When Users Hate Help

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HELP

Research findings

- Users don't know help exists
- Users know help exists but choose not to invest time figuring out how to use it
- Users try to use it and get frustrated the first time and never return
- Users are told not to use help by supervisors

Default argument

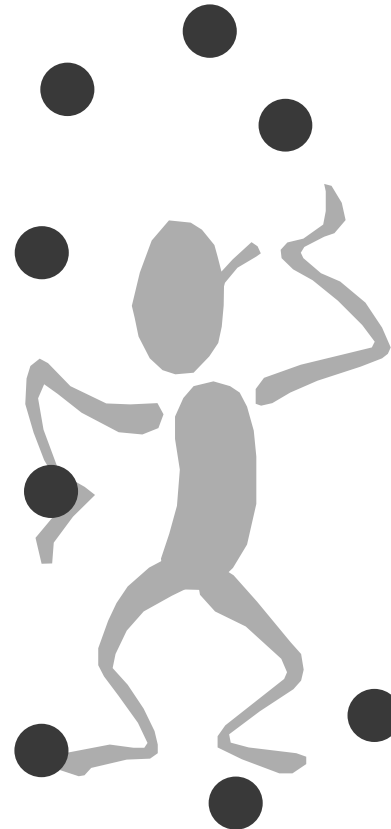- "We just have to make the users use the help system."

Corporate position

- Help is cheap (no paper, no shipping)
- Context-sensitivity is not important
- No printing allowed

Writer position

- Creating Help is the "in" thing to do
- I need a Help system
  on my resume
- I like to be seen
  as the Help expert
- Content and design
  take a back seat
  to using the tools

The reality is . . .

- We can't make customers do anything
- Training won't necessarily help if the rewards are negligible
- We've already trained our customers not to use help
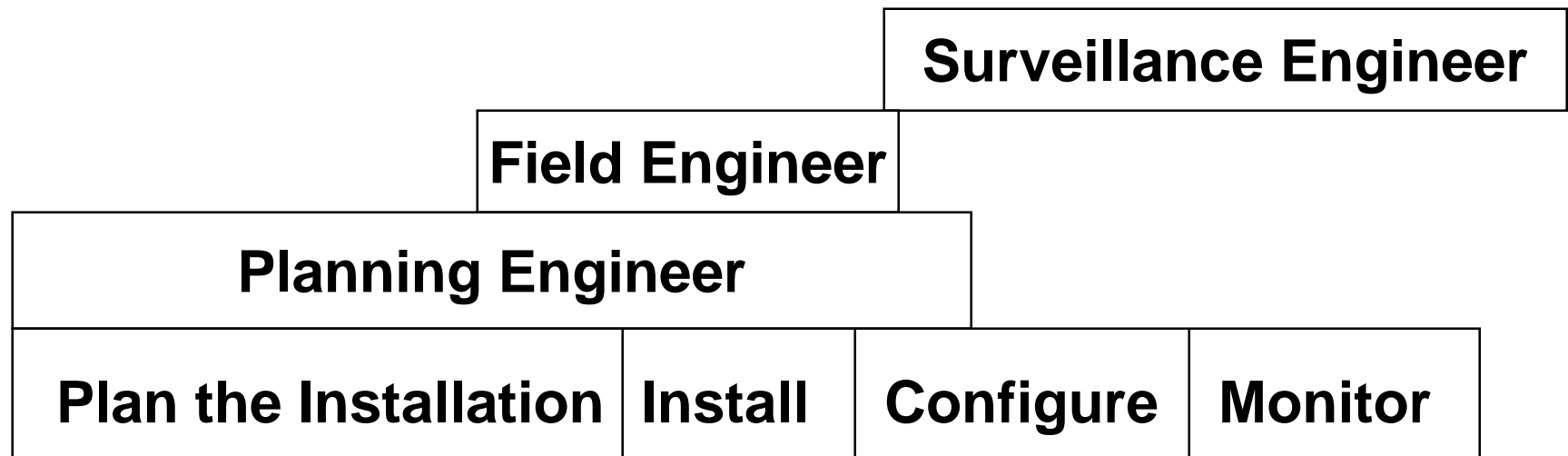- Customers are more interested in content than in clever screen displays

The necessity . . .

- Information needs to match the users' workflow

- Information needs are different at different points in the workflow

- Different users need different types of information to perform tasks successfully

