Software Engineers are People Too: Applying Human Centered Approaches to Improve Software Development



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Natural Programming Project

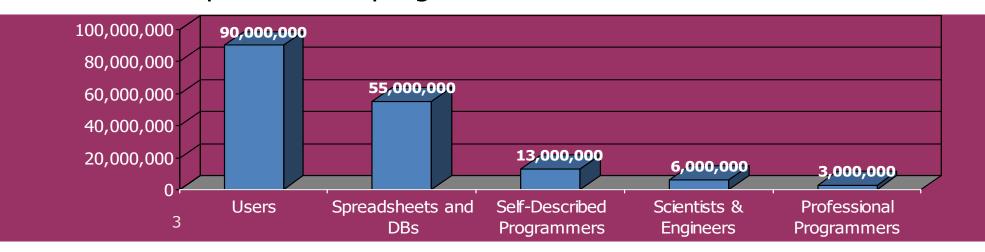
- Researching better tools for programming since 1978
- Natural Programming project started in 1995
- Make programming easier and more correct by making it more natural
 - Closer to the way that people think about algorithms and solving their tasks
- Methodology human-centered approach
 - Perform studies to inform design
 - Provide new knowledge about what people do and think, & barriers
 - Guide the designs from the data
 - Design of programming languages and environments
 - Iteratively evaluate and improve the tools
- Target expert, novice and end-user programmers





End User Programming

- People whose primary job is not programming
- [Scaffidi, Shaw and Myers 2005] (and confirmed recently)
 - 90 million computer users at work in US
 - 55 million will use spreadsheets or databases at work (and therefore may potentially program)
 - 13 million will describe themselves as programmers
 - 3 million professional programmers

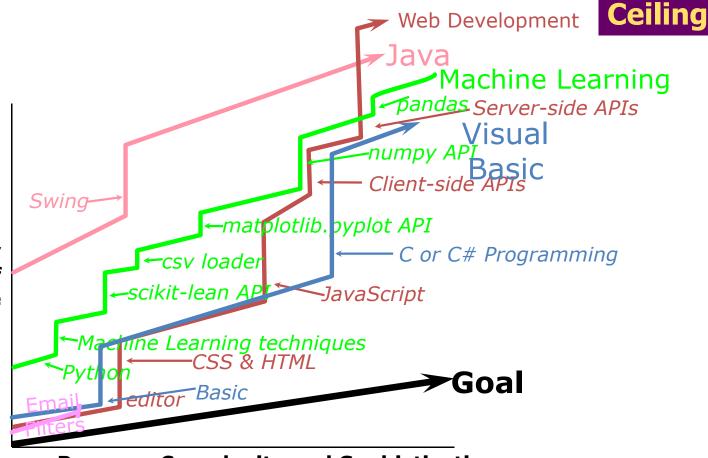


Goal: Gentle Slope Systems

DARPA ISAT Study Group. August, 1992, Woods Hole, MA. With Michael Dertousos

Difficulty of Use

Low Threshold



High

Why Human Centered Approaches?

- Developers are people
- HCI can impact everything the developer encounters:
 - Tools IDEs & their user interfaces
 - Languages themselves
 - Not necessarily just "taste", "intuition"
 - Error-proneness
 - APIs
 - "Interface" between developer and functionality
 - "Languages" by themselves can do very little these days
 - Documentation for all of the above
 - Processes & context of development
- New as well as legacy systems
- DX or DevX developer experience (as in UX)



Dangers of *Not* Applying Human Centered Approaches

- Tools may show no measurable impact
 - Desired advantage overwhelmed by problems with other parts
 - Example: Emerson Murphy-Hill found that refactoring tools are under-utilized and programmers do not configure them due to usability issues

[Emerson Murphy-Hill, Chris Parnin, Andrew P. Black. *How we refactor, and how we know it.* In ICSE '09: Proceedings of the 2009 IEEE 31st International Conference on Software Engineering (2009), pp. 287-297.]

