

# Programmers are Users Too: Human Centered Methods for Improving Tools for Programming

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# Natural Programming Project

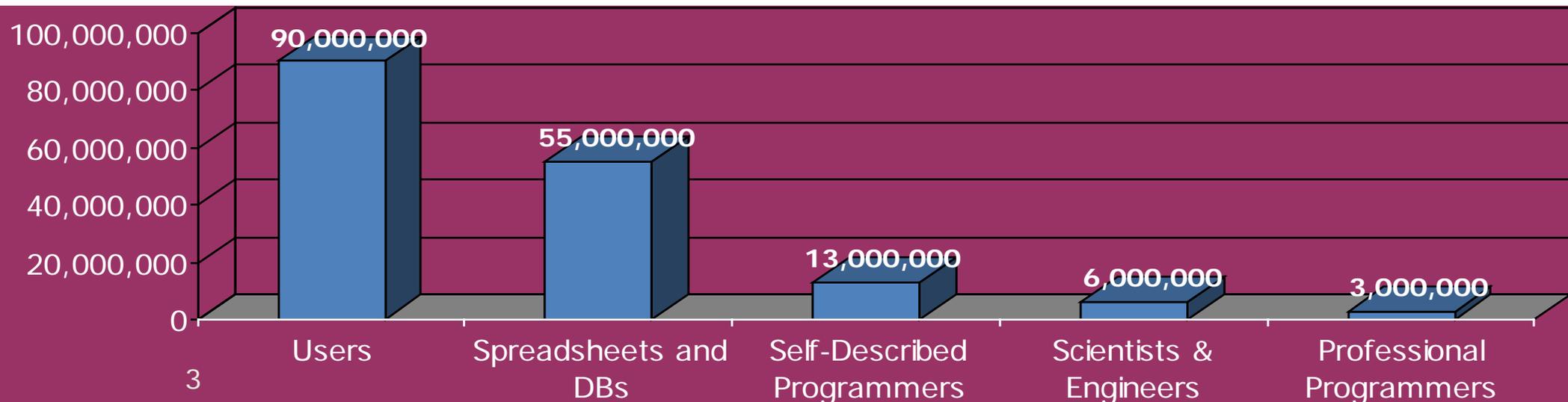


- Researching better tools for programming since 1978
- Natural Programming project started in 1995
- Make programming easier and more correct by making it more *natural*
  - Closer to the way that people think about algorithms and solving their tasks
- Methodology – human-centered approach
  - Perform *studies* to inform design
    - Provide new knowledge about what people do and think, & barriers
  - Guide the designs from the data
    - Design of programming *languages* and *environments*
  - Iteratively evaluate and improve the tools
- Target novice, expert and end-user programmers



# End User Programming

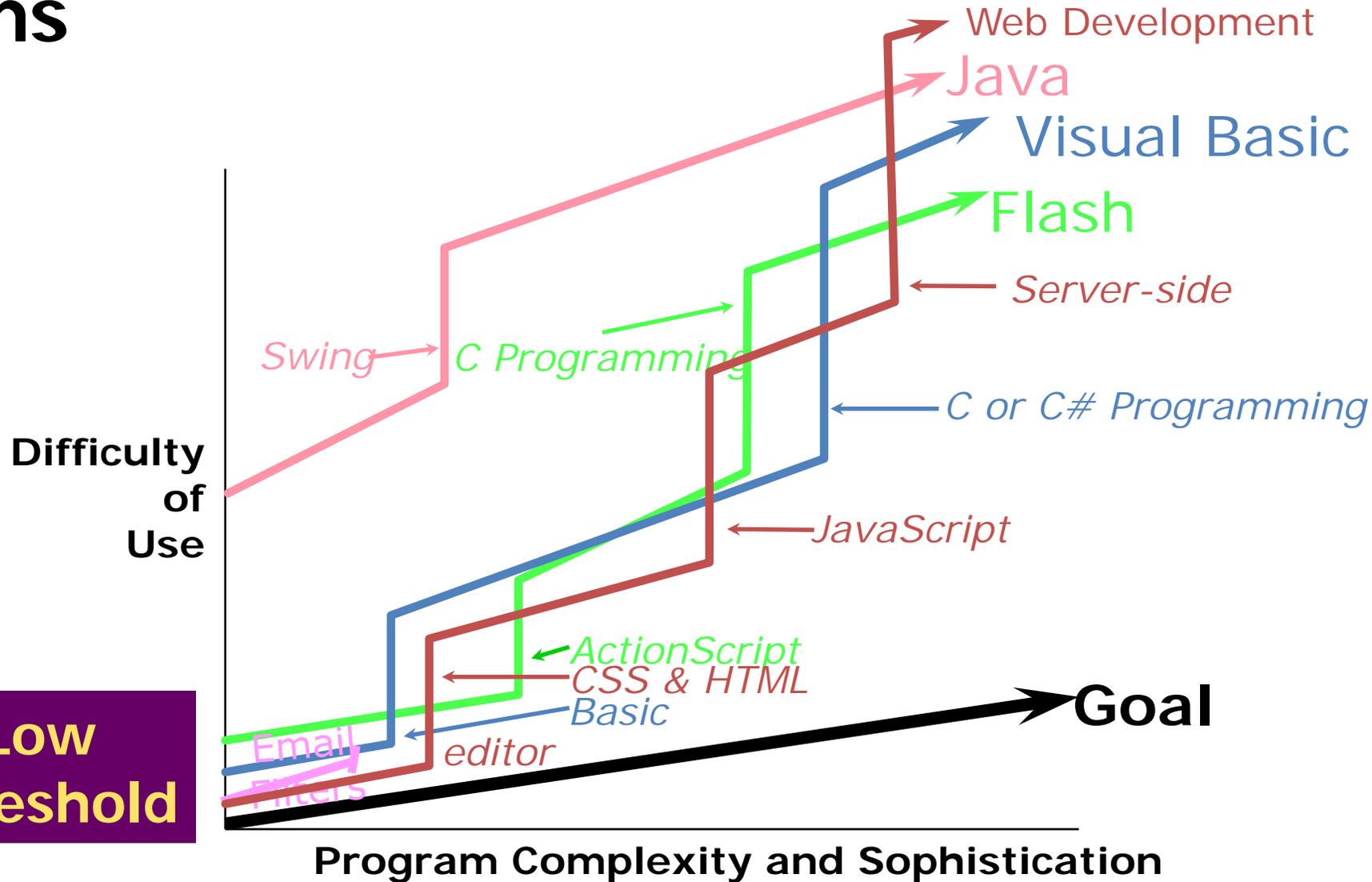
- People whose primary job is not programming
- [Scaffidi, Shaw and Myers 2005]
  - 90 million computer users at work in US
  - 55 million will use spreadsheets or databases at work (and therefore may potentially program)
  - 13 million will describe themselves as programmers
  - 3 million professional programmers
- All of these people use APIs!



# Goal: Gentle Slope Systems

High Ceiling

Low Threshold



# Human Centered Approaches?

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- Concerned with everything the user encounters
  - Functionality & Usefulness
  - Content
  - Labels
  - Presentation
  - Layout
  - Navigation
  - Speed of response
  - Emotional Impact
  - Context (social environment in which use happens)
  - Documentation & Help
- Measures:
  - Learnability, Productivity, Errors, ...



# What Can Be Addressed?

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- **Everything** the developer encounters
- Tools – IDEs & their user interfaces
- Languages themselves
  - Not necessarily just “taste”, “intuition”
  - Error-proneness
- APIs
  - “Interface” between developer and functionality
  - “Languages” by themselves are almost irrelevant these days
- Documentation for all of the above
- Processes & context of development
  - Consider the whole “system” together
  - New as well as legacy systems



# “Human Centered Approaches” – More Than Lab User Studies

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- Design & aesthetics matter & will affect:
  - User’s performance
  - Errors
  - Adoption of your tool
- Many different methods for answering many different questions
  - Before design time
  - During design & implementation
  - After implementation



# Many HCI Methods

- Contextual Inquiry
- Contextual Analysis
- Paper prototypes
- Think-aloud protocols
- Heuristic Evaluation
- Affinity diagrams
- Personas
- Wizard of Oz
- Task analysis
- A/B testing
- Cognitive Walkthrough
- Cognitive Dimensions
- KLM and GOMS (CogTool)
- Video prototyping
- Body storming
- Expert interviews
- Questionnaires
- Surveys
- Interaction Relabeling
- Log analysis
- Storyboards
- Focus groups
- Card sorting
- Diary studies
- Improvisation
- Use cases
- Scenarios
- “Speed Dating”
- ...



# Dangers of *Not* Applying Human Centered Approaches

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- Tools may prove to be **not useful**
  - Useful = solves an **important** problem
    - Happens **frequently**
    - **Difficult** to solve otherwise
    - Developers believe academic tools solve **unimportant** problems
- [How do practitioners perceive Software Engineering Research?]
- Tools may **not** actually solve the problem
  - Example: a study suggested that Tarantula tool identifying potentially faulty statements for debugging was not helpful
    - Changed the task, but telling if the identified statement was *actually* faulty not easier than finding the bug
    - Parnin, C. and Orso, A. 2011. Are Automated Debugging Techniques Actually Helping Developers International Symposium on Software Testing and Analysis (2011), 199–209.

