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A brief introduction to our research approach

About Ethnography

The interpretive value of ethnography in the analysis of complex systems for social innovation (like sustainable fishing) is realized best when innovation itself is reconceptualized. Rather than framing innovation in terms of design thinking, or a means of adapting products or services to ‘unmet needs,’ large-scale social challenges require innovative thinking at the systemic level, where organizational, social network, and behavioral analyses inform creative problem solving.

To do this, we need to understand both the diverse range of motivations and barriers that individuals within these systems experience as well as the relations of power, systemic barriers and enablers that make these systems persist as they do. Only then can we design solutions for “disrupting” them productively.

The role of ethnographic research in this process becomes one of “knowledge arbitrage” and engagement. First, it fills gaps in knowledge by laying open these complex systems to greater scrutiny and enabling the identification of the key problems that might be solved to create social innovation and business opportunities. Then, through narrative and a deep understanding of the lives of people operating within these systems, ethnographic insights can energize a broad community of problem solvers and enlist their knowledge to address those key problems.

Background and Previous Research

A thorough, insightful, and highly valuable set of research findings was developed as part of Phase 1 of Project Ahi. These findings (see documents listed below) set the context for Phase 2 research, which will be the focus of the remainder of this research plan.

Changing the Future of Wild Fish: An Entrepreneurial Approach to Sustainable Solutions, Discovery Group, Ashoka Initiative.

Reimagining Complex Systems, Ashoka Changemakers.

SOME RESOURCES

Others like us

For part of our project we used design ethnography to inform and inspire us as we created a prototype solution, other design consultancies also use similar methods, read more about their work and available tools at the links provided below:

IDEO HCD Toolkit:

IDEO produced a free innovation guide for NGOs and Social Enterprises, read more and download their toolkit from here:

<http://www.ideo.com/work/item/human-centered-design-toolkit/>

MAYA Design:

Maya Design was founded in 1989 to focus on human centric product design and research. Their work and case studies on Human Centered Design can be found here:

<http://www.maya.com/practices/human-centered-design>

AIGA Ethnography Primer:

The American Institute of Graphic Artists teamed up with Cheskin Research to produce a simple and short introduction to Ethnography and how graphic designers might use it.

<http://www.aiga.org/content.cfm/ethnography-primer>

future of fish

Research Strategy

Strategically planned ethnographic methods and data interpretation offer a deeply-rooted understanding of the pulls, pushes, disconnects and other forces at play within and between complex systems. This provides a better understanding of the multiple, competing problems at play, and helps identify where the leverage points and real opportunities for change reside.

At least three key data sources feed into this analytical process: 1) the diverse and sometimes competing range of identities, practices and interactions operating within and between systems; 2) the same factors operating within the culture of the organization(s) attempting to shape potential solution sets; and 3) analogous systems from which we might learn about other modes of thinking, different value sets, creative approaches to problem solving, or other practices and interactions that could be appropriated or shed light on insights from direct data sources. For this study, an ethnographic understanding of the first set will begin by focusing primarily on processors, as identified in *Changing the Future of Wild Fish: An Entrepreneurial Approach to Sustainable Solutions*. Sampling for this population will be largely dependent upon industry contacts developed in the course of research conducted by Ashoka. Although it is likely that most processors willing to participate in our research will have a vested interest in sustainable fishing, an effort will also be made to recruit participants who are less clearly motivated, in order to be sure we fully understand the range of barriers and resistances prevalent in the industry. Methods outlined in the next section are designed to elicit insights in the following areas for this population:

Motivations

- What motivates this population in the broadest sense of the term?
- When do their actions, or the actions of others, tend to engender feelings of cleverness, discovery, or control within this population?

Barriers

- What obstacles and frustrations stand out in the lives of this population?
- How have they responded?
- Which barriers are perceived as surmountable? Which are not? Why?

Moments of Change

- What sets of conditions have commonly existed for this population that tend to trigger change for them?
- How did these conditions come about? Who created them?