- Hard-to-use APIs and tools have resulted in bugs and security problems
- Usability and quality are key influencers for the decision about which APIs and tools to use



Many HCI Methods

for answering • different • questions •

- Contextual Inquiry
- Contextual Analysis
- Paper prototypes
- Think-aloud protocols
- Heuristic Evaluation
- Affinity diagrams
- Personas
- Wizard of Oz
- Task analysis
- A/B testing
- Cognitive Walkthrough
- Cognitive Dimensions
- KLM and GOMS (CogTool)
- Video prototyping

- Body storming
- Expert interviews
- Questionnaires
- Surveys
- Interaction Relabeling
- Log analysis
- Storyboards
- Focus groups
- Card sorting
- Diary studies
- Improvisation
- Use cases
- Scenarios
- "Speed Dating"
- Journey Maps
- ...



Many HCI Methods

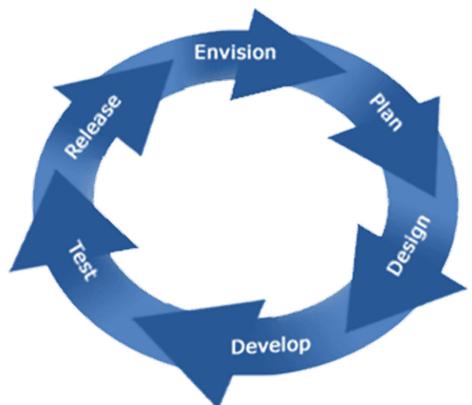
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Product Lifecycle





Source: http://www.accordtech.co.in/Product%20Development%20Lifecycle.htm

Product Lifecycle

Field Studies

Logs & error reports

Evaluative Studies

- Expert analyses
- Usability Evaluation
- Formal A/B Lab Testing

Formative Studies

- Contextual Inquiries
- Interviews
- Surveys
- Lab Studies
- Corpus data mining

Design Practices

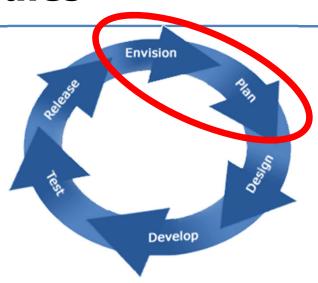
- "Natural programming"
- Prototyping



Envision

Develop

Formative Studies



- Identify what is really happening
- Discover important problems
- Quantify need
- Develop use cases based on data



Contextual Inquiry (CI)

[Beyer, H. and Holtzblatt, K., *Contextual Design: Defining Custom-Centered Systems.* 1998, San Francisco, CA: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers, Inc.]

- Watch developers while they are performing their real tasks
- Objective, concrete data about real activities
- May be followed by a survey, to establish generality of the issues
- Reveals many barriers and problems in current practice
- API Designers told us that identifying developer's real

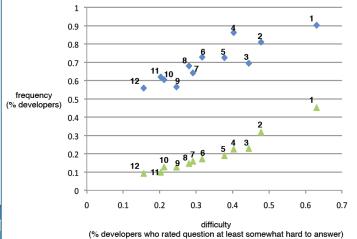
needs was a key barrier [Murphy, Kery, Alliyu, Macvean & Myers, VL/HCC'18]

Example of Contextual Inquiry & Surveys

"Developers Ask Reachability Questions"

[Thomas D. LaToza, Brad Myers, ICSE'2010, Cape Town, South Africa, 2-8 May 2010. pp. 185-194.]

- "Search across feasible paths through a program for target statements matching search criteria"
 - Watched 17 developers investigating unfamiliar code
 - Also surveyed 460 developers
 - Over 100 other hard-to-answer questions



- 1. What are the implications of this change? (e.g., what might break)
- How does application behavior vary in these different situations that might occur?
 Could hip method call patentially be along in come situation.
- 3. Could this method call potentially be slow in some situation I need to consider?
- 4. To move this functionality (e.g., lines of code, methods, files) to here, what else needs to be moved?
- Is this method call now redundant or unnecessary in this situation?Across this path of calls or set of classes, where should
- Across this path of calls of set of classes, where should functionality for this case be inserted?
- 7. When investigating some application feature or functionality, how is it implemented?
- 8. In what situations is this method called?
- 9. What is the correct way to use or access this data structure?
- 10. How is control getting (from that method) to this method?
- 11. What parts of this data structure are accessed in this code?
- 12. How are instances of these classes or data structures created and assembled?



