

## *3.1.4 User research*

*Check this: What we can learn from spaghetti sauce...*

**So who are your users?**



**You are not your user!**

**Your client is not your user!**

# Your client is not your user!



# Understanding your users

- Initial business analysis usually identifies the general types of users.
- In a business context, **marketing departments often have a good overview of users.**
- We need to find out more detail, though...



# User research

- **What can you find out about your users?**
- **Techniques for research**
  - Lab Interviews
  - Surveys
  - Contextual Interviews & field research
- We will cover just three of many ...  
<http://www.usabilitynet.org/tools/methods.htm>

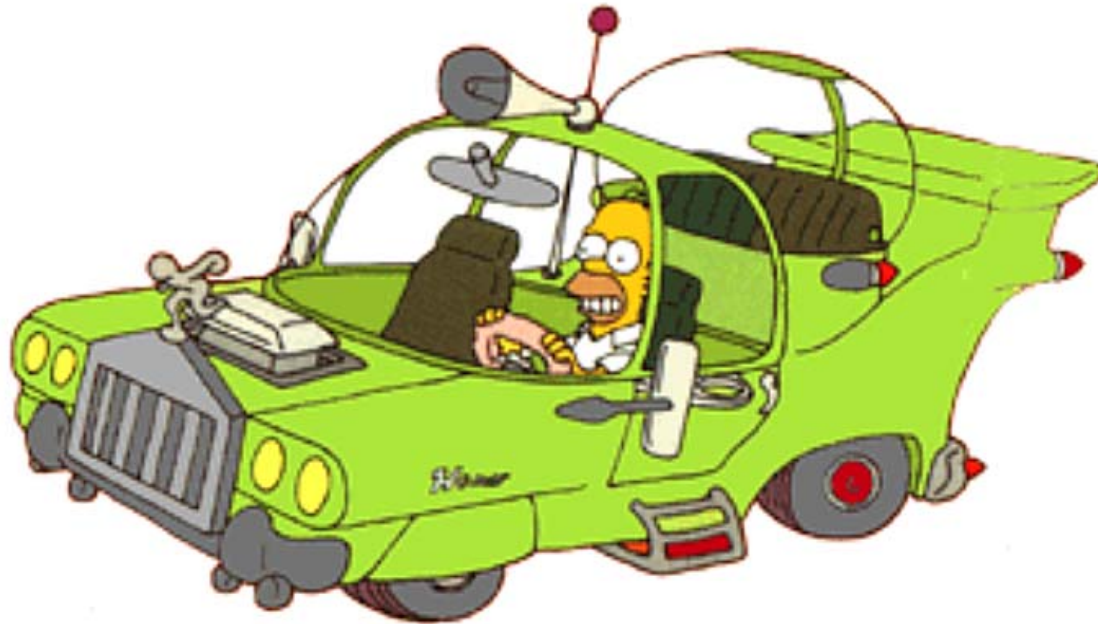
# Some general things you can find out

- **Skill** levels (expert or novice?)
- **Likes and dislikes**
- **Product usage** patterns & product-related desires
- **Vocabulary**/language
- **Environments** (connection speed/browser/hardware/shared or exclusive use?)
- **Social** and economic factors

# Some specific things you can find out

- What do users **want?** (user preferences)
- What do users **do?** (user behaviours)
- What do users **need?** (gap between user desire and their current behaviour or tools)
- What do users **feel?** (emotional responses)
- Our aim is to develop an **understanding of our users** and the way they carry out their tasks.
- Focussing on **what users need and what they currently do** is more productive than asking users what they want.

