Let Your User Be Your Guide

User-Centered Taxonomy Development in Complex Domains

Problem

You can't always design for topics you know really well. What should you do if your next project is in a complicated but unfamiliar field, such as the law or medicine?

Imagine this: You're a great IA, and you've been asked to build an intranet for a global health research organization. Data management, search, and research collaboration are all part of the assignment. Unfortunately you don't know your *vital registry* from your *common indicator*! You better figure out what you're doing right quick. How can you gain a basic understanding of the topic while simultaneously producing actionable insights about taxonomy, navigation, and content?

Solution

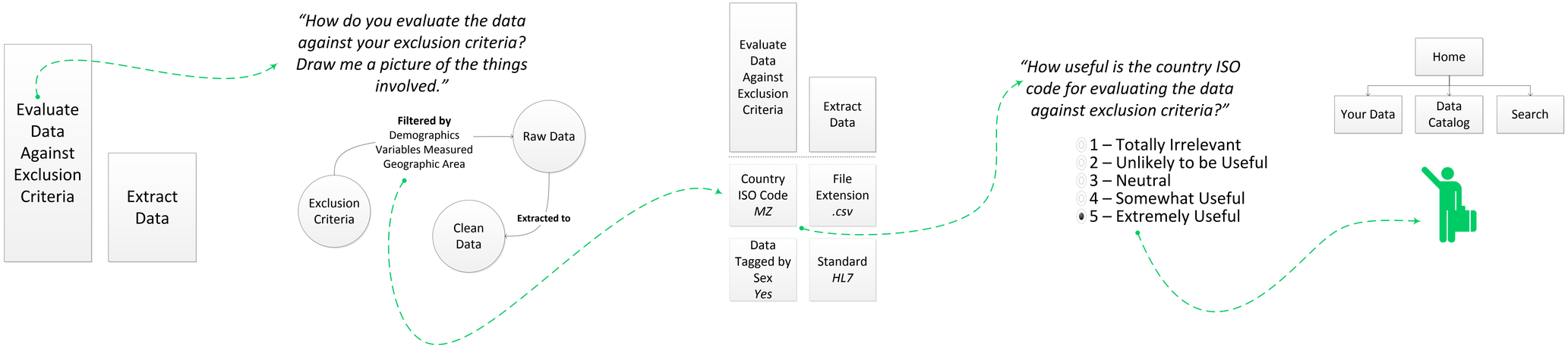
Step 1: Mental Modeling (Young)
- Build "towers", i.e. mental spaces, from interviews and surveys
- *Outcome:* Formulate questions for guided topic mapping

Step 2: Guided Topic Maps (Tonkin)
- Participants draw topic map
- Researcher leads exercise by using towers from previous step as question prompts
- *Outcome:* Important entities and relationships made explicit

Step 3: Prototype Taxonomy (Holsapple)
- Researcher proposes specific metadata elements to support each mental space, based on attributes revealed in concept mapping
- *Outcome:* Draft taxonomy reviewed by experts

Step 4: Evaluation (Zhang)
- All metadata elements evaluated according to usefulness with respect to tower they support
- Combination of surveying and consensus building
- *Outcome:* Iteration and prioritization

Step 5: Sitemap + Wireframe Iteration
- Build according to what you've learned
- Define priority tasks from Step 1, Mental Models
- Top-level pages should be clear from the concept map too
- Iterate and circulate until consensus



Reasoning

	Task-based	Conceptual
Generative	**Step 1: Young** *Interview-driven mental modeling*	**Step 2: Tonkin** *Guided topic maps*
Evaluative	**Step 4: Zhang** *Evaluation through task-based surveying*	**Step 3: Holsapple** *Collaborative + iterative review* *"Delphi" method*

This process is intended to capture the two axes that are important in user-centered design: task-based (what the user is trying to do) versus conceptual (abstract notions about the makeup of reality); and generative (brainstorming new designs) versus evaluative (testing existing designs).

The multi-step process above covers all the combinations shown at left.

Send Feedback or Get in Touch

Adam Taplin
taplina@uw.edu
@aktaplin

Dr. Jinha Lee
jinhalee@uw.edu
@ElegantLogic

Information School®
UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

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