CSE 440: Introduction to HCI

User Interface Design, Prototyping, and Evaluation

Lecture 03:
Contextual Inquiry

James Fogarty
Daniel Epstein
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Tuesday/Thursday
10:30 to 11:50
MOR 234

Today

Group Formation Today

- Please watch your email this afternoon
- Seating in section and in Tuesday lecture

Project Milestones

- Brainstorm in tomorrow's section
- Contextual inquiry plan (1 page, what is your plan)
- Contextual inquiry check-in (1 page, in progress)
- Contextual inquiry review (4 pages of results and task analysis)

Lectures

- Critique
- Task Analysis

Learn by Example from Prior Projects

Remember prior projects have a different reporting and milestone structure

Plantr:

http://courses.cs.washington.edu/courses/cse440/13au/projects/plantr/

NutriView:

http://courses.cs.washington.edu/courses/cse440/13au/projects/nutriview/

JuiceBox:

http://courses.cs.washington.edu/courses/cse440/13au/projects/juicebox/

Today

Brief Introduction to Ethnography

Contextual Inquiry

Amazing Color Changing Card Trick

Amazing Color Changing Card Trick

Why did I show you that?

Why did I show you that?

If we're focusing on the wrong thing,
we can completely miss other important things

Our assumptions and pre-conceptions play a huge role in how we focus our attention

Today is about this danger when understanding the context for which you design technology

“You Are Not the Customer”

Seems obvious, but…

- You have different experiences
- You have different terminology
- You have different ways of looking at the world

Easy to think of self as typical customer

Easy to make mistaken assumptions

Ethnography

Traditional science attempts to understand a group or individual objectively

> Understand the subject of study from the outside in a way that can be explained to “anyone”

Ethnography attempts to understand a group or individual phenomenologically

> Understand the subject of study as the subject of study understands itself

Ethnography

Emerged in 1920s as a new anthropology method, exploring why groups think and act as they do

Learn local language, record myths, customs, and ceremonies in much greater detail than prior work

You will likely never perform an ethnography

Four ethnographic principles

Natural settings

Holism

Descriptive

Member point-of-view

Four ethnographic principles

Natural Settings

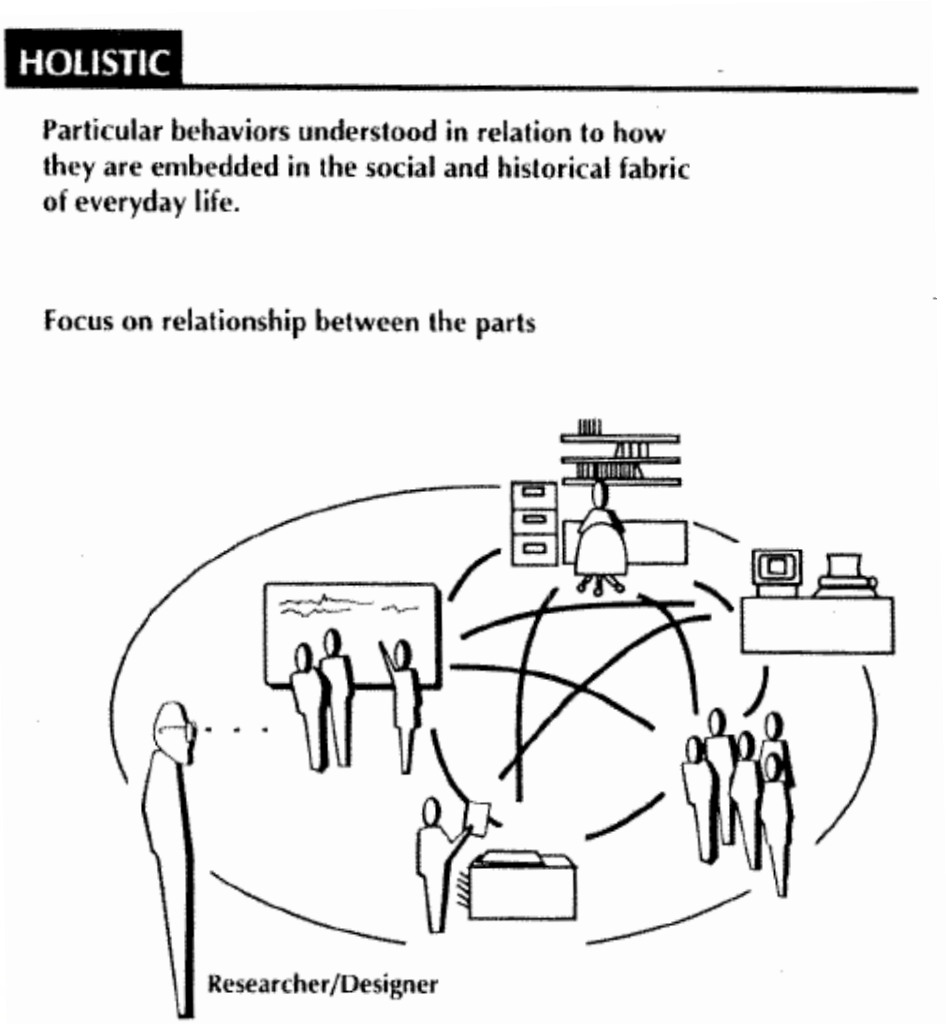
- Conducted in the setting of the participant
- Focus on naturally occurring, everyday action
- Cannot use laboratory or experimental settings to gather this type of data

You really do have to go out there and see it

Four ethnographic principles

Holism

Behavior can only be understood in its larger social context; that is, holistically.

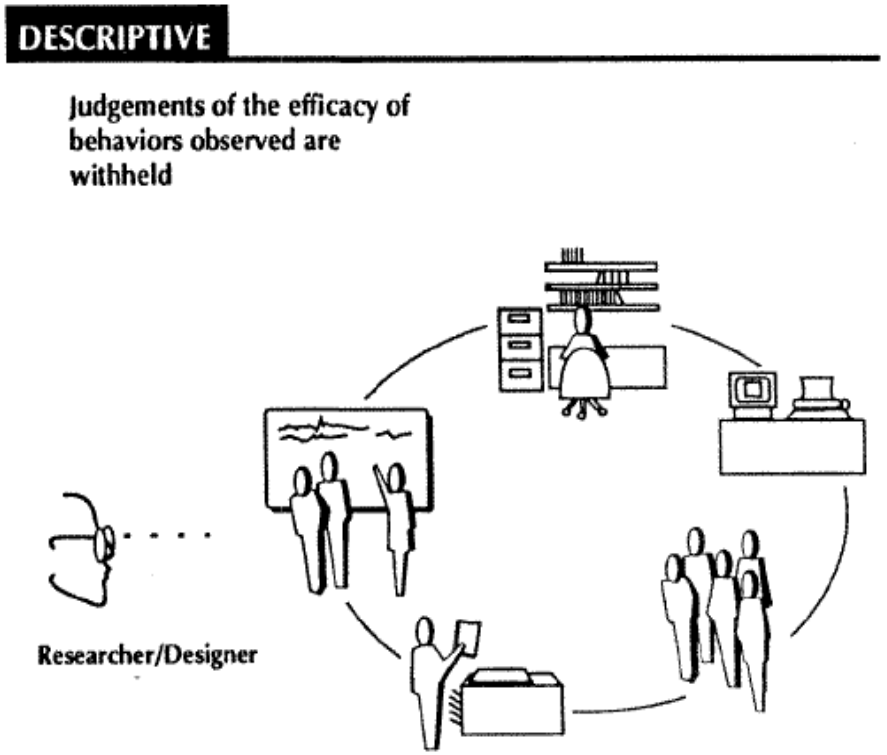


Four ethnographic principles

Descriptive

Study how people actually behave, not how they ought to behave.

