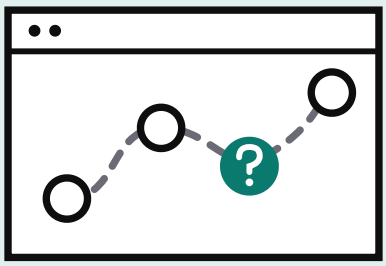
Method

Cognitive walkthrough

An inspection method in which a team goes through a task action by action and, at each one, asks whether a person using the system for the first time would know what to do.



In Spanish
Recorrido cognitivo

Origin
Lewis, Polson, Wharton and Rieman (1990)

Output
The list of steps where a newcomer would get stuck, and why

What it's for

It helps you find the points where an interface isn't understood the first time, especially when no people are available to test it.

Key elements

Through a beginner's eyes
It assesses whether people learn by using it, not whether it's fast for someone who already knows it.

One concrete task
You first define what the person wants to achieve and the correct sequence of actions.

Four questions at each step
Will they try to do the right thing? Will they see the action? Will they link it to what they want? Will they notice they're making progress?

How it's done

1

Choose a task and write down the correct sequence of actions to complete it.

2

The team goes through each action and answers the four questions with a newcomer in mind.

3

Each "no" is noted with its reason and an idea to fix it.

Applications in design

When to use it

When it matters that someone understands the product the first time they use it, or before testing it with people.

Avoid

Walking through the task thinking of how you would do it, since you already know the interface.

Don't fall for it

It doesn't replace testing with people: use it to reach those tests with the obvious errors already fixed.

Connections

Builds on

- Nielsen's usability heuristics

Used by

- UI design

Related to

- Usability testing

Authors and works

1990	**Clayton Lewis, Peter Polson, Cathleen Wharton and John Rieman**	Proposed the method to review walk-up-and-use interfaces, such as an ATM or a kiosk.
1994	**Cathleen Wharton, John Rieman, Clayton Lewis and Peter Polson**	Simplified it into a practical guide for teams, with the four questions asked at each action.

Sources

Original sources

- Lewis, C., Polson, P., Wharton, C., & Rieman, J. (1990). Testing a walkthrough methodology for theory-based design of walk-up-and-use interfaces. In Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '90) (pp. 235–242). ACM. View source (https://doi.org/10.1145/97243.97279)
- Wharton, C., Rieman, J., Lewis, C., & Polson, P. (1994). The cognitive walkthrough method: A practitioner's guide. In J. Nielsen & R. L. Mack (Eds.), Usability inspection methods (pp. 105–140). Wiley.

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