Many hard-to-answer questions about code

[LaToza & Myers, PLATEAU'20101

Rationale (42)

Why was it done this way? (14) [15][7] Why wasn't it done this other way? (15) Was this intentional, accidental, or a hack? (9)[15] How did this ever work? (4)

Debugging (26)

How did this runtime state occur? (12) [15] What runtime state changed when this executed? (2) Where was this variable last changed? (1) How is this object different from that object? (1) Why didn't this happen? (3) How do I debug this bug in this environment? (3) In what circumstances does this bug occur? (3) [15] Which team's component caused this bug? (1)

Intent and Implementation (32)

What is the intent of this code? (12) [15] What does this do (6) in this case (10)? (16) [24] How does it implement this behavior? (4) [24]

Refactoring (25)

Is there functionality or code that could be refactored? (4) Is the existing design a good design? (2) Is it possible to refactor this? (9) How can I refactor this (2) without breaking existing users(7)? (9) Should I refactor this? (1) Are the benefits of this refactoring worth the time investment? (3)

Testing (20)

Is this code correct? (6) [15] How can I test this code or functionality? (9) Is this tested? (3) Is the test or code responsible for this test failure? (1) Is the documentation wrong, or is the code wrong? (1)

Implementing (19)

How do I implement this (8), given this constraint (2)? (10) Which function or object should I pick? (2) What's the best design for implementing this? (7)

Control flow (19)

In what situations or user scenarios is this called? (3) [15][24] What parameter values does each situation pass to this method? (1) What parameter values could lead to this case? (1) What are the possible actual methods called by dynamic dispatch here? (6) How do calls flow across process boundaries? (1) How many recursive calls happen during this operation? (1) Is this method or code path called frequently, or is it dead? (4) What throws this exception? (1)

What is catching this exception? (1) Contracts (17)

What assumptions about preconditions does this code make? (5) What assumptions about pre(3)/post(2)conditions can be made? What exceptions or errors can this method generate? (2) What are the constraints on or normal values of this variable? (2) What is the correct order for calling these methods or initializing these objects? (2)

What is responsible for updating this field? (1)

Performance (16)

What is the performance of this code (5) on a large, real dataset (3)? (8) Which part of this code takes the most time? (4) Can this method have high stack consumption from recursion? (1) How big is this in memory? (2)

How many of these objects get created? (1)

Type relationships (15)

What are the composition, ownership, or usage relationships of this type? (5) [24] What is this type's type hierarchy? (4) [24] What implements this interface? (4) [24]

Where is this method overridden? (2) Data flow (14)

What is the original source of this data? (2) [15] What code directly or indirectly uses this data? (5) Where is the data referenced by this variable modified? (2) Where can this global variable be changed? (1) Where is this data structure used (1) for this purpose (1)? (2) [24] What parts of this data structure are modified by this code? (1) [24] What resources is this code using? (1)

Location (13)

Where is this functionality implemented? (5) [24] Is this functionality already implemented? (5) [15] Where is this defined? (3)

How can I move this code to this branch? (1)

Building and branching (11) Should I branch or code against the main branch? (1)

What do I need to include to build this? (3) What includes are unnecessary? (2) How do I build this without doing a full build? (1) Why did the build break? (2)[59] Which preprocessor definitions were active when this was built? (1)

Architecture (11)

How does this code interact with libraries? (4) What is the architecture of the code base? (3) How is this functionality organized into layers? (1) Is our API understandable and flexible? (3)

History (23)

When, how, by whom, and why was this code changed or inserted?