} HCI questions



# Dangers of *Not* Applying Human Centered Approaches

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- Tools may show no measurable impact
  - Desired advantage overwhelmed by problems with other parts
  - Example: Emerson Murphy-Hill found that refactoring tools are under-utilized and programmers do not configure them due to usability issues
    - Emerson Murphy-Hill, Chris Parnin, Andrew P. Black. *How we refactor, and how we know it*. In ICSE '09: Proceedings of the 2009 IEEE 31st International Conference on Software Engineering (2009), pp. 287-297.



# Human Centered Approaches are Not Too Difficult for You

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- Getting *some* user data better than none
- Observing real usage reveals many opportunities
  - Insights about new issues to address, not necessarily what originally planned
    - Thomas LaToza's Reachability Questions from Architecture study
    - Jeff Stylos's method placement result from study of class size: from **2.4 to 11.2 times faster**  
`server.send ( message )` vs.  
`mail.send ( server )`
- Collaborating with Graphic Designers for even a short time can provide significant improvements in aesthetics



# Key Decision: What is Your Question?

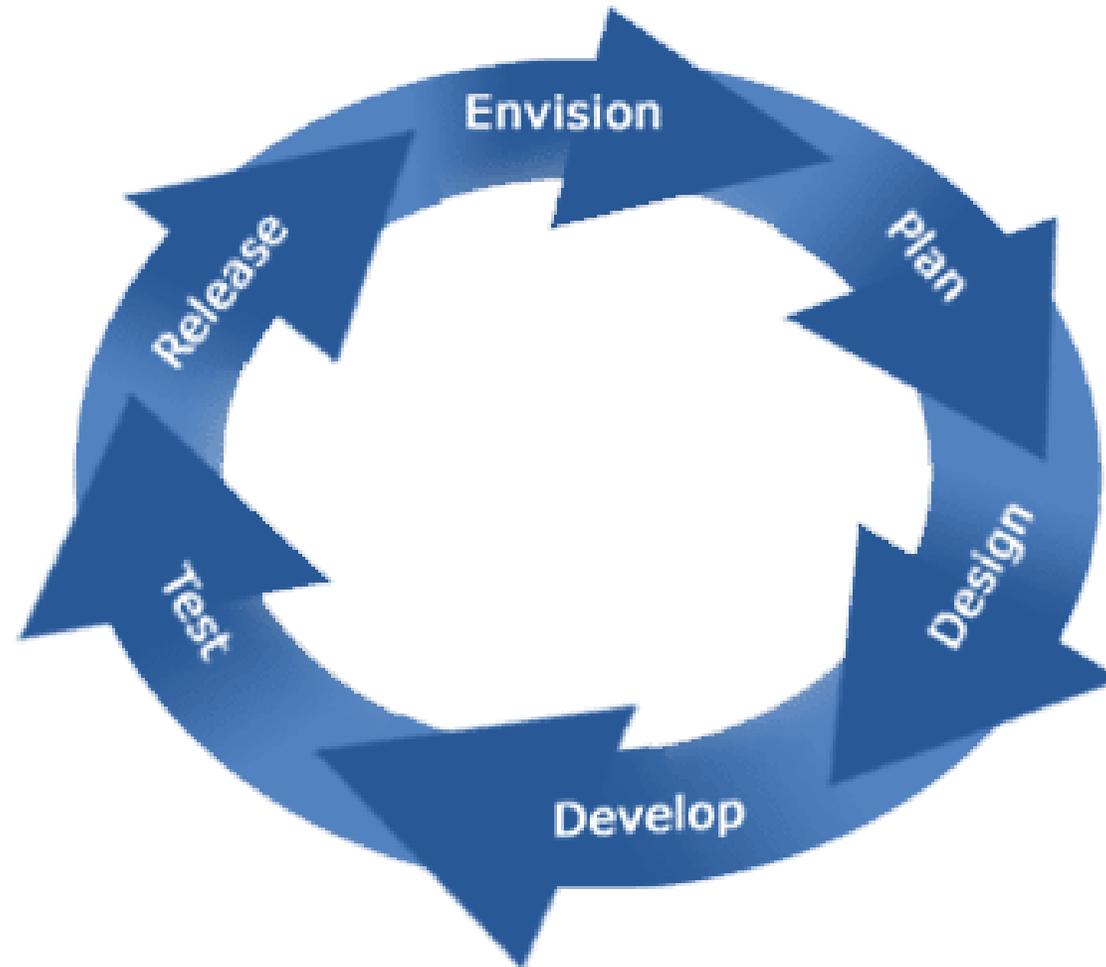
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- What do you need to find out or show?
  - What **claim** to do you want to make?
- Showing that a tool is *usable* is different from whether it is *useful*
- Exploring **what** people are doing, is different from determining **how often** an observed behavior happens
- Drives what **type** of method to use, and **tasks** to be done with it



# Product Lifecycle

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Source: <http://www.accordtech.co.in/Product%20Development%20Lifecycle.htm>

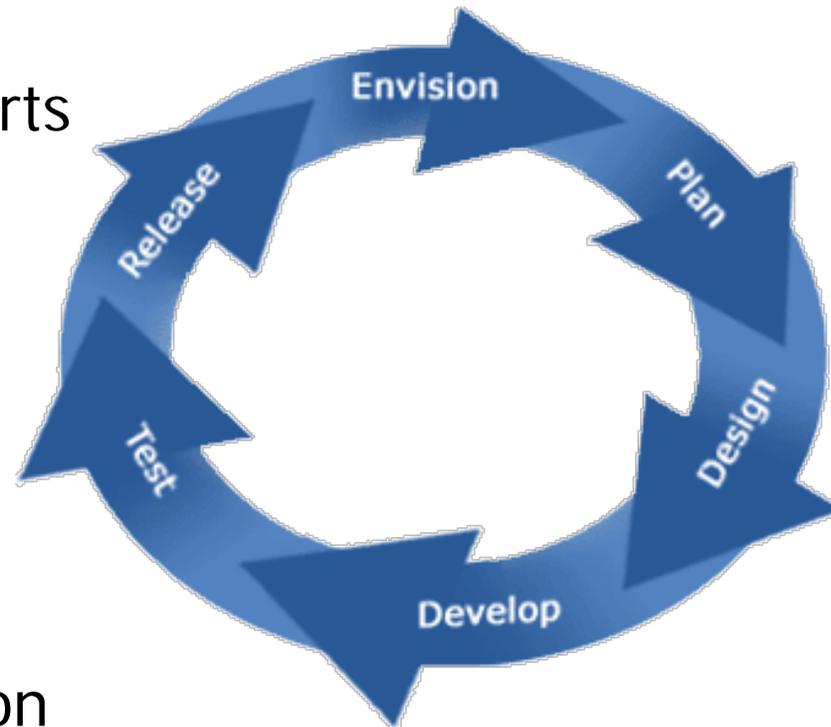
# Product Lifecycle

## Field Studies

- Logs & error reports

## Evaluative Studies

- Expert analyses
- Usability Evaluation
- Formal A/B Lab Testing



## Exploratory Studies

- Contextual Inquiries
- Interviews
- Surveys
- Lab Studies
- Corpus data mining

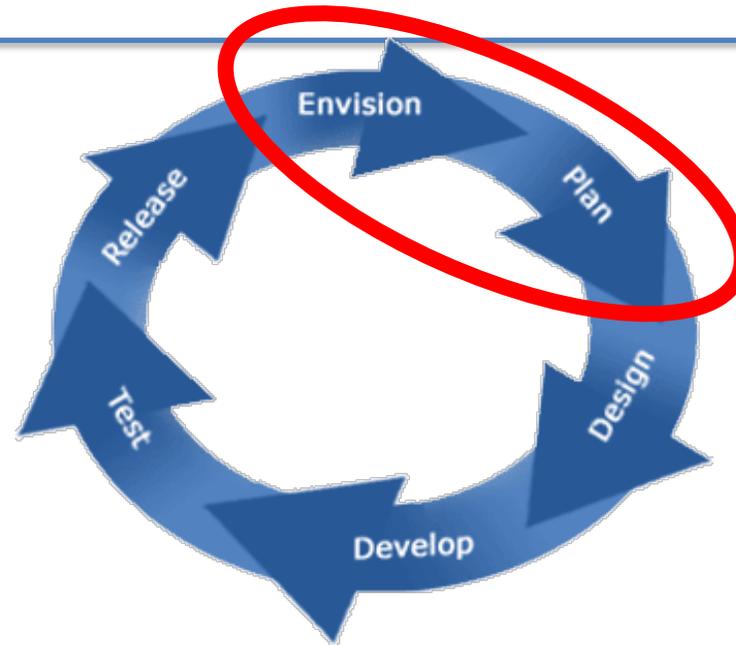
## Design Practices

- “Natural programming”
- Graphic & Interaction Design
- Prototyping



# Exploratory Studies

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- Identify what is really happening
- Discover important problems
- Quantify need



# Contextual Inquiry

- Beyer, H. and Holtzblatt, K., *Contextual Design: Defining Custom-Centered Systems*. 1998, San Francisco, CA: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers, Inc.
- A kind of “ethnographic” or “participatory design” method
- Watch developers while they are performing their **real tasks**
- Objective, concrete data about real activities
- May be followed by a survey, to establish generality of the issues



