



PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION



Participant observation is a tool where the people who are being observed know that designers are present and that they are currently being observed in situations that are relevant to the design challenge. Designers can observe situations that include digital and physical actions with other people and/or equipment.

PREPARATION:

2-8 hours

DURATION:

1-4 hours per round

FACILITATORS:

1-3, service design team members

RESOURCES:

Notebook, photo camera, video camera, voice recorder

PARTICIPANTS:

5-20, Users, employees, or other stakeholders

EXPECTED OUTCOME:

Field data such as notes, photos, videos, audio recordings, sketches

DESIGN PHASE:

Insights

TEMPLATE OR GUIDELINES:

Create own observation guidelines

By using the participant observation tool, designers collect data by observing behavior whilst interacting with the subjects when necessary. The subjects are often users, employees, or other stakeholders, who are observed in situations that are relevant to the design challenge.

1. START:

Define the focus of what you are interested in and consider what you want to do with the findings (build personas, journey maps, system maps, etc.).

2. IDENTIFY:

Based on the selected focus area, define the criteria for selecting suitable participants, considering not only who to observe and interview, but also when and where - suitable locations and situations for the participant observation.

3. PREPARE:

Think about how you will approach the participants, what expectations will be set up-front, how you will start and end, and how much time is planned for the participant observation. Write up the observation guidelines based on what you want to find out. Decide on how the observations

will be documented, e.g. videos, voice recordings, photos, and field notes.

4. CONDUCT:

Try to influence the participants as little as possible while at the same time being as close as necessary. Use the situational context and ask participants to explain their specific activities, behavior, motivations, needs, etc.

REPORT:

Right afterwards, write up the key learnings. Start organizing the data with the affinity diagram tool. Review all the data and highlight important issues whilst trying to find patterns within the data. Make a short presentation that includes the key findings and examples from the data that exemplify these, e.g. quotes, photos, or videos.

