Innovation isn’t easy. Companies can easily miss new business opportunities—especially those that arise from unfamiliar sectors—when innovating incrementally or drawing on entrenched expertise. And while focus groups or surveys can provide some understanding of customer needs and opportunities, these methods do not surface implicit needs or contexts of use.

look before you leap

Developed at PARC over many years and across diverse settings, PARC Opportunity Discovery has helped clients produce game-changing new businesses, products, and services.

This work has included helping our customers: detect and filter emerging market trends; understand R&D and design implications for reaching existing and potential customers; and address the most appropriate and promising business opportunities.

PARC Opportunity Discovery is an innovation targeting process that utilizes the social science method of ethnography.

Ensuring solutions are useful, PARC Opportunity Discovery puts users at the center of the innovation process. This approach helps you determine what to build for your customers before you invest time and money building it.

the benefits

Strategic, user-centered innovation
Opportunities maximized
Faster time to market
Reduced risk
Fewer innovation misses

Ethnography is the naturalistic study of human behavior in context. It combines systematic data capture and rigorous analysis to provide a detailed, nuanced, and complete picture of what people actually do and experience not just what they say.

By examining people’s practices, tacit knowledge, implicit needs, and the contexts in which they interact with various products, services, or processes ethnographic research helps:

Discover innovation opportunities
Transform business practices
Train ethnography competency
Design & evaluate user experience
Define clear outcomes tailored to your business goals
PARC Opportunity Discovery offers a structured, time-constrained, yet customizable framework – especially compared to open-ended consulting engagements.

Leverage your company’s strengths
PARC Opportunity Discovery considers your assets, desired direction against the competition, and customer needs – unlike pre-packaged, uncustimized approaches.

Focus without prematurely narrowing options
PARC Opportunity Discovery rapidly broadens options and then systematically assesses and culls them – to avoid committing too early to the wrong choice. It then validates the best opportunities early in the process.

Overcome decision-making obstacles
PARC Opportunity Discovery goes beyond buzzwords by using proven methods for avoiding digressions, unfounded assumptions, confirmation bias, dominant personalities, and other pitfalls.

Draw on the leading minds in the business
PARC Opportunity Discovery hand-picks a team with the greatest possible vision and cross-disciplinary expertise (business, scientific, technical, and engineering) suited to your needs.

Pools all available wisdom. Maximizes contributions from diverse participants with deep domain expertise
Remains objective. Conducts systematic, comparative assessments across opportunity space
Creates audit trail. Documents rationale for later management review or approval

Provides focus. Decisions are constrained to explicit, objective, and shared information from participants; limits new stakeholders from suddenly changing focus
Uses innovation experts. PARC’s track record of pioneering change leverages experts who can spot opportunities or trends where others may not.

Assumption verification in the field
Observations “in the wild” and other methods unveil the unknown, surface unimagined requirements, and present unexpected opportunities.

Opportunity recommendation for further R&D
The process results in the most promising opportunity filtered by experts.

Early receptivity, utility, and usability feedback
Mock-ups and in situ conceptual walk-throughs ensure target-user feedback is incorporated into design concepts prior to implementation.

Provides actionable insights. Generates deep and actionable insights – not revealed by standard market research methods – about customer needs for novel solutions
Reduces risk. Greatly reduces building unwanted products or services that do not provide competitive advantage
Cuts costs. Upfront investment prevents later expenses...especially those associated with finding a problem for an already developed solution.

Team selection for common framework and direction
Select participants and share critical background knowledge; this involves diverse stakeholders and experts from both PARC and the client side.

Idea development to broaden possibilities
Conduct trend analysis, develop selection criteria, and elicit target market and solution options for exploration.

Analysis and filtering for the best options
Develop scenarios and requirements and consider competitive landscapes to filter options for customer utility, business viability, and company fit.

Go/No-Go Further pursue promising opportunities?

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the PARC difference

verified and validated
By partnering with an outside institution like PARC, it forced us to consider ideas that might have been dismissed had they been born internally.

Dr. Hitoshi Matsumoto, President, Fujitsu Laboratories America

The project we engaged in with PARC resulted in a technology which will innovate the way we conduct our information communication business. PARC has a unique competitive advantage. The ethnographic approach was significant. They are able to create original solutions, and develop prototype systems that exceed the ability of competitors.

Fumio Saito, General Manager, Dai Nippon Printing

PARC ethnographer expertise in conversation analysis is something we do not have training in. My colleagues and I sought to understand the method, especially as it could be applied to what we cared about: contributions to communication technology innovation. The findings were persuasive and the process was efficient for our needs – we would gladly work with PARC again.

Crysta Metcalf, Ph.D., Anthropologist and Manager of Experience Research, Motorola Applied Research Center

The PARC Eureka knowledge system helped our technicians move from a hierarchy of control to a hierarchy of expertise; this was essential for us as we were moving beyond machines and into services. More importantly, the socio-cultural perspective that Xerox has always supported and drawn from PARC ethnographers helped us focus on increasing employee knowledge, and most of all on delighting our customers.

Sophie Vandebroek, CTO, Xerox and President, Xerox Innovation Group