

DB304 – Mental Models
Reflection
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Why

With choosing this module I wanted to broaden my interest in the workings of the human brain. As I believe that psychology is an important part of design I needed to find out how these elements influence human interaction. By learning how a human perceives, reasons and act with an intelligent system I wanted to see how my basic knowledge in social psychology could be broadened by new knowledge and add to my abstract way of thinking.

Mental Exhaustion

For me the most intense part of the module was combining the presented theory and frameworks with my own, and my groups' reasoning while developing the mental models based on the five concepts. While this discussing way of working does help to create a better understanding of the principle of mental models in general, it also exposed the immense complexity when you try to apply them. I noticed for myself that during the process I really need this framework (perceive-reason-act) to distinguish the several elements of the models. With that given I also need to limit this process into a reasonable outcome. As a designer I often have the tendency to implement every possible aspect when working something out. With such a complex process it is necessary to set clear goals and boundaries in order to sufficiently use the time given and create a satisfying level of understanding.

Learning from existing products

An quick way to reach that level of understanding was when we used the 'Learning from a Learning Thermostat' paper. At first I was a bit skeptical about using this theory for creating our own understanding. I first wanted to try to grasp the subject myself. However, talking about limiting the size of the process, it can be very helpful to use these kind of studies as an inspiration for thinking about intelligent system behavior. At this point it appeared that this literature gave the right means to wrap up our own research and give the insight necessary to continue (mutual intelligibility). This showed me that I have to search for this balance between my own reasoning and existing knowledge during the process.

Not so social?

Although I was learning a lot during the module I did not directly felt that these new frameworks and theories were adding to my interest in social psychology. This focus on intelligent systems focused on a type of interaction I did not directly associated with social processes between people. It however became interesting when I started to compare these two different aspects of interaction. Whereas people adapt their existing knowledge to other people based on how they think of themselves as humans, we are not capable of knowing how an intelligent system thinks and learns. Looking into these kind of social processes in comparison to the interaction with, for example, a Learning Thermostat, I think it is valuable to think about the way people interpret this new learning of intelligent systems. The way we interact with other people can be a valuable starting point when creating products and services that can 'think' and learn from interaction.