Spark innovation through emphatic Design

* Customers’ ability to guide the development of new products is limited by their experience and their ability to imagine and describe possible innovations- how can companies identify needs that customers themselves may not recognise?
* **Emphatic design:** observation- watching consumers use products or services. Conducted in the customer’s own environment- in the course of normal, everyday routines. Researchers able to gain access to a host of information that is not accessible through other observation- orientated research methods.
* **Techniques:** gathering, analysing and applying information gleaned from observation in the field. Use of visual information. Demands creative interaction among members of an interdisciplinary team.
* Customers become so accustomed to current conditions that they don’t think to ask for a new solution- as consumers we create ‘work arounds’ and we may forget that we are being forced to behave in a less-than-optimal fashion.
* **5 types of information gathered through emphatic design:**
* Triggers of use- what circumstances prompt people to use your product or service? Do they turn to it in the way you expected? If not, there may be an opportunity for your company. Unanticipated usage can identify opportunities not only for innovation and product redesign but also for entering entirely new markets.
* Interactions with the user’s environment- How does the product or service fit into the users own idiosyncratic systems? The small changes that can result from watching people use your product in their own environment can also be competitively important.
* User customization – do users reinvent or redesign your product to serve their own purposes?
* Intangible attributes of the product- what kinds of peripheral or intangible attributes does your product or service have? Such intangible, invisible product assets can be augmented, exploited, or redirected. Failing to note intangible attributes can sink a new product.
* Unarticulated User needs- the greatest potential benefit is the observation of current or possible customers encountering problems with your products or services that they don’t know can be addressed and may not even recognize as problems. Emphatic design techniques thus exploit a company’s existing technological capabilities in the widest sense of the term. With view from a fresh observer whilst simultaneously carrying the knowledge of what is possible for the company to do, they can redirect existing organizational capabilities towards new markets.
* **The process:**
* 1: Observation- **who should be observed?** –customers/ non-customers/ customers of customers/ group of individuals who by playing different roles collectively perform a task

**Who should do the observing and what should they be watching?** – differences in training, education and natural inclinations predispose different people to very different information when watching the exact same situation. Optimal to send a small team, each member of which has expertise in a different discipline. Eg. Experience in behavioural observation, deep understanding of the organizational capabilities the development team can draw upon.

**What behaviour should be observed?** – those being observed should carry out their normal routines.

* 2: Capturing Data- most data are gathered from visual, auditory and sensory cues, thus frequent use of photography and videography as tools. Video able to capture subtle, fleeting body language that may convey large amounts of info for future review and analysis.
* 3: Reflection and Analysis- Team members reflect on what they have observed. The team will try to identify all its customers’ possible problems and needs.
* 4: Brainstorming for solutions- used to transform the observations into graphic, visual representations of possible solutions, it is not undisciplined. Companies that carry out brainstorming sessions routinely need supporting infrastructure eg. Low tech as covering table in paper or high tech eg. Idea Factory which is a physical and virtual space.
* 5: Developing prototypes of possible solutions- the more radical an innovation, the harder it is to understand how it should look, function and be used. Prototypes are a critical part of the emphatic- design process for at least three reasons: - clarification of the concept of the new product or service for the development team. Enable the team to place its concept in front of other individuals who work in functions not formally represented on the team. Can stimulate reaction and foster discussion with potential customers of the innovation because of their concreteness.
* Sometimes, two prototypes are used, one that emulates the function but not the form and another that illustrates the ideal physical appearance of the intended product but doesn’t work- elicit feedback from consumers and retailers.
* Simulations are also useful prototypes.
* Emphatic design techniques involve a twist on the idea that new- product development should be guided by users. It pushes innovation beyond producing the same things only better.
* Developing a deep, empathic understanding of users’ unarticulated needs can challenge industry assumptions and lead to a shift in corporate strategy.