Intro to Contextual Research Methods

Jon Kolko
Savannah College of Art & Design

Overview

• About User Centered Design
• Understanding This Course
• How It Fits In
• What The Course Covers
• What The Course Doesn't Cover

About User Centered Product Design

If I don't understand this, whose fault is it?
### Understanding This Course | What Is It?

- A careful study
- An investigation, or inquiry

To learn, so as to present in a detailed, accurate manner

- A particular procedure
- A systematic way of doing something

A technique, which is repeatable and systematic

Systematic and repeatable techniques used to carefully learn about the circumstances in which events occur.

**How is this different than “traditional research”?**
What This Course Covers

- How to conduct contextual research
- How to model user behavior, in order to understand both explicit and implicit workflow
- How to synthesize gathered research

Specifically, we will cover:

- Contextual Inquiry
- Interviewing
- Contextual Design Work Modeling
- Task Flow Work Modeling
- Questionnaire Development
- Questionnaire Analysis
- Focus Groups
- Development of Unique Methodologies

What This Course Doesn’t Cover

- Design, as a verb. This class is focused on analysis and interpretation, not on “making”.
- Aesthetics. In this class, we are more concerned with the intellectual, social and cultural issues surrounding design.
- Self Expression.

Summary

- About User Centered Design
- Understanding This Course
- How It Fits In
- What The Course Covers
- What The Course Doesn’t Cover

... Coming up: Focus Setting

Understanding Focus Setting

**Contextual Inquiry: Focus**

- The point of view an interviewer takes while studying work

  - A perspective
  - A set of pre-conceived assumptions and beliefs
  - Will reveal and conceal
### Contextual Inquiry: Focus

**Focus**

- Focus serves many roles:
  - Directs the selection of participants
  - Helps manage limited interview time
  - Directs questioning towards a goal
  - Creates understanding
- Clear focus steers the conversation

---

### Contextual Inquiry: Focus Setting

**Focus Setting**

**How to conduct a Focus Setting Meeting:**

1. Form a team
2. Create an "affinity diagram" of potential foci:
   - a. Brainstorm questions, assumptions
   - b. Record all items generated
   - c. Remove items participants cannot answer
   - d. Remove "personally-biased" questions
   - e. Organize remaining items
   - f. Develop general foci based on affinity groupings
3. Review the foci with the team
4. Select research direction

---

**Contextual Inquiry: Focus Setting**

1. **Setting a Focus**
   - Form a team
   - Team should include all stakeholders, including project managers, engineers, designers, marketing, sales, and even the end users if available.

---

2. **Create an "affinity diagram" of potential foci:**
   - (Chapter 8 in Rapid Contextual Design)
     - a. Brainstorm questions, assumptions
     - b. Record all items generated
     - c. Remove items participants cannot answer
     - d. Remove "personally-biased" questions
     - e. Organize remaining items
     - f. Develop general foci based on affinity groupings

---

3. **Remove items participants cannot answer**

Some questions may ask a participant for a factual quantity or piece of data that they may not know ("How large is your market?").

Other questions may ask the participant to state their opinion about a hypothetical situation ("Would you buy this product?").

---

4. **Remove "personally-biased" questions**

A team member may have suggested items that are particularly important to them, but don't contribute to the problem domain and goal; remove these items too.
Contextual Inquiry : Focus Setting

**Setting a Focus**

1. The point of view an interviewer takes while studying work

2. Create an "affinity diagram" of potential foci:
   
   ```
   e. Organize remaining items. Create categories and groups from the individual items.
   
   f. Develop general foci based on affinity groupings.
   ```

3. Review the foci with the team

   Make sure everyone involved understands the potential foci that have been developed.

4. Select a path for your research.

   Let's try it in class . .