

Principles of Contextual Inquiry

Contextual inquiry is a user research method that mixes interviews with observations. They are an excellent way to gain insight into people's work processes, daily routines, how they use different products, and so on. There are clear guidelines for how to conduct contextual inquiries, and here we summarize the four most important principles of how to run a contextual inquiry.

There are 4 overall principles of contextual inquiry:



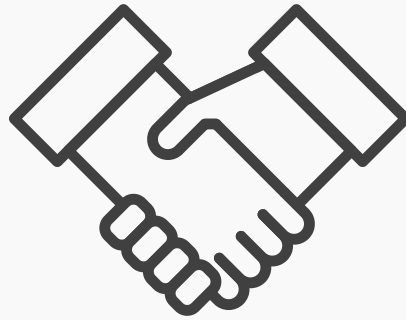
Context

Interviews are conducted in a natural setting for the activities. The researcher watches users do their own tasks and discusses any artifacts they generate or use with them. The researcher may also ask about and collect notes on past events when they are relevant to the project focus.

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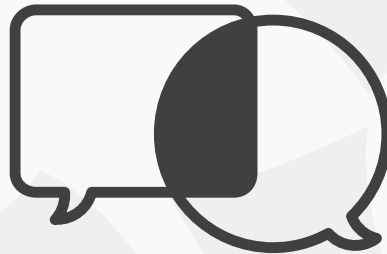


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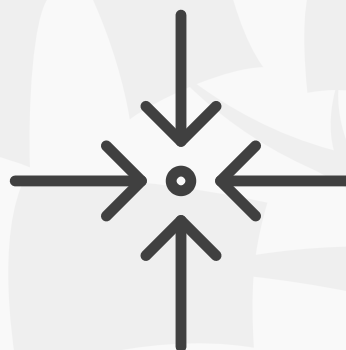
Partnership

User and researcher collaborate to understand the user's work. The interview alternates between observing the user as they work and discussing what they did and why.



Interpretation

The researcher shares interpretations and insights with the user during the interview, particularly if any significant re-wording has taken place or if the insights do not directly follow from what the user said or did. 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. Note that significant steering may be needed for some participants.

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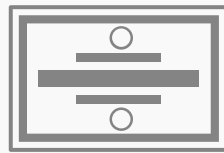
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