Assignment: Contextual Inquiry
Due September 27 CS 160, Fall 2007

Overview

In this assignment you will conduct a contextual inquiry to learn more about the work practices of your target users. This assignment will help you design your group project to meet the needs of users. Be sure to make an early start on this assignment. It will take time to schedule participants for observations. Remember, we will not give extensions for group assignments.

Requirements

1. Each team member must do first-hand data collection on at least one target user (no CS160 classmates) using contextual inquiry (indicate who did which observation).
2. Pick an appropriate method from the ones we discussed in class (or one you learned on your own), how you’re going to record user data, and explain why it is a good fit for your topic. As a group, you can decide to all use the same method or use a combination of methods.
   1. Direct observation
   2. Passive observation
   3. Interview
   4. Participatory observation
   5. Diary study
   6. Experience Sampling Method
3. As a group, analyze the data you’ve collected. Be sure to identify
   1. Resources used
   2. Hindrances encountered
   3. Design implications for improvement
4. Submit a group report (2 copies please) describing your work

Report Guideline

You will submit roughly 5-10 pages of text (optionally sketches) as described below. Feel free to use this as an outline for the report, or you can organize your report differently as long as it at least contains the following information.

- Statement of the project topic (short, 1 paragraph)
- Description of observation method(s) chosen to investigate this topic and explanation for how it is a good fit for this topic.
- Description of participants (1 short paragraph per person). Give a bit of relevant background on each subject, why they are appropriate target users. For privacy reasons, do not use real names or identifying information about your subjects.
• Description of how you conducted the observation method(s)
  o What activities did you observe?
  o What context did you observe them in?
  o How did you record the user data?

• Summary of analysis
  o Description of common tasks and context in which activities are currently accomplished
  o What resources and tools are used in currently accomplishing the activity
  o What hindrances or problems are they currently encountering in the activity
  o Other observations that were interesting or surprised you

• Reflections
  o What did you learn from studying users?
  o How did your observations change the way you thought about your project?
  o What problems did you encounter in running the contextual inquiry? What did you learn from those problems? What would you do differently?

• Key design issues
  o Based on your observations, what are the key issues that your design is going to have to address?
  o What design features need to be included in your project for it to be successful?
  o What tasks are users going to have to be easy enough and properly motivated to do for the project to be successful?

• Group member contribution
  o Each team member’s name and a short description (about a sentence or two) of how they contributed to this assignment.

Grading Criteria

• Picking appropriate method
  o Did your observation method give you good insight into your topic?

• Conducting method properly
  o Picking appropriate participants
  o Appropriate description of method

• Analysis
  o Including data from contextual inquiry (at least one example from each participant)
  o Drawing appropriate conclusions (at least 4 resources used and 4 hindrances encountered)

• Reflections
  o Explaining what you learned from the process

• Design
  o At least 4 key design issues from your observations