What else changed when this code was changed or inserted? (2) How has it changed over time? (4)[7]

Has this code always been this way? (2)

What recent changes have been made? (1)[15][7]

Have changes in another branch been integrated into this branch? (1)

Concurrency (9)
What threads reach this code (4) or data structure (2)? (6) Is this class or method thread-safe? (2) What members of this class does this lock protect? (1)

Dependencies (5)

What depends on this code or design decision? (4)[7] What does this code depend on? (1)

Method properties (2)

How big is this code? (1) How overloaded are the parameters to this function? (1)

Teammates (16)

Who is the owner or expert for this code? (3)[7] How do I convince my teammates to do this the "right way"? (12) Did my teammates do this? (1)

Policies (15)

What is the policy for doing this? (10) [24] Is this the correct policy for doing this? (2) [15] How is the allocation lifetime of this object maintained? (3)

Implications (21)

What are the implications of this change for (5) API clients (5), security (3), concurrency (3), performance (2), platforms (1), tests (1), or obfuscation (1)? (21) [15][24]



Many opportunities for better tools

- Of all the reported questions
 - -34% addressed by commercial tools
 - -25% addressed by research tools
 - -41% unaddressed by any tools



Example of Interviews: Immutability

- Experts recommend making classes immutable so instances cannot change accidentally [Coblenz, et al, ICSE'2016]
 - Thread safe, more secure, no unexpected state changes, etc.
- Many relevant language features
 - C++ const, Java final, Obj-C immutable collections,
 .NET Freezable, etc.
- Usability studies suggest programmers prefer classes that can change
- Semi-structured interviews with a convenience sample of 8 software engineers
 - Agreed that mutability is a frequent source of bugs
 - But none of these features are what is needed
 - Preferred transitive, class-based immutability
 - So we provided this in the Glacier language extension [Coblenz, et al, ICSE'2017]
 Great Languages Allow Class Immutability Enforced Readily
 - User study showed none made errors enforcing immutability, vs all in control condition using Java final



Exploratory Lab Studies

- To understand what is happening
- More controlled than Contextual Inquiries
 - Can compare multiple people on same tasks
- Example: studying Eclipse for maintenance tasks

[Andrew J. Ko, Htet Htet Aung, and Brad A. Myers. "Eliciting Design Requirements for Maintenance-Oriented IDEs: A Detailed Study of Corrective and Perfective Maintenance Tasks". *ICSE'2005*. pp. 126-135.

Winner, Distinguished Paper Award.]

- Detailed study of fixing bugs and adding features
- Dataset used for 3 different award-winning papers: interruptions, navigation, code editing behaviors

	Interactive Bottleneck	Overall Cost	
	Navigating to fragment in <i>same</i> file (<i>via scrolling</i>)	~ 11 minutes	
	Navigating to fragment in <i>different</i> file (<i>via tabs and explorer</i>)	~ 7 minutes	=35%
_	Recovering working set after returning to a task	~ 1 minute	
	Total Costs	~19 minutes	nputer Intera



puter Interaction Institute

Corpus Data Mining

- Studied 11 million Java try/catch blocks from GitHub using Boa tool
- 12% of catch blocks were completely empty. [Kery, Le Goues, & Myers, 2016]
- 25% of all exceptions caught are simply Exception
- Motivated a new tool to help programmers write better exception handling code
 - Moonstone: Making Object Oriented Novel Software Tools
 Optimized for Noting Exceptions [Kistner, Kery, Puskas, Moore & Myers, VL/HCC'17]