# The danger of asking users what they want...



# The danger of asking users what they want...

- Often users **voice a perceived need**
- Users often **do not mention some requirements** assuming they are obvious
- You can only address this issue by grounding the discussion in users' real world behaviour
- Users also **will not appreciate technical possibilities** (or impossibilities) **nor your client's needs**

# 1-2-1 interviews

- **You can also get users in a lab** (or any other place) and involve them in activity sessions
- Ask users to explore their habits and decision making processes by using **games, sketching, interviewing** and **web surfing** in the lab
- Helps users to **recreate their actual experiences** even though they are out of their everyday environment

## Use this method as:

- **A more quick and cost-effective** approach to understand **goals, attitudes** and **behaviours** where you can reproduce what you need in a lab

# Planning interviews

- Set your **goals for your research**
- Write a **discussion guide**
- **Don't stick to the discussion guide!** It is a resource for an open conversation, not a survey
- Take a few notes but if you need a good record of the interview record it, don't try to transcribe while you're reading

# Goals for a travel booking website

## Brief from client

- What are the key features in a booking engine?
- How can we best sell hotels to people who come for flights?
- Can we improve customer retention with (cheap) after-sales service?

## Research goals

- What do users want to do on a booking website?
- What do users think of features in competing booking engines?
- How do users choose hotels at the moment?
- What makes up a trusted recommendation for a hotel?
- What is the whole travel experience like for the user?
- What are the key moments of frustration or pain in this?



# A common structure for an interview

- **Set expectations** for the session – time, recording, payment
- Get some background information and have a chat to **build a rapport** – this is one place where it's OK to reveal your own opinions
- Understand their real life by talking about **relevant behaviour offline** – remember to identify needs through current behaviour
- Start with general topics and then move naturally into more detailed ones
- Ask about **current internet and computer usage**
- Close the interview by asking for any last comments or questions

# For a travel booking website...

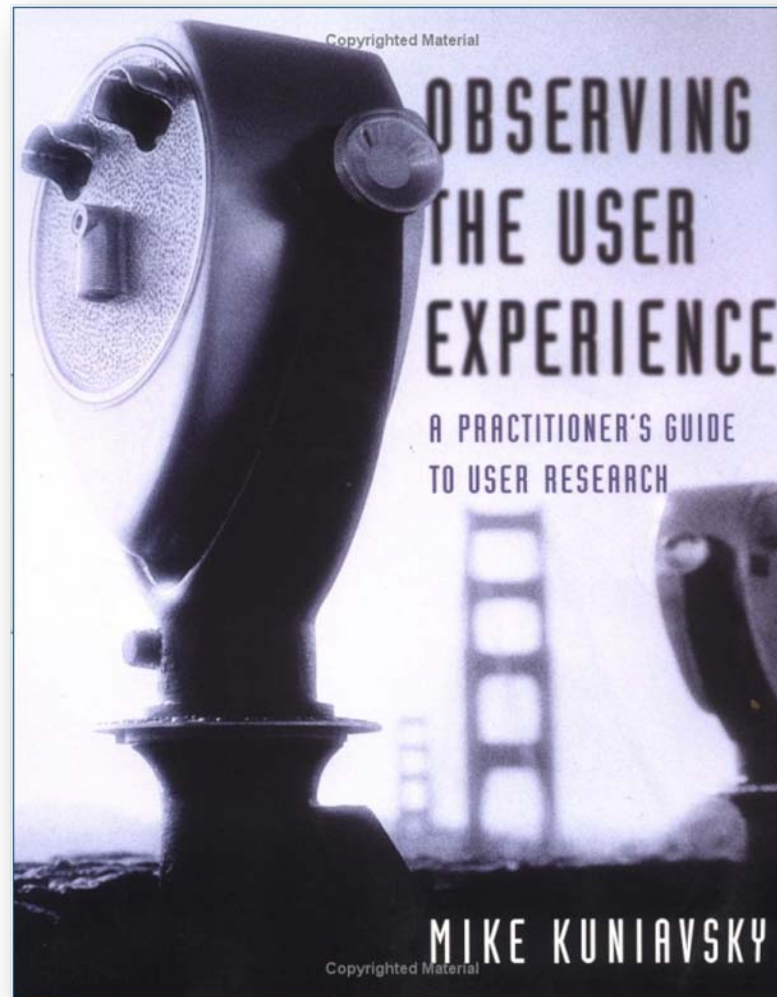
- When was the last time you went overseas? ➤ Set the scene
- Where did you go? Why? ➤ Motivation
- Why did you choose the place you went to? ➤ Motivation
- What kind of holidays do you like? ➤ Preferences
- Tell me how you went about finding the holiday ... ➤ Research
- How many sites did you visit? When did you know when to book? ... ➤ Booking
- Tell me about the day you took the flight... ➤ After-sales

