TURN8

HOW TO CONDUCT
AI-POWERED
CUSTOMER DISCOVERY
INTERVIEWS

Customer validation & insight generation

WHERE THIS IS USED

- Venture Studio programs
- Corporate Incubators
- Accelerators (corporate or government-backed)
- CVC pre-investment transitions
- AI Studio agent escalation
- Foundry-as-a-Service engagements

AUDIENCE

- Venture Builders
- Innovation Program Managers
- Startup Founders
- Customer Research Leads
- AI Studio Operators

PHASE

Phase Two: Validation & Design → Customer Discovery Sprint (Weeks 1–3)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This guide enables you to **design**, **schedule**, and **conduct** structured customer discovery interviews that are enhanced by AI-generated question sets and real-time insight analysis. By the end of this guide, your team will have spoken with at least 30-50 target customers, captured validated pain points, and produced a synthesized insight report ready for the problem-solution fit assessment.

This is the most cost-efficient and fastest way to learn whether the problem you identified in Phase One is **real, urgent, and monetizable**.

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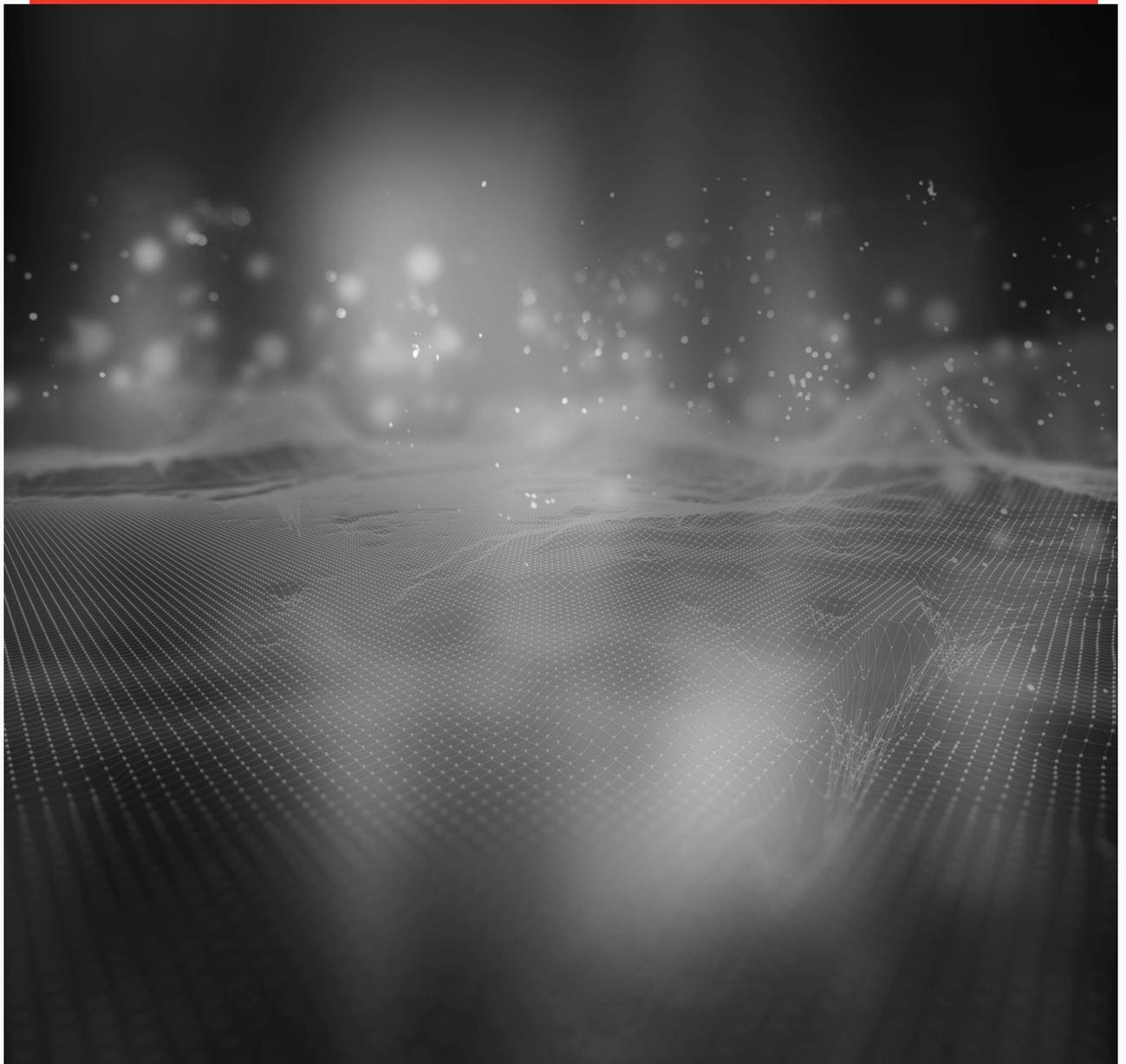
THE CORE PROBLEM