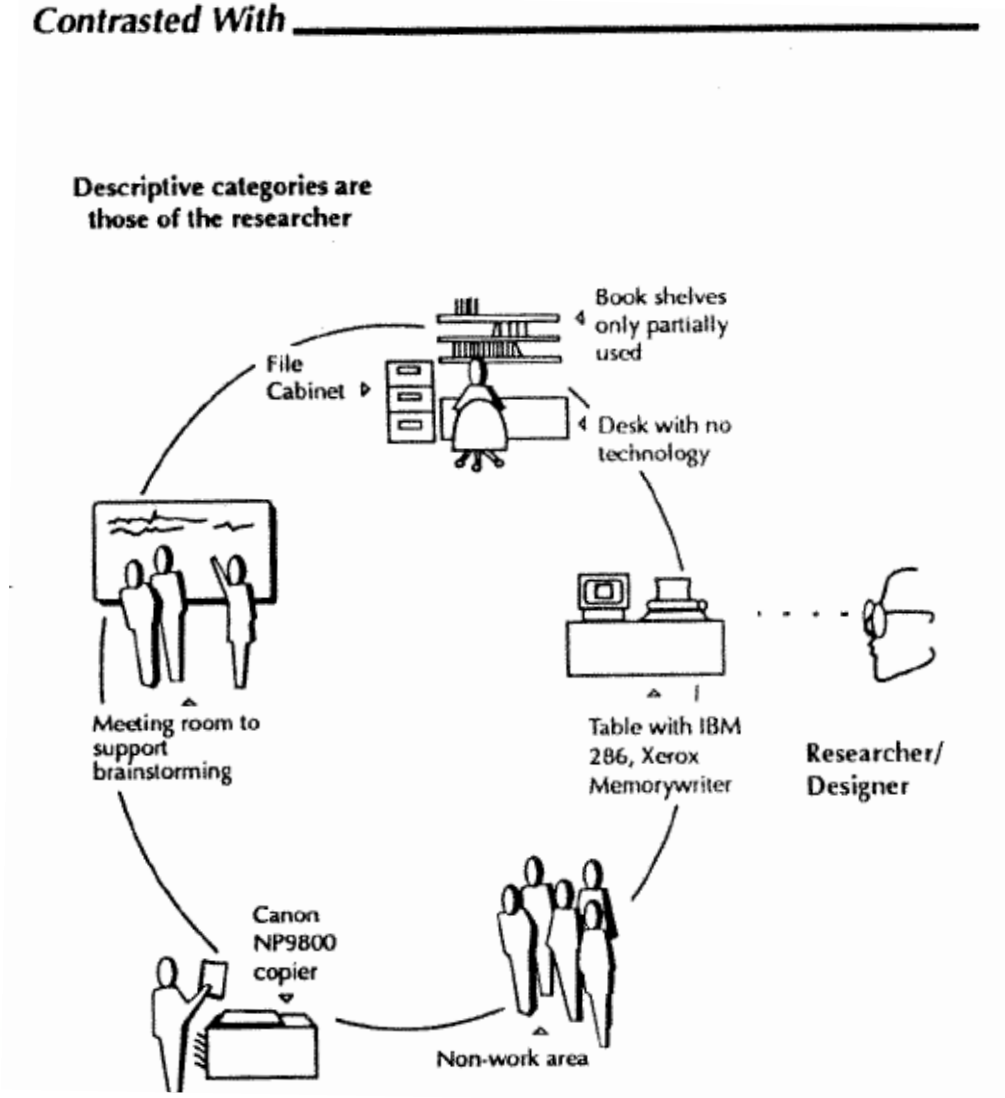
Defer judgment.



Four ethnographic principles

Member Point-of-View

See through participant eyes in order to grasp how they interpret and act in their world.



Four ethnographic principles

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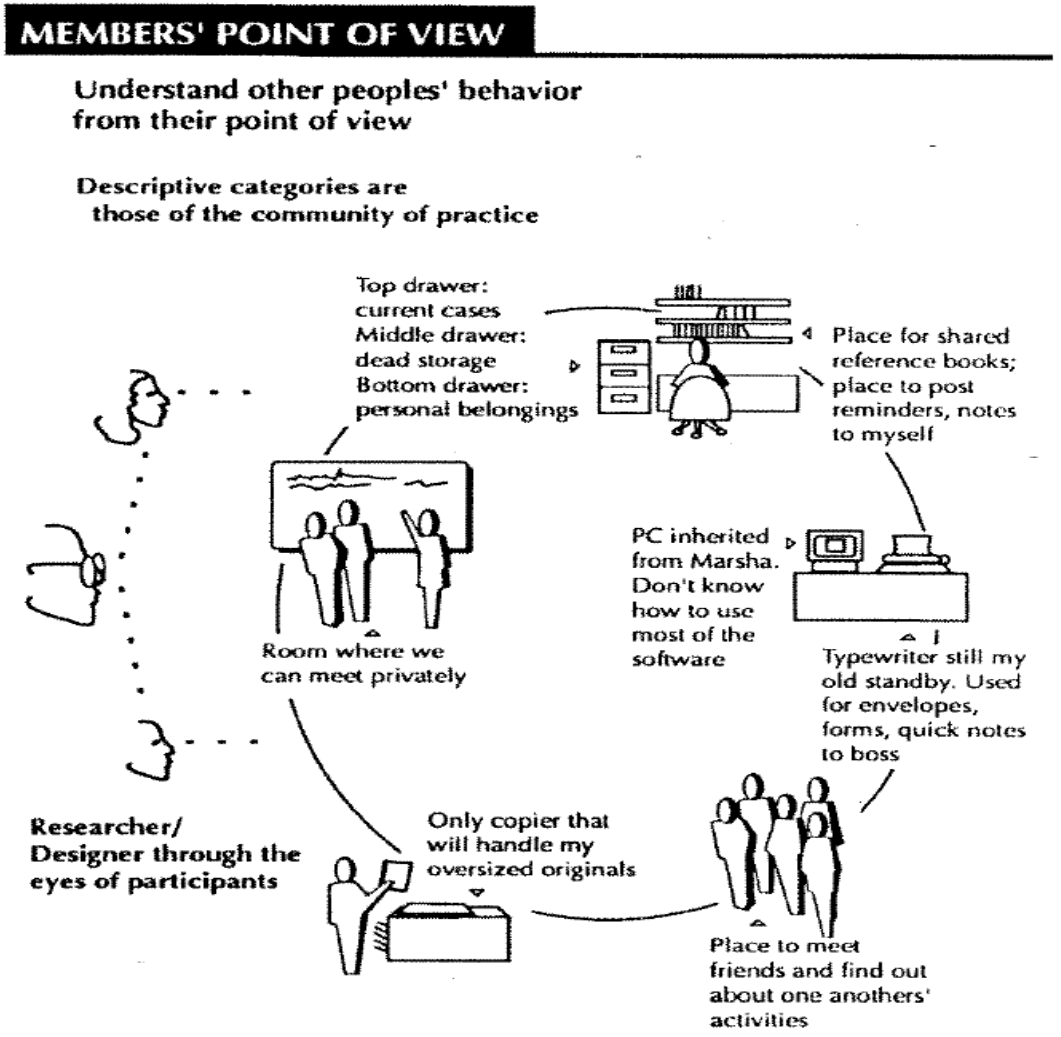


Design Ethnography

Quicker than traditional ethnography

- Days, weeks, or months, not years

Sometimes “concurrent ethnography”

- The ethnography is being done
  at the same time that design is under way

Goal is to generate insights informing design

Translating from raw field observation
to design ideas can be a difficult process

Contextual Inquiry

Applied design ethnography

"The core premise of Contextual Inquiry is very simple: go where the customer works, observe the customer as he or she works, and talk to the customer about the work. Do that, and you can't help but gain a better understanding of your customer."