# Exercise: Write a discussion guide


- If your website lets it run
- Your client wants to launch a DVD mail rental service. Write a discussion guide to get information about:
  - Current movie-watching behaviours and practices
  - What information about the movies the website should display
  - How movie recommendations should be presented
  - What additional features should the website include?
- Remember to start by setting the scene and building rapport

# A quantitative view: Surveys

- A great idea if the website already exists and has an audience
- Can be useful before or after interviews
  - Before: If you don't know who your users are
  - After: To follow up interview results and check the size of your findings
- Needs very certain research goals with no ambiguity
- The phrasing of questions is a very detailed art
  - **Always** pilot a survey to get preliminary feedback
- **A good web resource**  
<http://hfrg.ucc.ie/resources/qfaq1.html>
- **A great reference book** [Observing the User Experience](#)



# What's missing?



***“What people say,  
what people do,  
and what people say they do  
are entirely different things”***

***Margaret Mead***

# ...there's more to it!

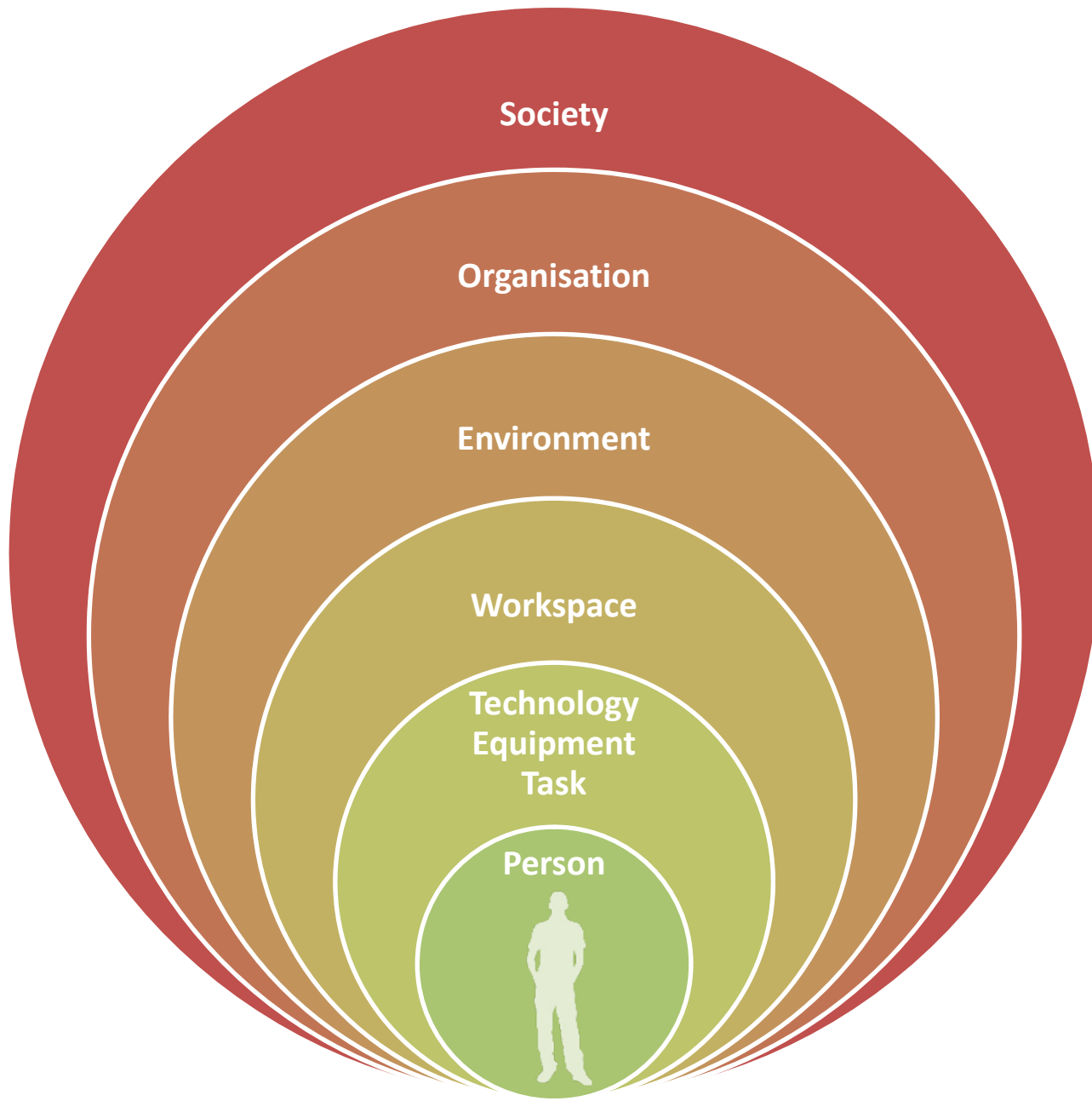
- Context: the **human, physical, organisational, historical and social environment** in which a product is used
- These variables can determine **how technology is used** & how **work is carried out** that appears to be similar
- Degree of fit between context-of-use and product design **influences uptake**
- Understanding the context of use is therefore **vital for effective user-centred design**
- Traditional HCI was often more concerned with the interaction between humans and machines. **Why do you think that is?**