# Why Contextual Inquiry?

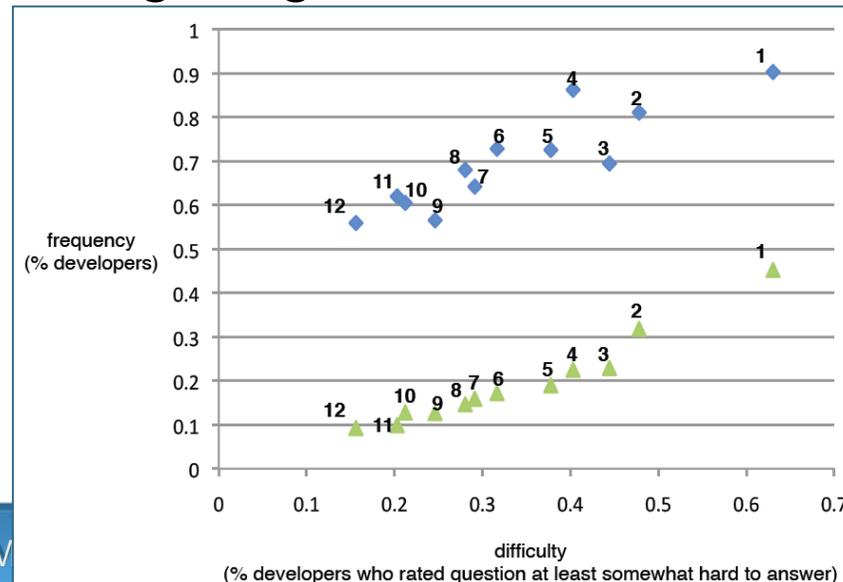
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- Usually reveals many barriers and problems in current practice
- Helps develop *insights*
  - Be open to inspiration
- Not for confirming what you already know
- Qualitative data (not quantitative)
  - CIs are not for gathering statistics, analytics
    - In contrast to surveys & lab studies
- But need to be able to observe real tasks



# Example of Contextual Inquiry & Surveys

- “Developers Ask Reachability Questions”
  - Thomas D. LaToza and Brad Myers, ICSE'2010, Cape Town, South Africa, 2-8 May 2010. pp. 185-194.
  - “Search across feasible paths through a program for target statements matching search criteria”
    - Watched 17 developers investigating unfamiliar code
    - Also surveyed 460 developers
    - Over 100 other hard-to-answer questions



1. What are the implications of this change? (e.g., what might break)
2. How does application behavior vary in these different situations that might occur?
3. Could this method call potentially be slow in some situation I need to consider?
4. To move this functionality (e.g., lines of code, methods, files) to here, what else needs to be moved?
5. Is this method call now redundant or unnecessary in this situation?
6. Across this path of calls or set of classes, where should functionality for this case be inserted?
7. When investigating some application feature or functionality, how is it implemented?
8. In what situations is this method called?
9. What is the correct way to use or access this data structure?
10. How is control getting (from that method) to this method?
11. What parts of this data structure are accessed in this code?
12. How are instances of these classes or data structures created and assembled?

◆ at least once per 3 days ▲ at least twice a day



# Many hard-to-answer questions about code (PLATEAU'2010)

## Rationale (42)

*Why was it done this way?* (14) [15][7]  
*Why wasn't it done this other way?* (15)  
*Was this intentional, accidental, or a hack?* (9)[15]  
*How did this ever work?* (4)

## Debugging (26)

*How did this runtime state occur?* (12) [15]  
*What runtime state changed when this executed?* (2)  
*Where was this variable last changed?* (1)  
*How is this object different from that object?* (1)  
*Why didn't this happen?* (3)  
*How do I debug this bug in this environment?* (3)  
*In what circumstances does this bug occur?* (3) [15]  
*Which team's component caused this bug?* (1)

## Intent and Implementation (32)

*What is the intent of this code?* (12) [15]  
*What does this do* (6) *in this case* (10)? (16) [24]  
*How does it implement this behavior?* (4) [24]

## Refactoring (25)

*Is there functionality or code that could be refactored?* (4)  
*Is the existing design a good design?* (2)  
*Is it possible to refactor this?* (9)  
*How can I refactor this* (2) *without breaking existing users*(7)? (9)  
*Should I refactor this?* (1)  
*Are the benefits of this refactoring worth the time investment?* (3)

## Testing (20)

*Is this code correct?* (6) [15]  
*How can I test this code or functionality?* (9)  
*Is this tested?* (3)  
*Is the test or code responsible for this test failure?* (1)  
*Is the documentation wrong, or is the code wrong?* (2)

## Implementing (19)

*How do I implement this* (8), *given this constraint* (2)? (10)  
*Which function or object should I pick?* (2)  
*What's the best design for implementing this?* (7)

## Control flow (19)

*In what situations or user scenarios is this called?* (3) [15][24]  
*What parameter values does each situation pass to this method?* (1)  
*What parameter values could lead to this case?* (1)  
*What are the possible actual methods called by dynamic dispatch here?* (6)  
*How do calls flow across process boundaries?* (1)  
*How many recursive calls happen during this operation?* (1)  
*Is this method or code path called frequently, or is it dead?* (4)  
*What throws this exception?* (1)  
*What is catching this exception?* (1)

## Contracts (17)

*What assumptions about preconditions does this code make?* (5)  
*What assumptions about pre(3)/post(2)conditions can be made?*  
*What exceptions or errors can this method generate?* (2)  
*What are the constraints on or normal values of this variable?* (2)  
*What is the correct order for calling these methods or initializing these objects?* (2)  
*What is responsible for updating this field?* (1)

## Performance (16)

*What is the performance of this code* (5) *on a large, real dataset* (3)? (8)  
*Which part of this code takes the most time?* (4)  
*Can this method have high stack consumption from recursion?* (1)  
*How big is this in memory?* (2)  
*How many of these objects get created?* (1)

## Type relationships (15)

*What are the composition, ownership, or usage relationships of this type?* (5) [24]  
*What is this type's type hierarchy?* (4) [24]  
*What implements this interface?* (4) [24]  
*Where is this method overridden?* (2)

## Data flow (14)

*What is the original source of this data?* (2) [15]  
*What code directly or indirectly uses this data?* (5)  
*Where is the data referenced by this variable modified?* (2)  
*Where can this global variable be changed?* (1)  
*Where is this data structure used* (1) *for this purpose* (1)? (2) [24]  
*What parts of this data structure are modified by this code?* (1) [24]  
*What resources is this code using?* (1)

## Location (13)

*Where is this functionality implemented?* (5) [24]  
*Is this functionality already implemented?* (5) [15]  
*Where is this defined?* (3)

## Building and branching (11)

*Should I branch or code against the main branch?* (1)  
*How can I move this code to this branch?* (1)  
*What do I need to include to build this?* (3)  
*What includes are unnecessary?* (2)  
*How do I build this without doing a full build?* (1)  
*Why did the build break?* (2)[59]  
*Which preprocessor definitions were active when this was built?* (1)

## Architecture (11)

*How does this code interact with libraries?* (4)  
*What is the architecture of the code base?* (3)  
*How is this functionality organized into layers?* (1)  
*Is our API understandable and flexible?* (3)

## History (23)

*When, how, by whom, and why was this code changed or inserted?* (13)[7]  
*What else changed when this code was changed or inserted?* (2)  
*How has it changed over time?* (4)[7]  
*Has this code always been this way?* (2)  
*What recent changes have been made?* (1)[15][7]  
*Have changes in another branch been integrated into this branch?* (1)

## Concurrency (9)

*What threads reach this code* (4) *or data structure* (2)? (6)  
*Is this class or method thread-safe?* (2)  
*What members of this class does this lock protect?* (1)

## Dependencies (5)

*What depends on this code or design decision?* (4)[7]  
*What does this code depend on?* (1)

## Method properties (2)

*How big is this code?* (1)  
*How overloaded are the parameters to this function?* (1)

## Teammates (16)

*Who is the owner or expert for this code?* (3)[7]  
*How do I convince my teammates to do this the "right way"?* (12)  
*Did my teammates do this?* (1)

## Policies (15)

*What is the policy for doing this?* (10) [24]  
*Is this the correct policy for doing this?* (2) [15]  
*How is the allocation lifetime of this object maintained?* (3)

## Implications (21)

*What are the implications of this change for* (5) *API clients* (5), *security* (3), *concurrency* (3), *performance* (2), *platforms* (1), *tests* (1), *or obfuscation* (1)? (21) [15][24]



# Many opportunities for better tools

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- Of all the reported questions
  - 34% addressed by commercial tools
  - 25% addressed by research tools
  - 41% unaddressed by any tools



