Practicalities and Difficulties of Conducting Observations

When you conduct observations (for example, in contextual inquiries), there are different practicalities you need to consider:

• Think about where you can you sit or stand without getting in the way.

• If you need to follow your participants around e.g. at a workplace, consider any how you will handle any difficulties you expect to encounter.

• Ensure that you have enough battery power for equipment you need to record -or that you have the possibility of charging equipment without interrupting your observations.

• Consider if any equipment you need to leave unsupervised is safe from theft, vandalism etc.

• If you are doing observations where you are not present all the time, think about who will make sure your recording equipment is turned on and running.

There are also things that might make your observations difficult:

• If you are doing observations in a domestic environment you need to consider ways to handle privacy issues.

• If you are observing anything that is commercially sensitive you have to consider how to handle anonymity.

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- You should always consider if any observation can prove physically dangerous.

- If you are dealing with sensitive participants you must ensure you have the proper ethical approvals.

- Be aware that you might need to supplement your observations with other research methods, if you are observing processes or behaviors that take place on a timescale that is longer than your research or that. only happen rarely.

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