SAMPLE FRAMEWORK TO **HELP STRUCTURE**

Some designers use proprietary systems to process their research findings, but numerous general purpose frameworks for conducting and analyzing ethnographic research exist.

Many of these are rooted in the work of Professor James P. Spradley, an anthropologist who taught at Macalester College in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Spradley developed a tool for structuring ethnographic observations that he called the *Descriptive Observation Matrix*.[3] Spradley's matrix structures observations into the following nine categories, summarized here with instructions on use:

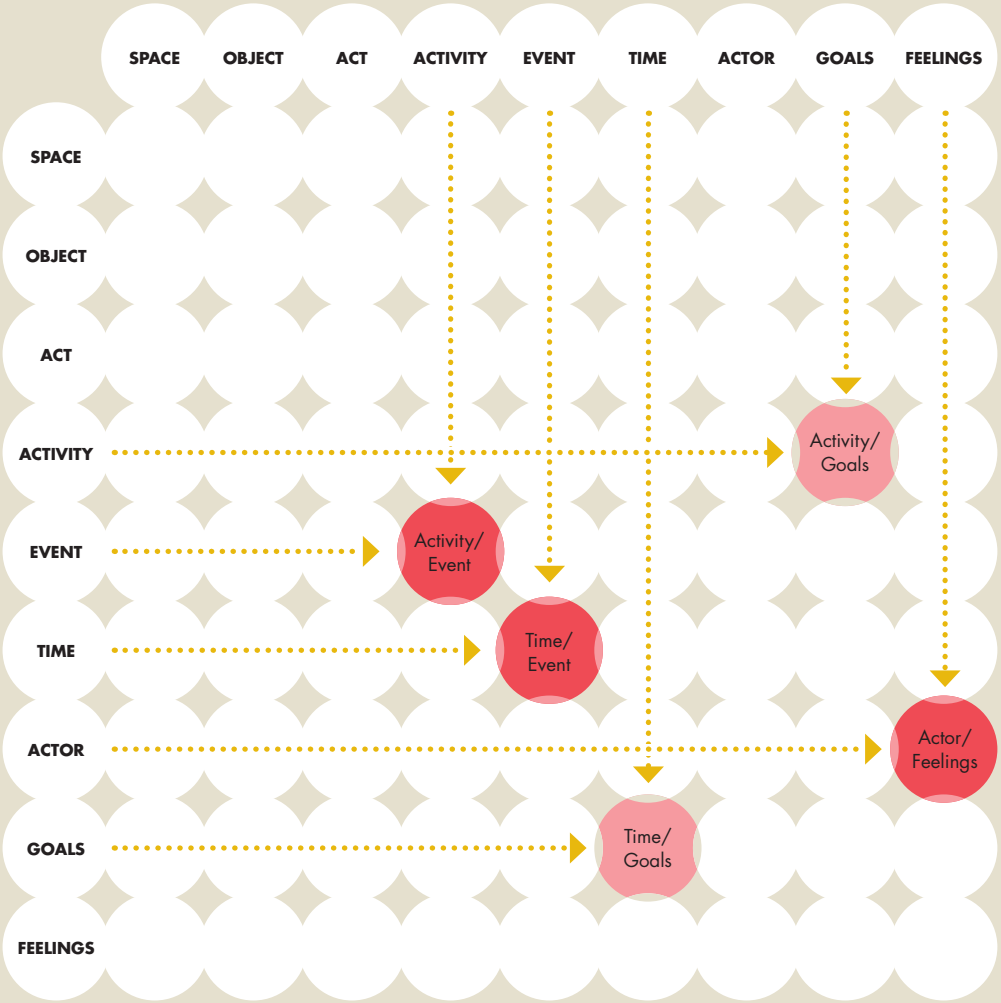
1. Space: Describe the physical environment in detail.
2. Object: Take stock of relevant objects in the environment.
3. Act: Catalog the behaviors of the individuals under observation.
4. Activity: Detail the actions performed by participants, including interactions with other individuals, objects, and the environment.
5. Event: Connect activities to happenings, or events.
6. Time: Chronicle the time and date of the observation, and the amount of time spent engaged in activities.
7. Actor: Describe the people under observation.
8. Goals: Note what the people under observation are trying to achieve in their activities.
9. Feelings: Recount any discernible emotions expressed by the individuals under observation.

Spradley suggested that placement of the categories be repeated on both the X and Y axes of the matrix, forcing the researcher(s) to explore how each classification influenced the other. For example, "What is the impact of physical space on participant goals?" or "How are activities related to feelings?"

Use Spradley's categories as a reference point for your own framework. Adjust category quantity and titles to align with the goals of your investigation or project. The take-away is to be cognizant of people, the places they go, the things they use or encounter, and actions they undertake. Research activities and observations need to be summarized before they'll fit neatly into your system. Rarely does one framework perfectly serve every research query. Experiment until you find a structure that works best for you and your practice.

3. Read Spradley's influential book: Spradley, J. (1980). *Participant Observation*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

SPRADLEY'S **DESCRIPTIVE OBSERVATION MATRIX**



Spradley's Matrix forces the researcher to consider how categories that may seem disconnected influence each other. When compiling research (either from multiple activities or from several researchers), look for gaps in the matrix. They may indicate an area where more research is needed, or may reveal an opportunity for design to fulfill an unaddressed need.