# Example of Interviews: Immutability

- Michael Coblenz, Joshua Sunshine, Jonathan Aldrich, Brad Myers, Sam Weber, Forrest Shull, "Exploring Language Support for Immutability" *ICSE'2016*. pp. 736-747.
- Experts recommend making classes *immutable* so instances cannot change accidentally
  - Thread safe, more secure, no unexpected state changes, etc.
- Usability studies suggest programmers prefer classes that **can** change
- Various relevant language features
  - C++ `const`, Java `final`, Obj-C immutable collections, .NET `Freezable`, etc.
- Semi-structured interviews with a convenience sample of 8 software engineers
  - Agreed that mutability is a frequent source of bugs
  - But *none* of these features are what is needed
  - Preferred *transitive, class-based immutability*
    - Provide this in the **Glacier** tool (*to appear in ICSE'2017*)
    - **Great Languages Allow Class Immutability Enforced Readily**



# Exploratory Lab Studies

- To understand what is happening
- More controlled than field studies
  - Can compare multiple people on same tasks
- Example: studying Eclipse for maintenance tasks
  - Andrew J. Ko, Htet Htet Aung, and Brad A. Myers. "Eliciting Design Requirements for Maintenance-Oriented IDEs: A Detailed Study of Corrective and Perfective Maintenance Tasks". *ICSE'2005*. pp. 126-135.  
**Winner, Distinguished Paper Award.**
  - Detailed study of fixing bugs and adding features
  - Dataset used for 3 different award-winning papers: interruptions, navigation, code editing behaviors

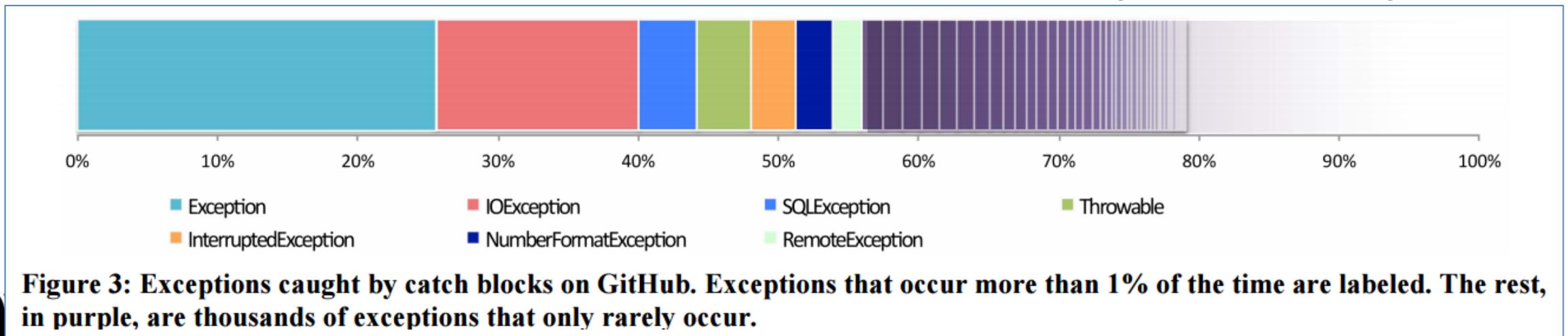
Interactive Bottleneck	Overall Cost
Navigating to fragment in <i>same</i> file ( <i>via scrolling</i> )	~ 11 minutes
Navigating to fragment in <i>different</i> file ( <i>via tabs and explorer</i> )	~ 7 minutes
Recovering working set after returning to a task	~ 1 minute
Total Costs	~19 minutes

=35%



# Corpus Data Mining

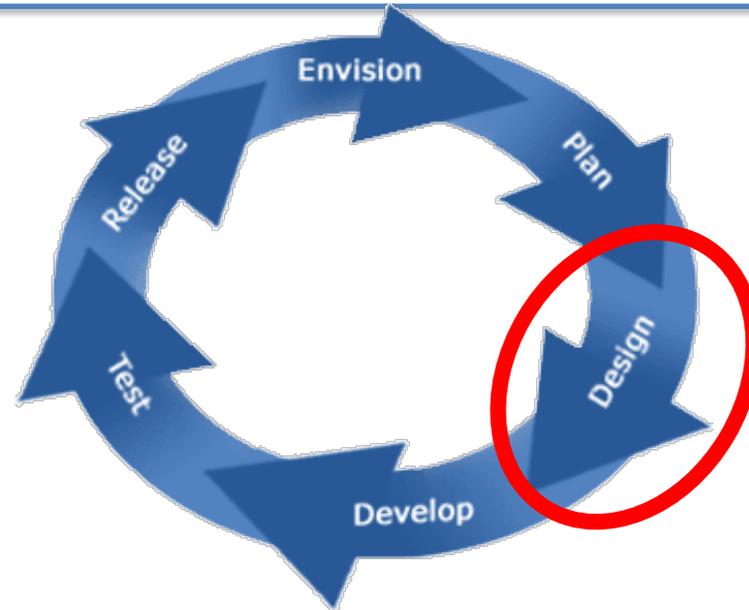
- Studied 11 million Java try/catch blocks from GitHub using Boa tool
  - 12% of catch blocks were completely empty.
  - 25% of all exceptions caught are simply `Exception`
  - Motivated a new tool to help programmers write better exception handling code
- [Kery, Le Goues, & Myers, 2016]



**Figure 3: Exceptions caught by catch blocks on GitHub. Exceptions that occur more than 1% of the time are labeled. The rest, in purple, are thousands of exceptions that only rarely occur.**

# Design Methods

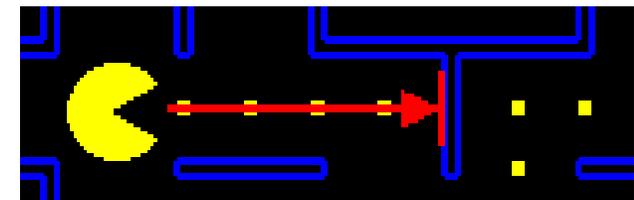
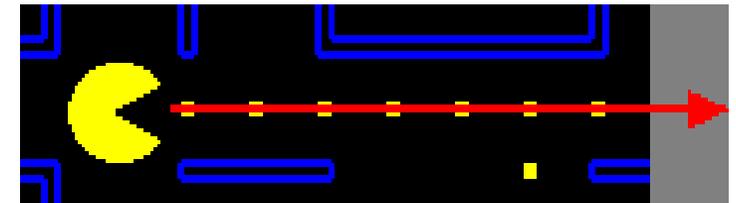
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- Now know the problem, what is the solution?
- How do I design it so it is attractive and effective?

# “Natural Programming”

- Technique developed by my group to elicit developer’s “natural” expressions
  - Mental models of tasks, vocabulary, etc.
- Blank paper tests
- Must prompt for the tasks in a way that doesn’t bias the answers
- Examples:
  - PacMan before and after
    - Mostly rule-based (if-then)
  - API designs
    - Architecture, words used, which methods are on which classes



# Why Natural Programming?

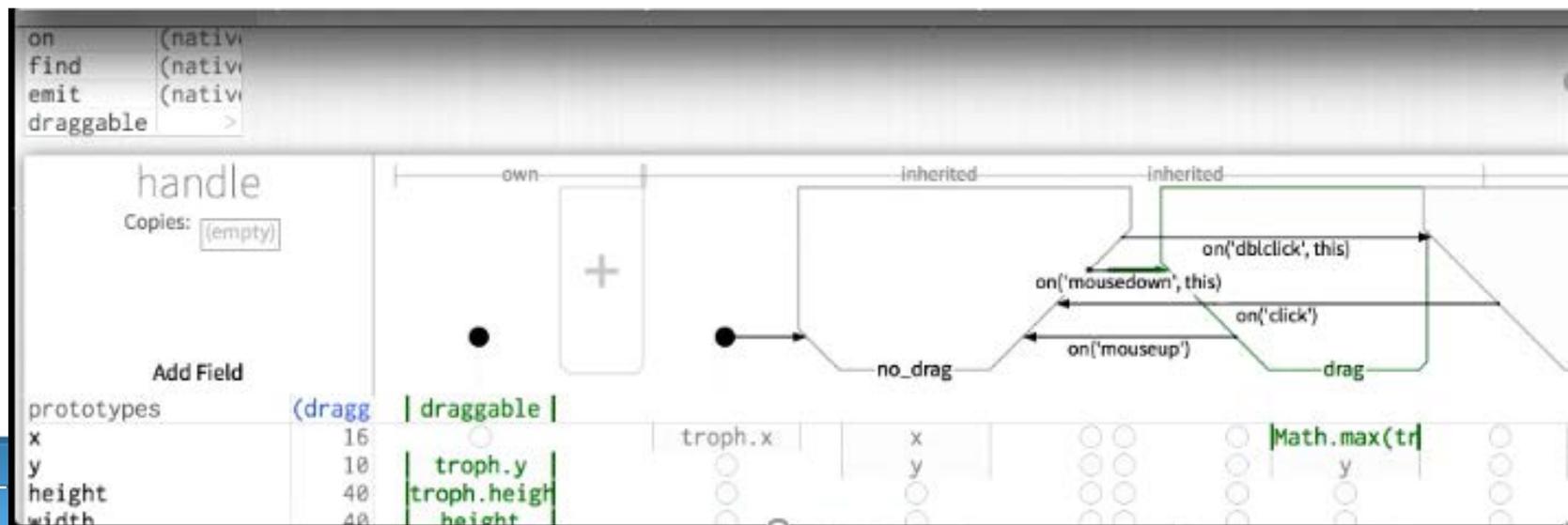
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- When want design to be easily learned by novices
- But biased by what they already know
  - Graphic designers will think PhotoShop is “natural”
  - Programmers will think Java is “natural”



# Graphic Design

- Importance of graphic design and interaction design
- Software Engineers (and researchers) are not necessarily the best interaction designers
- Design can have a big impact even with same functionality
- Might involve designers for colors, icons, which controls, layout, ...
- InterState system combines state transition diagrams and spreadsheets.
- Stephen Oney, Brad A. Myers, and Joel Brandt, "InterState: A Language and Environment for Expressing Interface Behavior", *UIST'14*, October 5-8, 2014, Honolulu, Hawaii. pp. 263-272.
  - Carefully designed to be *usable* and *attractive*
  - Good graphic design
  - Animations on change



# Prototyping

- ❖ Try out designs with developers before implementing them

- **Paper**

- “Low fidelity prototyping”
    - Often surprisingly effective
    - Experimenter plays the computer
    - Drawn on paper → drawn on computer

- **Implemented Prototype (“Click through”)**

- Balsamiq, Axure, PowerPoint, Web tools (even for non-web UIs)
    - (no database)

- **Real system**

- ❖ Need to test these with users!