Why Most Teams Get This Wrong

• Teams skip or rush interviews because they believe they already understand the customer.

• Interview questions are written to confirm existing hypotheses, not to discover new ones.

• Cognitive biases (confirmation, social desirability, projection) corrupt the data.

• Insights are captured informally and never synthesized — learning dies in meeting notes.

• Teams confuse what customers say they want with what they demonstrably need.

In GCC organizations specifically:

Seniority hierarchies make it difficult to access frontline decision-makers who experience the real pain.

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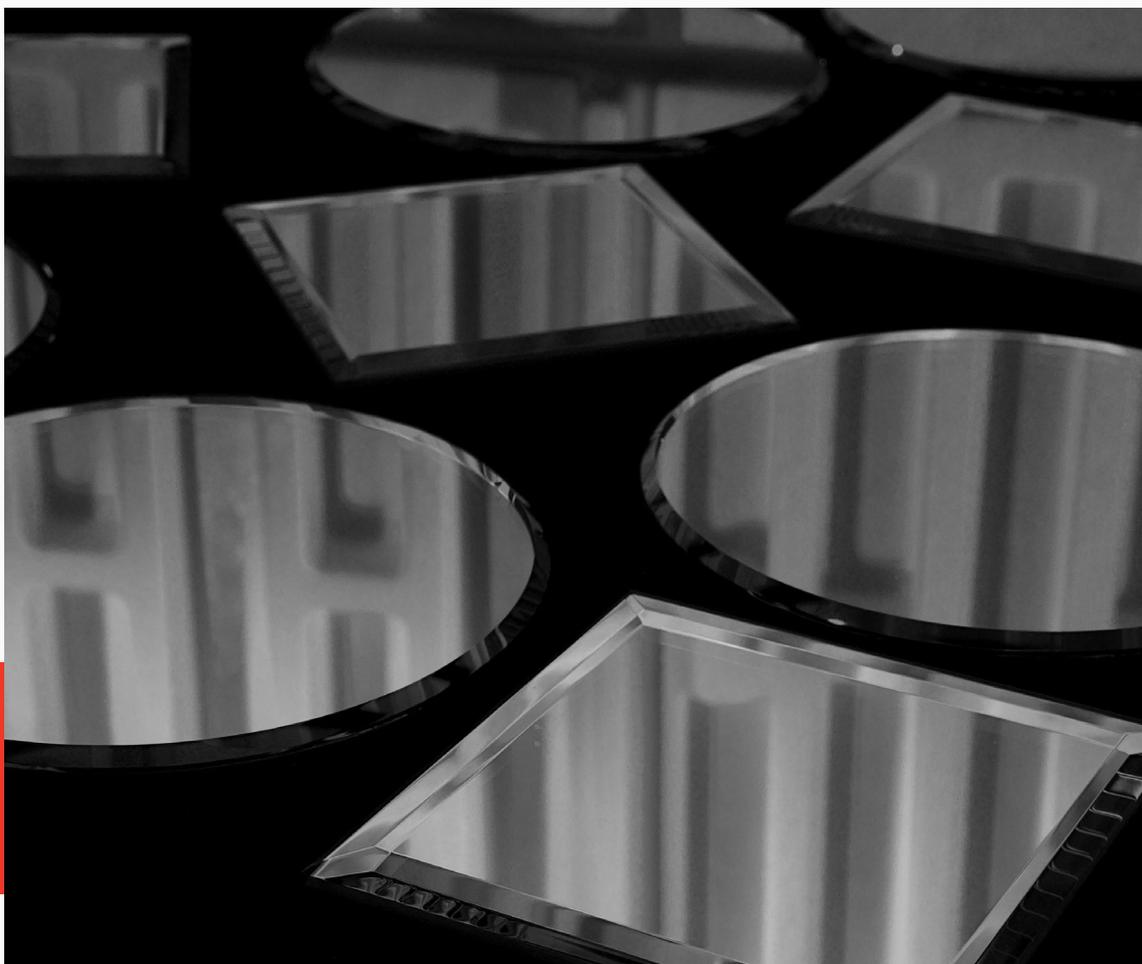
PREREQUISITES

