Prototyping for usability engineering

CS 3724
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What is prototyping?
- **Prototype**: A concrete but partial implementation of a system design
- Creating an artifact to represent the system during design
- Simulating the appearance and behavior of the final system
- Making something tangible to test (evaluate) for usability

Goals of Prototyping
- Prototyping enables evaluation, happens throughout
  - Exploring requirements
    - Market analysis, participatory design, envisionment
  - Choosing among alternatives
    - Risky or critical features, go/no-go decisions
  - Empirical usability testing
    - As early as possible, try out ideas with target users
  - Evolutionary development
    - May deliberately choose a malleable software platform, building software in incremental, iterative fashion
- Do scenarios as used in SBD serve as prototypes?
Some Key Tradeoffs

- Quality vs. premature commitment
- Realism (e.g., timing, content) vs. early availability or throw-away efforts
- Constant iteration vs. radical change and/or re-factoring of a design
- Dynamic (highly malleable) platforms vs. organized, well-structured code base
- Horizontal vs. vertical
- Low-fidelity vs. high-fidelity

Horizontal vs. Vertical

- Horizontal prototype:
  - broad coverage of features
  - less detail for each feature
  - less realistic evaluation
- Vertical prototype:
  - fewer features
  - more detail for each feature
  - more realistic evaluation

Fidelity in Prototyping

- Fidelity: how much like the final product is the "look and feel" of the prototype?
- High fidelity
  - Prototypes look like the final product
- Low fidelity
  - Artist's rendition with many details missing

Why Use Low-fi Prototypes?

- Traditional methods take too long
  - Sketches -> prototype -> evaluate -> iterate
- Can simulate the prototype
  - Sketches -> evaluate -> iterate
  - Sketches act as prototypes
    - Designer "plays computer"
    - Other design team members observe & record
- Kindergarten implementation skills
  - Allows non-programmers to participate
Hi-fi Prototypes Warp

- Perceptions of the tester/reviewer?
  - Formal representation indicates “finished” nature
    - Comments on color, fonts, and alignment
- Time?
  - Encourage precision
    - Specifying details takes more time
- Creativity?
  - Lose track of the big picture

More issues in prototyping

- Representation
  - How are designs represented in a prototype?
- Scope
  - How much of the system is prototyped?
- Executability
  - Can the prototype be executed at any time?
- Maturation
  - How does the prototype grow into a product?

Prototyping approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Storyboard</td>
<td>Sketches or screenshots illustrating key points in a usage narrative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper, cardboard</td>
<td>Fabricated devices with simulated controls or display elements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wizard of Oz</td>
<td>Workstation connected to invisible human assistant who simulates input, output, or processing functionality not yet available</td>
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<tr>
<td>Video prototype</td>
<td>Video recording of persons enacting one or more envisioned tasks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Computer animation</td>
<td>Screen transitions that illustrate a series of input and output events</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scenario machine</td>
<td>Interactive system implementing a specific scenario’s event stream</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rapid prototype</td>
<td>Interactive system created with special-purpose prototyping tools</td>
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Narrative scenario machine example

Wizard of Oz example

Video Prototype example

“Off-the-Shelf” Prototyping
  - Jump-start the design and iteration process
  - Recruit existing tools and devices
  - Integrate into approximation of a “system”
  - Example as used in virtual school project
    - Telephone for audio conferencing
    - Netmeeting for video conferencing, chat
    - Web pages for project questions and answers
    - Email for interaction with mentors
  - Can be very useful in requirements exploration and in activity-oriented feasibility studies
Prototyping Tools

- Presentation tools
  - Paper sketches/printouts
  - PowerPoint
- Scripting languages
  - Tcl/Tk
  - Director
  - SuperCard
- Visual languages
  - Visual Basic
  - SILK/Denim
- Markup languages
  - HTML
  - UIML
- Image/drawing editors
  - Photoshop
  - Freehand
- Animation/video tools
  - Flash
  - QuickTime

Features of a good tool

- Easy to develop and modify screens
- Supports many interface styles
- Supports many I/O devices
- Easy to create and modify links
- Is itself usable
- Allows transitioning of prototype to product

Prototyping with PowerPoint

- Create general look-and-feel of interface with essential functionality
- Generate interface widgets using Visual Basic macros
  - Available through toolbar that can be turned on
  - Must set security level to “Low”
  - Actual control functions can only be tested in “slideshow mode”
- Supports creation of an output file for testing

Integrating HCI with Software Construction

- Classic problem in designing from specifications
  - The “specification-design” gap: a written spec is never enough, always ambiguous, always interpreted
  - Who does the interpretation, using what knowledge?
- There are many ways to create tighter linkage
  - OO analysis and design enable simultaneous attention to user task and software design issues
  - Early and continued prototyping is essential
- But, do we want to do this?
  - Only for projects that allow (welcome) requirement shift, that view design as an inquiry process