

End-user participation in design – an informal approach

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Abstract

The European Trade Union Technical Bureau for Health and Safety (TUTB) and The Joint Programme for Working Life Research in a European Perspective in Sweden (SALTSA) have recently commissioned a programme of research to collect case studies where end users have been involved in the process of redesign or procurement of equipment for their workplace. The information from these cases was to be used to promote the importance of utilising end user knowledge in the development of equipment standards. The underlying premise for this approach is that end users have valuable knowledge about the interactions of the equipment with themselves as users, their work environment and the process being undertaken.

In the literature there are many reports of organisational participatory ergonomics programmes and the systems that have been employed to introduce ergonomics on a wide scale. There are fewer examples of small-scale participatory ergonomics initiatives. It is suggested however that there may be a number of 'barriers' to organisations adopting a systematic approach. Whilst some of the cases collected for the project used such an approach there were many that were more 'ad hoc' or informal in nature. This paper discusses some of these cases and suggests that such an informal approach may be a useful first step to developing a more systematic approach within an organisation.

Introduction

The field of participatory ergonomics has developed over the past twenty years and there has been an increasing number of reports in the literature as to the development and implementation of participatory ergonomics approaches within organisations. The principle of participation in the application of ergonomics is fundamental to a user centred design approach but whilst traditional methods such as user trials and observation and interviews with operators have been used and repeatedly reported, the methods described in the participatory ergonomics literature have been quite varied. The field of participatory ergonomics has developed its own methods (such as Design Decision Groups, Wilson, 1995) as well as borrowing them from other domains (such as focus groups and brainstorming). The variety of methods and