- Completed Phase One: Challenge Statement, Venture Thesis, and defined Opportunity Areas

- Customer segment hypothesis: a written description of your target persona (role, industry, geography)

- Access to a CRM or contact database with at least 50 potential interview candidates

- A note-taking framework or tool (Notion, Airtable, or **TURN8** Interview Tracker template)

- AI tool access: Claude, ChatGPT, or equivalent (Claude recommended — see Step 2) for question generation and insight analysis

- Calendar scheduling tool (Calendly or equivalent)

- Recording consent framework aligned with local regulations (KSA, GCC)
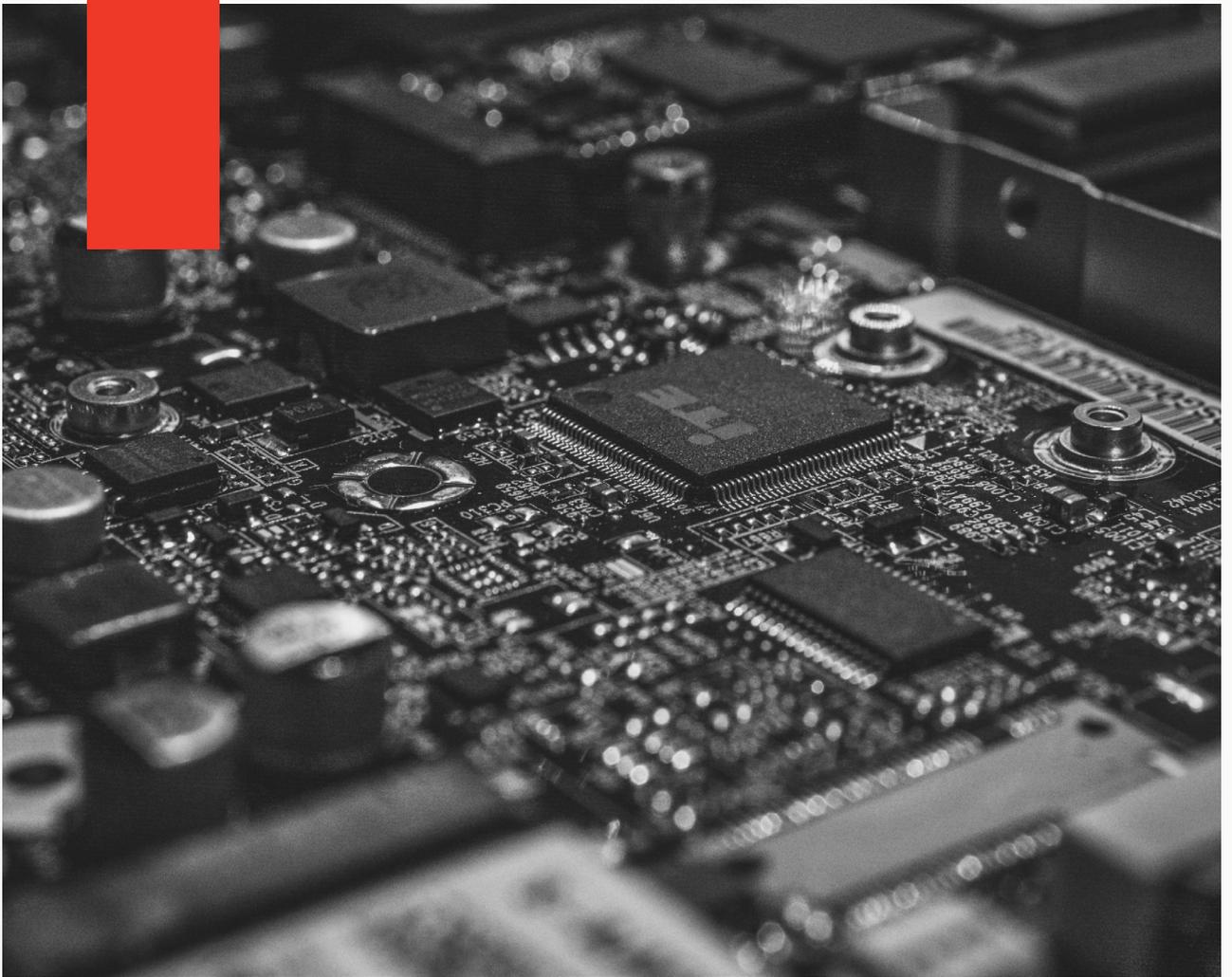
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EXPECTED OUTPUT/ SUCCESS CRITERIA

