

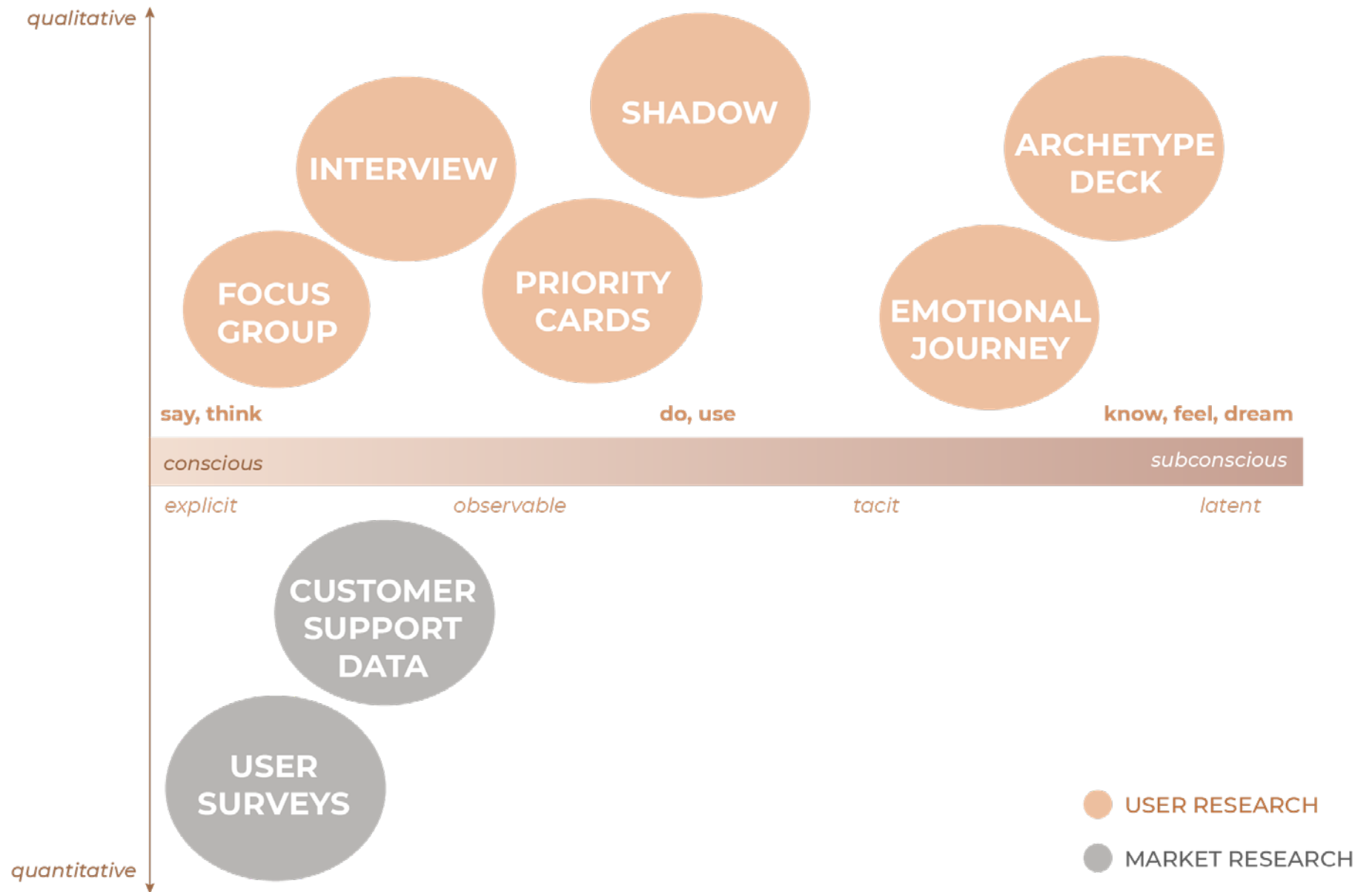


USER-CENTERED RESEARCH

6 ways to find insights from the user

what kinds of insights do user-centered research generate?

User-centered research is a qualitative approach while market research usually generates quantitative data. Both are useful in understanding your users. Quantitative research can bring great amount of user data in the short period of time (ex: survey) but you can only get the conscious level of information that people share. Qualitative research (ex: interview and observation) is more time consuming but it helps you to understand the subconscious level of desire and latent knowledge.



6 user research examples will be explained in the following pages.

before you start it...

WRITE DOWN YOUR BRIEF

- What's your project objective?
- Who are your target users?
- What do you want to learn from your users?
- Create a project plan with your calendar.

