Pluralistic Walkthrough

By Richard Neves

WHAT IS IT?

The pluralistic walkthrough (Nielsen, 1994) is not a strict expert review but an inspection method where a team walkthrough an application.

WHY DO YOU NEED IT?

The method has a couple of really useful pros:

- Predicts user problems.
- Incorporates the feedback of multiple stakeholders including users, UX and developers.
- Produces a single set of usability problems from multiple participants.

However, it is quite a time and resource expensive method. It also requires a good facilitator to run effectively.

WHEN DO YOU NEED IT?

The walkthrough should happen early on, ahead of any user testing.

HOW DO YOU DO IT?

Preparation

1. Decide on the group of participants and facilitator. The participants should include the representative users, UX and members of the development team. Aim for 4-6 users, 2-3 each of development and UX – try not to overwhelm the users.
2. Prepare the tasks (focus on goals and areas of concern).
3. Prepare the prototype or screenshots.

The Walkthrough

4. One group member acts as the facilitator (usually a member of the UX team). They introduce the session, possibly providing an overview of the product and any key features.
5. They walkthrough the task, one screen at a time. At each screen, the group are asked to write down what the next action will be for the given task.

6. The facilitator convenes the discussion, asking the users first, followed by the developers and finally UX.
   - Developers can explain why something needs to be done a certain way, possibly citing data/technical constraints. They can also suggest solutions.
   - UX can explain why the want something a certain way, especially if it will be affected by any technical constraints. They can also provide recommendations and rationale.
7. The facilitator continues to moderate and progress the group through all the task screens, making discussion notes if there is no observer in attendance.

Analysis

8. Aggregate the problems raised by the users.
9. Assess the severity of the problems.
10. Align the documented solution recommendations from development and the UX recommendations and rationale with the issues raised by the users.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

This evaluation method was first presented in the book *Usability Inspection Methods*:

R. Bias "The Pluralistic Usability Walkthrough: Coordinated Empathies:, in J. Nielsen & R. Mack "Usability Inspection Methods", Chapter 3, pp.63-76, John Wiley, 1994.