

Adapting to Bad Design

By Theresa Wilkinson

People never cease to fascinate me. Every research study I conduct teaches me something new, but one of the most intriguing studies I conducted was for a customer service application, InQuira, at an insurance company.

As I conducted contextual inquiries with the customer support staff for several days, I was fascinated to discover that most of them did not use the InQuira product as intended. They did not use the search functionality at all. One CSR impressed me by stating how long it took to perform a search and get results (not always the desired results) - 203 seconds if you're curious.

If they weren't using the product, how did they help the customers? They adapted. People are adept at adapting to their environments because they have had to do it for millions of years. If they didn't adapt, they would not survive.¹

Pain Points of the Current System:

- The InQuira system is challenging to use, and the search function is ineffective.
- Finding information in the system takes 203 seconds, and it may not even be the correct information. This impacts on the CSR's Average Call Time (ACT).
- 50% of support calls require information that is only available in the InQuira system.
- If the CSR cannot find the solution, they must call the Help Desk and wait for the answer, which also impacts on the CSR's Average Call Time (ACT).

So, how did CSRs find the information they needed to do their job? They adapted.

- 43% (10 out of 23) used PLMR Subscriptions

- 30% (7 out of 23) used shared PowerPoint decks
- 13% (3 out of 23) used screen-savers with PLMRs
- 9% (2 out of 23) called the Help Desk
- 4% (1 out of 23) used Post-It Notes with PLMRs

The CSRs created what they called “subscriptions” - lists of links to the PLMRs. A PLMR is the page within InQuira containing the necessary claim information. CSRs shared updated subscriptions in daily “huddle meetings.” One CSR even created a PowerPoint that resembled an iPad with the PLMRs. Experienced CSRs also emailed their subscription lists to new CSRs since they were more likely to abandon the search and call the Help Desk due to insecurity.

These CSRs adapted remarkably well to bad design to perform their jobs successfully. “We share information, we create and pass on knowledge. That's the means by which humans are able to adjust to new situations, and it's what differentiates humans from our earlier ancestors, and our earlier ancestors from primates,” said Rick Potts, director of the Human Origins Program at the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History.¹

¹Massey, Nathanael & ClimateWire, 25 September 2013 “Humans May Be the Most Adaptive Species” (<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/humans-may-be-most-adaptive-species/>)