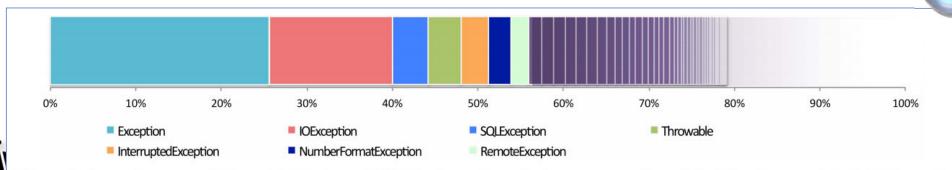
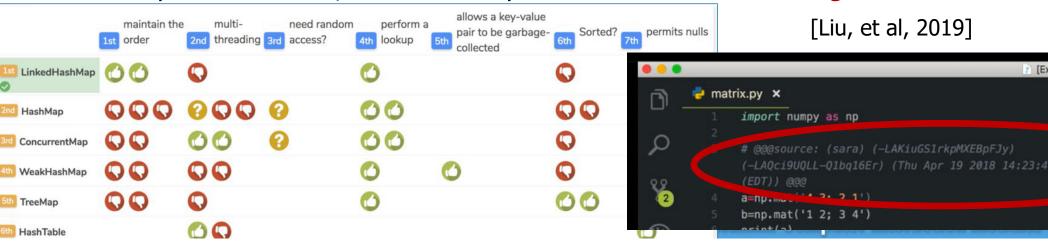


Figure 3: Exceptions caught by catch blocks on GitHub. Exceptions that occur more than 1% of the time are labeled. The rest, in purple, are thousands of exceptions that only rarely occur.

Data Mining Stack Overflow

- Want to help developers organize information after finding it
- Study what kinds of questions people express on Stack Overflow
 - 51% involved decisions with multiple options and criteria
- Motivated new web & IDE tool: Unakite: Users Need Accelerators for Knowledge for Implementations in Technology Environments
 - Programmers clip snippets of information from the web
 - Organizes information into a table
 - When paste into code, creates back pointers to the table as design rationale

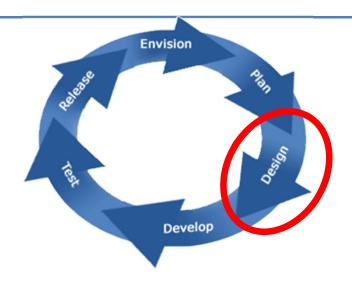


Data Mining for Boilerplate code

- Marble: Mining API Repositories for Boilerplate Lesseni Effort
- New work of PhD student Daye Nam, with Andrew Macvean and Bogdan Vasilescu
- Help API designers by identifying "boilerplate" in code repositories
- Not well-defined what counts subjective
 - "Repetitive code that I don't like"
 - Survey to refine criteria
- Improving the tool's precision



Design Methods



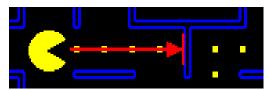
- Now know the problem, what is the solution?
- How do I design it so it is easy to learn and effective?



"Natural Programming" Elicitation Method

- Technique developed by my group to discover developer's "natural" expressions
 - Mental models of tasks, vocabulary, etc.
- A form of participatory design
- Blank paper tests
- Must prompt for the tasks in a way that doesn't bias the answers
- Examples:
 - PacMan before and after
 - Mostly rule-based (if-then)
 - API designs
 - Architecture, names used, which methods are on which classes







Example of use of Natural Programming

- Obsidian is a new domain specific language
 (DSL) for blockchains [Coblenz, et al, 2019]
 - Object-oriented Blockchain State Interaction and Development
 Implementation And Notation
- Combining state transition language ("TypeStates") with resources ("linear types") all checked statically
- 11 different NatProg studies on how to present these complex concepts



ncreasing fidelity

Prototyping

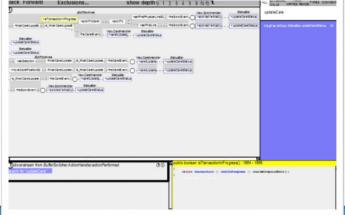
- Try out designs with developers before implementing them
 - Paper

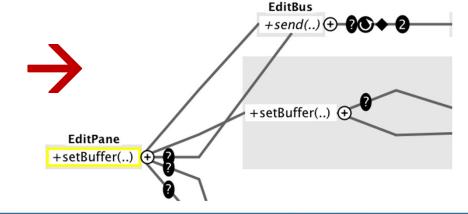
 - "Low fidelity prototyping"
 Often surprisingly effective
 Experimenter plays the computer
 Drawn on paper → drawn on computer
 - Implemented Prototype ("Click through")
 - Balsamiq, Axure, PowerPoint, Web tools (even for non-web UIs)
 - (no database)
 - Real system
- Need to test these with users!
- Better if sketchier for early design
 - Use paper or "sketchy" tools, not real widgets
 - People focus on wrong issues: colors, alignment, labels
 - Rather than overall structure and fundamental design



