The interaction architect

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ABSTRACT

Earlier research in Human-Computer Interaction has often, implicitly or explicitly, taken for granted that the proper belonging of the usability professional role is in the supplier's organisation (in a division between procurers and suppliers). The supplier has been responsible to integrate a user-centred perspective in development practice and, from this, develop usable solutions. In spite good intentions, however, there is still a shortage of examples of suppliers who have succeeded with this integration and who make use of user-cantered design today. In addition, recent research indicates that the reasons for the failure to develop usable systems can not be attributed solely to the supplier. The procurer also seems to play an important part in limiting the possibilities for the supplier to focus on usage requirements.

In this article I introduce the idea that user-cantered design does not necessarily have to be done by the supplier. On the contrary I argue that user-cantered activities can be seen as defining the overall requirements for the solution, to define what kind of system that shall be produced. In this perspective usability activities also fit into the procurer's work of transforming overall business needs into the requirements for a particular application. Studies of use and the design and evaluation of solutions can prove to be a useful way of managing this transformation, with a focus on future use. If this can be done - moving the work of the usability professional into procurement and basing the procurement on this work (rather than vice versa as is often the case today) - there are several potential gains: 1) Usability can be naturally integrated into the requirements, even before the development project has even been ordered, 2) there might be less risk that the procurer will, unconsciously, obstruct usability work and 3) the demands of finding user centred suppliers will likely decrease, since much of the usability work has already been completed.

I wrap up the argumentation in the article by presenting one possible strategy for managing usability work in the procurement. Lending from architecture I introduce the role of the "*interaction architect*" into system development. As procurers of large constructions may not know anything about architecture most procurers of information systems do often not know much about how to define system requirements grounded in use. The role of the architect is to help the procurer in the work of defining the requirements of the building. Similarly, the responsibility of the interaction architect should be to help the procurer define system requirements through user-cantered design. The result of the work of the interaction architect is the "blueprint" which is used in the procurement.