Inclusive Design: an accelerating vehicle and its limits (Reply)

'Inclusive Design' (ID), a wider concept[1] than its earlier predecessors 'design-for-all' or 'universal design', has been promoted for quite some time and the efforts are starting to bear fruit. This is becoming manifest in a number of ways. A direct effect is the increased awareness of industrial designers who have become familiar with the concept at school and at advanced training courses[2,3]. Consequently, the user categories of products are being widened toward those with lesser perceptual, cognitive, and motor abilities. Indirectly this may also result in more extensive user involvement in the development process of industrial products and services, which in itself is a key factor for improving quality, functionality, and user interface. An indirect effect is the emergence of standards based on the ID concept, which, although often not binding, help to increase awareness if not compliance. The letter of Sandhu[4] provides evidence for a potentially even wider impact, i.e. in the sphere of political backing of formal rules and standards. The targeted areas correspond largely with the areas identified for gerontechnology focus as reported in matrix form[5]. Consequently, direct and indirect promotion of the concept of inclusive design is in the best interest of older people world-wide. So we are awaiting anxiously the appearance on the mass market place of whole ranges of real ID products, services, and indeed environments, exemplary for the new trend and showing the real value of the ID concept.

Additionally, we will have to think about the limits of the ID concept. Obviously, such limits do exist. For every product, there are perceptual, cognitive, and motor limits of the user below which the product becomes more difficult to use or even fully unusable. For people of which one or more of such limits are being surpassed, we need products or product additions that are specifically directed at dealing with the visual, auditory, cognitive, motor, and/or mobility restrictions. The promotion of the ID concept should not lead us to neglect the ambitions and needs of those categories of users who, by no fault of their own, fail to be satisfied by products marked as ID products. Also, it remains essential to realise that users with a restriction of some sort, can be normal users in other respects each with their individual ambitions, pursuits, and preferences. When promoting ID, the wide range of individual differences surpassing that presupposed by any economically viable ID product or service has to be made explicit. This amounts to the need for some hard work to establish the real limits within which the ID concept can be pursued, without the risk of an unrealistic over-optimism that will bounce back.

References

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