Social Networks

- What sources of information are most highly valued? Why?
- Which social networks are used most often and why?
- What is the nature of stories that are commonly shared?
- What is considered magnetic? Viral? Compelling? Trustworthy?
- In which direction do flows of information tend to flow most?
Is it hierarchical?

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research strategy continued:

Choice Logics

- What factors regularly contribute to decision-making processes for this population?
- How are they weighed? What forms of evaluation are used? How are different influences prioritized? How might they be combined?
- What role does technology play in their decision-making processes?

As for research among organization(s) attempting to shape potential solution sets, data mining strategies will be enlisted to cull insights from the extensive interviews conducted with representatives from NGO's, alliances, consortiums, associations, and regulatory agencies for the development of Changing the Future of Wild Fish: An Entrepreneurial Approach to Sustainable Solutions. If it is determined that these exchanges were not aligned well enough with this research strategy and its objectives, select individuals will be targeted for inclusion in this study as well. Research on analogous systems will focus primarily on three categories of systems that are likely to offer parallel insights valuable for the analysis of our direct research. The following list includes initial categories and some suggestions for potential systems to explore:

- Resource Managers (of dwindling or limited supplies)
- Organ transplant systems Bee hive crop pollinating services
- Energizers
- Political campaign planning and organizing Event planning
- Change Agents
- Personal training Crisis management consulting

Methods

The following ethnographic methods will be used to elicit data during the course of this study for the first segment of our research population (processors). They are adapted specifically to the anticipated work environment of this population, and therefore favor informal interaction Please see Appendix 1 for a draft discussion guide, which includes a suggested protocol for research activities during interactions with research participants.

- Facility Tour: Informal, guided visits hosted and led by research participants.
- Informal Interviews: Unscripted dialog with participants guided by a pre-determined set of discussion topics.
- Photo Journaling: Participants take a series of photos or short video clips that reflect their response to a series of prompts designed by the researcher. Often 'assigned' to the participant at the end of a visit, and returned to the researcher at a later date.
- Shadowing (when possible): Researchers follow and observe research participants throughout a typical day or set of activities (often conducted in a mode similar to that of an 'apprentice').

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Methods for analogous systems are likely to be less structured, and will typically include:

- **Empathic Experiences:** Researchers place themselves in the role of a person to gain a first-hand sense of their experiences.
- **Participant Observation:** Researchers participate directly in the daily routines and experiences of research participants.

In addition to fieldnotes, all research activities will be recorded using a video recorder, audio recorder, and still camera for later analysis of data, project communications, and design of deliverables. With the exception of shadowing, interactions with research participants are expected to take between 1.5-2 hours. Two researchers will attend each session. Please see Appendix 2 for General Fieldwork Protocols, which include best known practices for ethnographic research, suggested data downloading techniques, and other research management protocols.

Research Sites

In the interest of optimizing research resources and staff time, visits with processors will initially be concentrated in the United States and Canada, where keen interest from potential participants, close geographic proximity, and relative familiarity with local cultural context and broader Western maritime history will make interactions with participants easier to arrange, contextualize, and analyze.

Early networking has begun in Europe, Central America and SE Asia, for which initial visits will be arranged where possible. Research sites will also be identified in the rapidly growing markets of Asia, Africa and South America (as identified in *Changing the Future of Wild Fish: An Entrepreneurial Approach to Sustainable Solutions*). Research planning for geographies with different maritime histories and contemporary cultural approaches to fishing than Western traditions (as well as the ocean more generally) will require additional secondary research to better contextualize the cultural context of the industry in those places. Results from this secondary research will shape research strategy and methods for these geographies in ways that are adapted to local contexts and are appropriately tailored to cultural practices and traditions. This will allow us to maximize our return on those research efforts, as well as reduce the possibility of mis-aligned interactions or culturally inappropriate or ineffective lines of inquiry.

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Analysis

Analysis of field data is an ongoing process that often begins in the field, evolves throughout the research phase, and is refined further in a concentrated phase sometimes referred to as 'synthesis.' This typically plays out in the following stages: In the field

Data downloads: Researchers spend time storytelling and summarizing key observations as soon as possible after each interaction with participants. Special attention is paid to descriptive detail, approaching the experience from many different perspectives, and project relevance. Notes are typically recorded on post-its at this stage, which are often arranged in sets of themed observations among which patterns can be identified later in synthesis.

