Supporting Generation Y Interactions: Challenges for Office Work

Wei Liu

ID-StudioLab, TUDelft

Landbergstraat 15

2628 CE, Delft, The Netherlands

wei.liu@tudelft.nl

Pieter Jan Stappers

ID-StudioLab, TUDelft

Landbergstraat 15

2628 CE, Delft, The Netherlands

p.j.stappers@tudelft.nl

Gert Pasman

ID-StudioLab, TUDelft

Landbergstraat 15

2628 CE, Delft, The Netherlands

g.j.pasman@tudelft.nl

Jenneke Taal-Fokker

User eXperience Team, Exact

Molengraaffsingel 33

2629 JD, Delft, The Netherlands

jenneke.taal@exact.com

Abstract

With Generation Y entering the workforce, for the first time IT supported tools at home are more advanced than these tools at work. This project aims to understand and model this friction and its challenges through a sequence of literature review and interviews. We identified six qualities of interactions and how they occur in private and work contexts. Based on these findings, we aim to develop guidelines as well as demonstrators that support Generation Y interactions in future office work.

Keywords

Generation Y, interaction style, office work

ACM Classification Keywords

H.1.2 User/Machine Systems: Human factors.

General Terms

Human factors.

Introduction

Over the past decades the workplace has been dominated by a workforce who grew up interacting with computers through their IT supported work tools, which were more advanced than the basic equipment they used in their private lives. However, a new workforce named Generation Y (born between 1980-2000), is quickly entering the job market, for which this situation

is just the opposite. Being the first generation of digital natives, they grew up with hi-tech equipment, such as mobile phones and wireless Internet, in their private domains. In their office work, however, the rich interactions that these new technologies offer, are hardly supported. Our study aims to understand this friction, and provide guidelines for improving the fit.

Figure 1 shows our research framework, which distinguishes three major components: Generation Y (people), information technology (IT), and work context. On the intersections of these three components lie the interactions we want to understand. Literature research provided us with an overview of current knowledge, trends, and the state-of-the-art for each component, but also revealed that not much has been published on the intersections. Therefore, in a series of interviews at four companies, we tried to gain insights into the frictions at these intersections. In further studies we intend, mainly through prototyping and case studies, to fill in the frictions with our understanding of these intersections, and ultimately to come to guidelines for supporting Generation Y interactions in office work situations.
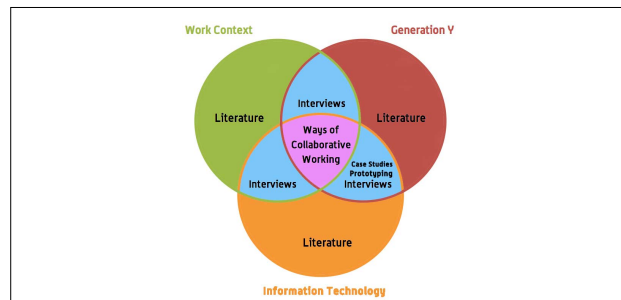

figure 1. The Proposed Research Framework.

In the sections below, we present our findings to date on the three components and their intersections. The paper concludes with our plans for continuing the research.

Generation Y

While most contemporary research [2,4] on Generation Y mainly focuses on marketing and demographic aspects, we consider behavior to be the main factor for defining Generation Y. Therefore, our focus group consists of people who have been experiencing digital technology in their entire lives, and consequently have developed new behaviors in interacting with people, products, and services.

Information Technology

The rapid development of information technology in the past few decades has also enabled the introduction of a number of highly engaging tools in everyday life, such as instant messaging, podcasting, blogging, and social networking. These tools offer people new ways of interacting, which enables them to retrieve and broadcast an enormous amount of digital information, something they could never have done before [4]. IT creates a (digital) platform for Generation Y to learn, communicate, and work, as well as train them as "intuitive visual communicators" who have strong digital skills [3]. As a result of being constantly exposed to (digital) knowledge seamlessly, Generation Y is more socially active by quickly exchanging information with other people. They are capable and ready to integrate their "virtual world with their physical world" [1]. IT makes them multi-taskers who connect themselves perpetually with instant (mobile) channels and work collaboratively with social networks.

