2020

Needfinding

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This OER material was produced as a result of the PIT-UN network Challenge Grant – New America

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The development of any software project begins with identifying the needs of your uses. Remember: we want to build programs that are *useful* in addition to *usable.* ˆ

You as the developer cannot determine what is useful to your users; only they can tell you. Your goal with this project is to draw out users' needs using contextual inquiry. (We will be using the term *user* to refer to the *potential user* whom you will be observing/interviewing during this activity.)

In this assignment, keep in mind the goal of "coding for the public good" in designing a program that will benefit the public good of the Brooklyn College / CUNY / NYC community. You don't need to have a firm idea of a product idea yet – in fact, you *shouldn't,* since the goal of this exercise is to identify needs that you can address with your product – but you should have some glimmers of ideas that will guide you to identify a target audience and environment.

To conduct needfinding:

1. Identify the core demographic that you will target your product to. Include anything of importance – age, gender, education level, geographic location, etc. You don't have to be overly specific if it's not warranted; e.g., an app help navigate the Brooklyn College campus would be targeted to Brooklyn College students/faculty/staff, but an app to help manage course schedules and workload would be more generally targeted to college students in general.

    Note: you do not have to target college students, but you should have some strong familiarity with and access to the demographic that you target. You will need to be able to conduct contextual inquiry on your potential users.

2. Identify (at least) three "types" of individuals in your core demographic that differ in some meaningful way that is relevant to your program. (Examples might include: level of experience with technology, gender, age, roles, geographic location, major).

3. Sketch a plan for how you will conduct contextual inquiry with these participants. Try to where, when, and how (the who, what and why should be obvious). If the procedure would be different for different participants, explain how and why they would differ. For example, if you are creating a campus app, you might target common locations where people might get lost or need assistance.

4. Go forth and conduct the contextual inquiry with (at least) three participants.

    Recall that the core components of contextual inquiry are:

-   **Context**: Inquiry is conducted in the users' own space. The researcher watches users do their activities and discusses the process with them.

- **Partnership**—User and researcher collaborate to understand the user's activity. The interview alternates between observing the user as he or she works and discussing what the user did and why.
- **Interpretation**—The researcher shares interpretations and insights with the user during the interview. The user may expand or correct the researcher's understanding.
- **Focus**—The researcher steers the interaction towards topics which are relevant to the team's scope.

(adapted slightly from the [Wikipedia article](#))

To actually conduct contextual inquiry, you will want to:

- Head to the location(s) where you hope to find users.
- Introduce yourself, explain what you will be doing (including method of recording data – will you just be taking notes? recording video or audio? -- and the confidentiality of those recordings), and ask the user if they consent.
- Watch the user do their activity (e.g. navigating the campus, checking out books in the library, waiting on line in an office). Observe what occurs and any problems that the user faces and discuss your observations with the user. Take notes.
- Finally, wrap-up: summarize what you observed so that the user can correct or clarify if necessary. Thank the user for their time.

When you are done, briefly summarize what you observed/found/noticed. Include relevant quotes, insights, photos and surprising findings.

5. Identify some core needs of your demographic and give a brief description of how you will create a product to fulfill them.