



experience based design

Observation

Studies of highly creative people indicate that one of the things that they habitually do is pause, notice and observe. While the rest of us pay somewhat limited attention to what goes on outside our immediate sphere of interest, creative people notice more and are relentlessly curious. Taking the time to pause, notice and observe helps provide us with both understanding and inspiration; and we have more to bring to idea generation sessions.

Curiosity may have killed the cat, but where human beings are concerned, the only thing a healthy curiosity can kill is ignorance.

Harry Lorayn

Approach 1:

Randomly pause, notice and observe to store up ideas for later use

George de Mestral, the inventor of Velcro™, got the idea for the fastener by pausing, noticing and observing the cockleburs that stuck to his trouser leg during a walk in the woods. Millions of people before him had experienced the frustration of cockleburs, but de Mestral was the first to study the mechanism by which they clung so tightly to everything and wonder how that mechanism might be used productively. He wasn't really looking for ideas for a better fastener, but once he looked at the cockleburs under a microscope he could see how a new type of fastener was possible - and Velcro was the result!



We encourage you to practice similar curiosity as you go about your daily life. For example...

- *As you shop, or when you travel through airports and hotels, pay attention to how you and others find your way around, how you gather information, what constitutes good and bad service, and so on.*
- *Take the time to chat to staff in shops, managers, airline flight attendants, taxi drivers, and others to understand how they do their work and, most importantly, how they think about things.*
- *Read magazines and books on topics outside your professional field.*
- You don't have to be looking for anything in particular. Just notice and store it away in your mind. Someday you may find yourself using that information to help you reframe and think differently about some issue in your own work.

Approach 2:

Purposefully pause, notice and observe for a given topic

This is a useful starting point to any improvement work as it helps to really identify what the challenges and improvement opportunities are. Begin by identifying the area that you want to observe. This could include a whole care pathway (which you will need to observe in sections) or a specific section of a pathway for example: a patient being admitted through the emergency room or waiting for diagnostics on a ward or receiving information as leaving an outpatient consultation.

You can observe by:

Sitting/standing in an area and just watching what happens

Video recording

Shadowing – being with a patient as they go through a process. It is best not to be ‘in uniform’ as you do this as it could influence the patient journey.

Standing in their shoes:

This is when the observer ‘becomes or acts as’ a patient and can be helpful but you need to remember it cannot be thought of exactly the same experience as a patient would have because the observer does not feel the same anxiety, comfort, discomfort as a patient would. An analogy in the business world is that of a secret shopper.

Tips for gaining better insights from observation

Observation inspires new ideas and can help to bring understanding of the real problem. Observation is a mindset that involves seeing beyond the surface to really understand what is going on and how a system works or fails.

When you are immersed within a system, it can often be impossible to see the blindingly obvious. You need to observe because:

- _ People do not always do what they say they do.
- _ People do not always do what they think they do.
- _ People do not always do what you think they do.
- _ People cannot always tell you what they need.
- _ Things are not always what they seem.

(Adapted from IDEO)

If you want a definition of water, don't ask a fish.

Chinese proverb

Whether observing within or outside the usual setting for your issue, here are some things to keep in mind:

- Ensure staff know what you are doing, prepare a short note to give to staff, patients, family members.
- Position yourself so that you are as unobtrusive as possible but that you can see what is happening.
- Sit and watch. Sometimes just sitting and watching what is going on within an environment is a great way of getting new insights that you can then talk about in your other observations.
- Never compromise a patient- leave your position if this might happen.

- Keep an open mind and observe without judging. Don't make assumptions about what you see just make notes.
- You can develop a simple set of questions or prompts to help guide you.
- Take enough note paper with you and wear a watch so that you can make a note of timings. For example if a clinician leaves a patient in a room on their own how long is that, if a patient presses their call bell how long before it is answered.
- Keep the observation period short (unless you are shadowing) less than 1 hour at a time is good but observe at different times of the day. For example early morning, when a ward round is in progress, at lunchtime, just before a clinic is supposed to finish and so on.
- Remember to make a note of the positive things you will see as well as those that could be less positive
- It can be helpful for more than one person to observe the same thing- you will be surprised at the different things you will both see.

Observing by shadowing:

You can also observe through shadowing both staff and patients and this can include more integration/discussion

- Ask the person you are shadowing to think aloud. For example if a staff member, as they perform a process or execute a specific task, ask them to describe aloud what they are thinking. This helps uncover motivations, concerns, perceptions, and reasoning. If a patient you might ask what they are thinking about or how they are feeling (remember to capture comments/phrases/emotion words).
- Learn to say instinctively, "Show me". If you are in the interviewee's environment (and you should be!), ask them to show you the things they interact with (objects, spaces, tools, etc) instead of just talking about them. Ask them to take you on a tour of their environment and capture pictures and notes to jog your memory later. This can also be used if shadowing a patient or family carer at home
- Try to get people to share their stories, not just provide answers – ask questions to find out what is behind the behaviours you observe.
- Taking photos can be a really valuable way of remembering things that you have seen, and can give you and your team additional insights once you have reflected on your observations. Be mindful of the usual practices within a setting for getting individual consent when taking photos of people (this is especially important in a healthcare setting, but is also common courtesy in any setting).
- Make sure you capture as much as you can in a legible form that will make sense 2-3 days later.

The important thing is not to stop questioning.

Curiosity has its own reason for existing.

Albert Einstein