

by Patrice Martin & Kevin Schmidt, *SonicRim*

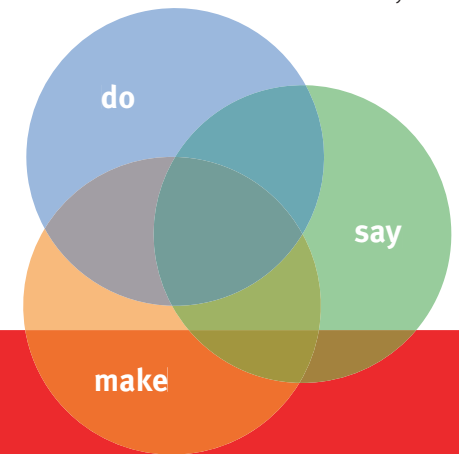
Ethnography, observing user behavior (what people do), is the current state of the art in design research. This approach, usually supplemented with face-to-face interviews (what people say), constitutes the core of research in the design development process. Interviewing and ethnography are structured on the assumption that users are not creative and do not know what they want. These methods rely on the expertise of the design researcher to draw conclusions and make assumptions about users' wants and needs. Today's standards in design research do not actively involve the intended user in the creative process.

Participatory design is an emerging paradigm shift in the design process. While this approach seeks to include the design research methods mentioned above, participatory design is founded on the belief that users are creative and can play an active role in the design process. This shift means that we are designing with users, not just for them.

product development team is driven by relevant aspirations in the marketplace AND the technology which will enable these aspirations to be realized. The creativity of the designer is liberated through a team focus on meeting the need, not critiquing the visual expression of the designer. Designers draw inspiration from users, not just from a set of design criteria.

User involvement in the earliest stages of the creative process affords designers insight into the users' lives, feelings and dreams. This approach expands the creative process beyond the development team's perceptions, which can sometimes be a barrier

We can learn more about people by looking at not only what they say and do, but also what they make.



Beyond Ethnography:

Redefining the Role of the User in the Design Process

13

Actively involving users in the process of ideation can benefit design in many ways. Companies will begin to perceive design as a strategic activity. New innovations will be successful because they are derived from people's experiences and aspirations. New opportunities for integrating the physical and interactive elements of products will be discovered that enable unique, meaningful user experiences. The collective vision of the

er to the relevance of ideas. We regularly label people as customers, consumers and users, but overlook them as individuals with lives, feelings and dreams. As design is informed and inspired by users we begin to see them beyond their roles as users and as actual people. When we accept that people are creative, empathy becomes the basis of the creative process. Through respect for the people we are designing with our ideas become more in synch with the experiences they are seeking.

The purpose behind such activities is to gain deep insights into people's current experience and dreams. All people have feelings about how their lives might be improved, but are often unable to articulate them verbally. This new mindset seeks ways for people to express these feelings and ideas such that their aspirations can be realized. This expression demands that people go through a process that enables them to become aware of these latent or subconscious feelings. Only after they are aware of these feelings can they share them with others.

Methods known as projective tools (what people make) have consistently enabled this expression. This approach blurs the boundaries of psychology and design. Psychologists use abstract stimuli to allow people to project thoughts and feelings. Designers use visual means to communicate. The combined methods of these disciplines places creative tools into the hands of people, enabling them to be creative and expressive. When you give people the tools to envision new ideas, they generate ideas derived from their needs and experiences.

tools, empowering people with ways to generate and articulate ideas.

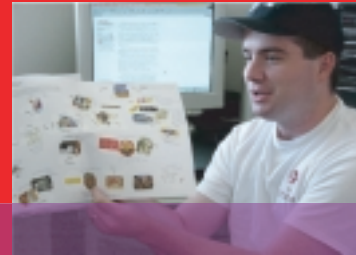
The options for these types of toolkits appear to be infinite. We have discovered that these toolkits appear to have three distinct variables. The expressions and construction can range from cognitive to emotional, or a combination of both. Toolkits can utilize two or three-dimensional components. The participant can be asked to create or express something that occurs at a single point in time, over time, or repeated time cycles.

The "make" tools are only one example of the infinite ways people can be involved in the creative process. Emotional considerations play a major role in how people live with their products. Participatory design research helps generate new ideas for making an emotional connection with the individual lives and dreams of people and the practice of design.

Design research is moving beyond its dependence on perception and assumption into a participatory philosophy. The roles of the designer, researcher and user are

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l-r: A sample velcro model toolkit; People creating together using the velcro model toolkit; One can use multiple participatory methods as converging sources of information; A participant explaining a collage he has created.

People make something from a "toolkit" and discuss it. The focus is not on what people actually construct, but in how they communicate their thoughts and ideas. These "make" tools need to be abstract to provide people a means to think and express themselves in more conceptual ways. The role of the designer in participatory design expands to facilitate this expression. Designers must continually explore and develop these

all converging. The practice is shifting from designing for users to designing with people. This shift is being driven by the need for relevant innovation demonstrated through business success. In the experience economy new products must make a meaningful impact upon people's lives. This impact must be continuous to allow business to be sustainable. The new participatory mindset represents a means to this end.