Course C20
Building Affinity Diagrams to Reveal User Needs and Engage Developers
2 units

Instructor: Shelley Wood, InContext Enterprises

Benefits:
Affinity diagramming is fairly well known in the CHI community and used as a technique for organizing large amounts of information, especially qualitative data. However, the full potential of affinity diagramming—both as a technique for revealing design implications and as a powerful communication tool—is not being fully exploited.

Many people are building affinities through deductive reasoning—starting with an explicit or implicit set of categories and then slotting notes into the known categories. Building an affinity like this may organize the data, but doesn't tell you very much new about your customers and also buries new insights or important distinctions in their work. Much more valuable affinities are instead built through a true bottoms-up process, driven by a process of inductive reasoning with the data suggesting the labels for the groups rather than predefined categories. This process exposes and makes concrete common issues, distinctions, work patterns, and needs without losing individual variation.

Organizations also run into logistical and team management problems during affinity building. Because they don't have an explicit process to follow with guidelines for what works and what doesn't work for managing the process and the people involved, teams get overwhelmed and discouraged.

This course teaches how to build more powerful affinities, offers a process for managing organizational issues, and provides a mechanism for using the affinity as a communication tool across the organization.

Origins:
This course is based on material previously presented in InContext's Understanding Your Customer and Rapid Contextual Design workshops, which have been taught in public and on-site classes. A highly rated 90-minute version of this course was taught at CHI 2006. To allow for more practice time, the course is being extended from one unit to two units. The time extension will allow the participants to finish building two sections of a small affinity, receive feedback on their work, and see an example of a completed affinity.

Features:
Attendees in the course will:
1. Learn how affinity diagrams are used organize large amounts of qualitative data
2. Learn how to use inductive reason to create groupings of data and write affinity labels that reveal insights
3. Learn the process for building an affinity diagram
4. Learn guidelines for running an affinity building session and driving to completion
5. Learn Dos and Don'ts for placing notes and writing labels

6. Learn the principles of walking an affinity diagram for the design implications
7. Understand how to leverage the affinity as a communication device

Intended Audience:
No specific background is required. It is appropriate for all roles.

Presentation Style:
Lecture, group discussion, exercises

Instructor's Background:
Shelley Wood has more than 15 years of experience in the high technology industry. She provides side-by-side coaching and training for teams as they use Contextual Design. Shelley is a co-author of "Rapid Contextual Design."

Website for more information about the instructor: www.incontextdesign.com.