Summary of Empathetic Design

By Ian McCulloh

Description

Empathetic design consists of five steps: observation; capturing data; reflection and analysis; brainstorming; and developing prototypes of possible solutions. [1,2,3,4] While this may not seem to be very different from other design methodologies, empathetic design places a much greater emphasis on observation throughout the process [2]. People are directly observed using prototypes in their natural environments. Through this direct observation designers are able to note how people modify and adapt prototypes. They are able to identify difficulties people have in using the prototype and iteratively improve the design. This is especially useful when designing for foreign markets where user preferences may be significantly different than those of the designers [4].

Background

“[Many] target customers cannot always recognize or articulate their future needs” [4]. Empathetic design was created to identify these unstated requirements [1]. This design approach can provide unique insight into several important design considerations; Triggers (circumstances prompting the use of a capability); Customization (how do people adapt, augment, and modify prototypes); Intangible Attributes (identification of important, yet unnoticed attributes); and Unarticulated Needs (identification of user needs not addressed by the customer) [2]. Empathetic design, therefore, can aid researchers in identifying a wider range of design requirements that may be important to the user, yet overlooked by more traditional design methods.

References