You Have Succeeded When:

✔ 30+ customer interviews completed across at least 3 distinct customer sub-segments

✔ AI-generated interview guide reviewed and refined by team lead before first interview

✔ Every interview transcribed and tagged with pain, behavior, constraint, and preference labels

✔ A synthesized insight report identifying top 3 validated pain points with supporting evidence

✔ At least one hypothesis from Phase One confirmed and at least one invalidated

✔ A ranked list of 'must-solve' vs. 'nice-to-solve' pain points

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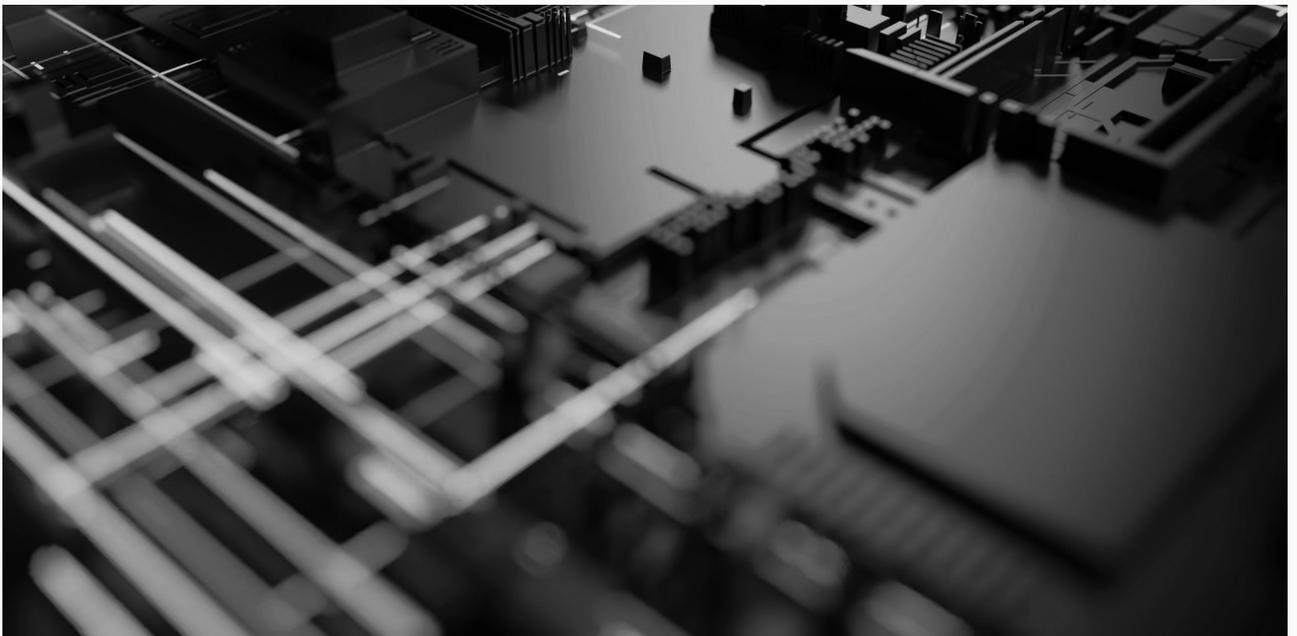
STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