Example of Early Prototyping

- Thomas LaToza designing new visualization tool to try to help answer Reachability Questions [LaToza & Myers, VL/HCC'11]
- Prototypes created with Omnigraffle and printed
- Revealed significant usability problems that were fixed
 - Basic concepts
 - Graphical presentation
 - Controls



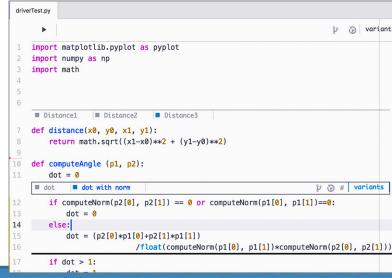




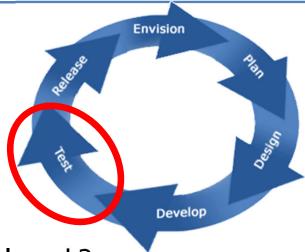
Another Example: Variolite



- How to support data scientists with exploratory programming?
- What kind of version control support would be useful?
 - Interviews and CIs showed that conventional approaches like Git are too heavy-weight
 [Kery, Horvath & Myers, CHI'2017]
- Showed dozens of sketches to target users to get feedback on which seemed usable and useful
- Final design appeared at CHI'2017
- <u>Variations Augment Real Iterative Outcomes</u> <u>Letting Information Transcend Exploration</u>



Evaluation Methods



- Does my tool work?
- Does it solve the developer's problems?
- How much better than alternatives?
- "If the user can't use it, it doesn't work!"
 - Susan Dray





Expert Analyses

- Usability experts evaluating designs to look for problems
 - Heuristic Analysis [Nielsen] set of guidelines
 - Cognitive Dimensions [T.R.G. Green] another set of guidelines
 - Cognitive Walkthroughs evaluate a task
- Can be inexpensive and quick
- However, experienced evaluators are better
 - 22% vs. 41% vs. 60% of errors found [Nielsen]
- Disadvantage: "just" opinions, open to arguments

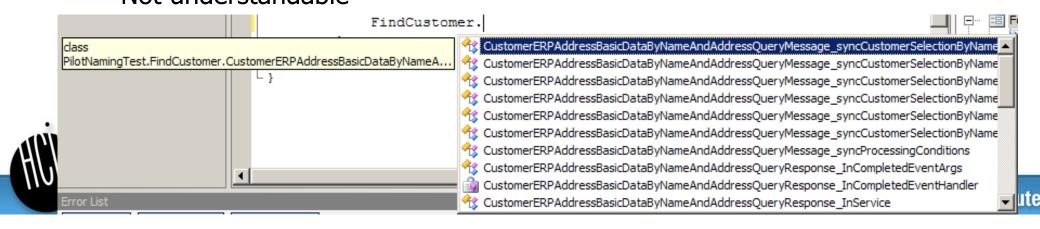


Our Use of Expert Analyses

- Collaborating with SAP on their APIs and tools
- We studied SAP's Enterprise Service-Oriented Architecture (eSOA)
 APIs & Documentation

[Jack Beaton, Sae Young Jeong, Yingyu Xie, Jeffrey Stylos, Brad A. Myers. "Usability Challenges for Enterprise Service-Oriented Architecture APIs," 2008 IEEE Symposium on Visual Languages and Human-Centric Computing, VL/HCC'08. Sept 15-18, 2008, Herrsching am Ammersee, Germany. pp. 193-196.]

