Procuring usable systems
Key issues for systems development

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1. Workshop theme

The maturity of processes for producing usable systems starts to level out, reaching their limits of what they might achieve. Taking, as a contrast, the procurer's perspective, and providing processes, tools and competence to procure and require usable systems as well as user-centred processes, would function as a driver for the production of more usable systems. This workshop explores experiences from procurement, taking a usability perspective, trying to chart out issues ahead for research on the procurement of usable systems. During the workshop we also want to explore and formulate opportunities for procuring usable systems as a complementary perspective to producing usable systems.

During the last decades a lot of work has been done to ensure user involvement in the design and development process (e.g. Gulliksen & Göransson, Schuler & Namioka 1993). In parallel to this a lot of work has been done focusing the development of user interfaces (e.g. Cooper 1999, Raskin 2000, Shneiderman 1998). Much less has focused the procurement of systems, even less about procuring usable systems. Some re-search performed within HCI can be read and analysed from a procurer perspective even though it was not the primary focus for the research performed (e.g. Näslund 1996, Näslund & Löwgren 1999, Grudin 1991).

In the Scandinavian system development tradition the idea has been to short-circuit the procurer/customer relation, and go directly to the users (Greenbaum & Kyng 1991). Some work has been done regarding government contracting (Downey, Laskowski, Buie & Hartson 1996, Winkler & Buie 1995). Literature that focus procurement (Dahlgren, Lundgren & Stigberg 2000) takes a mirroring perspective and focus economic issues of procurement or as (Clark & Heivert 1999) focus on functions rather than functioning. Most often the analysis ends after a return-on-investments analysis.

By shifting focus from producing usable systems to procuring usable systems we see an avenue of research supporting the goals and tasks of users, as well as others dedicated to the use quality of the interactive artefacts.

2. Aim and outcome

The goal of the workshop is fairly simple. We would like to gather a Nordic body of researchers and practitioners to share experiences, formulate challenges and possibly find project proposals regarding procurement of information technology from a usability perspective.

Given the immaturity of the area we expect that the outcome will be fairly broad and heterogene. First, we expect to leave the workshop with a comprehensive list of issues regarding the procurement of usable systems. Second, we expect that the workshop formulate one or several draft frameworks or models that may guide researchers and practitioners regarding procurement issues of usability. We also expect to find relationships to other areas touching upon similar issues

The results of the workshop will be written up as an article to be submitted to SIGCHI bulletin. There might also be produced a poster during the workshop, to be displayed at NordiCHI.

3. Workshop programme

Initially, participants will present their view on usability procurement, and briefly share experiences of good and bad procurement examples. Secondly, there will be a moderated issue brainstorming session, followed by a brief bottom-up preliminary group clustering.

After a brief discussion and modelling of the process, we expect participants to interact in smaller groups. In the larger group, we will then summarize all the group work into one or several draft models of usability procurement. A new discussion will then be performed. Again, a discussion in smaller groups will be performed, this time to establish avenues and possibilities for research, research themes, research questions etc, for the draft framework.

At the end of the workshop, we expect to have established at least one framework for research on usability procurement. The goal is not to produce a homogenous view among the participants. Instead we wish to encourage heterogeneity and conflicting critical views. Thus, we expect to leave the workshop without a consensus regarding issues and frameworks.

We will also allow time for a general discussion of how to evaluate our output, how to continue the work in a distributed fashion, and how the results might be communicated.

4. Participants and admittance

We are looking for participants who are willing to give this enterprise a serious, constructive try; we are not interested in a one-day debate on where responsibility for the usability of interactive systems should lie or if procurement is an issue at all.

We are looking for participants with experience of aspects of procurement of interactive systems. We will attempt to construct a list of twenty. For reasons of diversity we will especially look for participants who have experiences working with procurement issues as a procurer and not only from the producers perspective.

5. Workshop organisers

Stefan Holmlid is a research scientist, earning his PhD in human computer interaction. He has organized practitioner workshops during the course of his doctoral research project, three Swedish workshops on usability procurement, developed several courses, basic as well as master's level, at Linköpings universitet.

Henrik Artman is associate professor, earning his PhD in Communication studies and has worked as consultant. He has organized three workshops in Sweden on usability procurement, as well as domestic workshops at smaller conferences.

The organizers are directing a research project on procurement competence. They moderated a hearing on usability procurement competence in November 2001. http://www.nada.kth.se/~artman/Best.htm.

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