

HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN

# Participant Observation

A world map is shown in a lighter blue shade against the dark blue background. Overlaid on the map are several white line-art icons of lightbulbs. One central cluster of lightbulbs is connected by arrows, suggesting a process or flow. Another cluster of lightbulbs is shown inside an open box, symbolizing ideas or discoveries. A single lightbulb is also placed over the continent of South America.

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“You Can Observe a Lot  
Just by Watching”

—Yogi Berra







# Tacit Knowledge: Deep Hanging Out

1. What do people do now?
2. What values and goals do people have?
3. How are these particular activities embedded in a larger ecology?
4. Similarities and differences across people
5. ...and other types of context, like time of day

# Process v. Practice

## Jack Whalen & the Call Center

# Apprentice

- Set up a partnership with the people to be observed
- Be taught the steps in the process
- Observe all of the practices
- Validate what you are observing with those observed as you go along



Look for workarounds & hacks

“Errors” are a goldmine



WHEN USER  
HITS MACHINE

will be  
receiving



# Walmart



# To learn more...

- Institute of Design at Stanford, <http://dschool.stanford.edu>
- Kuniavsky, *Observing the User Experience*
- Beyer & Holtzblatt, *Contextual Design*