

2

## Who to Interview

**Real users only** — not your friends, not your family, not classmates. Target people actively doing something: trading, commuting, waiting, working. Diversity in age, gender, and profession is essential.

3

## How Many

Minimum **10 completed interviews** per student. Patterns only emerge after 7–10 conversations. Before that, you're just hearing noise. Aim for 15.

4

## How to Record

Written notes during the interview are fine. Do NOT record audio without permission. After each interview, spend 3 minutes writing your key observation while it's still fresh.

# What You Must Submit After the Field

Your fieldwork is only valuable if it's captured and synthesised. Every student submits the following deliverables — these will be reviewed in the debrief session.



## Interview Transcripts

A written summary of each interview: who you spoke to, key quotes, and the flow of the conversation. Minimum 10 transcripts.



## Top 3 Key Pains

The three recurring frustrations you heard most often across all interviews. Quote the customer directly where possible.



## Behavioural Insights

What do people *actually do* (not say they do)? What workarounds have they invented? What behaviours surprised you?

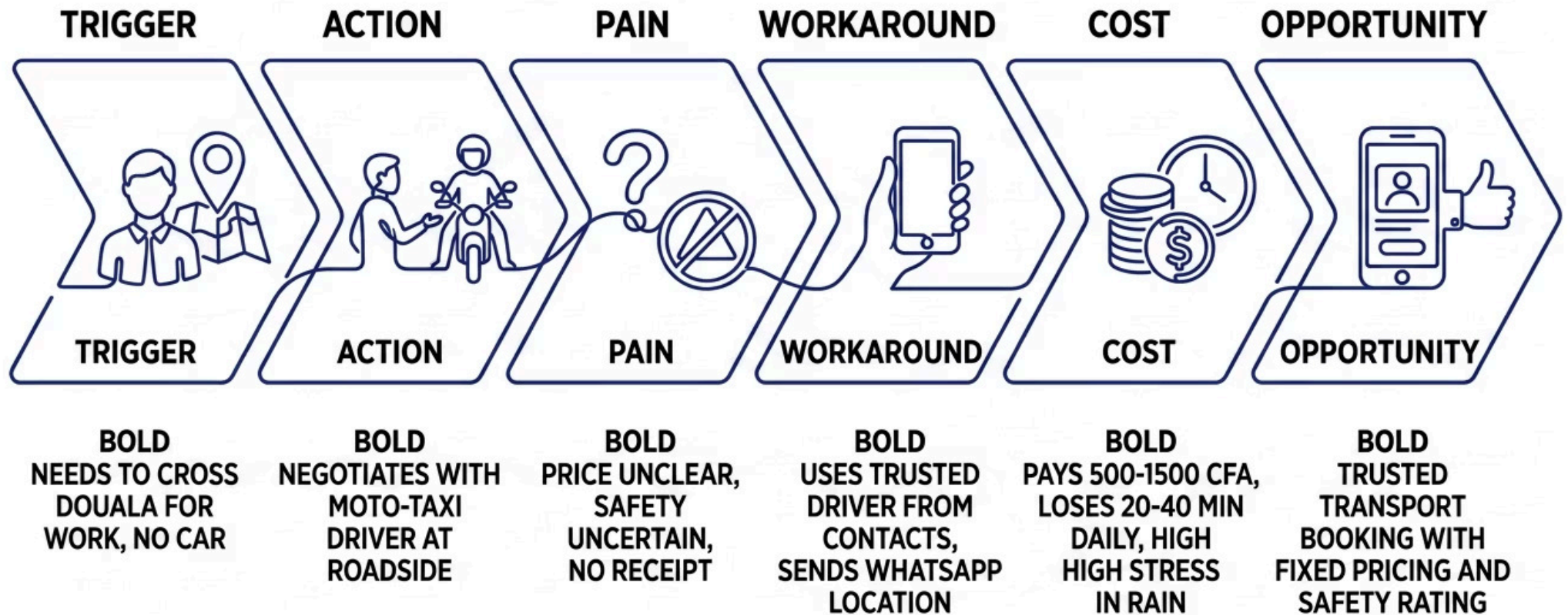


## One Unexpected Truth

The one thing you heard that completely surprised you — something you never would have discovered sitting in a classroom. This is the most important deliverable.

# Customer Journey Map: Transport in Douala

This is a real-world example of how to map a customer journey using insights from field interviews. Every stage reveals a potential startup opportunity.



✔ Notice: the **workaround** stage is where most startup ideas are born. People have already invented a partial solution — your job is to make it 10x better.

# The 5 Mistakes That Kill Your Interview Data

## → **Asking Hypothetical Questions**

"Would you use this?" and "How much would you pay?" are fantasy questions. They generate polite fiction. Replace every "would you" with "did you" or "tell me about the last time."

## → **Pitching Instead of Listening**

The moment you describe your idea, the interview becomes a sales call. The customer stops sharing problems and starts evaluating your solution. Keep your idea secret until after the interview.

## → **Interviewing Friends and Family**

They love you. They will support your idea. They will tell you what you want to hear. Real data only comes from strangers with no emotional investment in your success.

## → **Accepting the First Answer**

"It's fine" is never fine. Always follow up: "What do you mean by fine? Give me an example." The gold is always one or two layers deeper than the first response.

## → **Not Taking Notes Immediately**

Memory degrades within 30 minutes. You will forget the exact words — and exact words matter. Write your key observations within 3 minutes of ending each interview.

# You Don't Build Startups by Thinking. You Build Them by Listening — Correctly.

The street is your lab. The customer is your professor. Every interview is a data point that gets you closer to building something people actually need — and will actually pay for.

## Your Next 48 Hours

Conduct 10+ real interviews in Douala or Yaoundé. Use the framework. Trust the silence. Follow the pain.

## Debrief Session

Return with your transcripts, top 3 pains, behavioural insights, and your one unexpected truth. Be ready to present to the group.

## The Real Mission

Don't come back with an idea. Come back with **evidence**. The best startup pitch starts with: *"I spoke to 15 people, and here's what they all said..."*