

CATAPULT DESIGN WORKSHOP SERIES

WORKSHOP

RESEARCH METHODS FOR NAVIGATING CROSS-CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

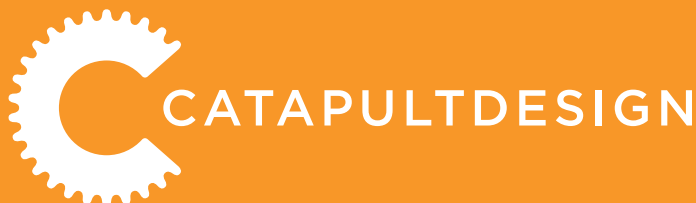
This workshop is about what it means to see the world with new eyes. What makes other cultures thrive? What makes people tick? As a cultural researcher, one has three simultaneous roles: ethnographer, visitor and colleague. In this workshop you will learn how to negotiate these roles, and uncover methods of studying “foreign,” unfamiliar cultures – be it a town across the seas or a firm down the block. We will investigate various methods of researching within and among diverse cultures, focusing on ways to be culturally appropriate. You will learn to recognize and appreciate diverse cultural norms, navigate language barriers, turn “mundane” observations into cultural “artifact” inquiry, and construct insightful cultural narratives. Find out how to engage with the tensions between insider vs. outsider, learn about the implications of an ethnographer’s participation in daily life, and develop the skills necessary to leave behind your assumptions in favor of a tabula rasa approach. Ultimately, this workshop will explore the ways in which exploration-oriented research of cultures can be used as a tool for better design.



AUTHOR Emily Eisenhart is a cultural anthropologist and graphic designer, who is interested in the intersection of design and social change. Her fascination with global cultures and development work led her around the world where she partnered with local nonprofits on a variety of projects; English language mentoring for students in India, computer literacy training with former child soldiers in Uganda, and art creation and peace building with African refugees in Egypt. She is now a Design Researcher at Catapult Design, where she contributes to project design strategy, conducts ethnographic research, and positions the firm’s brand through graphic design. Emily has a BA in Cultural Anthropology and International Studies from Northwestern University.

The majority of our world’s population lacks access to life’s basic needs. We develop and implement human-centered products to help them thrive.

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WORKSHOP

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NOTE: For most effective presentation, conduct this workshop as a slideshow or a talk that highlights examples of cross-cultural experiences (stories from the field). Touch on the topics covered in the section "12 FACTORS TO CONSIDER DURING CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH EXPERIENCE", but treat this as a supplementary, printed handout that can be referenced to in detail post-presentation.

What is culture?

Cultures consist of shared constructions that emerge out of social interactions of sets of individuals who inhabit overlapping social and physical spaces.¹

Includes: *ideas, behaviors, values, art, beliefs, language, lineage, custom, dress, rituals, practices, manners, religions, laws, morality, codes of honor, forms of organization*

How does culture influence society?

- It can shape economic and social norms
- It can shape self-knowledge or self-identification
- It can determine the collective psyche

What is cultural research?

- Research where the researcher is making observations about people of another culture and eliciting informed responses from them in a meaningful way
- Research that involves both contemporary observation as well as historical research

Why is it important to undertake?

In a global system where there is increasing interaction across cultures, investigations hinge on an understanding of diverse cultural dynamics.

What are the challenges of research in cross-cultural environment?

- Knowing what is important to pay attention to
- Difficulty in interpreting observations (determining "why" in addition to "what")
- Tendency towards judgment
- Communicating research goals effectively
- Fundamentally different models of understanding
 - Emic vs. Etic: Some that view behavior as culture-specific and some that view behavior as universal

How can cultural research relate to or inform design?

- Tip: When diving into a design challenge, try to begin

- the process as a "blank slate," without solution in mind
- Understanding use cases of products and services
 - How do people currently behave or interact?
 - What products are already present?
 - How do people react to external products/ideas?
- Needs assessment and needs-finding (of a community)
- Exploration and understanding of failed technology

Cross-Cultural Research Exercises, IDEO Methods Cards Cross-Cultural Comparisons

- *How:* Use personal or published accounts to reveal differences in behaviors or artifacts between national or other cultural groups. *Why:* This helps teams to understand various cultural factors and the implications for their projects when designing for unfamiliar or global markets

Draw the experience

- *How:* Ask participants to visualize an experience through drawings and diagrams. *Why:* This can be a good way to debunk assumptions and reveal how people conceive of and order their experiences or activities

DISCUSSION TOPICS

What are the challenges we have faced in cross-cultural settings? How did we overcome or navigate the situation?

What potential misunderstandings can there be, from either side?

What assumptions are we making going in? While on-the-ground?

How does culture influence design?

Sources:

1. Cross-Cultural Research: An Introduction for Students, 2002, Douglas R. White

2. *Certain sections draw heavily from Cross-Cultural Research* slideshow, Portigal Consulting <http://www.slideshare.net/steveportigal/ux-week-presentation-from-steve-portigal-crosscultural-research>

Ethical Issues in Cross-Cultural Research, 2003, Anne Marshall & Suzanne Batten

Cross-Cultural Psychology Qualitative Research Approaches slideshow, James M. Nelson <http://faculty.valpo.edu/jnelson/CCQMWebPage/CCQualPresent.htm>

IDEO Methods Cards

www.janchipchase.com

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RESEARCH METHODS FOR NAVIGATING CROSS CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

12 FACTORS TO CONSIDER DURING CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH EXPERIENCES 2

1 Preparation for departure

- Set the stage. Learn all that you can about the culture.
- Make use of resources: books, radio, newspapers, natives of that culture
- Keep track of questions you have
- Don't over estimate your adaptability. Leave one day in your schedule to acclimate and another for "cultural loading" (i.e. Be a sponge!)

