Ethnographic Field Methods and Their Relation to Design

Jeanette Blomberg (1993)
Objective of the paper

- Linking ethnography and design
- Encourage designers to use ethnographic approach
- Understanding human behaviours as a mechanism for change
- Implications of using ethnography in design
Motivation

• Shift of focus from individual tasks to collaboration
• Computer Supported Collaborate Work
• Need for methodology for exploring collaboration in organisations
Traditional design methods

• Customer surveys
• User tests
• Focus groups
• Field trips
The ethnographical approach

• Describe and interpret activities
• Basic principals
  – Natural environment
  – Holistic
  – Descriptive
  – Members point of view
• Ethnographical field methods
  – Observation
  – Interview
  – Video analysis
Contrasts between traditional design methods and ethnographical methods

- Designers representing users towards developers
- Only user participation when presenting the final design artefact
- Most traditional design methods done outside users context
- Technology focus versus relation between work and technologies
- Not usual with user participation
Relating ethnography and design

• Etnographers does the studies and communicate the results to the designers
• Collaboration between ethnographers and designers
• Collaboration between ethnographers, designers and users
Conclusions

- Ethnographic methods gives designers new methods for understanding users work practice
- Challenges in teaching designers ethnographical methods
- Challenges in changing the mind set of product planners and developers to understand the need for user participation though out the whole design and development process
Group tasks

- How would you gather information in a design process?
- What are the benefits of using the ethnographic approach in designing an artifact?
  - What might be disadvantages of not using this approach in the design process?
- What are in your opinion the pros and cons for the following way of conducting an ethnographical approach to a design process?
  - Ethnographers does the studies and communicate the results to the designers
  - Collaboration between ethnographers and designers
  - Collaboration between ethnographers, designers and users
- What are the ethical implications in using a “natural setting” on an ethnographical approach?