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End-user development (EUD) aims to empower users who are not professional programmers to develop or modify software in a variety of contexts such as work, home, or leisure activities. In all these contexts we are surrounded by increasingly sophisticated software technology, and we interact with this technology in a number of nontrivial ways. Our interactions would thus often cross the boundary from simple choices, such as selecting an e-mail address from a list of contacts, to activities which are in effect software development, such as devising e-mail filtering rules.

End-user development appeared in the context of office and professional work, enabled by the proliferation of personal computers. This brought computing power out of data processing centers onto the desktops of professional workers and management, giving them direct control over their reports and financial models and raising general issues of information control and empowerment, studied under the umbrella of end-user computing. Initial optimistic visions of end-user development drew parallels between programmers and chauffeurs, suggesting the user friendliness of software will soon increase to a degree where we would be able to “drive,” or develop our applications, without the help of specialists.

Taking stock of the progress a quarter of a century later, we are better positioned to see the complexity of the full picture. We have indeed achieved some success in narrow areas such as cognitive design of EUD languages and visual interactive interfaces, AI tools providing automatic inference of user intentions. However, a number of organizational and behavioral studies of end-user development practices and risks have made us realize that the complexity of the problem is in addressing the interactions between all these components, including the
reversal of the cost-benefit balance for, and in the provision of appropriate support and environment to foster EUD activities.

At the same time, the elements of EUD solutions are developed, like the components of a modern aircraft, all other the scientific “world,” distributed within separate communities aligned with diverse academic disciplines such as cognitive psychology, knowledge engineering, and organizational behavior. Software engineers build tools, cognitive psychologists produce increasingly sophisticated problem-solving models, management and social scientists publish interesting results from their studies of end-user computing practices and factors, yet papers and systems bridging these elements are few and far between.

Bringing solution components together in a holistic approach to EUD would be an important milestone to realizing the vision of end-user development. This special issue is conceived as the first step in this direction, seeking articles and themes which transcend individual disciplines and focus on the technology interaction aspects within development, cognitive, and social contexts. The diversity of topics and backgrounds make the selection of reviewers and the coordination of their recommendations a challenging task, as evidenced by the number of names on our list of reviewers. As guest editors, we hope that the set of chosen articles witnesses the success of this endeavor, and we would like to thank our reviewers for their effort in this respect.

The first article by Åsand and Mørch uses Activity Theory as a conceptual analysis framework to analyze real-world tailoring practices in a sophisticated organizational context, explored through a case study where a complex business application is implemented in an accounting company. The organizational context embeds formally defined roles of end users, super users, and application coordinators, and the article offers interesting findings regarding the relationships and interactions between these roles, concluding that the role of super users fills an important niche in supporting organization-wide EUD. The analysis in the article results in two critical success factors when implementing complex generic applications in distributed organizations: institutionalization of user tailoring practices and grounding the tailoring activities within the context of work. The recommendations of this article would benefit other organizations in their EUD efforts.

The second article by McGill and Klisc is also concerned with organizational issues of supporting EUD, with a focus on approaches to alleviating risks of EUD. It compares perceptions and opinions regarding risk management within two contexts: end-user development of Web pages with end-user development of spreadsheets. The article uses a questionnaire-based survey to gather information regarding practices and perceptions of Web page development among end users. The importance of the Web page development context comes from the external nature of the Web pages as development artifacts, which means that consequences of end-user development are much wider than the conventional EUD activities such as spreadsheet development, and mistakes can affect core business processes involving customers and suppliers. The survey targets end users who are known to have developed spreadsheets, probing the extent to which they undertake Web page development, and using their experience of EUD in both contexts. One interesting finding is that training is perceived to be the most important approach to risk reduction, despite the lack of such training among the survey sample of end-user developers.
The article by Costabile et al. analyzes the richness of working practices, representations, and tacit knowledge found in professional communities, and explores the interactions between these and software tools at the levels of use, design and metadesign. It proposes the SSW (software shaping workshops) methodology, which focuses on enabling the participation of end users in the development of their software environments to ensure the environment is tuned to their needs. The tools used in everyday work of users are gathered in environments called application workshops, while the tools necessary to design and customize those are gathered in system workshops, and so forth. This contribution is grounded in the medical domain, and a field study of physicians and their activities of customizing their workshops is reported in the article.

The fourth article by Jahnke et al. also targets the health care domain, and proposes a novel approach to enabling end-user development of Web portals. Web portals have recently gained importance in information-rich and agile domains such as health care. As the size and complexity of portal-based content delivery applications increases, current component-based technologies are no longer suitable because of their significant cognitive overload for end-user developers in terms of type checking, debugging, and complex metaphors. The core innovation reported in the article is the use of the semantic-based composition model, achieving integration of ontologies and component-based technology to simplify end-user development in this particular context. The proposed approach is implemented in a tool and evaluated using an application scenario.

These four articles cover only part of the variety of studies and ideas relevant to the creation of a working approach to end-user development by bridging diverse perspectives. However, we hope that they demonstrate the potential for realistic achievements in this direction, once the importance of interactions between the technology, organizational, and cognitive dimensions of end-user development is recognized and addressed.

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