Hugh Beyer and Karen Holtzblatt

User, Subject, or Participant?

Only two groups refer to their customers as users

In traditional science, “subjects” are “subjected to” experiments as a researcher develops understanding

In ethnographically-oriented design methods, “participants” instead “participate” in helping the researcher develop understanding

This isn’t simple PC, it’s a mindset that matters

What is your relationship?

In a scientist/subject relationship:

- The scientist does stuff
- The subject responds in some way
- The scientist collects data, goes back to their office, and analyzes the data to gain understanding

This is not very appropriate for gaining phenomenological understanding

What is your relationship?

In an interviewer/interviewee relationship:

- The interviewer asks a question
- The interviewee responds immediately
- At a pause, the interviewer asks another question from a list
- When all the questions are answered, the interview is over

This would only be appropriate for gaining phenomenological understanding if you knew what questions to ask in advance

Implying you have phenomenological understanding

What is your relationship?

In a master/apprentice relationship:

- The master is doing stuff
- The master explains what they're doing
- The apprentice asks clarification questions
- The master answers

This relationship is at the heart of contextual inquiry

Master/Apprentice Relationship

Seeing the work reveals structure

Many instances and many interviews reveal the picture

Every current activity recalls past instances

> A customer describing how she learned a feature told us, "I looked it up in the documentation." But when we asked her to look it up again, she was able to show us: "I looked the function up in the index and scanned the section. I saw this icon in the margin that I recognized from the screen, so I read just this paragraph next to it. It told me all I needed to know." The documentation provided the context she needed to recover a detailed story, and the detail revealed aspects that had been overlooked—that the icon was her visual cue to the relevant part of the page.

Unique or One of Many?

"Take the attitude that nothing any person does is done for no reason; if you think it's for no reason, you don't yet understand the point of view from which it makes sense. Take the attitude that nothing any person does is unique to them, it always represents an important class of customers whose needs will not be met if you don't figure out what's going on."

(p. 63, Contextual Design)

It’s not Quite Master/Apprentice

The goal is not to learn to do the task

Instead, the goal is to learn how the participant does the task in order to learn how to support it

And for the researcher to enlist the participant’s active assistance in understanding the task

Principles of Contextual Inquiry

Context

Must be done in the setting of the participant.

Partnership

Master/apprentice model; investigator is humble.

Interpretation

Observed facts must be regarded for their design implications. Raw facts without interpretation are not very useful.

Focus

Themes that emerge during the inquiry. You cannot pay attention to all facets of someone's work at all times.

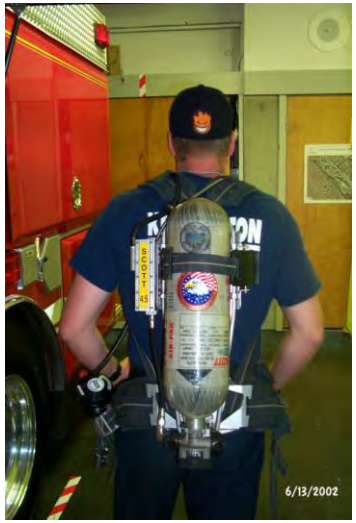
Context

Go to the workplace & see the work as it unfolds

People summarize, but we want details

Keep it concrete when people start to abstract

“Do you have one? May I see it?”



Context

Avoid summary data by watching work unfold

We once asked a secretary how she started her day. Her answer was, "I guess I just come in and check my messages and get started." She wasn't able to go beyond this brief summary overview. It was the first thing in the morning and she had just arrived at the office, so we asked her to go ahead and do as she would any other morning. She unhesitatingly started her morning routine, telling us about it as she went: "First I hang up my coat, then I start my computer. Actually, even before that I'll see if my boss has left something on my chair. If he has, that's first priority. While the computer's coming up, I check the answering machine for urgent messages. There aren't any. Then I look to see if there's a fax that has to be handled right away. Nope, none today. If there were, I'd take it right in and put it on the desk of whoever was responsible. Then I go in the back room and start coffee. Now I'll check the counters on the copier and postage meter. I'm only doing that because today's the first of the month. . . ."

Have them think aloud..

Context

"One customer said he would not use a manual's index to find the solution to a problem: 'It's never in the index.' He could not say what led him to this conclusion, what he had looked up and failed to find. All his bad experiences were rolled up into one simple abstraction: it's not there. But when we watched him looking things up, we could see that he was using terms from his work domain, but the index listed parts of the system."

Context

“A customer was unable to describe how she made her monthly report. When asked to create it, she pulled out her last report and started filling in the parts.”

Context

Ground in an instance

Span time by replaying past events in detail

Look for holes

Ask questions to fill them

Use artifacts for context

If story has not yet ended, go back to a story that did

Customer: *When I got this problem report I gave it to Word Processing to enter online—*

(Why did she decide to give it to Word Processing? Did she do anything first?)

Interviewer: *So you just handed it on automatically as soon as you got it?*

C: *No, it was high priority, so I read it and decided to send a copy to the Claims department.*

(How did she decide it was high priority? Is it her decision?)

I: *How did you know it was high priority?*

C: *It has this green sticker on it.*

(Someone else made the decision before the report ever got here. Who and when?)

I: *Who put on the green sticker?*

C: *That's put on by the reporting agency. They make the decision about whether it's high priority and mark the report.*

(We can better pursue how the reporting agency makes the decision with them; we'll only get secondhand information from this user. Instead of trying to go further backward, look for the next missing step forward: doesn't Claims get a more personal communication than just the report?)

I: *Did you just send it on to Claims, or did you write them a note about why they needed to see it?*

C: *Oh, I always call Claims whenever I send them one of these reports.*

Partnership

Traditionally, interviewer has too much power

- You don’t know what will turn out to be important

Apprenticeship model tilts power back too far

- You aren’t there to learn the skill

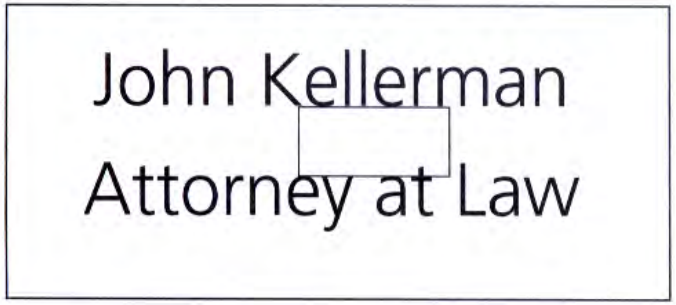
Interviewer should create a partnership

- Alternate between watching and probing

Partnership

Withdrawal and return

- Researcher observes action that indicates something meaningful
- The researcher asks about this, and the pair withdraw from the task
- Discuss the question
- Then return to the task



In one interview with a user of page layout software, the user was positioning text on the page, entering the text and moving it around. Then he created a box around a line of text, moved it down until the top of the box butted the bottom of the line of text, and moved another line of text up until it butted the bottom of the box. Then he deleted the box.