- Naming problems:
 - Too long MaterialSimpleByIDAndDescriptionQueryMessage_syncMaterialSimpleSelectionByIDAndDescriptionSelectionByMaterialDescriptio
 - Not understandable



Usability Evaluations

- Let representative target users use the system or a prototype of the system
- Also called "think aloud" protocols
- Different from formal A/B "user testing"
 - Understand usability issues
 - Get qualitative feedback about issues; not numbers
- Should be done early and often
 - Doesn't have to be "finished" to let people try it
- Demonstrates that users can use the system
 - Show that novel features of the UI are understandable



Example Use of Usability Analysis

- Sugilite: Smartphone Users Generating Intelligent Likeable Interfaces Through Examples
- Allow end-users to create automations on Smartphones
- Initiate with speech commands
- Record scripts by example
- Generalizes from one or more examples
- 19 participants attempted 5 tasks
 - All completed at least 2 tasks successfully
 - 8 (42.1%) succeed in all tasks
 - Overall, 65 out of 76 (85.5%) scripts worked
 - Feedback on what we need to improve



[Li, Azaria, & Myers, CHI'2017]





Formal A/B testing

- Formal A/B lab user tests are "gold standard" for academic papers to show something is better
- But many issues in the study design
 - "Confounding" factors which were not controlled and are not relevant to study, but affect results
 - Tasks or instructions are misunderstood
 - Use prototypes & pilot studies to find these
- Statistical significance doesn't mean real savings
- Be sure to collect qualitative data too
 - Strategies people are using
 - Why users did it that way
 - Especially when unexpected results

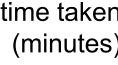


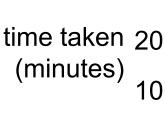
Example of A/B testing

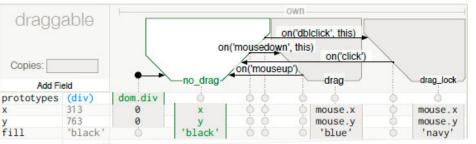
 User testing of InterState compared to JavaScript

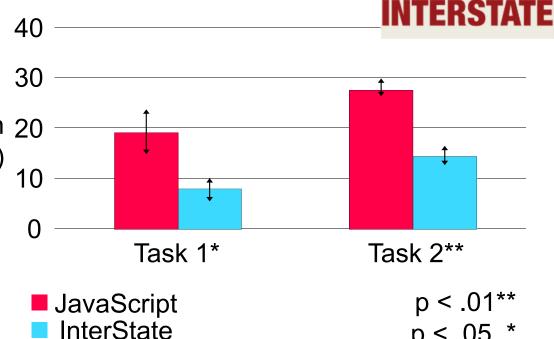
[Oney, Brandt, Myers, UIST'2012]

```
var ms_until_advance;
window.setInterval(function ()
    ms_until_advance = 5000 - g
    if (diff <= 0) {
        set_selected_index((sel
        reset_timer();
    }
```









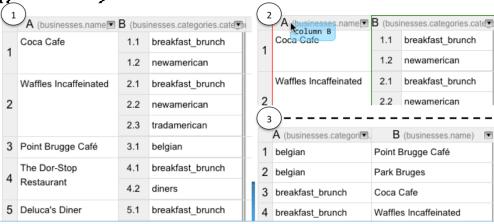
smaller is better

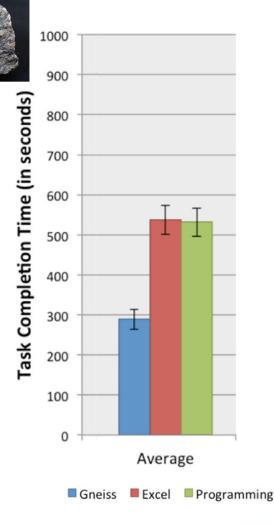


Another Example of A/B testing

- Gneiss: Gathering Novel End-user Internet Services using Spreadsheets [Chang & Myers, CHI'2016]
- Novel spreadsheet interface for investigating hierarchical (e.g., JSON) data
 - Investigate using conventional spreadsheet formulas and drag-and-drop of columns

 Gneiss users significantly outperformed Excel users and programmers (p<.001)

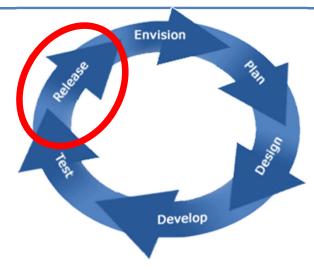




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Field Studies of System in Use



