Usor: A Web Based Collection of User Oriented Methods

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ABSTRACT

This web site contains short summaries of different user oriented methods. All methods are described by means of a simple template. The methods are also classified with regards to when in a design process the method can be used, what level of user involvement required, and why and in what context the method can be used. The classification scheme makes it easy for the reader to search for and browse the methods. There is a mailing list connected to the web site where user oriented methods can be discussed.

Keywords

Methods, user orientation, web site, mailing list, references, summaries, usability

INTRODUCTION

Usor is a web based collection of user oriented methods — mainly systems development methods. Some methods, however, originate from other areas such as the *Future Workshop* [2], a technique for helping small groups of people generate and implement creative ideas.

A user oriented method is a method where the users are considered in some way in the development process. This could mean anything from just being aware of the users to involving users in all steps in the development of the product.

Usor is a place to read about, get a short introduction to, and get a reference where to read more about user oriented methods. It does not contain extensive definitions of any of the methods. Because of this, only published and publicly available methods are and will be included.

AUDIENCE

Who is this collection intended for? The descriptions are easy to understand for every reader, regardless of their previous experience in user oriented methods. Additionally, the references and the classifications are useful both to experts and beginners.

WHAT IS A METHOD?

We have used the definition from Olson and Moran [4], who defines that "a method implies a systematic, repeatable way to design". Additionally, a method is defined as something that includes (1) a statement of the problem that this method addresses, (2) a device (a tool, technique or model), (3) a procedure for using the device, and (4) a result, or rather a definition of the nature of the result.

GOAL

This web site exists for three reasons: (1) to provide an overview of existing user oriented methods, (2) to provide a good source for references in the area, and (3) to offer a place for discussing user oriented methods. The third item is accomplished by means of the Usor mailing list, see below.

What makes Usor special? What makes Usor usable?

- It is complete with regards to what is presented. No named methods on the pages leads to an empty description.

- It is maintained by a research institute and is therefore publicly available and not commercially tied.

- Much effort has been spent on the classification and it is therefore easy to search and find a specific method not only by its name, but also by its content.

- It contains a mailing list on which user oriented methods can be discussed. The discussions on this list will be reflected in the contents of the web site.

- The readers of Usor are encouraged to contribute with their opinions on the descriptions and with their own methods. Anyone could have their method included in the collection, provided that it has been published. No restrictions have been introduced so far.

DESCRIPTION TEMPLATE

All methods are described according to the following template.

- A short introduction to the method and a description of what problems it addresses.

- **Classification**. The classification of the method. This states something about the contents of the method.

- **Results**. What kind of results the method is expected to produce.

- **How to perform the method.** How to perform the steps of the method. The steps are briefly described to give the reader an idea of what skills and resources are required for using the method.

- **Benefits and limitations**. What is good and what is bad about the method? When is it appropriate to use it and when is it inappropriate?

- **Further reading**. Where can I read more about this method?

CLASSIFICATION SCHEME

The classification of the methods is an important part of Usor. In order to browse and search the methods in a meaningful way, some sort of classification needs to be used. The classification scheme must support the readers in their efforts to find a suitable method for a particular situation.

The classification is based on the classification made in an article by Sweeney, Maguire & Shackel [5]. There are three main categories.

- **Activity**. The activity is the state in which the development process is. Most software cycle models or system development methods are easy to divide into the following four activities; *planning* (what?), *analysis* (how?), *design* (the design of a product or a prototype), and *evaluation* (assessment of a product or a prototype).

- **User involvement**. The user involvement states in what way end users are involved in the development process. Remember that in this context, even if you do not have any user participation, your work can be user oriented. The three levels are *modelling* (theoretical models of the interaction), *without* (pretending to be users based on experience), and *participation* (users participate).

- **Goal**. The goal is the reason why the method is being used. It also states something about what type of problems that are being addressed. The four different goals are *diagnostic* (identify shortcomings and recommend redesign solutions), *summary* (does the system support the users task?), *certifying* (generate quantitative information), and *envisioning* (producing visions of the future).

USER STUDIES

The first version of this web site was evaluated [7] using an adapted version of the Thinking Aloud method [3]. The test subjects were asked to think aloud while solving a number of tasks. In contrast to a regular thinking aloud session, the test subjects were encouraged to comment all their spontaneous reactions about the web pages and their content instead of describing each action they did. The second version of Usor is the one that is presented here. Most matters commented on by the test subjects has been changed accordingly.

ACCESSIBILITY

One important aspect when creating web pages is to make them easy to read and understand. Many people tend to forget that this also should include people with disabilities. There are a couple of guidelines on how to design web pages that are accessible for all users and Usor meets these requirements, therefore Usor has got the *Web Access Symbol* [6] and the *Bobby Approved* icon [1].

USOR MAILING-LIST

The web site also contains a mailing list. This mailing list offers a place for discussing user oriented methods. The list is unmoderated and will be so for as long as possible. The goal is to have the discussions on this list to be reflected in Usor. If, for example, some specific opinions or experiences are shared on this list and they are considered to be of interest to all Usor visitors, they will be integrated on the web pages.

DISCUSSION

Usor is on the web right now, and will be so as long as it fulfils a purpose. The activity on Usor is dependent on the readers. Only if the readers take an active part, the goals and the visions of this web site will be fulfilled. We will try to spread the word about this web site to anyone that could be interested and to any web site that could be relevant. But you play an important role as a reader of this document, try to spread the word about this web site and take a look yourself, either at this conference or later.

REFERENCES

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http://www.nada.kth.se/cid/usor

USOR

A WEB BASED COLLECTION OF USER ORIENTED METHODS

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CLASSIFICATION SCHEME

The methods are classified with regard to when in a design process the method could be used, the Activity , what level of user involvement is required, the User involvement, and why and in what context the method can be used, the Goal[3]. This classification scheme makes it easy for the reader to search for and browse the methods.

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Notes

1. Web Access Symbol, The Web Access Project, National Center for Accessible Media, http://www.wgbh.org/wgbh/pages/ncam/currentprojects/symbolwinner.html (7/7 1998)
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