

Hear
Choose Research Methods
Method: In-context Immersion

STEP
4

METHOD: IN CONTEXT IMMERSION

Meeting people where they live, work, and socialize and immersing yourself in their context reveals new insights and unexpected opportunities.

Human-Centered Design works best when the designers understand the people they are designing for not just on an intellectual level, but also on an experiential level. Try to do what your constituents do and talk to them about their experience of life in the moment.

Facilitator Notes

Time:
2-4 Days

Difficulty:
★★★★☆

Step 1: To plan a homestay, identify people willing to host a researcher for one-to-three nights in their home. Depending on local customs, level of safety, and language barriers, team members can stay in homes individually or partner up in groups of two to three people.

Step 2: Make sure the team understands that the goal of this exercise is to see how participants live day-to-day. Advise your team not to bring elaborate gifts, food, or alcohol to the homestay. However, a small gift of ordinary household supplies or help with normal family expenses is perfectly fine.

Step 3: Tell team members to participate with the family in their normal routines. Ask the team to spend time with and talk to the men, women, and children in the household. It's important to see how the household works from all these different perspectives.



GENDER

On a project in rural India, people said that cultural tradition prevented women from touching men who are not immediate family members. However, by spending several days in a village, the team observed that there were many instances in which trained or uniformed women doing specific jobs were able to touch men without any serious problems. These gaps between what people say and what they do are not bad. In fact, seeing these differences may highlight new opportunities; for example, designing a new medical service that could be provided by uniformed women.



**TRY
#1**

Work Alongside

Spend a few hours to a few days working with someone. By experiencing the business and activity firsthand, you may gain better understanding of their needs, barriers, and constraints.



**TRY
#2**

Family Homestay

Ask a family to host 1-2 team members for a few nights in their home. Staying for a few nights allows the family to gain comfort and act naturally. After the second night, very few people can maintain a “show” for guests, and the understanding and empathy the team will gain will increase the longer you stay in one place.

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TIP
#1

What people say (and think) they do and what they actually do are not always the same thing.

With no intent to mislead you, people often have strong beliefs about what they do on a daily basis that differs from what they actually do. The goal is not to correct or point out the misperception, but rather to understand the difference.



TIP
#2

Putting yourself in someone's shoes enables you to get beyond what people say to what they think and feel.

Being in-context means gaining true empathy through being with people in their real settings and doing the things they normally do. This kind of deep immersion gives us Informed Intuition that we take back with us to design solutions. We begin to take on the perspective of the interview participant which enables us to make design decisions with their perspective in mind. Of course, we always go back into the field and get feedback from the source to see if our Informed Intuition led us to the right choices, and how we can improve them.



TIP
#3

Deep immersion shows commitment and staying power.

For example, working with a person for a day in his or her field, living with a family for a few days or helping them bring their products to market are ways of showing your deep interest in the day-to-day lives of your participants. Trust is built over time and people feel at ease sharing their plans and hopes for the future. Many NGOs gain this depth of connection over many months of relationship building. Some techniques like the overnight stay described in the case study on the next page can accelerate this trust building.

**STEP
4****CASE
STUDY****OVERNIGHT
STAY IN THE FIELD**

On a project to increase small holder farmer income for IDE Ethiopia, the design team stayed overnight in Arsi Negelle, Ethiopia, where they plowed the family's fields the next morning. The overnight enabled the team to get beyond the common stories people are used to telling NGOs and learn about one farmer's most intimate plans for the future.

They visited a farmer named Roba the first evening and once again the next day.

When they first met Roba, he portrayed an overall sense of hopelessness. He described things that happened TO him, in particular the government's recent land redistribution. Some farmers received land in the irrigated area near the lake. Some did not. He was in the latter group.

The next day, he was shocked to discover that the team was still there. His demeanor had changed completely. He knew the team was committed. This time, he shared that in fact he did have a plan for pulling his family out of poverty. If he could secure a \$200 USD loan, he would first buy an ox so he wouldn't have to trade two days of his own labor to borrow a neighbor's. Then he'd rent a piece of land in the irrigated territory and purchase improved seed. He no longer viewed the team as a wealthy NGO who was there to provide a free gift, but rather a partner in how he could take command of his own future.

Hear
Choose Research Methods
Method: Self-documentation



METHOD: SELF-DOCUMENTATION

Self-Documentation is a powerful method for observing processes over a long period of time, or for understanding the nuances of community life when the researcher can't be there. Records of experiences, such as journal entries, allow the team to see how participants see their life, community, and relationships.



TRY

Recruit several people and give them cameras, video cameras, voice recorders or journals, with instructions. Ask them to document their experiences over a few days or weeks. Give participants instructions designed to guide them on how to easily record activities that will yield relevant information to the research project. The easier it is to self-document, the more likely it is that participants will complete the exercise.

Facilitator Notes

Time:
2-30 Days

Difficulty:
★★★★☆

Step 1: Decide what you would like people to document — their feelings, activities, family life, income, or behaviors. Based on this, decide what the best mode for collection of the information might be: photographs, diaries, voice recordings, etc.

Step 2: Give participants the tools and instructions to document themselves for several days.

Step 3: When you return to the participants, review the materials together. Remember to ask them not just what the things are that they documented, but also why they chose these details and how they felt about the items.



TIP
#1

Often teenagers and young people are good participants in self-documentary exercises. Young people tend to want to express themselves in new ways, and can find the process of documenting their lives and the community less intimidating than older adults.



TIP
#2

You may find that your participants need a little help practicing the techniques for self-documentation. If this is the case, show some examples of how other people have done self-documentation, or spend a few hours with the participant to show them how to capture information.



GENDER

Be sensitive to who has access to what in a community. It is important to recruit both men and women in this exercise to have a balance of perspectives. Also be sensitive to class, age, and other factors that will affect the information people are able to collect and record.



Each number shows
you which picture you
should take



- | | |
|--|--|
| 27-24. This is a picture of me (3) | 12. I wish I had this |
| 23. This is in my pocket or purse | 11. I spend most of my time here |
| 22. This is what I wear on my feet | 10. This is something I need |
| 21. This is where I live | 9. This is someone I love |
| 20. This is where I work | 8. This is where I relax |
| 19. This is where I sleep | 7. I spend time with friends here |
| 18. This is what I see when I step outside | 6. This is someone I respect |
| 17. This is where I shop | 5. This is beautiful to me |
| 16. This is what I bought for 500 francs | 4. This is something I worry about |
| 15. This is my favorite drink | 3. This is something I am proud of |
| 14. This is my favorite food | 2. This is something I want to improve |
| 13. You can only find this in my country | 1. I use this every day |

LOOK HERE
TO TAKE
PICTURE



To advance film,
turn wheel until it stops.



1 metre



Stand about
two arms
length from
the person or
thing you are
shooting.