Interviewer: *Could I see that again?*

Customer: *What?*

I: *What you just did with the box.*

C: *Oh, I'm just using it to position this text here. The box doesn't matter.*

I: *But why are you using a box?*

C: *See, I want the white space to be exactly the same height as a line of text. So I draw the box to get the height.* (He repeats the actions to illustrate, going more slowly.) *Then I drag it down, and it shows where the next line of text should go.*

I: *Why do you want to get the spacing exact?*

C: *It's to make the appearance of the page more even. You want all the lines to have some regular relationship to the other things on the page.*

Partnership

Don’t squash design ideas if they arise

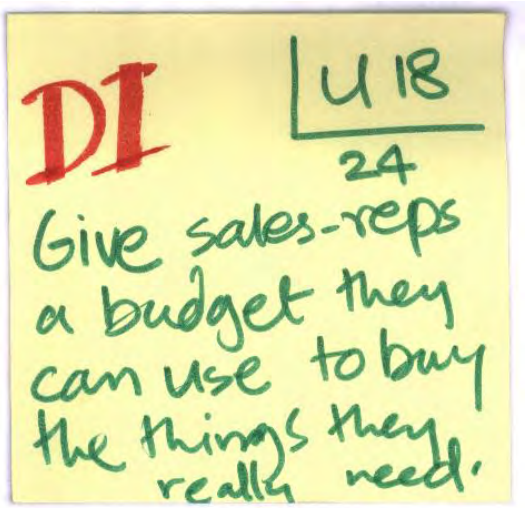
This is design, not dispassionate science

Get instant feedback

If it works, you understand
the work practice and have a solution

If it fails, you can improve
your understanding of the work

Find the issues behind design ideas



Partnership

Avoiding Other Relationship Models

Interviewer / Interviewee

- You aren't there to get a list of questions answered

Expert / Novice

- You aren't there to answer questions

Guest / Host

- Move closer, ask questions, be nosy

Interpretation

Chain of Reasoning

- Fact, Hypothesis, Implication for Design, Design Idea

Design is built upon interpretation of facts

- Design ideas are end products of a chain of reasoning
- So interpretation had better be right

Share interpretations with users to validate

- Will not bias the data
- Teaches participant to see structure in the work

Interpretation

Instead of asking open ended questions…

> "Do you have a strategy to start the day?"
>
> "Not particularly."

… give participants a starting point

> "Do you check urgent messages first,
> no matter where they are from?
>
> "Actually, things from my boss are important, because they are for me to do. Messages or faxes may be for anybody."

Participants fine-tune interpretations

> Probe contradictions until assumptions fit

Interpretation

Non-verbal cues can confirm or negate

Yes and Nos

- "Huh?" – way off
- "Umm, could be" – usually means no
- "Yes, but…" or "Yes, and" – depends on what follows

Commit to hearing what people actually say

- Most have not ever had people actually pay careful attention to what they are doing

Focus

Everybody has a focus, you cannot prevent it

- Entering focus
- Project focus

Because you will have a focus, be mindful of that focus and use it to your advantage

Focus

- Focus defines the point of view
  - Clear focus steers the conversation
  - Everyone in the team should have an entering focus
- Focus lets the interviewer sees more
  - Focus reveals detail
- Focus conceals the unexpected
  - Focus on one, and lose the other
- Start with a focus and then expand

Focus

Opportunities to expand focus

Surprises, contradictions, idiosyncrasies

- Nothing any person does is for no reason

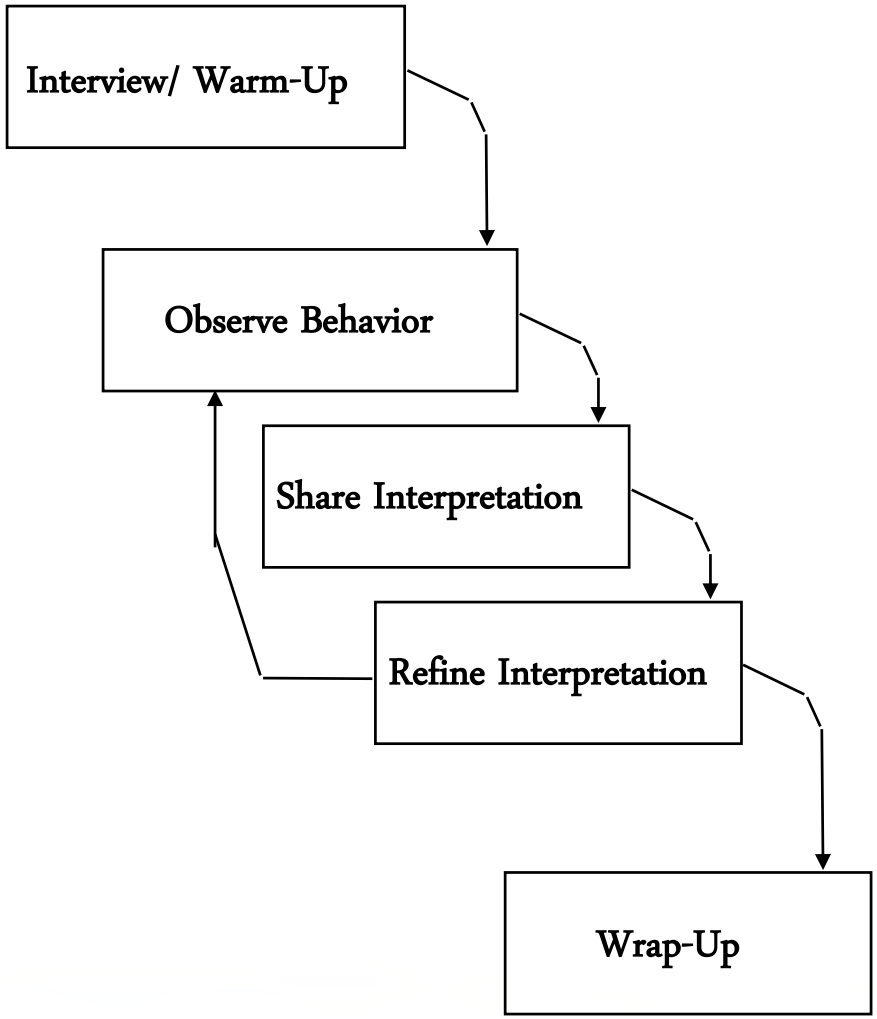
Nods

- Question assumptions even if they match
- "Do they really do that? Why would they do that?"