<http://www.flickr.com/photos/elron6900>



***Question:** So how are you going to find out about the context your product or service will be used in?*



Hang out with the people you're designing for...



# Contextual Inquiry

- **Observe and interview** users in context of their work to see **what users do, not what they say they do**
- *“go where the user works, observe the user as he or she works and talk to the user about the work.”*

## Use this method to get:

- Deeper insight into **motivations and behaviours**
- An understanding of user goals and needs, in particular the **unsatisfied or unarticulated**
- Identify **problems and work-arounds**
- Understand **organisational and environmental factors**

# Contextual Inquiry

## Master - Apprentice model:

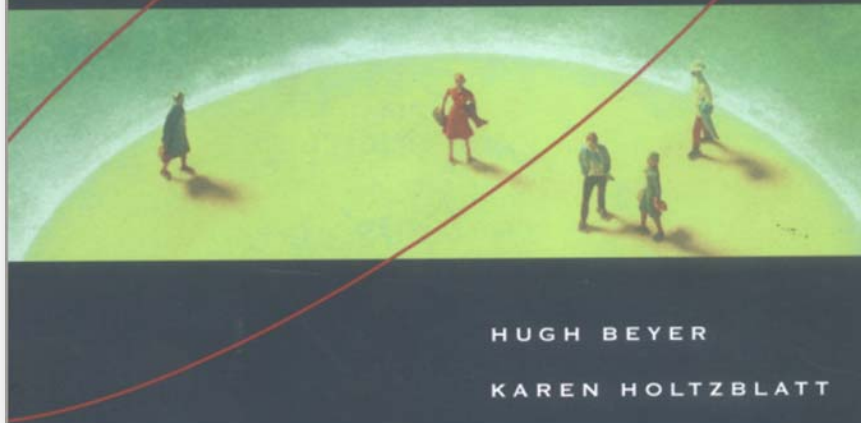
Avoid interview/interviewee or novice/expert situation

## Based on four core principles:

1. **Context** – all work is observed in its context
2. **Partnership** – no “interviewer” situation
3. **Interpretation** – the researcher interprets the observations and shares them with the user to validate
4. **Focus** – on concrete data & tasks

# CONTEXTUAL DESIGN

*Defining  
Customer-Centered  
Systems*



HUGH BEYER

KAREN HOLTZBLATT



# User research recap

- **Interviews**

- Relatively cheap, easy to run and easy to extract data
- Hard to get large numbers, limited ability to generalise

- **Surveys**

- Good for existing websites and large numbers of users, even international, can be cheap
- Great care needed for setup, analysis and avoiding bias

- **Contextual Inquiry**

- Unbeatable for complex or unfamiliar situations or identifying unmet needs
- Lots of data, most of which will not be relevant; highest cost



**20 min. Coffee Break**