RECRUIT THE PARTICIPANTS

- Generate participant spectrum
- Prepare consent form for them to read through and sign
- Be careful about vulnerable group (ex: children) or avoid it if you are not experienced professional

HAVE A GOOD MINDSET

- Embrace how other people see the world.
- Let them bring you to their world voluntarily
- Be friendly, but don't comment your own thoughts
- Stop when they feel uncomfortable

method 1.

interview

Interviews are best conducted in person so that nuances of personal expression and body language are recognized in conversation. The researcher will guide the session but let the conversation organically flow when the participants are willing to share insights. Interview can be done with an individual, a couple or a group.

LADDERING TECHNIQUE

By repeatedly asking “why” to find out the unspoken motivation behind the behavior. the conversation builds on itself to reveal what a person values. ex: “why is it important to you?”

ASKING EXPERT

Experts can often give you a systems-level of your project area, tell you about history, recent innovations and offer great connections and insights of the industry.

method 2.

observation


























































The intent is to collect information through immersion. The researcher should be attentive observing the people, interaction and environment with with an open mind. Recording, photographing and taking notes systematically will help capture data.



This is an example how the process was documented with observation notes.

how to document user journey

During interviewing or shadowing users, you should be actively taking notes, photos or videos with their permission. After that, the information should be organized in a timeline format. Keep in mind that every detail is important- just like investigating a crime scene.

	<i>before</i>		<i>during (break down to smaller events)</i>			<i>after</i>
<i>example:</i> going skiing/ snowboarding at ski resort	planning	get to the mountain	get on the lift get off the lift	skiing riding	water break lunch break	go back home
ENVIRONMENT	   	 	 	 	 	  
ACTIONS	  		   	 	 	 
EMOTIONS	 		   			
CHALLENGES	  		  			  
UNARTICULATED	 		  			

method 3.

focus group

When properly recruited and guided by a skilled moderator, participants can quickly accept others as peers. And they are more willing to share their experiences, opinions in a more relaxing environment.



Example: For a ski helmet design project, we invite skiers/snowboarders to try out different helmets and share their opinions.

method 4.

archetype deck

By using a deck of cards with images or illustration, it inspires the participants to tell their stories. With good laddering technique, a researcher can find out how they conceive themselves and the world. Images help them to recall their experience, connect to the personal accounts of participant lives.

DIXIE CARDS



a set of beautiful illustrated cards that can be interpreted in various ways. I usually use this tool to find out how they conceive themselves and the world, as well as subconscious thoughts on a certain event.

ANIMAL CARDS



around 20-30 carefully selected different animal cards that's designed to provoke a story. I usually ask them to pick two cards that represent themselves.

method 5.

priority cards

We all want lots of things in our life but the truth is we can't have everything. Priority cards is a great exercise to find out how a user ranks their needs. The researcher will provide several colored cards that represent different elements. Users have to select and arrange in order. We can see what's more important for them.



Example: my ideal workplace for my first job

method 6.

emotional journey

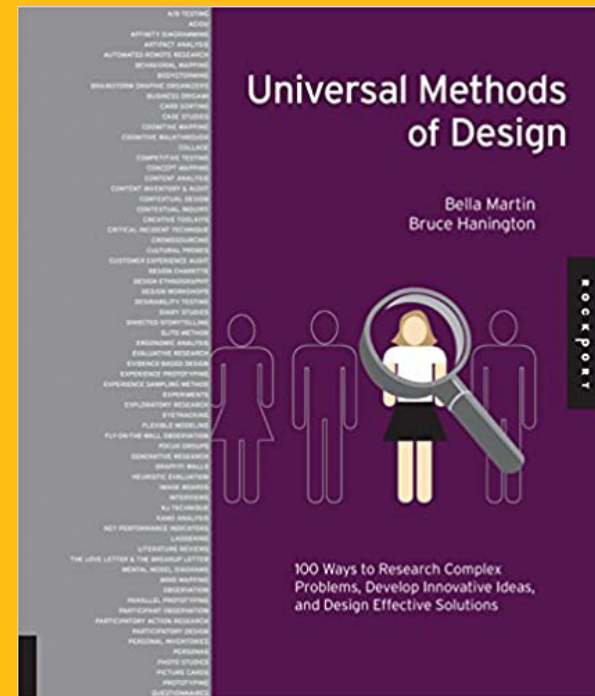
It's a good way to find out their highs and lows with a product or event. invite the user to draw how they feel during the process without telling you how they feel. this practice works best when participants are in a relaxed environment. Offer them colored markers, crayons, all sorts of stickers and even legos so they can visualize their thoughts easier, especially for those who are not comfortable with drawing.

resources

There are lots of ways to do reserch, for further reading. I recommend these books:



Interviewing Users: How to Uncover Compelling Insights



a comprehensive reference that has everything you need to know from research to user testing

Have questions about the user-centered research?

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About the author

Cerra Teng is a design strategist that helps companies to increase their audience by integrating marketing, branding, storytelling and design. She has worked with numerous startups and mid-size outdoor companies.

She's currently the Design Thinking instructor at Oregon State University and Design Coach at INSEAD EMBA program.

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