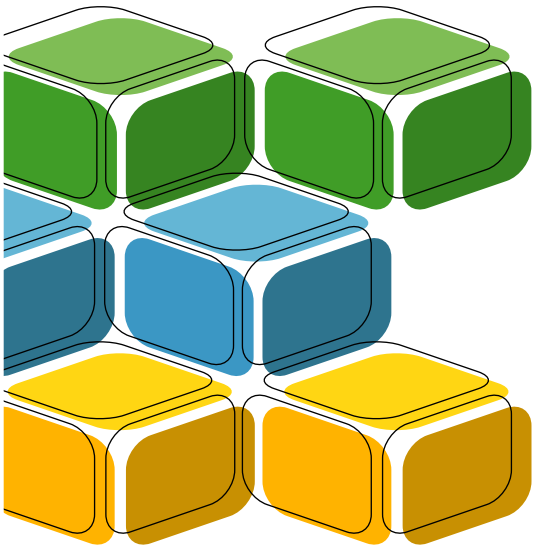
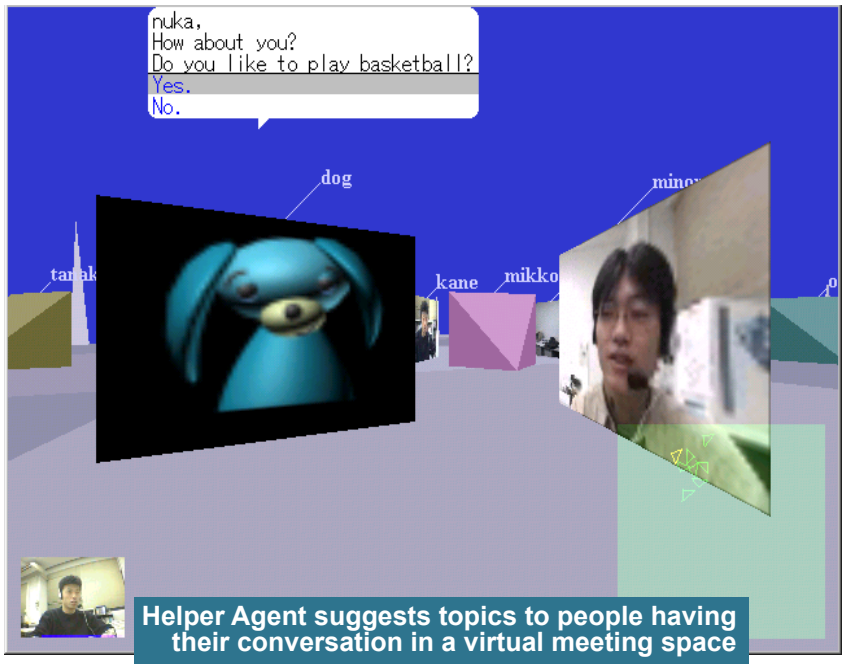
UNIVERSAL DESIGN OF Digital City

Helper Agent

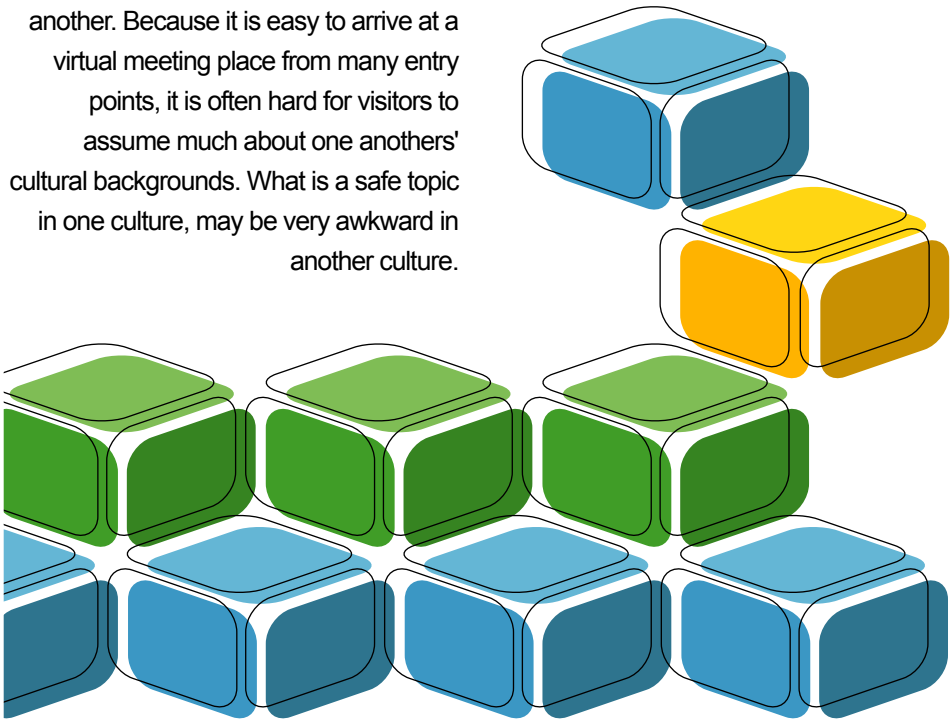
Research





Helper Agent suggests topics to people having their conversation in a virtual meeting space

Virtual meeting places usually provide very little social context to use as a basis for finding common ground with each another. Because it is easy to arrive at a virtual meeting place from many entry points, it is often hard for visitors to assume much about one anothers' cultural backgrounds. What is a safe topic in one culture, may be very awkward in another culture.



Helper Agent mimics a party host, trying to find a safe common topic for guests whose conversation has lagged. We performed an experimental evaluation of the agent to assist in cross-cultural conversations. We designed the agent to introduce safe or unsafe topics to conversation pairs, through a series of questions and suggestions. The agent made positive contributions to participants' experience of the conversation, influenced their perception of each other and of each other's national group, and even seemed to effect their style of behavior.

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Katherine Isbister, Hideyuki Nakanishi, Toru Ishida, and Cliff Nass, ``Helper Agent: Designing an Assistant for Human-Human Interaction in a Virtual Meeting Space,'' International Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI-2000), pp. 57-64, 2000.

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