What you don't know

- Treat the interview as an opportunity to learn new stuff
- Even if the participant is not knowledgeable, the extent of their knowledge / misinformation will be useful

The Stages of a Contextual Inquiry



Explain the Rules

Be sure you explain “the rules” of how you’ll be interacting during the contextual inquiry

If this isn’t completely clear, the encounter may devolve into a traditional interview (since this relationship is more familiar to people)

How to Screw it Up

Slipping into abstraction

- Keep it concrete, in the work, in the details

Not being inquisitive or nosy enough

- If you have the impulse to ask, do it right away

Overly disrupting the task

- Questions are great, but do not ask so many so fast that the participant stops doing their tasks

Turning it into a regular interview

- If you could have done it in a coffee shop, then you didn't do a contextual inquiry

When All Else Fails

Remember Master/Apprentice

Remember Context

Remember Withdraw & Return

Developing Models

Contextual inquiry yields a lot of data

- Does not reduce to a statistical test

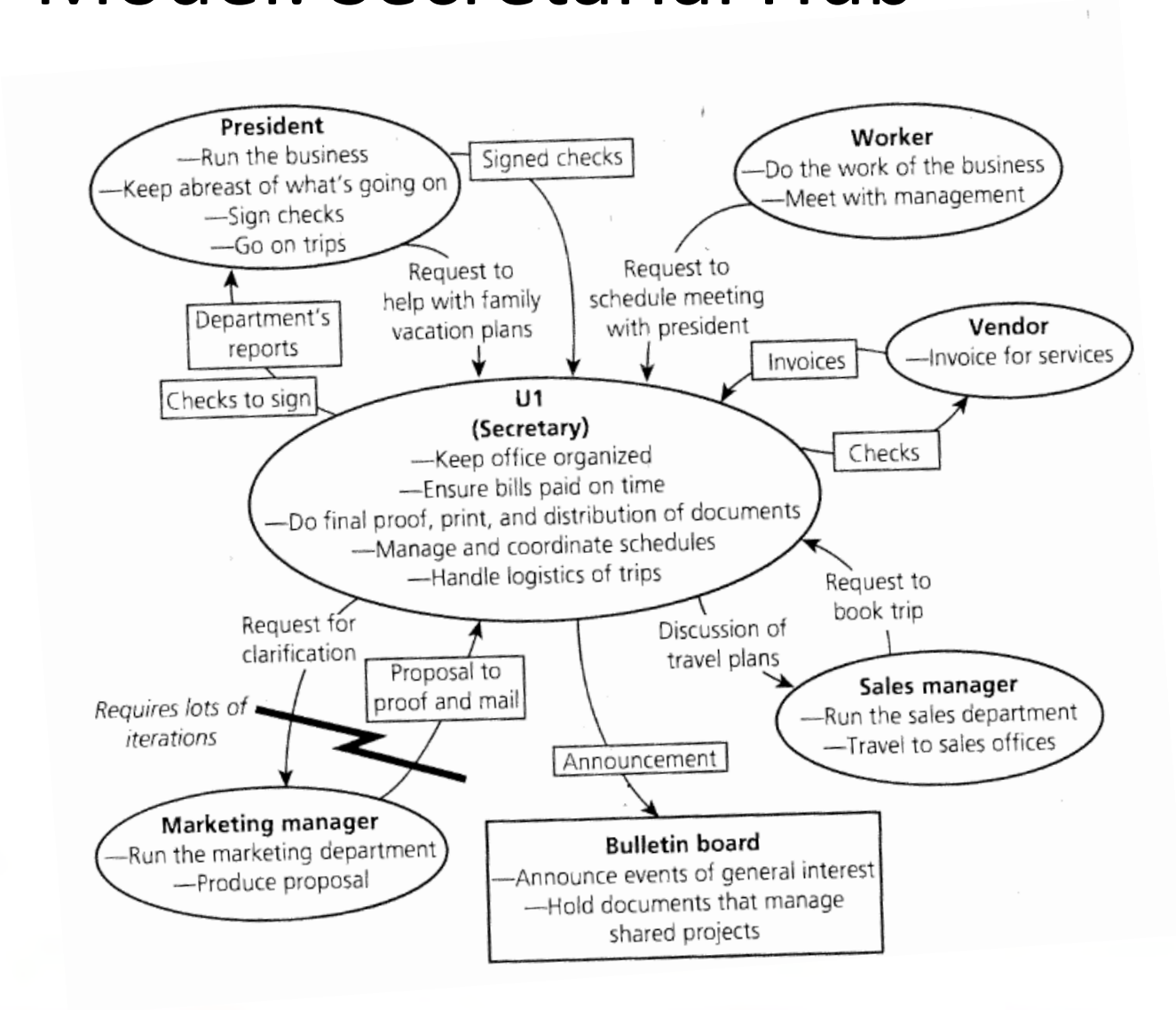
Use it to distill models

- Help to understand the workflow
- Highlights gaps in understanding
- Identify breakdowns and workarounds

