

## Qualitative Research (604 words)

The old way of product development is that you come up with a new product and then try to sell it to customers. This often results in expensive marketing efforts. In the design thinking way, we are doing the reverse. We put users needs forward and make them the starting point of the product development cycle. The idea is that if we succeed identifying users' needs and designing products that satisfy them, they will buy and use the products. So design thinking flips the traditional product development on its head.

You will say: okay, if users' needs are the focus of design, why don't we just ask them? Well you are only partly right. In most circumstances, however, users either don't know what they need, or they cannot articulate them. As Henry Ford said, "if I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses." So understanding users and their needs is not as easy as it may seem. In this lecture, I will teach you three tools for needs finding.

These three tools are called respectively domain research, competitive analysis, and user interview & observation. They are globally combined and called qualitative as opposed to quantitative because we don't need a large number of users, nor a large body of quantitative data to carry out this work, which saves time and money. At the same time, if we do QR correctly, we can find out the whats, hows, and whys users may want our product **in rich details** (should have been in the audio) and we may even derive more superior results than those obtained from quantitative methods. We just have to look everywhere for hints and think about the user problem with mindfulness.

Domain research, the first tool, consists of researching the domain and if possible interviewing the subject matter experts. The idea is to become quickly an "expert" in the domain your product operates. For example, if you were to design an online store to sell wines and provide wine recommendations, you should know something about wine production, oenology, and how people consume wines, which country in the world consumes the most wines. If you were to design a travel planning tools, you need to know how flights were designed, produced, categorized, and sold, how traditional travel agents operate, and how users plan and research their trips. If you were to design virtual reality glasses to help people jog better, you probably should know something about jogging, sports medicine, sports psychology, and the health benefits as well as the risks of jogging.

The second tool in Qualitative Research is to perform competitive audits. This will bring you up to date about the state of the art, prevent you from re-inventing the wheel, and most importantly make you think about what will be your value proposition vis-à-vis what's already out there. Interestingly, knowing your chief competitor's products also prepares you for the user interview in terms of what questions you want to ask them. One important tip is to try to use one or more competitive products yourself, assess their interaction design in terms of how well they meet users' mental model, and establish a competitive analysis map.

After the domain research and competitive audit, you should be able to generate a problem statement, meaning you should have a hypothesis what's maybe

missing and this can lead to a well-prepared document for what you want to design to fill the gap.