STEP 1 DEFINE YOUR INTERVIEW OBJECTIVES

1.1 Write down the 3 hypotheses from Phase One that you most need to validate or invalidate.

1.2 For each hypothesis, write one question you are afraid to ask (this is your most important question).

1.3 Define your target interviewee profile: role, seniority, industry, company size, geography.

1.4 Set your interview quota: minimum 5 interviews per customer sub-segment, minimum 3 sub-segments.

STEP 2 GENERATE YOUR INTERVIEW GUIDE USING AI

Open your preferred AI tool (Claude recommended) and enter the following prompt, replacing the brackets with your context:

AI PROMPT TEMPLATE

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"You are a customer discovery expert. I am building a venture in the
[INDUSTRY] space targeting [CUSTOMER PERSONA] in [GEOGRAPHY]. My core
hypothesis is that [TARGET CUSTOMER] struggles with [PROBLEM] and
currently solve it by [CURRENT SOLUTION]. Generate a 20-question
discovery interview guide using open-ended, non-leading questions.
Structure it: (1) Context-setting warm-up questions, (2) Behavioral
and process exploration, (3) Pain and frustration probing, (4)
Current solution mapping, (5) Implication and consequence questions.
Flag the 3 most critical questions."
```

2.1 Review the AI output with your team. Remove any question that leads the interviewee toward your solution.

2.2 Add 2–3 questions specific to your local market context (e.g., regulatory, cultural, language).

2.3 Finalize guide to 10–12 questions. A 45-minute interview supports no more than 12 questions with follow-ups.

STEP 3 — RECRUIT INTERVIEW CANDIDATES

3.1 Export your target contact list from your CRM or build one using LinkedIn Sales Navigator.

3.2 Write a 4-sentence outreach message: (1) Who you are, (2) What you are exploring, (3) Why their expertise matters, (4) Clear ask for 20–30 minutes.

3.3 Send outreach in batches of 20. Target a 20–30% response rate — if lower, revise your outreach message.

3.4 Prioritize 'Earlyvangelists': contacts who have already tried to solve the problem themselves.

3.5 Confirm interviews 24 hours before. Send the calendar invite with a one-line agenda — do not share questions in advance.

STEP 4 — CONDUCT THE INTERVIEW

4.1 Assign roles before each interview: one person leads questions; one takes notes (never the same person).

4.2 Open the interview with: *'We are here to learn, not to sell. There are no right or wrong answers. We will share our findings with you afterward.'*

4.3 Ask your opening question. Then be quiet for as long as possible. Silence is data.

4.4 Use probe phrases when the interviewee gives short answers: *'Tell me more about that.' / 'What happened next?' / 'How did that make you feel?'*

4.5 Do not share your product idea or suggest solutions. If asked, say: *'We are still in the learning phase.'*

4.6 Enforce a hard cut-off at 45 minutes, even if the conversation remains productive.

4.7 Immediately after the interview, spend 5 minutes completing the debrief form before the next meeting.
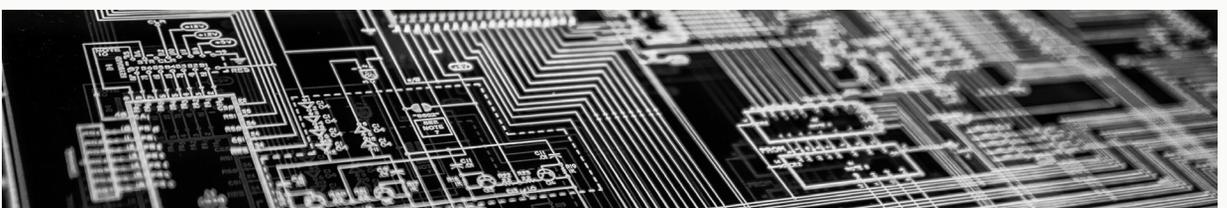
STEP 5   CAPTURE AND TAG INSIGHTS WITH AI

After every 5 interviews, run the following AI analysis process:

5.1   Compile your raw interview notes into a single document.

5.2   Submit to your AI tool with this prompt:

AI ANALYSIS PROMPT
```
"Analyze these customer interview notes. Identify and tag every
insight as: [PAIN], [BEHAVIOR], [CONSTRAINT], [PREFERENCE], or
[SURPRISE]. Then produce: (1) Top 5 recurring pain themes with
frequency count, (2) Most emotionally intense pain points, (3)
Behaviors that contradict stated preferences, (4) Any surprising
insights not anticipated in the hypothesis, (5) A hypothesis
validation scorecard: for each of my 3 hypotheses, rate Validated /
Partially Validated / Invalidated with evidence."
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5.3   Review AI output with the team. Do not accept AI interpretation without reviewing source quotes.