- ❖ Better if sketchier for early design

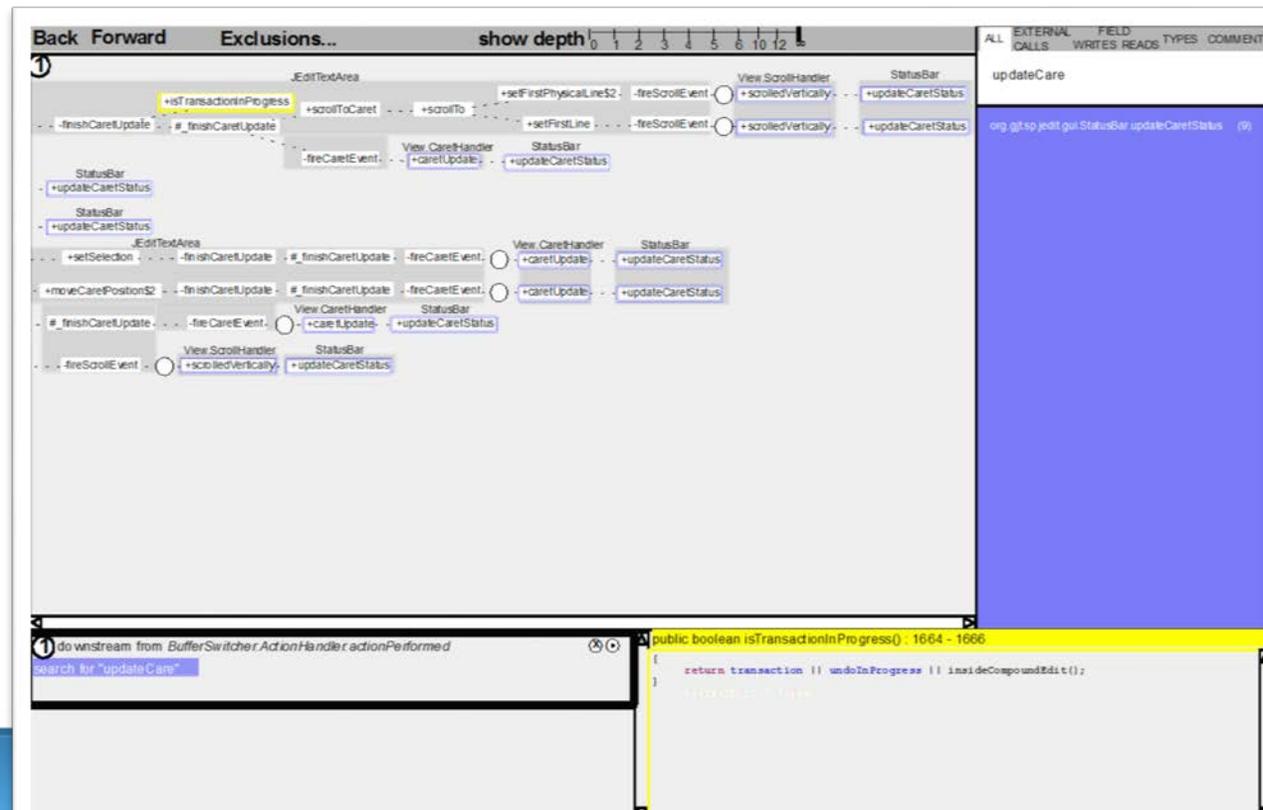
- Use paper or “sketchy” tools, not real widgets
  - People focus on wrong issues: colors, alignment, labels
  - Rather than overall structure and fundamental design

Increasing fidelity



# Example of Early Prototyping

- Thomas LaToza designing new visualization tool to try to help answer Reachability Questions
- Prototypes created with Omnigraffle and printed
- Revealed significant usability problems that were fixed before implementation
  - Graphical presentation
  - Controls



# Another Example: Variolite

- How to support data scientists with exploratory programming?
- What kind of version control support would be useful?
  - Interviews and CIs showed that conventional approaches like Git are too heavy-weight
- Showed dozens of sketches to target users to get feedback on which seemed usable and useful
- Final design to appear at CHI'2017
- Variations Augment Read Iterative Outcomes  
Letting Information Transcend Exploration

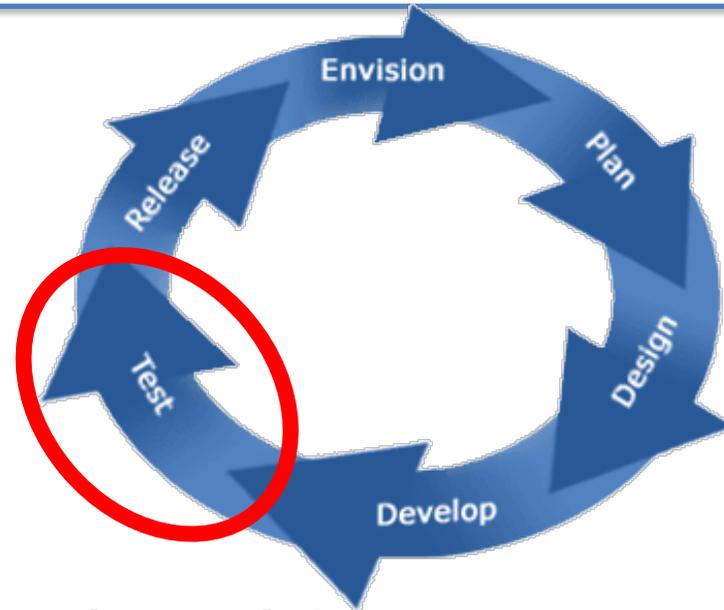


```
driverTest.py
1 import matplotlib.pyplot as pyplot
2 import numpy as np
3 import math
4
5
6
7 def distance(x0, y0, x1, y1):
8     return math.sqrt((x1-x0)**2 + (y1-y0)**2)
9
10 def computeAngle (p1, p2):
11     dot = 0
12     if computeNorm(p2[0], p2[1]) == 0 or computeNorm(p1[0], p1[1])==0:
13         dot = 0
14     else:
15         dot = (p2[0]*p1[0]+p2[1]*p1[1])
16             /float(computeNorm(p1[0], p1[1])*computeNorm(p2[0], p2[1]))
17     if dot > 1:
```



# Evaluation Methods

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- Does my tool work?
- Does it solve the developer's problems?
- **"If the user can't use it, it doesn't work!"**
  - Susan Dray



Dray & Associates  
Human Centered Innovation

# Expert Analyses

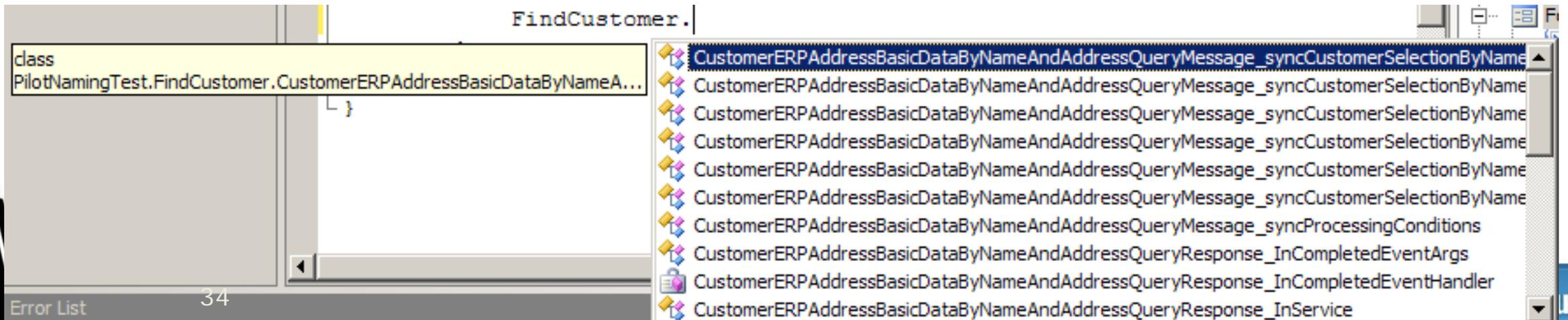
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- Usability experts evaluating designs to look for problems
  - Heuristic Analysis – [Nielsen] set of guidelines
  - Cognitive Dimensions – [Green] another set
  - Cognitive Walkthroughs – evaluate a task
- Can be inexpensive and quick
- However, experienced evaluators are better
  - 22% vs. 41% vs. 60% of errors found [Nielsen]
- Disadvantage: “just” opinions, open to arguments



