

Patterns of Culture:

The “Evolution” of an Ethnographic Project

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Anthropological approach

- Measures
- Observes
- Investigates
- Describes what is

- But it is not evaluative

Why Ethnography?

- Ethnography is not assessment
- Can get at unspoken needs and perceptions of users that more direct questions may not bring to light
- Identifies barriers
- Supports design of new products and services based on needs
- Listen to users, don't instruct

S.I. Newhouse School for Public Communications

- Professional school for public communications
- 65 faculty + adjuncts
- 2000 students (includes 200 grads)



Two Projects

- Newhouse Pilot Project
 - February 2007 – April 2007
- Patterns of Culture
 - October 2007 – October 2008

Initial Goals of Pilot Project

- Interview faculty about resources and tools used for research and for teaching
- Expose broader team of librarians from multiple subject areas to different type of interview process

Pilot Time Frame

Three months:

- 6 librarians
- 30 interviews
- Listen to 20 hours of audio files
- Review 228 pages of transcripts
- Preliminary analysis of “themes”

Interview Questions

- Resources and tools
- Typical project for you and for a student
- Staying current
- Collaboration

Data Processing/Analysis

- Will recordings be transcribed?
- If not, what documentation will form the basis of your analysis?
- Group analysis through “co-viewing or co-listening”?
- Develop and test protocol early in the process

Methods

“You may not know this, but people who teach journalism often suggest that the worst possible thing is to tape it because it is so darn time consuming to try to go back and listen. And if there’s something you didn’t get good notes on it often turns out that the person mumbled at that point, and you go back over it over and over trying to find it and you can’t find it anyway. Good luck. “

Methods

“ I don't quite understand the process here. I know you all are working hard and I don't know exactly what you hope to gain from us. But it seems to me, having two of you talking to one of me is awfully labor intensive and I don't know what we've gained from it. “

Research

“I do research that is a combination of journalistic technique, journalistic methodology with interviews of witnesses of events along with research on other primary materials and some secondary materials. I am a huge believer in using the library, in using the stacks, in using microfilm and so much so that I’m evangelical about it.”

Research

“Go to the people who generated that data, not the people who reported on the people who generated the data. There are two main sources for journalists. There are people and then all the reports and data that they produce. They [students] do a lot of research, I hope. We tell them to. They need to do a lot of research before they start reporting. Collect a lot of data, see what’s happening elsewhere.”

Research

“How they do their research, I don’t know. I don’t see it as my place, in that circumstance, to teach them how to-- they’re seniors or grad students. I don’t teach them how to research a paper. I just tell them the sorts of topics and the sorts of conclusions that I think would be a valid research paper. And then I leave it to them. “

Further questions

- What does research *mean* to librarians and what does it mean to this school?
- What does “library” mean?
- Are we talking the same language?
- Is the library “culture” in sync with other academic cultures on campus?

Patterns of Culture: Re-aligning Library Culture to Meet User Needs

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Methods

- Add students to the “mix”
- Conduct observations in addition to the interviews
- Apply same ethnographic methods to the Library
- Distill data in ways that allow for comparison

Research with Human Participants

If your project qualifies as “research” and involves human subjects, it may be subject to review by an Institutional Review Board

- Exempt research
- Expedited review
- Full review

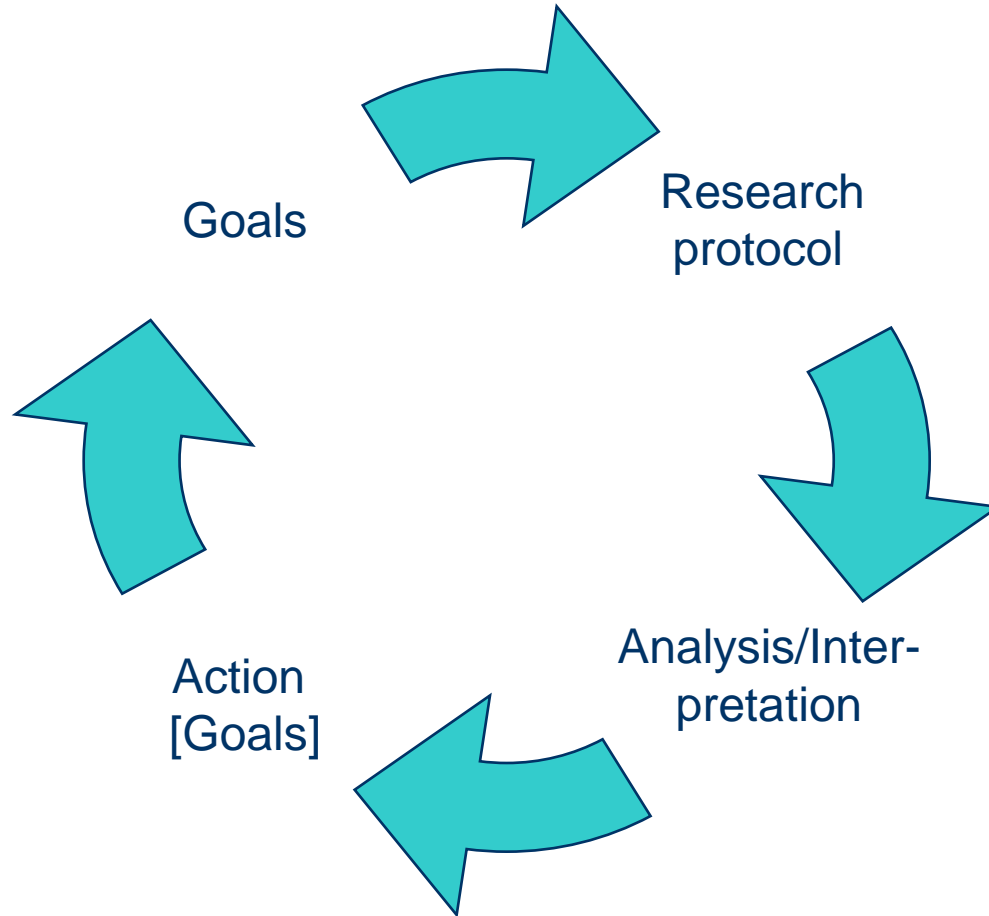
What We Learned: Before and After

- No training
- No testing of instruments
- No IRB review
- 3-month time frame
- Little group analysis
- Little forethought on analysis or documentation
- Training
- Testing of instruments
- IRB review
- 12-month time frame
- Group analysis of data
- Much forethought on analysis and documentation

Questions to ask

- Is the method relevant for your research questions?
- Is administration and the project team in agreement about goals and outcomes?
- Do you have the time and resources?
- Are you willing and able to make changes based on what you learn?

Project Cycle



Useful resources

- Jeanette Blomberg et al. Ethnographic Field Methods and Their Relation to Design. In *Participatory Design: Principles and Practices* (Schuler & Namioka, eds.). Lawrence Erlbaum, 1993.
- Dev Patnaik & Robert Becker. Needfinding: The Why and How of Uncovering People's Needs. *Design Management Journal*, Spring 1999: 37-43.
- Catherine Courage & Kathy Baxter. *Understanding Your Users: A Practical Guide to User Requirements*. Elsevier, 2005.