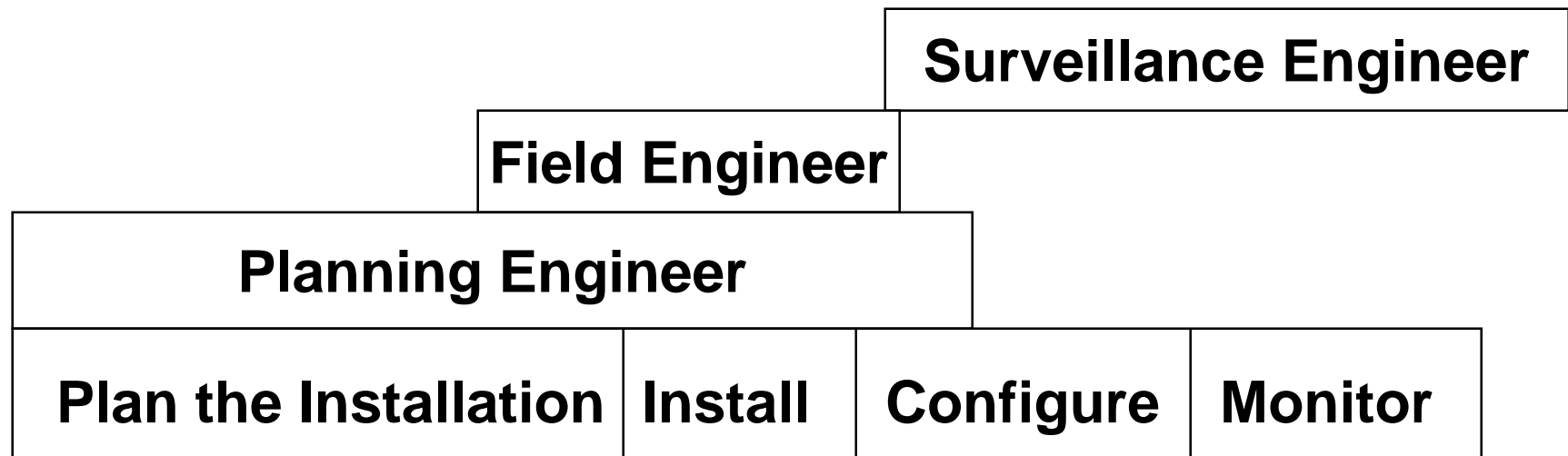# The Workflow

Plan the Installation	Install	Configure	Monitor

The Users

			Surveillance Engineer
		Field Engineer	
	Planning Engineer		
Plan the Installation	Install	Configure	Monitor

The Integrated Learning Points

			Surveillance Engineer
		Field Engineer	
	Planning Engineer		
Plan the Installation	Install	Configure	Monitor

What is . . . ?   When . . . ?   What way . ?   What is . . . ?

What way . ?   How to . . . ?   How to . . . ?   How to . . . ?

How to . . . ?

The Integrated Learning Points

- ILPs describe the integration of learning with the users' workflow

- ILPs identify which users need information during the workflow

- ILPs focus on what information is needed at what point in the workflow process

The best solution

- The best information is presented when it is needed, in the context of the users' tasks
- The best information is part of the interface
- The best information is unobtrusive

The technical workflow

Planning Engineer	Field Engineer	Surveillance Engineer
Planning checklist	Install plan	Alarm messages
System overview	Install safety	Alarm resolution
Capacity measures	Install methods	Computer monitoring
Test methods		Corrective actions
Provisioning	Preventive	Service requests
Configuration	maintenance	
	Removal and	
	replacement	
	Testing	

Information solutions

Planning Engineer	Field Engineer	Surveillance Engineer
Forms	Procedures	Definitions
Tables	Flow charts	Procedures
Extended text	Tables	Flow charts
Graphics		
Flow charts	Notes	Notes
Calculators		Forms
Procedures	Graphics	
	Procedures	

Solutions

- Begin from the users' point of view
  - What does the user find difficult about using the software?

◯	**Black and white**
◯	**Pure black and white**

Prints the entire presentation in only black and white.
Changes all shades of gray to either black or white.

Solutions

- Understand the nature of the user's tasks

<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:10px;">

○ **Grayscale**

○ **Pure black and white**

</div>

New Version

Solutions

- Begin from the users' point of view
  - What is the user actually trying to accomplish?

> **How do I begin my first project?**

Solutions

- **Start with information design**
  - What are the users' goals?
  - What tasks are needed to support those goals?
  - What information comes first?
  - What is the best way to name the topics?
  - How are topics related?
  - How do you help your users learn?
  - How do you help your users "do"?

Solutions

- Start with information design
  - Is the software designed to support user tasks?
  - Should the software interface design provide the workflow structure?
  - Is another structure better, more effective?

Solutions

- Redesign the user interface
  - Is help the best solution?
  - Is a better designed interface the real solution?
  - Is a custom interface the best?
  - Is a custom information set possible?
  - Should help be part of the interface?
    More words – more content -- more context

Custom information

- Dynamically configured content
- Password security
- Information responsive to user actions

Technology

- Winhelp (no longer supported??)
- HTML Help (context-sensitive, compiled)
- HTML
  - Web Help
  - Java Help
- XML/XSL custom interface
- Embedded Help

Technology

- ## Wizard or Coach
  - ### Provide a special interface to direct the user through an activity

- ## Learning module
  - ### Provide information elements that allow demonstration and practice

- ## Performance Support System
  - ### Provide information that supports task performance

Justifying redesign

- Partner with customer support
- Meet the customer
- Involve customers in the redesign effort
- Develop a prototype and test
- Don't waste time and money on something that nobody wants