5.4   Update your insight tracker after each batch analysis.

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TROUBLESHOOTING

ISSUE	LIKELY CAUSE	FIX
Low response rate to outreach	Message too salesy or vague	Rewrite to lead with curiosity, not product. Reference a specific pain in the subject line.
Interviewee gives short answers	Questions are too closed or leading	Switch to: 'Tell me about the last time you...' prompts. Use silence as a tool.
All interviewees confirm hypothesis	Recruiting from biased network (friends, warm contacts)	Deliberately recruit skeptics. Ask each interviewee to refer someone who would disagree.
Notes are too shallow to analyze	Note-taker is trying to capture everything	Capture verbatim quotes only. Emotion and specific words matter more than summaries.
AI analysis misses key themes	Notes too fragmented or short	Before submitting to AI, expand abbreviations and add context sentences to each note.

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VALIDATION STEPS

Have you completed at least 15 interviews across 3 sub-segments?

Has at least one hypothesis been invalidated (if zero were invalidated, you are asking leading questions)?

Can you identify the single most painful problem that appeared across more than 60% of interviews?

Do you have at least 5 verbatim customer quotes that describe the pain in the customer's own words?
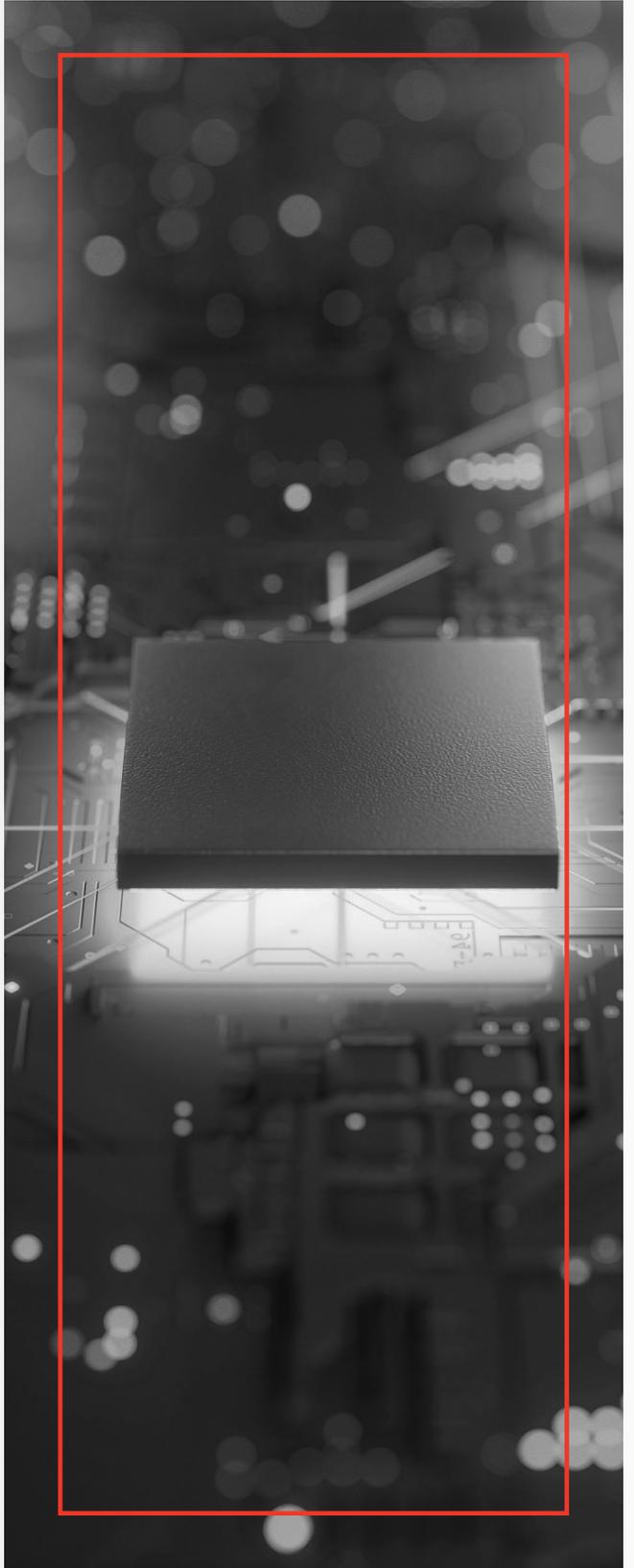
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NEXT STEPS

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Proceed to Guide A2: How to Validate Problem-Solution Fit Without Building Anything

↘