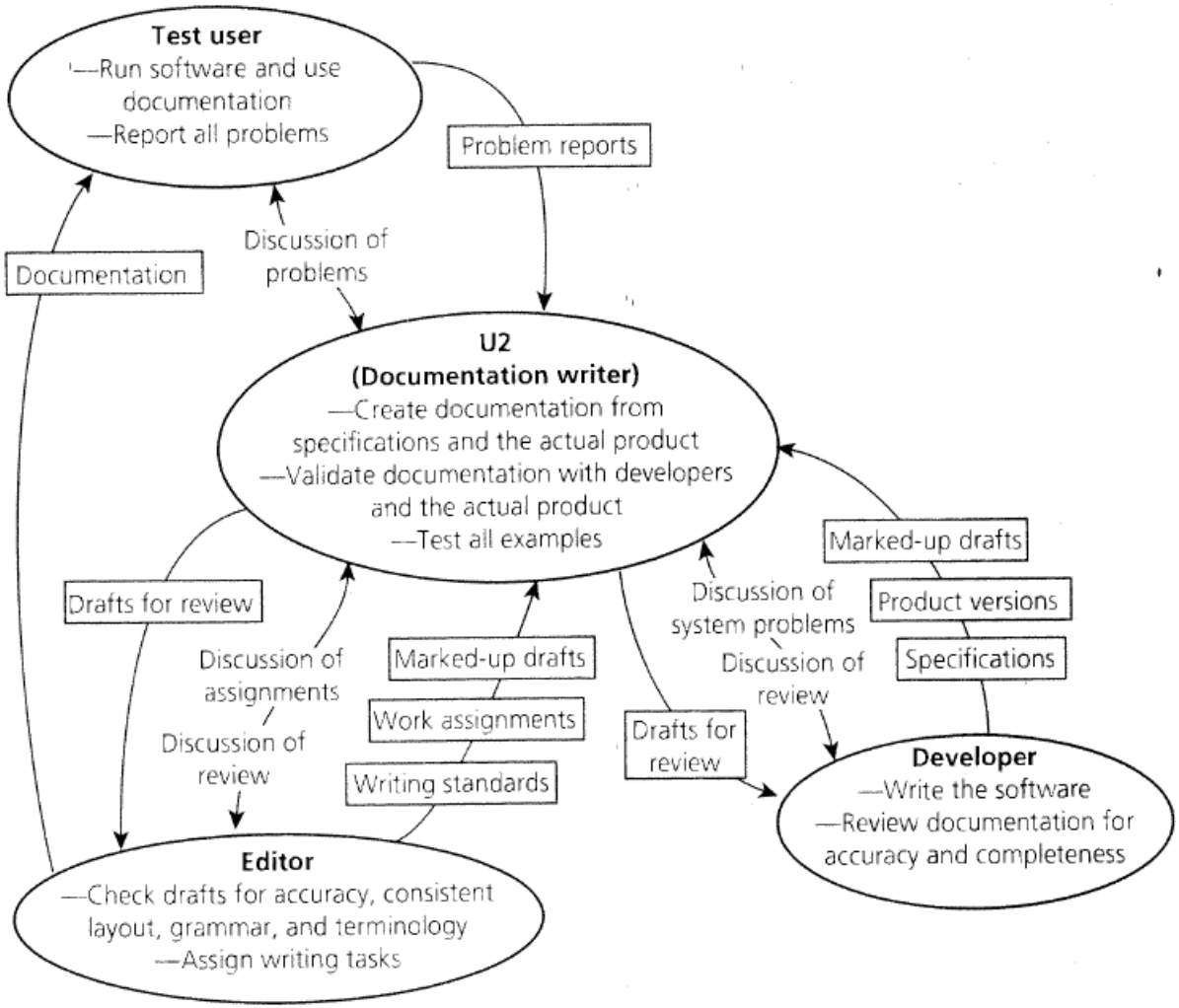
Many types of models

- e.g., Flow, Sequence, Artifact, Cultural, Physical

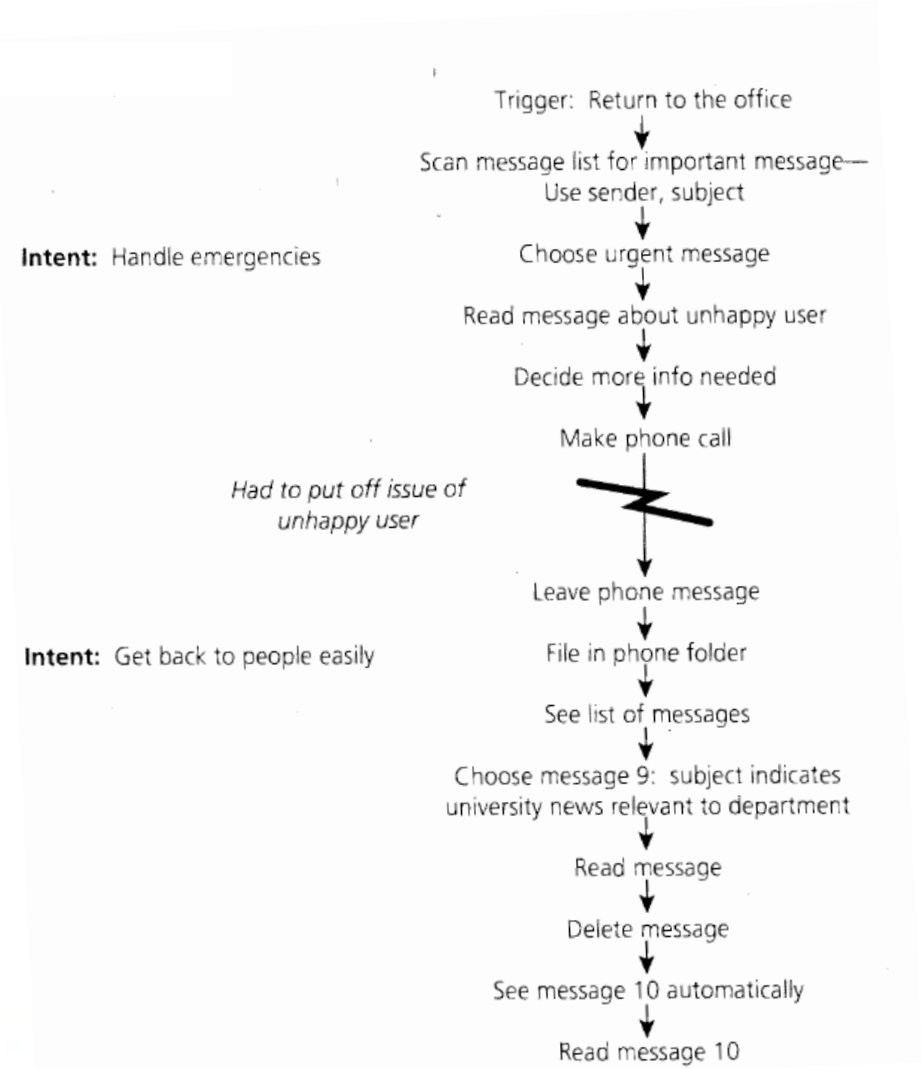
Flow Model: Secretarial Hub



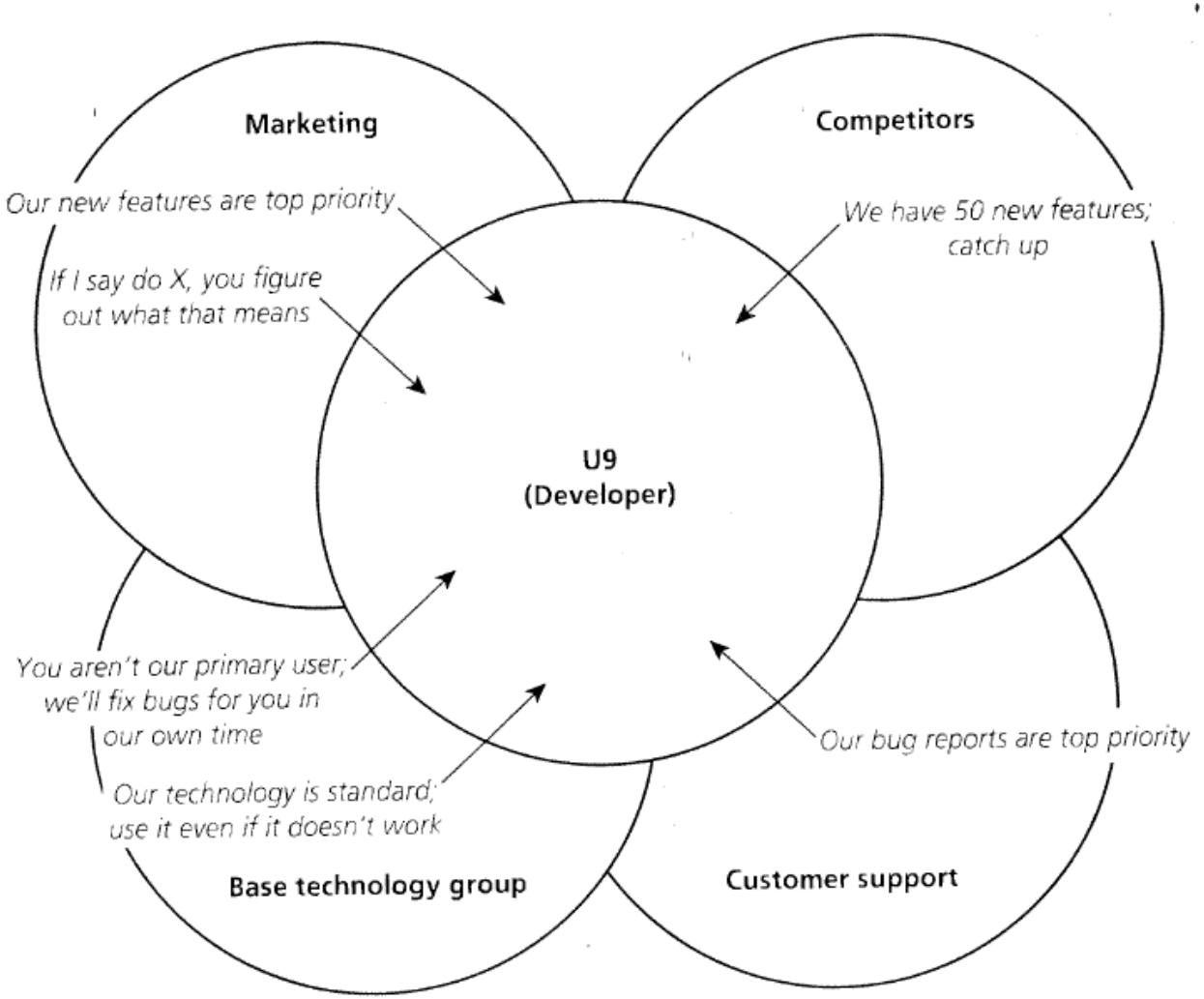
Flow Model: Creative Work