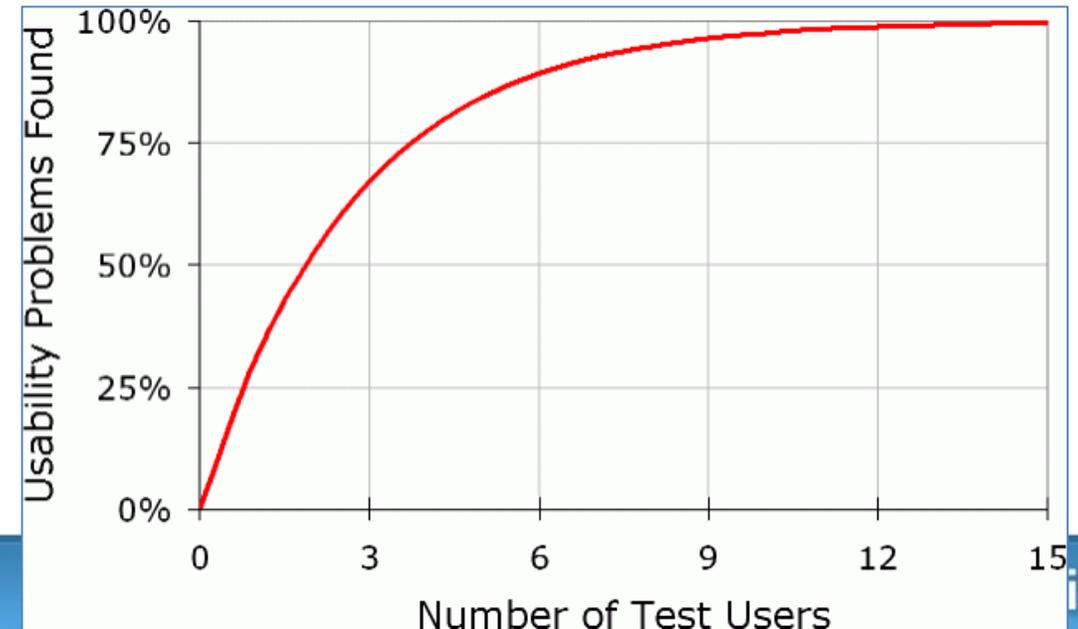
# Our Use of Expert Analyses

- Collaborating with SAP on their APIs and tools
- We studied SAP's Enterprise Service-Oriented Architecture (eSOA) APIs & Documentation
  - Jack Beaton, Sae Young Jeong, Yingyu Xie, Jeffrey Stylos, Brad A. Myers. "Usability Challenges for Enterprise Service-Oriented Architecture APIs," *2008 IEEE Symposium on Visual Languages and Human-Centric Computing, VL/HCC'08*. Sept 15-18, 2008, Herrsching am Ammersee, Germany. pp. 193-196.
- Naming problems:
  - Too long `MaterialSimpleByIDAndDescriptionQueryMessage_syncMaterialSimpleSelectionByIDAndDescriptionSelectionByMaterialDescription`
  - Not understandable



# Usability Evaluations

- Different from formal A/B “user testing”
  - Understand usability issues
  - Should be done early and often
    - Doesn’t have to be “finished” to let people try it
- “Think aloud” protocols
  - “Single most valuable usability engineering method”
    - [Nielsen]
  - Users verbalize what they are thinking
    - Motivations, **why** doing things, **what** confused about
  - Don’t need many users



# Why Usability Analysis

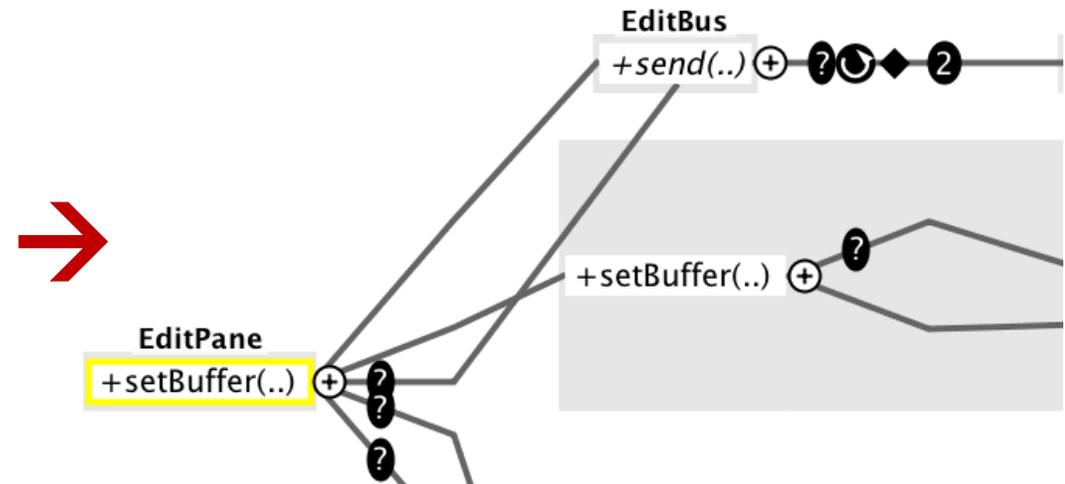
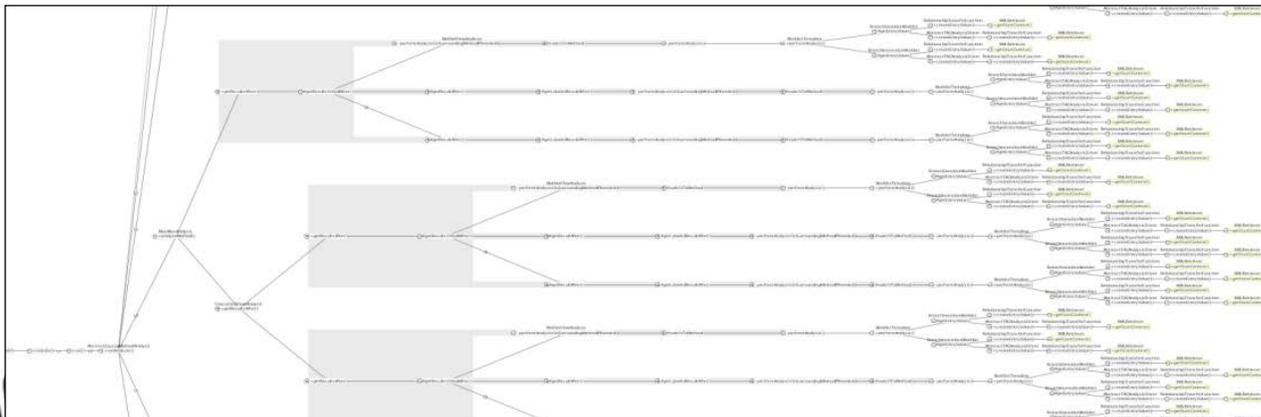
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- Improve the user interface prior to:
  - Deployment
  - A/B testing (as a “pilot” test)
- Demonstrate that users *can* use the system
  - Show that novel features of the UI are understandable



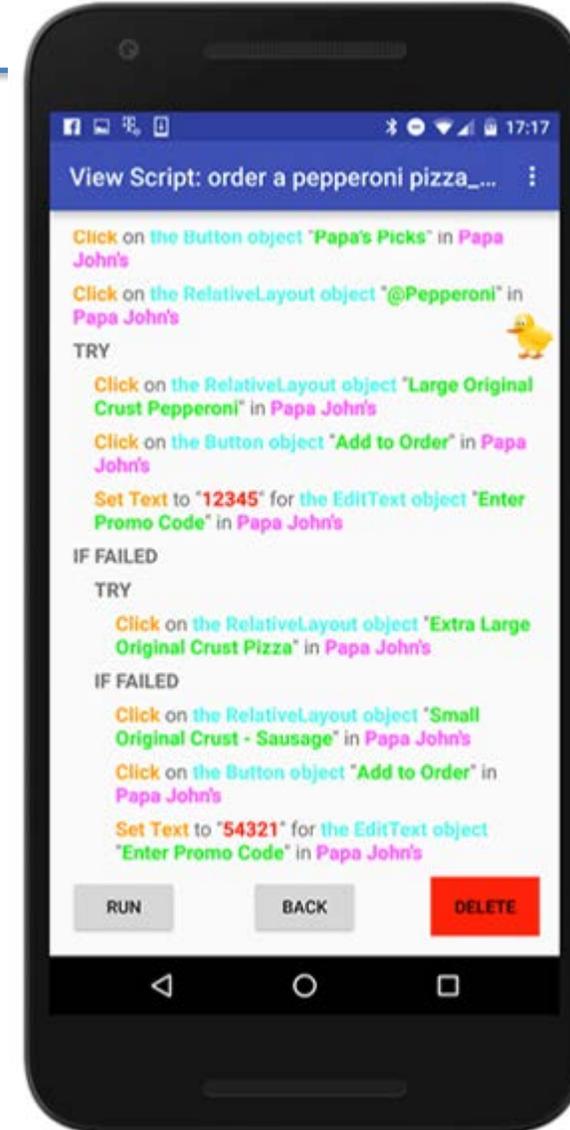
# Example of Using Usability Analysis

- Thomas LaToza's REACHER tool for Reachability Questions went through multiple iterations
  - Revised based on paper prototype (discussed already)
  - Revised based on 1<sup>st</sup> evaluation of full system
    - E.g., replaced duplicates of calls to methods with pointers
    - Changed to preserve order of outgoing edges
    - Redesign of icons, interactions