Share the insight report with your executive sponsor before proceeding to solution design

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Add confirmed pain point descriptions to your Venture Thesis document from Phase One

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CHECKLIST

PREPARATION

☐ Phase One deliverables reviewed: Challenge Statement, Venture Thesis, and Opportunity Areas documented

☐ 3 core hypotheses written — including the one you are most afraid to invalidate

☐ Target interviewee persona defined: role/title, seniority, company size, industry, geography

☐ Buying Center mapped: Initiator, Decision Maker, Approver, Gatekeeper, User, and Wildcard identified

☐ Contact list built with minimum 50 candidates — prioritize Earlyvangelists who have already tried to solve the problem

☐ AI interview guide generated, reviewed by team lead, and stripped of leading or solution-suggesting questions

☐ All questions are open-ended and cannot be answered with yes or no

☐ Interview guide finalized to 10–12 questions maximum (suitable for 30–45 minute format)

☐ Outreach message written: 4 sentences covering who you are, what you are exploring, why their expertise matters, and a clear ask for 20–30 minutes

☐ Recording consent approach confirmed and aligned with local regulations (KSA/GCC)

SCHEDULING AND ROLES

☐ Outreach sent in batches of 20; response rate monitored (target 20–30% — rewrite message if below 15%)

☐ Interviewer and note-taker assigned for every session — never the same person

☐ Calendar invites sent 24 hours before each session with a one-line agenda — questions NOT shared in advance