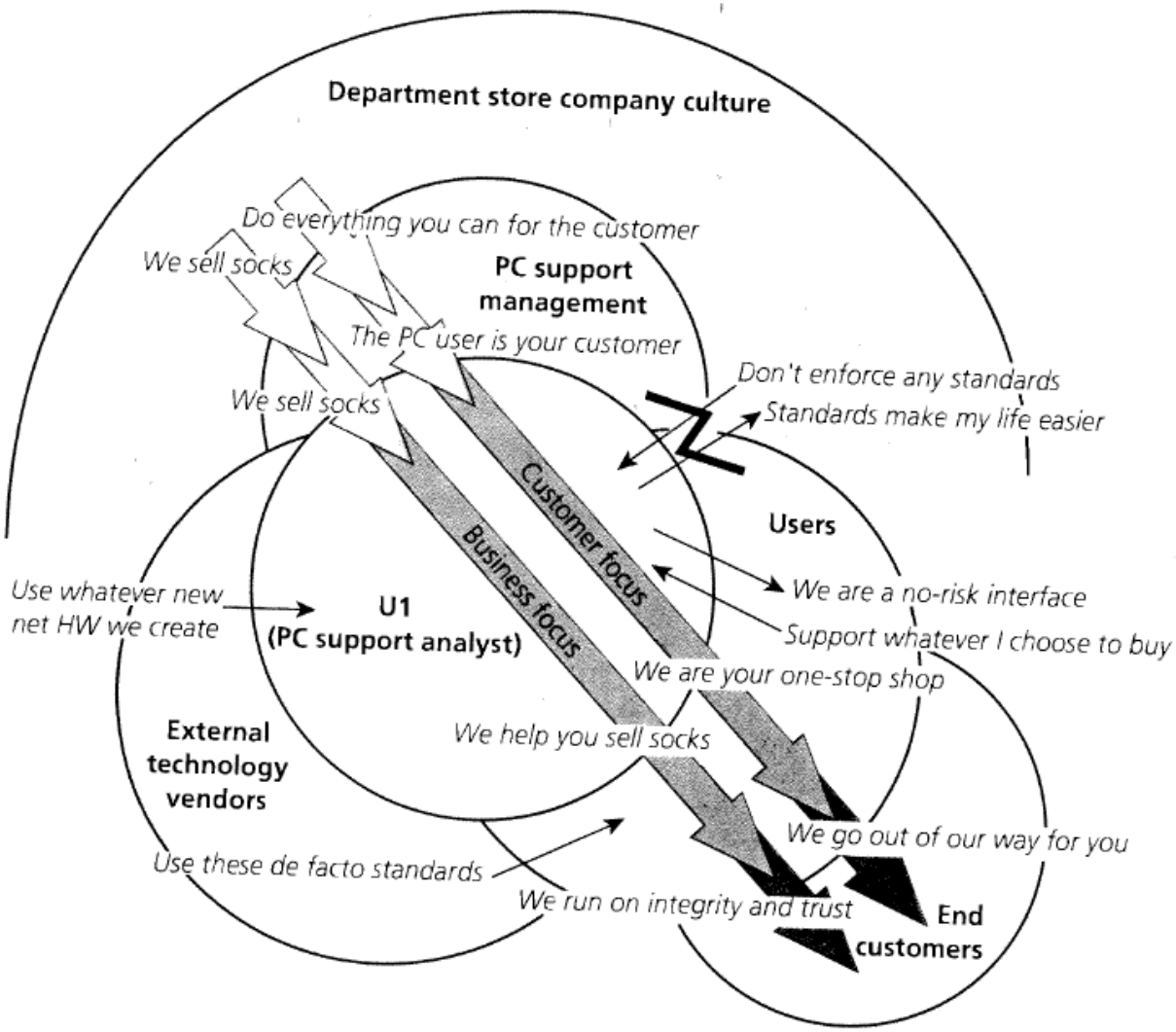
Sequence Model: Doing Email



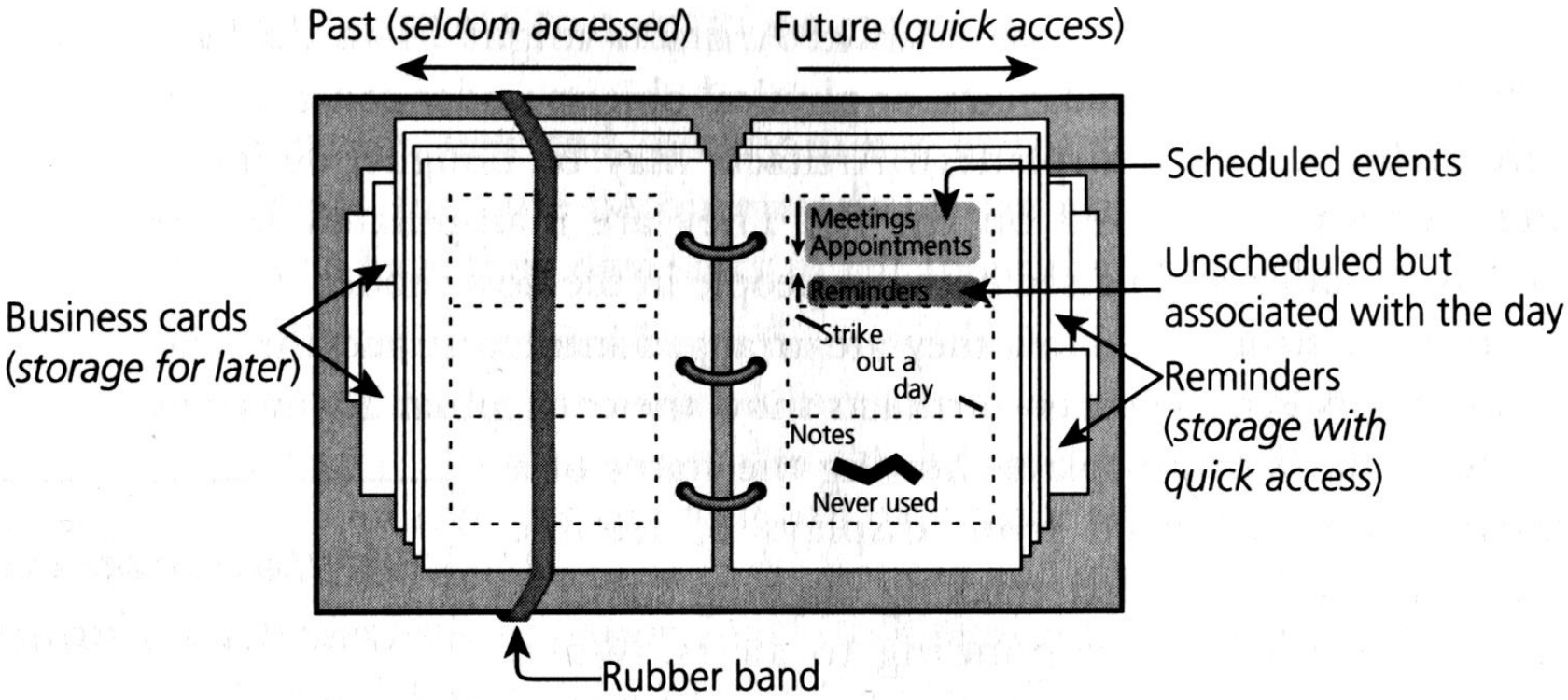
Cultural Model: Developer



Cultural Model: Department Store

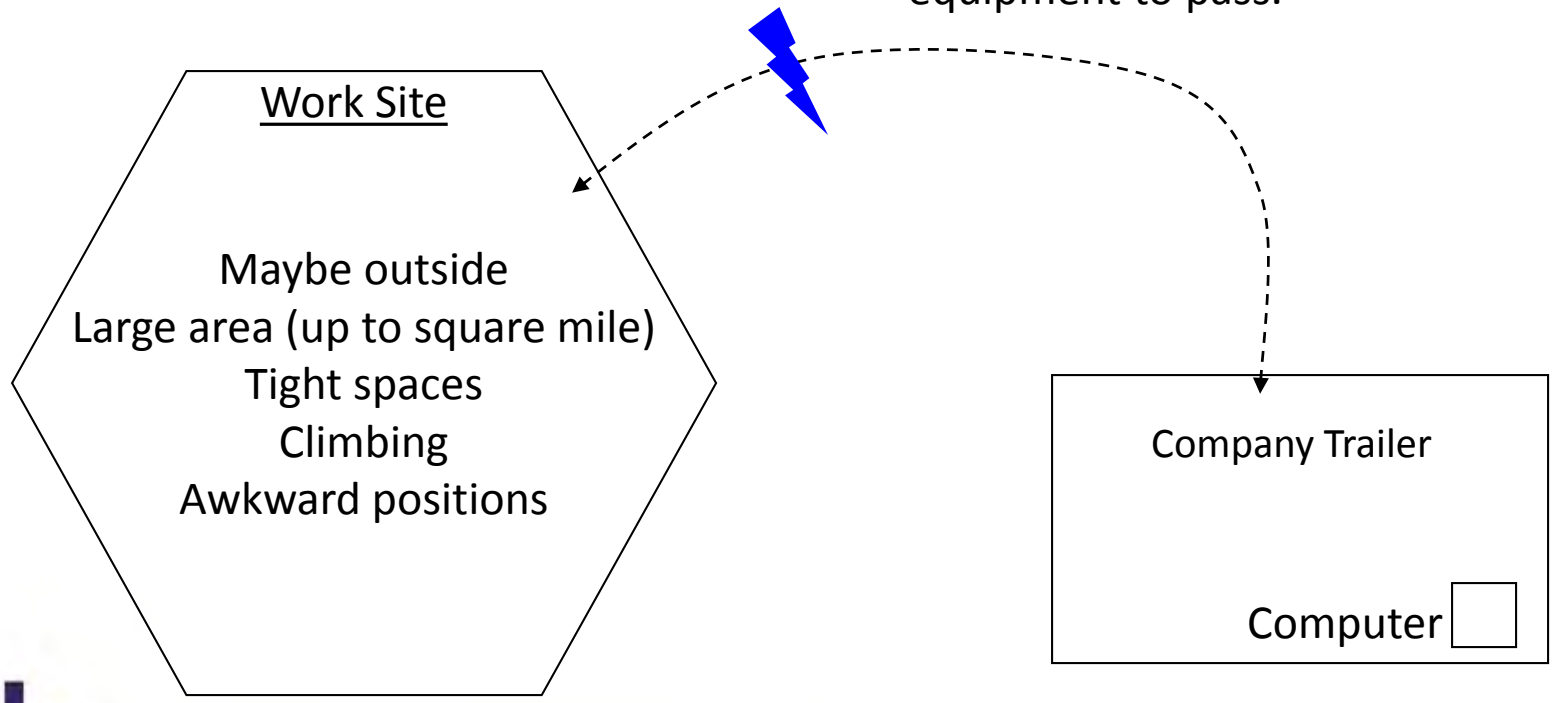


Artifact Model: Calendar

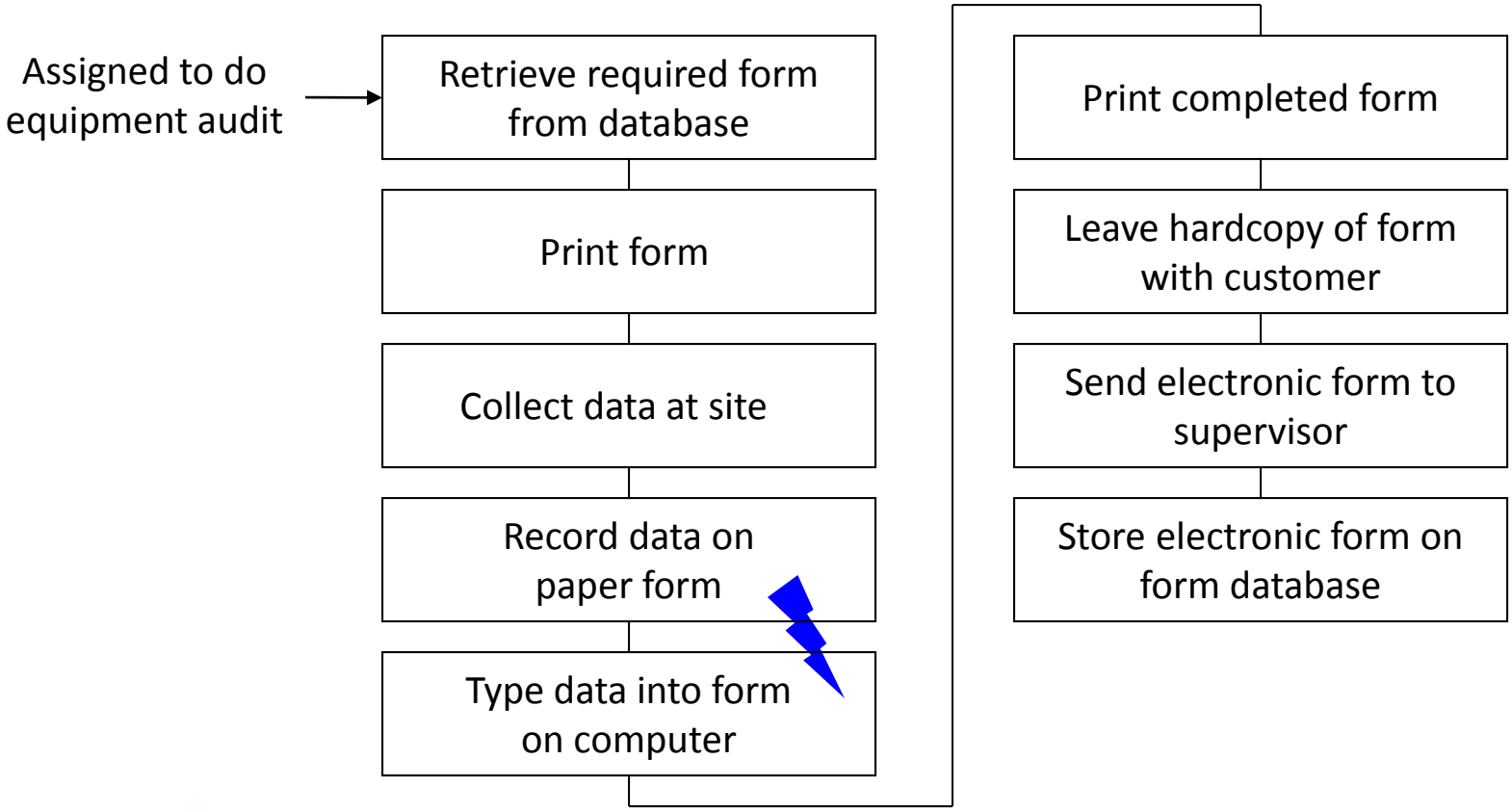


Physical Model: Work Site

Approximately a 5 minute walk. If doing an audit at a site under construction, then safe path frequently changes and may need to wait for construction equipment to pass.



Sequence Model: Equipment Audit



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