

Usability Lab Tests

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	FACILITATORS	CATEGORY	DURATION	LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY
36-125	1 Moderator, 1 Notetaker	Test Phase	45min - 1h	Simple

Description

Usability lab test is a qualitative research method which is an integral and important part of the user-centered design process and its function is to observe and measure how effective a product is to the users or how people understand the features of an interface with a purpose to make it more usable. It is a very common technique done in the lab and is done by watching or recording the users interact with the product. In the usability lab test, there is an option of having other observers (stakeholders) present or watch the process recording live. In the case that the observers are present, the lab is divided into 2 and separated by a two way mirror and the observers get to sit on the other side to avoid being seen by the participants. In a usability lab test, to be able to observe the participants, they need to be given a list of things to do and these are called tasks, and it is important for the participants to know that it is the product that is being tested and not them. While the tasks are being completed, the note-taker takes notes and the facilitator observes and focuses on their behaviours and not totally what they are saying. A usability lab test should be done if knowledge about how the product is performing wants to be known, if competitive advantage needs to be assessed and if the user experience needs to be refined and risks mitigated to improve general performance of the product.

Materials

- ▶ Video recorder
- ▶ Audio Recorder
- ▶ One way mirror
- ▶ Pens & Paper
- ▶ Computer
- ▶ Compensator

Preparation

- ▶ To identify the tasks that are to be tested. The tasks are created from the user goals, that is, the actionable and realistic things that every user must be able to achieve on the website/application
- ▶ Create the scenarios for each task for the participants
- ▶ Figure out the solution for each scenario so there is a benchmark for what success looks like
- ▶ Identification of who the participants will be
- ▶ Identification of what compensation to offer them
- ▶ Recruit the participants
- ▶ Test the product internally to identify issues that may come up during the real test

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. Welcome the test participants and make them feel at ease and comfortable with the environment. Also, inform them that they are being recorded and that people are going to be watching for the sake of the test. Remind them that they are not the ones being tested but the product.
2. Make the participants understand the task at hand by having them read out the tasks or scenarios aloud.
3. Ask them to start, while recording, the moderator, the note taker and other stakeholders observe and pay attention to what the participants are doing, to know if they get stuck, if they fail or perform another task different from what they are given.
4. Ask them questions to follow-up and know why they took certain steps, it is important to pay attention to their non-verbal cues too, because some people may say one thing while doing another
5. Appreciate and thank the participants, offer compensations if any.
6. The next step is to hold a session with the observers and stakeholders for everyone to share their observations and thoughts
7. The facilitator is to sum up and combine failures and successes for each task by the different participants.
8. Identify the root causes of the failures and the facilitator can also give suggestions to fix the identified issues.

Remarks

- For existing products, usability lab testing is a good way to know what is really working and what is not.
- For new products, usability lab tests are a great method to identify the feedback of customers very early which will save a lot of back and forth and money.
- It is also a way to know the ideas that other people have that the internal team does not have

Tips

- It is very important for the participants to remember that it is the product being tested and not them
- As a facilitator, try not to project your ways of doing things on the participants, and watch yourself to ensure to are not giving cues
- Focus on the behaviour of participants rather than what they say

Limitations

- Always leave room for the fact that the number of people in the lab test are not your entire customers
- The environment might make the participants change their behavior to please the facilitator

References

Lallemand, C., & Koenig, V. (2017, May). Lab Testing Beyond Usability: Challenges and Recommendations for Assessing User Experiences. *Journal of usability studies*, 12(3), 133-154. University of Luxembourg Library. <http://hdl.handle.net/10993/31420>

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