Work Context

Work context has also changed dramatically during the past few decades as society makes the transition from an industrial age to a knowledge age [4]. During this transformation, new work styles, tools, locations, and patterns have changed the ways office workers work today. This creates a better-connected, more competitive, and increasingly complex work environment. Key trends are increasing collaboration within virtual teams (geographically spread), the changing demand for flexible employment (in time and place), and the increased number of mobile workers. In addition to these trends, office workers have much more choice in products or services that help them to do their work. Suppliers of these products or services have to create added value on top of a commodity offering (automation is no longer a selling point). In a recent user research workshop among wholesale entrepreneurs at Exact (figure 2), we found that office workers value a smart collaboration between people and information in their network. This gives direct and relevant insight and helps them run their business better. To them, information is the key to collaborate and to deliver the best customer service themselves.

figure 2. User Research Workshop at Exact.

Identifying Generation Y Interactions

Besides literature review and a workshop, four contextual interviews with Generation Y workers have taken place at four companies. We found that this type of office workers put very high demands on the applications, services, devices, and networks that enable and support collaborative work. They expressed that some (online) collaborative tools that assist them efficiently and pleasantly in their private life were not available or did not meet their expectation in their work settings. They also stated that instant communication channels were lacking at work, highlighting a significant friction in expectations vs. reality. Considering this situation, future work support should take further steps to accommodate these new and evolving ways of communication and collaboration. From these interviews, we have identified six key-qualities of interactions typical for Generation Y. These were explored in storyboarded scenarios based on the interviews. Table 1 describes the qualities with specific examples for IT supported private and work contexts, in order to help understand how they are missing in office work.

Qualities	Private Life	Work
Instant	Use Twitter to tweet	Check email
Collaborative	Game with virtual friends	Discuss in group
Playful	Send emoticon in Skype	-
Expressive	Shake iPhone to shuffle	Present a PPT
Responsive	Tap to wake up a device	Answer a phone
Flexible	Telework besides office	Work in office

table 1. Examples of Qualities of Interactions in Private Life and Work.

Based on these qualities a number of possible design guidelines can be foreseen, which could drive the development of future office work support, such as:

- Any content for interacting has to be playful, expressive, and responsive.
- Collaborative working requires an engaging (digital) platform for gathering and exchanging information.
- New mobile offerings should enhance instant and context-aware communications, result in flexible working conditions.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued that to successfully support the generation of office workers that is now currently entering the market, future business tools and services should fit in with richer ways of collaborative interactions. The challenges lie in further supporting Generation Y interactions within the context of office work, developing new tools that support these interactions, and studying how they could affect future ways of collaborative working. We need to do further studies to determine these challenges fit into concrete work contexts in industrial practice. Conducting more qualitative research studies to further identify and formulate design guidelines as well as designing and testing, through a "research through design" cycle [5], prototypes in which these guidelines are implemented, will thus be critical to support Generation Y interactions in a work context. The work presented here is intended as a first step in this direction.

Acknowledgements

References

[1] Accenture. *Millennial are at the Gates.* High Performance IT Research (2008).

[2] Litmus. *Decoding the Digital Millennials*. Colombus, OH: Resource Interactive (2006).

[3] Oblinger, D.G., Oblinger, J.L. *Educating the Net Generation.* EDUCAUSE (2005).

http://www.educause.edu/educatingthenetgen/

[4] Oxygen Report. *Generation Y and the Workplace Annual Report 2010*. Johnson Controls (2010).

[5] Stappers, P.J. *Doing Design as a Part of Doing Research.* Design Research Now: Essays and Selected Projects. Birkhauser Verlag AG (2007), 81-91.