User-Centered Design: Science Or Window Dressing?

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Designing information systems with the user in mind, generally referred to as 'user-centered design' has become an established goal of much of the work in information science. According to this approach, activities such as user studies, usability evaluations, and user analyses (amongst others) must be performed if we are to either advance our field or design better systems. However, despite the rhetoric, user-centered design methods are not uniform in nature, and the variability in application of the user-centered approach is leading some researchers to question its value. Negroponte (1996) argues that good design will attract its own users, while Heinbokeke et al (1996) found that adopting user-centered approaches actually led to more problems in many designs. This panel explores the extent to which there is real substance behind the rhetoric of user-centeredness in our research and practice, explores ways in which we can improve the quality and applicability of data and inputs from users, and engages in debate and discussion with the audience on the real values of user-centered design for the field.

Specifically, the panel will address the following issues:

1. To what extent is there any meaningful agreement in what is called 'user-centered' design or is user-centeredness now a 'catch-all' for all research in IS?
2. What do you fail to learn when you rely solely on users for input on decisions?
3. When do users not know what is best for them?
4. How can we improve our methods for gaining input from users and improve the output of such methods so that it informs our theories and models?
5. Is it time for a new philosophy of information science?
6. Have we uncovered significant knowledge of users since the advent of the user-centered approach?

The goal of the panel is to stimulate a wide-ranging discussion among attendees of the theory, practice and philosophy of our field.

REFERENCES
