

What is a Participatory Design workshop?

A Participatory Design (PD) workshop is one in which developers, business representatives and users work together to design a solution. PD workshops:

- Give users a voice in the design process, thus increasing the probability of a usable design
- Enable technical and non-technical participants to participate equally
- Provide an opportunity for developers to meet, work with and understand their users
- Provide a forum for identifying issues
- Provide an opportunity to get or enhance user buy-in
- Are highly productive
- Use techniques which can be easily learned and applied in future activities.

When is a PD workshop appropriate?

Ensure you have the appropriate commitment from the organization.

PD workshops are most effective early in the design process, when ideas can be less constrained by existing code or other infrastructure.

Who should attend?

The workshop should include:

- At least 2 representative users. Real users are the *only* domain experts and the value they add is considerable.
- At least 1 business representative.
- At least 1 developer.
- At least 1 facilitator.

The ideal number of participants is probably 8 or 9.



Preparing for a workshop

- Ensure you have a thorough knowledge of the problem domain—what systems are currently in use and what are the workplace issues?
- Ensure you have considered at least one potential solution. You may or may not present this solution during the workshop.
- Prepare scenarios.
- Prepare an agenda. Ensure that you understand clearly the purpose of each agenda item, and the techniques you will use to achieve it.
- Confirm attendees and ensure all participants are notified of dates and times. If appropriate, send out a short kit explaining what will happen in the workshop.
- Book an appropriate room—participants must be comfortable during the workshop. Ensure the room has flipchart, sufficient table space, and a whiteboard.
- Ensure you have all materials required—Butcher's paper, pens, sticky notes.

Sample Agenda

Agendas will vary depending on the problem at hand, the attendees, and the amount of time available. The following is an example only.

- Introductions—Participants introduce themselves. The facilitator can set the tone by being first to do so.
- Usability presentation—This is an opportunity to get participants thinking about usability.
- Objectives and Expectations. Be clear about the purpose of the workshop, and identify what each participant expects as an outcome.
- Identify issues—The issues may be with a system to be replaced, or with the domain in general. Use affinity diagramming to extract and structure the issues.
- Design goals—With the issues in mind, identify the usability goals that the system must meet.
- Scenarios—Scenarios serve to centre the discussion on the actual users. Have participants read and refine the scenarios.
- Paper prototyping. Split the group in two and have each spend a short amount of time (no more than 20 minutes) working independently on solutions that address the selected scenario or scenarios.
- Combine designs. Each group presents its design and the group discusses relative merits.
- Further design work. Depending on the outcome of the first prototyping session, decide how to use the remaining time most effectively.
- At the end of the workshop, review expectations and objectives to ensure they have been met.
- Document the outcomes as soon as possible.

Be prepared to diverge from the prepared agenda if necessary.