Synthesis

Storyboarding: An extension of data downloads, storyboarding is a more extensive process of aggregating ethnographic data from the field, and giving it visual and narrative form. This typically involves highlighting key findings from field investigations, and making meaning from those experiences. In addition to a note taking process similar to data downloads, storyboarding often includes key visuals that help tell the story. Patterns and Themes: Clustering and re-clustering findings into categories, in order to reveal relationships between them. Some common categories include motivations, barriers, tensions, symbolic statements, opportunities, themes, etc.

Insights: Meaning derived from patterns and themes, constructed with an emphasis on unique analytical logics that unearth both the diverse range of motivations and barriers of individuals within complex systems as well as the relations of power, systemic barriers and enablers that allow these systems persist. Relys heavily on anthropologically-informed organizational, behavioral, and interaction analysis.

Frameworks: Interpretations of different relationships and configurations of insights that can help define the problems, illustrate new perspectives, and shape or substantiate design principles.

Ideation: Brainstorming sessions that focus specifically on identifying high-impact opportunity areas and solution strategies for select challenges. Typically involves sketching, scenario creation, mock prototypes, model creation, flow diagrams, participatory workshops, and other methods.

Messaging: A narrative arrangement (often expressed as a journey) of ethnographic findings, key insights, and frameworks that gives shape to the motivations, barriers, relations of power, systemic barriers and enablers found in the field. Lays the groundwork for continued analysis, prototype revision, and refinement of ideas generated during ideation.

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Outcomes and Deliverables

The following deliverables are expected to be complete by the end of Phase 2:

Blueprint: A process map of opportunities illustrating the entire journey of the system, interactions, and actors in this system. Designed to communicate opportunity areas we see in a framework for action.

Design Principles: Design guidelines that help determine and evaluate solutions and inform cohesive and consistent tactical implementation of present and future initiatives.

Program Review: A participatory workshop and subsequent workshop output document based on insights and findings.

The following guidelines (on the next page) are a suggested protocol for recruiting participants.

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Project Background

Describe the project's objectives in two sentences.

Details for the Potential Participant

Determine if potential participant is willing to allow a researcher to shadow them during the course of their work. If so, adapt facts in the following protocol accordingly:

Visits are likely to last approx 1-2 hours and typically include:

- 2-3 researchers from Central.
- An informal 'get-acquainted' period, combined with some general discussion about the participant's role, responsibilities, the industry, etc.
- A facility tour (led by research participant).
- A short picture-taking exercise the participant will complete on their own time.
- Other informal communications.

Schedules:

- Schedule around research participant's convenience.
- Schedule no more than 2 visits per day for each research team.
- Be sure to account for travel time between sites when scheduling.
- Do not commit to participants that an interview will definitely occur until you have had a chance to confirm with researchers.

Logistics and Details (this information should be clearly explained to the participants well in advance of the visit):

- All participants will have to sign a standard consent form before we begin the visit.
- In exchange for their time, participants will be compensated the amount of \$
(in this project, because it was grant funded we did not offer cash compensation)
- Still photos, video, and audio will be recorded throughout the visit. Researchers do their best to keep all equipment as unobtrusive as possible. No additional lighting is usually necessary.

Other Matters:

- Ask research participants not to drastically change anything for our visit. We are interested in their daily lives, natural practices, and common routines.
- Finally, the visit itself is often quite fun, and gives participants a chance to take the time to reflect about their lives in ways they probably never have before. Let them know they can be totally honest with the research team, and that we want them to have a good time during our visit.

What do we do with the images and recordings?

- We use them in internal research activities (coding, analyzing, ordering, etc.) to inspire new ways to improve sustainability in the fishing industry.
- We may use specific examples in internal and external communications, in order to communicate our findings in venues such as professional conferences, trade shows, journal articles, etc.
- We NEVER disclose the real names or other personal information (addresses, phone numbers, email) of our participants.