2 Existing biases or presumptions

- What assumptions are you bringing in?
- Negative effects of biases
 - Incorrect interpretations of results
 - Adverse effects upon individuals
- What if you're of the same culture?
 - Tension between insider knowledge and need to remain objective
- How to shun presumptions or biases?
 - Carefully observe; notice details
 - Observe human behavior at face value
 - Explore before you form hypothesis

3 Your status as a foreigner or "outsider"

- Cultural immersion: immerse yourself, but don't hide!
- Be gracious and genuinely curious
- Often welcomed as guest, given local "guide"
- You're naïve: ask questions!
- Unique position to be in
 - Relish the unfamiliarity
 - Think like a foreigner - treat everything as new
 - Look, learn, ask, try
- Be aware of trust issues or suspicions from others
- Recognize the constraints of even "good" experiences
- What should you do about "outsider fatigue"?

4 "Mundane" observations

- The observations that seem "mundane" or "trivial" can be reflective and telltale
 - May reveal cultural needs, preferences, motivators, trends
- Explore the "cultural backdrop"
 - Often unnoticed in familiar environments
- Engage your five senses: see, hear, touch, smell, taste
- Have a "novelist's eye" for details - find those tiny details that make a scene come to life

ACTIVITY: Deconstruct the "trivial"

In any given setting, find what you believe to be a "trivial" or "mundane" object. Focus on that object. Write down your observations. Explore the reasons as to why that object might be important or have value. List the questions you would ask the owner to find out more about the significance of that object.

5 Key social cues

- Move cautiously at first
 - Ask for clarification, en lieu of guessing/assuming
- Learn the ropes from local confidantes
 - What to do, what not to do
- Learn the "unwritten" rules of the culture
- Glean information and clues by observing others
 - Dress, behavior, interactions, language

6 Language barriers

- Importance of language choice during interviews
 - Native tongue vs. English
- Interpreters
 - Interpretation vs. translation. Often, the information or transcript you receive is interpreted, not directly translated. Even with direct translation, cultural cues are often lost. It's important to keep track of sounds, facial gestures, movements and pauses when interviewing someone
 - Interpreters can be used for cultural advice; they can help you adhere to cultural rules. They can legitimize you, your presence and your work
 - When and how to hire an interpreter? Try to find someone with market research experience
- The interview is a collaborative effort between you, the interpreter and the interviewee
- Non-verbal methods can be important for uncovering values and information

7 Cultural artifacts

- What are the physical representations of culture?
 - Products, materials
 - Transportation
 - Advertising
 - Media
 - Street culture
 - Food
 - Dress
 - Trends/fads
 - What else?
- Explore what people tell you vs. what you observe

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8 Cultural norms

- What is “normal” in this context?
 - Nothing is “right” or “wrong,” it’s a set of rules
- What norms dictate daily life?
 - Social structures, family dynamics
 - Gender
 - Religion/spirituality
 - Authority figures
 - Language
- What is the history of interaction between other cultures?

9 Your position as a researcher

- There are multiple and complex cultural and contextual differences among researchers, participants and between the two. Researchers need to be sensitive to the sociocultural context
- Research does not require you to be a part of the culture in question, but it does require an understanding of the culture. Researchers must be aware of cultural differences and local norms
- Develop an understanding of the cultural model
 - Connections between people, artifacts, factors
- Recognize your own values and worldview
 - Separating “observation” from “interpretation” or even “judgment”
- The need for objectivity. Be a tabula rasa (“blank slate”)
- Engage and observe through Participant Observation
- Identify potential barriers that could affect research [e.g. gender norms, language practices].
- Be culturally appropriate
 - Understand norms to the best of your ability
 - Enact what you learned about social cues
 - Dress appropriately [Follow your host’s lead]
 - Question and interview respectfully
- Respect for community values, differing worldviews
 - Be humble. Understand that the people you interview are the experts; their knowledge set is uniquely valuable.
 - In your research, try to incorporate practices relevant to the culture. Respect cultural values and belief systems.
- Flexibility and adaptation skills are necessary. Research is iterative, and research plans often change.

10 Informants’ participation

- It can be helpful if the research process is collaborative, with involved parties shaping the definition and scope of the research
- How to find participants

- Determine the populations you are interested in
- Engage trusted, respected community leaders
 - Field questions or concerns of community
 - Interpret hidden meanings or motivations
 - Your role is better understood and trusted with their support
- Partner with local firm that can suggest informants
- Tap into your social networks, but be wary. You don’t want to get into a situation where people are feeding you answers they think you want to hear
- Build rapport by being culturally aware
- Ask rather than tell
- Be transparent about your research
 - Describe research, explain intentions, walk participants through process, discuss info presentation
- When/how to use informed consent or waivers

11 Possible tensions

- Researcher vs. researched
- Differences of opinions among subject population
- Variations within a certain culture, across cultures
- Different conception frameworks: People are the same everywhere vs. people are different everywhere
- When interviewing, standardization is difficult. People understand and answer questions differently

12 Interpretation models

- Choice of notetaking style - many styles
- Choice of particular focus or lens - what angle?
- Situating the study
 - Research is contextual; it has a location and time-stamp. Give it relevant context
- Inherent reflexivity: Your interpretations are *your* interpretations, not fact, and shape all future interpretations
- Choice of presentation of results: writing, representation and dissemination, summary vs. detail

Main takeaway: Being cognizant of cultural differences provides a lens to improve interpretation

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