☐ A friendly contact identified and booked as the first practice interview
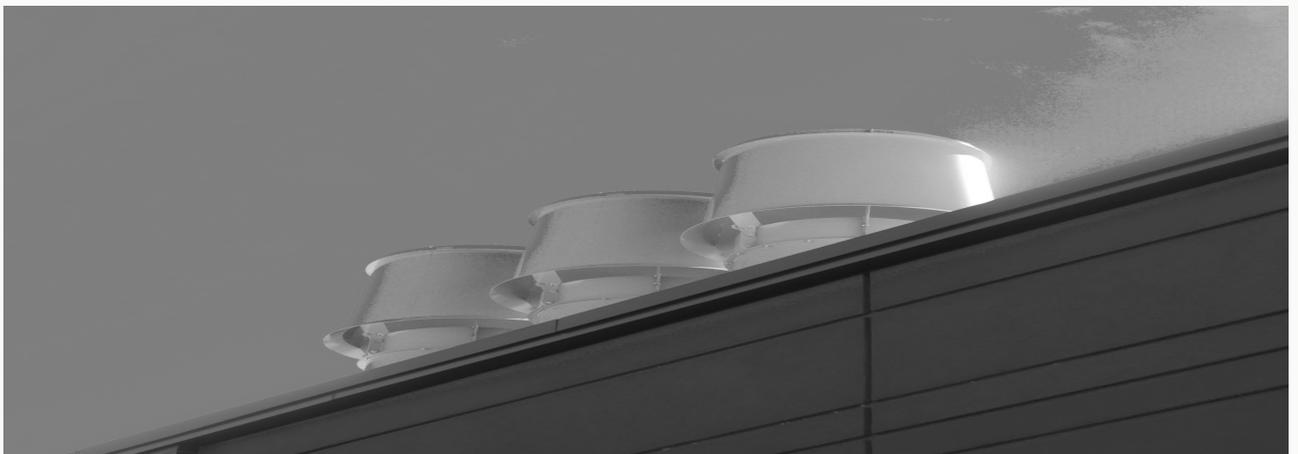
DURING THE INTERVIEW

☐ Interview opened with: We are here to learn, not to sell. There are no right or wrong answers

☐ Cameras-off option offered for video calls to reduce formality and bandwidth barriers

☐ Only the moderator speaks during the interview — note-taker stays completely silent

☐ First question asked — silence held for at least 3 seconds before any follow-up

☐ Probing questions used: Tell me more about that / What happened next? / What was the impact on you personally?

☐ Past behavior questions used (not hypothetical): Tell me about the last time... not Would you ever...

☐ Only one question asked at a time — no double questions

☐ Emotional cues noted: changes in pace, pitch, laughter, or sighs — these signal the most important pain points

☐ No product idea or solution concept shared at any point during the interview

☐ Hard cut-off respected at 45 minutes even if conversation is going well

☐ Referral ask made at close: Is there anyone in a comparable position we could speak with?

☐ Offer made to share an anonymized findings report as a follow-up — this increases referral conversion

AFTER EACH INTERVIEW

☐ Post-interview debrief completed within 5 minutes: What leading questions were used? What should change? What was missing?

☐ Verbatim quotes captured — especially emotionally charged or surprising language

☐ Notes tagged using five categories: [PAIN], [BEHAVIOR], [CONSTRAINT], [PREFERENCE], [SURPRISE]

SYNTHESIS & COMPLETION

☐ Minimum 15 interviews completed across at least 3 distinct customer sub-segments

☐ AI insight analysis run after every 5 interviews using the batch analysis prompt

☐ At least one hypothesis from Phase One has been invalidated (zero invalidations indicates leading questions were used)

☐ Top 3 validated pain points identified with a minimum 5 supporting verbatim quotes each

☐ Pain points classified as must-solve vs. nice-to-solve based on frequency and emotional intensity

☐ Hypothesis validation scorecard completed: Validated / Partially Validated / Invalidated with evidence for each

☐ Insight report produced and shared with the executive sponsor for sign-off before proceeding to Guide 2