Impact of Poor Design (Schriver)

Lecture # 5
Issues in Poor Design

- The prevalence of poor product and document design partly explains why people have so many problems in learning to use technology.
- It does not explain how people think about the problems they experience while using text and technology.
- How people represent the troubles they experience because their beliefs may affect how they approach new situations, beliefs about documents or products in one setting may influence people's beliefs about another.
- How people interpret the problems is a direct function of the ideas people hold about the source of the problem. (We blame the text, illustrations, topic, blame ourselves).
The Blame Study

- Japanese consumer electronics companies demanded this design study to improve its quality. The companies marketing department received numerous complaints from customers about the poor design of VCR and stereo systems. Consumers reported that these products were confusing and hard to understand. Managers suspected that the problem was related to the document and not to the product itself.

- Research team had multiple strategies. First, focus on four types of products that the company had received the most complaint about and asking consumers about their product and manual experience.

- Second, readers were asked to learn product functions using the instruction guide. It appeared what was expected as a product design or instruction problem, came out to be people's thinking about themselves as tech and instruction users.
Survey of Customers

- Their habits in using the consumer product and the instructions that came with it.
- Their attitudes about the problems they experienced “when things went wrong.
- Most of the time manuals are scanned through and read as reference.
- Customers reported using the manual 80% of the time for all the four products studied.
- British customers think it necessary to read manuals based on whether they thought the product needed instructions.
- See Table 4.1 and 4.2 in Schriver.
The Blame Game Attribution

- To the manual
- To the machine
- To the manufacturer
- To myself
- Don't remember

- The blame differs by age and gender. Older participants might show tendency to blame themselves more often than younger ones. Females would blame themselves more often than men. However, the difference might not be significant. Roughly 60% of all participants blamed themselves.

- Schriver conducted a usability testing to study readers' blame attribution before, during and after using a product. Readers tended to blame themselves 52% of the time on an average before, during and after usability testing.

- Fig. 4.1, 4.3 and 4.4, 4.5 (Schriver)
Increased Product Features

- Tasks are made difficult by poor product design.

- Schriver's study also makes apparent that manufacturers should avoid making the assumption that the problems people have with texts and technology can be attributed to not reading the manual, not trying hard enough or simple inability to complete the task.

- The study highlights that products laden with features can be intrinsically hard to use. But it has been hard for companies to resist the temptation of using new features.

- Customers might buy products with added features but if they are certain that those features are useless to them, based on their needs and ability to learn, they would not buy the product. *Don't drown customers in the sea of features.*
What would Improve Product Design

- Standardizing the user interface. Consistently, make the labeling and arrangement of inputs, outputs, switches, settings clear.
- If users can master the core task easily, they would be willing to try new features that are currently beyond their range.
- Learning how to use new products would be a whole lot easier if users can apply their past experience effectively.
Allow Users to Monitor Progress

- If the manufacturer provides with some indication that users are making progress in the right direction, it would make the task lot easier. Users need frequent feedback.

- For example, the software / program download screen, searching icon etc. Every product should have some kind of feedback for users to know what is going on.

- It helps users immensely. However, sometimes the same task can be completed in more than one way for intricate products. If the product features/instructions in manuals are not clear, the users might be completely lost.

- Document design and product design must be integrated.

- Bad documents and bad products may have a long term negative impact on people.
Read Chapter 4

Continue to work on Workshop #1 & Response #2