- Find out what happens when the tool is really used
- Requires significant effort to make the tool sufficiently solid



Logging Actual Use

- Easier if instrument your tools
- Objective use data better than users' recollections and opinions
- Many levels of data can be collected
 - Privacy issues
- Easy to log and analyze web data
- Example: Fluorite logger for Eclipse

[Yoon & Myers, PLATEAU 2011]

- Fluorite: Full of Low-level User Operations Recorded In The Editor
- Records all edits and events, including scrolling operations & source code,
- Has been used by multiple studies





Summary of Insights

- Formative field and lab studies can reveal the real questions
 - Answering these questions creates tools that are actually useful
- Human centered design methods help insure workable designs
- Researcher's intuitions about what might be useful may be wrong
- Our experience highlights:
 - Developers often have specific questions in mind, which can be exploited in tools
 - Code views are central
 - Visualizations are often useful as navigation aides for code
 - Ability to search is key
 - Not just through code, but also through dynamic and static call-graphs, through time, etc.



More on This Topic

- Our current tools: <u>www.natprog.org</u>
- Brad A. Myers, Andrew J. Ko, Thomas D. LaToza, and YoungSeok Yoon.
 "Developers are Users Too: Human Centered Methods to Improve Software Development," *IEEE Computer*, Special issue on UI Design, 49, issue 7, July, 2016, pp. 44-52.
- Brad A. Myers and Jeffrey Stylos, "Improving API Usability", Communications of the ACM, vol 59, No. 6, June, 2016, pp. 62-69.
- In general: CHASE and WAPI workshops at ICSE; PLATEAU at SPLASH/OOPSLA; IEEE VL/HCC conference



Acronyms are fun!

And there are lots of Gemstones!!

Fluorite: Full of Low-level User

Operations Recorded In

The **Azurite: E**ditor **A**ddina **Z**est to **U**ndoing and Restoring **I**mproves

Textual

Exploration



Euklas: Eclipse **U**sers' **K**evstrokes Lessened by Attaching from **S**amples



Variolite: **V**ariations

Augment Real **I**terative

Outcomes **L**etting

Information **T**ranscend **E**xploration

Obsidian:

Blockchain

State

And

Notation

Object-oriented

Interaction and

Implementation

Development

End **U**ser Centered Language, **A**PIs System and

Euclase:



Apatite:

Associative Perusing of **APIs T**hat

Identifies **T**argets **E**asily

Crystal: Clarifications Regarding Your



Jadeite:

Documentation with

Java

Extra

Information

Emphasis

Tacked-on for

APT



Construction

And Language Completion **I**ntegrated **T**hroughout



Mica: **M**akes **I**nterfaces Clear and Accessible

Lapis:

Lightweight

Processing

Structure

Information

Pebbles PDAs for **E**ntry of **B**oth Bytes and

Locations from **E**xternal

Aguamarine:

Ouick **U**ndoing of **M**arks

And Repair

Allowing

Any

Improving Novel

Architecture for Editing

GARNET

Generating an Amalgam of Real-time, Novel **E**ditors and **T**oolkits



Sources

Gneiss:

Gathering I Novel End-user

Internet

Services using **S**preadsheets

Suailite

Smartphone Users **G**enerating

Intelligent Likeable **I**nterfaces

Through **E**xamples

Glacier

Great Languages Allow Class **I**mmutability **E**nforced

Readily

<u>C32</u> CMU's Clever and Compelling

Contribution to Computer Science in CommonLisp which is

Customizable and Characterized by a

Complete

Coverage of Code and

Contains a Cornucopia of

Creative Constructs, because it

Can Create Complex,

Correct Constraints that are

Constructed Clearly and Concretely, and Communicated using

Columns of Cells, that are

Constantly Calculated so they

Change Continuously, and

Cancel Confusion





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Software Engineers are People Too: Applying Human Centered Approaches to Improve Software Development

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