Differences in Cross-Cultural Onsite Customer Feedback Elicitation

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Introduction

- Our Mission
  - Enabling people to manage, mine, and interpret data, with high satisfaction and success.

- Customer Visit Goals:
  - To gain a better understanding of our users,
  - To learn about our users' use experience with our product,
  - To facilitate a bridge between the customers and the product teams.
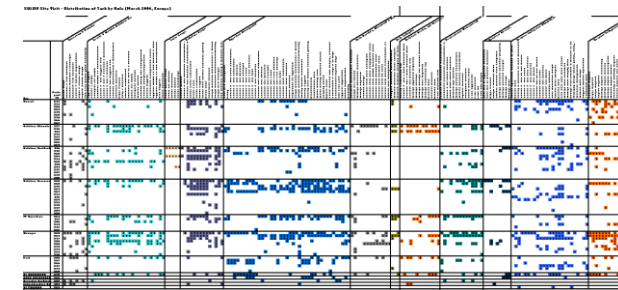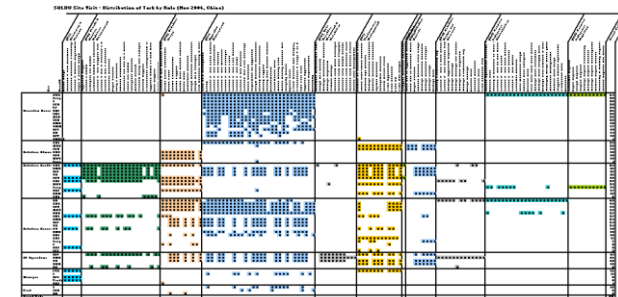
Introduction Cont.

- Customer Visit Process in General
  - Define research objectives
  - Identify customers
  - Planning/Scheduling
  - Execution
  - Data analysis
  - Reporting
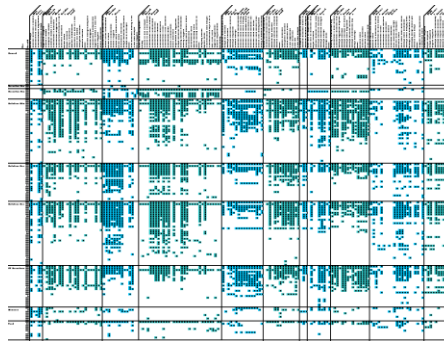
- Customer Visit Activities
  - Group discussion
  - Group exercise
  - Design validation
  - 1 on 1 interviews
  - Shadowing

US | China

US | Europe

Introduction

- Why site visit vs. technology mediated communication methods?
    - Easily establishing Common ground (Olson, Olson, 2000)
    - Quickly building trust and rapport as being in context (Bos, Olson, Gergle, Olson, and Wright 2002)
    - Access to visual cues and artifacts (Finn, Sellen, Wilbur, 1997)

- Difficulties in conducting cross-cultural onsite customer visit
    - Language, time zone
    - Cost (plan, schedule, travel, translation, data analysis)
    - Benefit (often multiplied by market share & customer profiles)

- Need to accommodate cultural differences in planning, scheduling and executing research activities.
    - Process differences
    - Communication style differences

Process Differences – Initial contact

UNITED STATES (US)

- No dependence on local contacts
  - Initial contact was made through acct mgrs and/or referrals.
  - We email our objectives to the customer with a time window.
  - Customer can agree or reject the request.

CHINA

- Largely relying on local contacts
  - We request customer profiles from local contacts (sales or ATS).
  - Sales/ATS negotiated with the customer for agenda, attendees and activities.
  - We have to make lots of follow-up phone calls with the local contacts to clarify any customer concerns before the visit.

Customer Request of Research Goals & Researcher Profiles

US

- No request
  - Customers typically don't ask about research objectives.
  - Sometimes they don't understand our goals and provide more attendees than expected for the initial meeting and follow-up interviews.

CHINA

- Formal & diplomatic
  - Request detailed info about our research objectives, activities, # of researchers, researcher titles, and profiles.
  - Using this info, they decide the meeting level, whether a CEO or CTO should need to attend.

Meeting Layout

US

- Relatively casual
  - Attendees sit casually and randomly regardless of one's title or level.
  - Come and go as they wish.

CHINA

- Power distance salient
  - Attendees sit in a distance to the meeting focal area relative to their level.
  - High level execs/mgrs sit closer to the meting.
  - Case 1: open up a spot for a high level manager
  - Case 2: an attendee moved back to his team

Meeting Activities

US

- Pretty much predefined
    - Activities based on research needs and customer availability.
    - Business/development process, group elicitation exercise, concept validation, interviews, shadowing

CHINA

- Predefined plan not applicable:
    - Need to adjust activity plan when on site.
    - No individual level activities - Replace 1:1 interviews with questionnaire.
    - No NDAs for individuals
    - No shadowing
    - Extensive group discussion

Communication Style

US

- Who speaks first and most
  - In general, executives and managers speak first and more.
  - On specific technical topics, ICs speak first and more.

- Critical style
  - "Hamburger mode"

CHINA

- Who speaks first and most
  - Executives and managers dominate the meetings.
  - They ask for conformation and details from their subordinates
  - It is common that they collect topics and issues before the meeting from Ics.

- Critical style
  - "Double bread hamburger"

Key Takeaways

- Planning
  - Provide a detailed meeting agenda and researcher profile.
  - Ask regional representatives to coordinate, attend the meetings, and translate as needed.
- Encourage critics
  - Encourage quiet attendees to speak up. You may want to ask follow-up questions: "Is this common in your work?"
  - Admit that the product is imperfect and that there are opportunities to improve the product. Keep asking about issues and probe deeper about the customer's use of the product features.

- Be flexible
  - If an NDA is not acceptable to customers and eliciting feedback on concept designs is not possible, use methods such as using existing product designs and asking for alternatives, or replacing the design validation with requirement/scenario discussion.
  - Use a collective group exercise.
  - Replace individual interviews with a questionnaire survey. Consider conducting the survey as a group activity.
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Food for thoughts

- Culture Dimension Attributes
  - Intrinsic vs. extrinsic
  - Dependency on situation/context?

- We are hiring.
  - Microsoft Career for UX designer and researcher positions.
  - Tuesday Job Fair.