

## Appendix: The Eight Principles of Design Research

### 1. Optimize surface area.

*Surface area* refers to the sum of all touchpoints with the locale and the participants of our research. Cumulative properties of such touchpoints include both breadth and depth of research, pressure (effort dedicated in some spots more than others), layers (that is, backup plans), and texture (ethics, professionalism, formality, hustle, intensity). An optimal surface area offers easy access to data collection and both formal and informal touchpoints, finds the right blend of information and inspiration, and has enough flexibility to cope with contingencies when—inevitably—things don't go according to plan.

### 2. You're only as good as your local team.

Hiring a local team (ideally one local per core team member) significantly increases the quality of local interactions and effectively doubles the research ground that can be covered. The ideal

local is bi- or trilingual, socially outgoing, values exposure to foreigners/outsideers, is hungry to learn, and is primarily motivated by the experience.

Bargain hard; tip well.

### 3. Everything flows from where you stay.

Find a home or guesthouse in or near a community that matches the research profile. Make the place feel like a home, invite the local team to join the core team, and enable formal and informal spaces for the team to come together, from debrief rooms to breakfast areas.

### 4. Adopt a multilayered recruiting strategy.

Take charge of setting up the most important in-field interactions: those involving your research participants. Don't leave it to a recruiting agency, except when the profile is highly specialized. Utilize the team's extended social network, including local team members', advertise on social networking sites to match all but the most obscure recruiting profiles, and provide the team with a deeper understanding of the locale prior to arrival. Learn how to snowball recruits from successful first interactions, and treat the recruiting process as constant and ongoing.

### 5. Put participants first.

Putting participants' well-being first in every interaction lays a strong moral foundation for collecting and positively applying

data throughout the project life cycle, from the local team's willingness to tap into their networks to the delivery of the final presentation. While the rule is traditionally "client first," by putting participants first, the client ultimately comes out furthest ahead.

### 6. Let the data breathe.

The journey from data (pure information) to insight (how to apply that information to the problem at hand) starts in the field.

Data should be consumed fresh. Review top-line data as a team after every interaction, at least once per day, and ideally for a full day prior to returning to the studio, using your local crew. A mobile project room gives the data ample space to breathe—where scrutiny can be set aside temporarily, without piling new data onto slightly older data too much and thus obscuring it. That breathing room can help you build a more nuanced understanding of the data, become more familiar with it, and absorb it through passive exposure prior to full-on synthesis back in the studio.

### 7. Normal rules don't apply.

Every research project is an opportunity to create a new reality, and with it release the team from their mental constraints. Take the opportunity to demonstrate that normal rules don't apply, from challenging the team hierarchy (such as letting the lowest-ranking member sleep in the best bed while grabbing some floor space for yourself), to putting visiting clients to work, to making collective changes to the live-work space.

## 8. Leave time to decompress.

Immersive research can be emotionally draining—consistently long days, living in proximity with people with whom you previously had only a working relationship, all while coping with the extensive demands of the project and the new locale. Recovery time is a must. Set aside at least two days at the end of the study for team decompression, preferably somewhere memorable where team members can be pampered, reflect on what they've achieved, and mentally prepare for their return to civilian life.

A year after the study, the team may not remember much more than the camaraderie of pulling together for a shared goal and the note on which they closed the trip; make it a good one.

## Notes

### Introduction

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