# Another Example of Usability Analysis

- **Sugilite: Smartphone Users Generating Intelligent Likeable Interfaces Through Examples**
- Allow end-users to create automations on Smartphones
- Initiate with speech commands
- Record scripts by example
- Generalizes from one or more examples
- 19 participants attempted 5 tasks
  - All completed at least 2 tasks successfully
  - 8 (42.1%) succeed in all 4 tasks
  - Overall, 65 out of 76 (85.5%) scripts worked
  - Feedback on what we need to improve



# Formal A/B testing

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- Formal *A/B* lab user tests are “gold standard” for academic papers – to show something is **better**
- But many issues in the study design
  - “Confounding” factors which were not controlled and are not relevant to study, but affect results
  - Tasks or instructions are mis-understood
  - Use prototypes & pilot studies to find these
- Statistical significance doesn’t mean real savings
- Be sure to collect qualitative data too
  - Strategies people are using
  - Why users did it that way
  - Especially when unexpected results



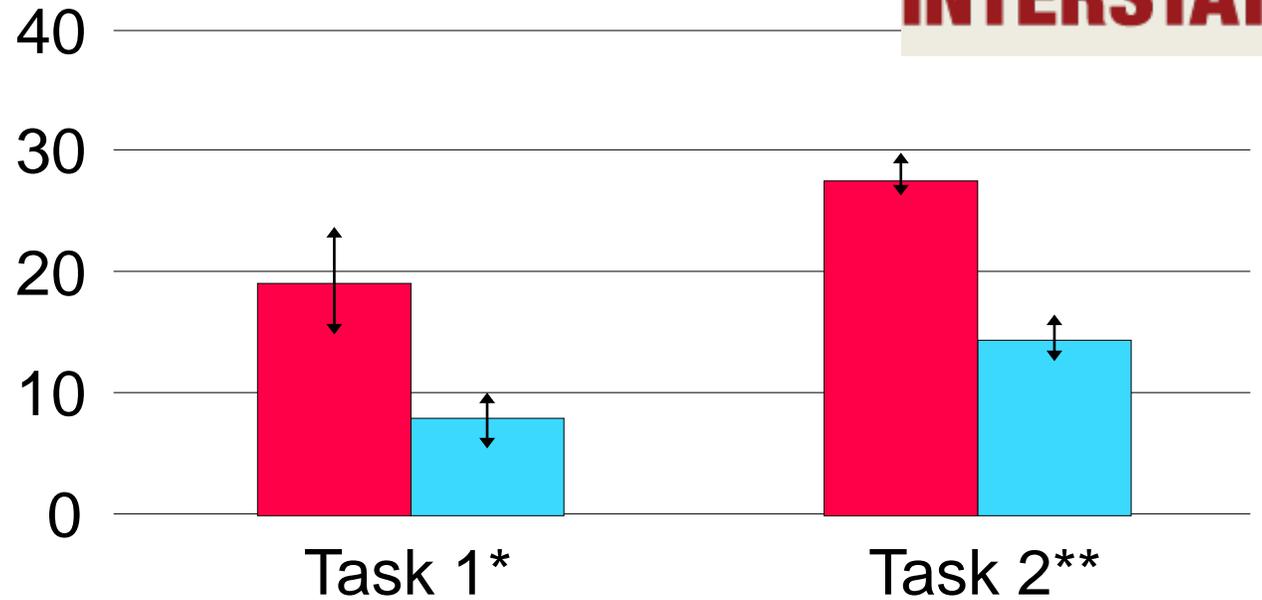
# Example of A/B testing



- User testing of InterState compared to JavaScript

```
var ms_until_advance;  
window.setInterval(function ()  
  ms_until_advance = 5000 - g  
  
  if (diff <= 0) {  
    set_selected_index((sel  
    reset_timer());  
  }  
}
```

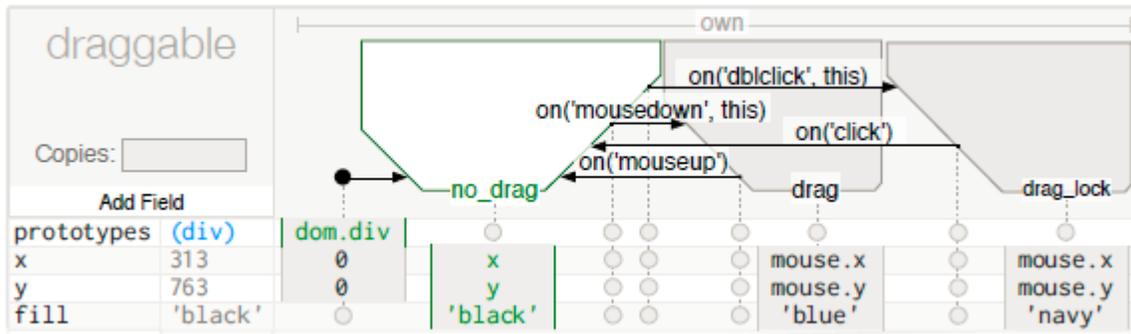
time taken  
(minutes)



■ JavaScript  
■ InterState

*smaller is better*

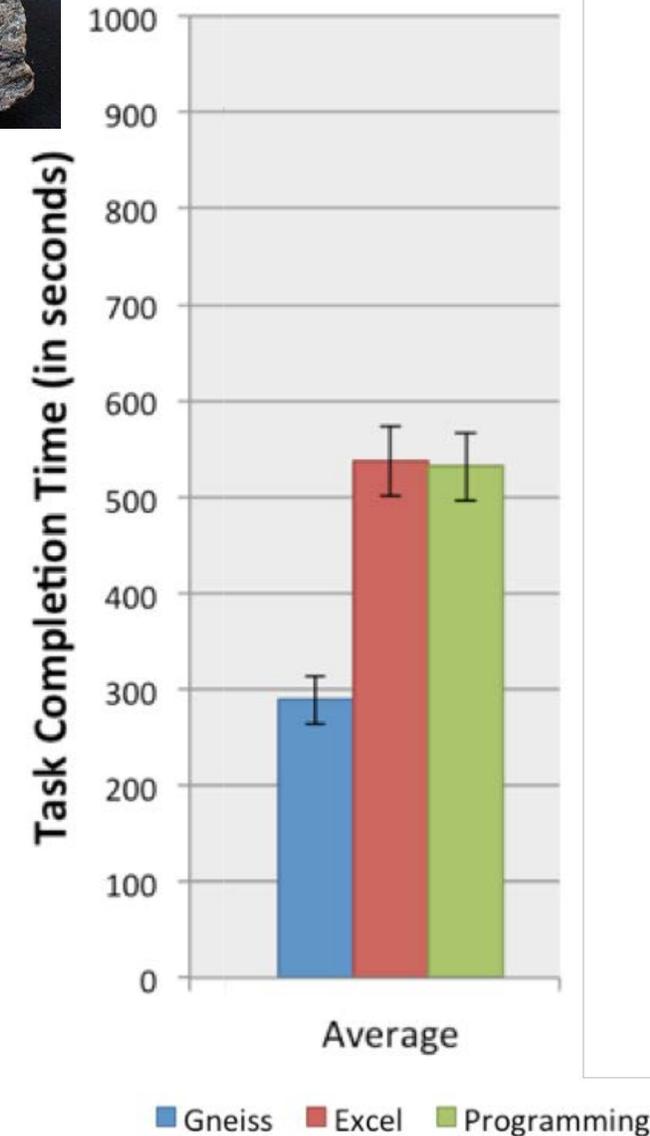
$p < .01^{**}$   
 $p < .05^*$



# Another Example of A/B testing



- Gneiss: **G**athering **N**ovel **E**nd-user **I**nternet **S**ervices using **S**preadsheets
  - Kerry Chang and Brad A. Myers, "Using and Exploring Hierarchical Data in Spreadsheets." *CHI'2016*, pp. 2497-2507.
- Novel spreadsheet interface for investigating hierarchical (e.g., JSON) data
  - Investigate using conventional spreadsheet formulas and drag-and-drop of columns
- Gneiss users significantly outperformed Excel users and programmers ( $p < .001$ )



1

A (businesses.name)	B (businesses.categories.cate
1 Coca Cafe	1.1 breakfast_brunch
	1.2 newamerican
2 Waffles Incaffeinated	2.1 breakfast_brunch
	2.2 newamerican
	2.3 tradamerican
3 Point Brugge Café	3.1 belgian
4 The Dor-Stop Restaurant	4.1 breakfast_brunch
	4.2 diners
5 Deluca's Diner	5.1 breakfast_brunch

