Goal-directed Design and the Personas Method

Goal-Directed Design

- Alan Cooper developed a technique of interaction design called "Goal-Directed Design"
  Cooper, Alan (1999): The Inmates are Running the Asylum. Indianapolis, IN: Sams.

- Goal-directed design is the opposite of developer-centered design

- The motto is: develop a precise description of your user and what he or she wishes to accomplish

- For several reasons it is not possible to find the actual user and ask him or her

Goal-Directed Design

- The alternative is to make up pretend users and design for them

- These pretend users are called personas

- "Personas are not real people, but they represent them throughout the design process. They are hypothetical archetypes of actual users. Although they are imaginary, they are defined with significant rigor and precision."
Cooper 1999: 124

Goal-Directed Design

- Cooper's design process never refers to "the user." Instead, he refers to a very specific individual: a persona

- The goal is to make the personas unavoidable in the design process

- The design always is focused on them instead of slipping back to speaking about "the user"

- The more specific the personas are the more effective they are as design tools

The Personas Method

Definition of personas according to Cooper:

- A number of pretend users (not real people) who represent prospective users throughout the design process

- Personas are hypothetical representations of actual users, they are
  - imaginary
  - stereotypical
  - concrete
  - not "elastic"

The Personas Method

Three rules for designing a persona:

- Be specific

- Be hypothetical

- Be precise

The Personas Method

Be specific:

- A fully realized, thoroughly defined persona is a powerful tool

- Until the user is precisely defined, programmers can always imagine that they themselves are the users

- A specific persona is not "elastic"

The Personas Method

Be hypothetical:

- Real people are of interest as providers of raw data

- But they are useless for the design process because they have specific interests and needs

- The major problem with real users is that they often have funny quirks and behaviors that are not typical for the majority of users

The Personas Method

Be precise:

- As a design tool, it is more important that a persona is precise than accurate

- It is more important to define the persona in great and specific detail than that the persona is the precisely correct one

The Personas Method

Advantages:

- Personas show the scope and nature of the design problem

- They make clear what the user's goals are, so one can see what the product must do or achieve

- The precisely defined persona indicates
  - what the user's level of computer skill will be
  - what kind of tools and applications he will use

The Personas Method

- Using personas the interaction designers
  - leave the world of possibility thinking
  - never fall back to "the user"
  - can end feature debates
  - focus on the needs of their target groups
- According to Cooper the design process becomes "enlightened"

Conclusion

- Goal-directed design wants to focus not on the developer but on the user (user-centered design)

- Users have needs and goals but also personal habits and quirks

- Personas are abstract representations of users

- They are imaginary, stereotypical, concrete, but not "elastic"

- Personas become unavoidable in the design process and make it user-centered