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Evaluating Distributed Usability: the role of user interfaces in an activity system

Lejla Vrazalic

Abstract

Traditional definitions of usability localise this fundamental Human Computer Interaction (HCI) concept in the user interface and reduce it to a variety of qualitative and quantitative attributes of the computer system. This simplistic view of usability has been used as the basis for developing design and evaluation methods in the discipline. This paper argues that, as a result, HCI methods are ineffective and suffer from various shortcomings. It is proposed that the notion of usability must be extended to include contextual factors, and viewed as being distributed across an activity system. Adopting this notion of distributed usability then requires a review of existing HCI methods. Usability testing, as a complete and self-contained HCI method, was chosen for this purpose, and the result, a distributed usability evaluation method (DUEM), is presented in this paper.

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