2

A (businesses.name)	B (businesses.categories.cate
1 Coca Cafe	1.1 breakfast_brunch
	1.2 newamerican
2 Waffles Incaffeinated	2.1 breakfast_brunch
	2.2 newamerican
	2.2 newamerican

3

A (businesses.categori	B (businesses.name)
1 belgian	Point Brugge Café
2 belgian	Park Bruges
3 breakfast_brunch	Coca Cafe
4 breakfast_brunch	Waffles Incaffeinated

# A/B Testing of Programming Language Feature

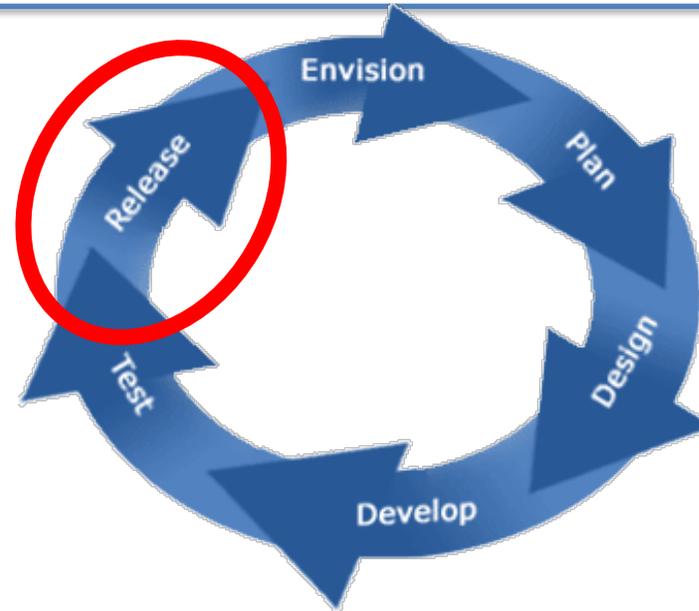
- Glacier immutability extension to Java
- 20 experienced Java programmers
- Compared to using Java `final` as instructed by Josh Bloch

	<code>final</code>	Glacier
Users who made errors enforcing immutability (after all tasks)	10/10	0/10
Completed <code>FileRequest.execute()</code> tasks with security vulnerabilities	4/8	0/8
Completed <code>HashBucket.put()</code> tasks with bugs	7/10	0/7



# Field Studies of System in Use

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- Find out what happens when the tool is really used
- Requires significant effort to make the tool sufficiently solid

# Logging Actual Use

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- Easier if **instrument** your tools
- Objective use data better than users' recollections and opinions
- Many levels of data can be collected
  - Privacy issues
- Example: Fluorite logger for Eclipse
  - **Fluorite**: Full of **L**ow-level **U**ser **O**perations **R**ecorded **I**n **T**he **E**ditor
  - Records all edits and events, including scrolling operations & source code,
  - Necessary to identify patterns of backtracking



# Why Field Studies?

---

- Understand which features are used and how
  - Not necessarily *why*
  - Can sometimes follow up with questionnaires, interviews of actual users
  - Developers often are surprised at how system is used
- Demonstrate that people choose to use the system when optional
- Easy to instrument web systems, some on-line tools



# Example of Field Analysis



- **Apatite**: Associative Perusing of APIs That Identifies Targets Easily
- Novel documentation tool that works *by association*
  - E.g., methods often used together
- Can start with verbs (actions) and find what classes implement them
- Couldn't figure out a comparison tool or or a lab study
- Deployed on the web
- Mostly used for fast lookup from partial names

The image displays two side-by-side screenshots of the Apatite tool's search interface. Both screenshots feature a search bar at the top with the placeholder text "Type here to search...".

The left screenshot shows a search for "read". The results are organized into categories: Packages (4/172), Classes (4/80), Methods (4/173), Actions (4/792), and Properties (4/39). The "Methods" category is expanded, and "read" is highlighted in green. Other methods listed include "close", "list", "write", "comparates", "read", "writes", and "written".

The right screenshot shows a search for "read". The results are organized into categories: Packages (4/17), Classes (4/71), Methods (4/286), Actions (4/138), and Properties (0/0). The "Classes" category is expanded, and "BufferedReader" is highlighted in green. Other classes listed include "BufferedReader", "FileInputStream", and "InputStreamReader". The "Actions" category is also expanded, and "read" is highlighted in green. Other actions listed include "block", "read", "stream", and "zero".



# Summary of Insights

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- Field and lab studies can reveal the real questions
  - Answering these questions creates tools that are actually useful
- Researcher's intuitions about what might be useful may be wrong
- Our experience highlights:
  - Developers often have **specific questions** in mind, which can be exploited in tools
  - **Code** views are central
  - **Visualizations** are often useful as **navigation aides** for code
  - Ability to **search** is key
    - Not just through code, but also through **dynamic** and **static call-graphs**, through **time**, etc.



# More on This Topic

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- CHASE and USER workshops at ICSE; PLATEAU at SPLASH/OOPSLA; VL/HCC
- Brad A. Myers, Andrew J. Ko, Thomas D. LaToza, and YoungSeok Yoon. "Developers are Users Too: Human Centered Methods to Improve Software Development," *IEEE Computer*, Special issue on UI Design, 49, issue 7, July, 2016, pp. 44-52.
- Thomas D. LaToza and Brad A. Myers, "Designing Useful Tools for Developers", [\*PLATEAU 2011: Evaluation and Usability of Programming Languages and Tools\*](#), workshop at the Onward! 2011 and Splash 2011 conferences, Portland, Oregon, October 24, 2011. [On-line pdf](#) or [local pdf](#).
- Thomas D. LaToza, Brad A. Myers. "On the Importance of Understanding the Strategies that Developers Use", *Cooperative and Human Aspects of Software Engineering (CHASE'10)*, An ICSE 2010 Workshop. May 2, 2010. Cape Town, South Africa. pp. 72-75. [pdf](#)
- Reading list for "**Human Aspects of Software Development (HASD)**" by Thomas LaToza and Brad Myers

<http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~bam/uicourse/2011hasd/>



# Acronyms are fun!

And there are lots of Gemstones!!

**Fluorite:**  
Full of  
Low-level  
User  
Operations  
Recorded In  
The  
Editor



**Azurite:**  
Adding  
Zest to  
Undoing and  
Restoring  
Improves  
Textual  
Exploration



**Euklas:**  
Eclipse  
Users'  
Keystrokes  
Lessened by  
Attaching from  
Samples



**Graphite:**  
GRAphical  
Palettes  
Help  
Instantiate  
Types in the  
Editor

**Variolite:**  
Variations  
Augment  
Real  
Iterative  
Outcomes  
Letting  
Information  
Transcend  
Exploration



**Euclase:**  
End  
User  
Centered  
Language,  
APIs  
System and  
Environment



**Calcite:**  
Construction  
And  
Language  
Completion  
Integrated  
Throughout



**Apatite:**  
Associative  
Perusing of  
APIs  
That  
Identifies  
Targets  
Easily

**Crystal:**  
Clarifications  
Regarding  
Your  
Software using a  
Toolkit,  
Architecture and  
Language



**Jadeite:**  
Java  
API  
Documentation with  
Extra  
Information  
Tacked-on for  
Emphasis



**Jasper:**  
Java  
Aid with  
Sets of  
Pertinent  
Elements for  
Recall



**Mica:**  
Makes  
Interfaces  
Clear and  
Accessible

**Aquamarine:**  
Allowing  
Quick  
Undoing of  
Any  
Marks  
And  
Repair  
Improving  
Novel  
Editing



**GARNET**  
Generating an  
Amalgam of  
Real-time,  
Novel  
Editors and  
Toolkits



**Pebbles**  
PDAs for  
Entry of  
Both  
Bytes and  
Locations from  
External  
Sources



**Gneiss:**  
Gathering  
Novel  
End-user  
Internet  
Services using  
Spreadsheets



**Sugilite**  
Smartphone  
Users  
Generating  
Intelligent  
Likeable  
Interfaces  
Through  
Examples



**Glacier**  
Great  
Languages  
Allow  
Class  
Immutability  
Enforced  
Readily

**C32**  
CMU's  
Clever and  
Compelling  
Contribution to  
Computer Science in  
CommonLisp which is  
Customizable and  
Characterized by a  
Complete  
Coverage of  
Code and  
Contains a  
Cornucopia of  
Creative  
Constructs, because it  
Can  
Create  
Complex,  
Correct  
Constraints that are  
Constructed  
Clearly and  
Concretely, and  
Communicated using  
Columns of  
Cells, that are  
Constantly  
Calculated so they  
Change  
Continuously, and  
Cancel  
Confusion

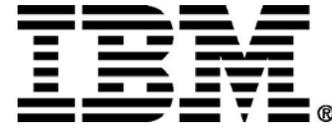
For more, see: [www.cs.cmu.edu/~bam/acronyms.html](http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~bam/acronyms.html)



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- Ruben Carbonell
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- Zizhuang (Zizzy) Yang
- YoungSeok Yoon

# Thank You!

## Programmers are Users Too: Human Centered Methods for Improving Tools for Programming

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