



# The HFI UX Maturity Survey – 2009

## Findings

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“HFI’s UX Maturity Survey indicates that stable, visible, internal usability and user experience groups with executive support have become significantly more prevalent since Schaffer (2004) outlined the elements of a mature usability/user experience practice. But having a presence is not the same as having a practice.”

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### Table of Contents

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Introduction	4
What makes a usability group mature?	4
The Survey	7
Findings	8
Organization Type	8
Where Interface Design Fits	8
Global Location	9
Executive Sponsorship - Champion	9
Executive Sponsorship - Level	10
User Interface Standards - Published	10
User Interface Standards - Required	11
Usability Method - Common Method	11
Usability Method - Required	12
Usability Method - Required Activities	12
Tools - Shared	13
Professional Staff - Recognize Usability	13
Professional Staff - Full-Time Practitioners	14
Professional Staff - Certified Staff	14
Training - Advanced Training (Practitioners)	15
Training - Outreach & Awareness	15
Showcase Projects - Recognized	16
Knowledge Management - Collected & Shared	16
Knowledge Management - What is shared?	17
Digital Strategy & Governance - Vision Statement	17
Digital Strategy & Governance - Governance Committee	18
Digital Strategy & Governance - Reporting to Governance	18
Conclusions	19
What's Next?	20

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### Introduction

User experience is the new differentiator in customer service. Just as service is key to customer satisfaction in face-to-face environments, customer satisfaction in the internet age turns on user-centered design, whether your work faces the customer or the organization's staff. Providing websites that customers can easily learn and confidently use leads to improved customer satisfaction and increased loyalty. Sites, applications, and tools that are task-relevant and usable allow staff to complete tasks more efficiently and cost effectively.

But how routine is usability, really? Do organizations have established user experience groups? Or do user experience professionals still float through, doing just-in-time work and grass roots evangelizing? What do teams look like? How established are the established groups? Do they use a common method? Published standards? Tools that support robust research best practice design? Training? Do practitioners aggregate and share their findings or does each project team reinvent the wheel each time? And who really does the work?

To better understand the state of the industry, Human Factors International has conducted the first survey of UX maturity within organizations. Our primary goal was to develop a snapshot of the user experience operations within usability-aware organizations world-wide. Second, we developed *The User Experience Maturity Checklist*. Taken together, the findings and checklist help usability/user experience professionals understand where their organization is on the path to maturity, and what to do next.

While Schaffer's Usability Maturity model, below, identifies the hallmarks of a fully mature user experience program, there is no single template for any organization to achieve usability maturity. As we note in our concluding remarks, interpreting the survey results as part of a larger user experience strategy is a separate step requiring a full assessment of your organization's size, culture, market, and management challenges.

### What makes a usability group mature?

In his 2004 book, *Institutionalization of Usability: A Step-by-Step Guide*, Eric Schaffer describes a roadmap to institutionalization within organizations. Based on 25 years of observation, he describes the elements and characteristics of maturing and mature usability practices. He defines the stages of maturation, and describes the landmines that typically thwart progress and the contexts in which they occur.

# The HFI UX Maturity Survey – 2009 / Findings

## HFI's Usability Maturity Model

**Usability Maturity Model**

Legend:  Not there,  Somewhat present,  Present

Usability Activity	Managed Usability				
	Level 1 Beginning Usability	Level 2 Executive Champion	Level 3 Infrastructure	Level 4 Staffing	Level 5 Routine
<b>Strategy</b>					
Written Strategy	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
<b>Infrastructure</b>					
Product and Site Review Process	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
User Centered Design Methodology	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Integrated Software Dev. Process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Corporate Design Standards	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Showcase Projects	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
<b>Education and Training</b>					
Continuous Training	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Usability Staff	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Developer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Management	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
<b>Staffing</b>					
Executive Champion	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Usability Team	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
CUA on Staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
10% Usability Staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
<b>Organization Certificate Audit</b>					

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Schaffer indicates that usability operations are mature when they integrate all of the following components:

*An Executive Champion* An executive who has made a clear and visible commitment to promoting usability throughout the organization. The executive champion's role is to educate his or her peers, secure funding, and remove organizational obstacles. To be effective, the executive champion must be at the SVP or C- level of the organization, or equivalent, in order to reach across the "silos" of particular groups and departments.

*User Interface Standards* Design standards go beyond brand and identity to define the underlying look, feel, and flow of websites and applications within an organization. To be meaningful, User Experience Standards must be easy to find and easy to use. (Straub, 2004)

*Professional Staff* To be effective, usability teams need staff to support both tactical and strategic initiatives. Most estimates suggest that an optimal usability staff would be 1/10th the size of the development team(s). Further, team members should represent the range of multi-disciplinary skills that define user experience design in that business sector, including psychologists and researchers,

as well as human factors engineering, interaction design, visual design and analytics/measurement specialists. Team members should have formal usability training that is substantiated by degrees or certifications.

*Tools* All individuals who are tasked with interface design should have open access to a common set of resources to educate and support best practices in research processes and interface design. The toolset should include reusable artifacts that practitioners can employ to streamline their work. The tools should be customized to reflect the user interface and branding standards. As with standards, to be useful, tools must be easy to find and easy to use.

*Training* Different individuals at different levels within organizations need to understand different information about usability. Practitioners need ongoing, advanced training on emerging methods, evolving best practices, and current trends across industries. Developers need to understand how to apply best practices and where/how to look for additional guidance or tools. Executives must be able to calculate return on investment (ROI)—whether in improved revenues, enhanced customer satisfaction, or any other criteria specific to that organization—without necessarily knowing the mechanics of usability or the current best practices in user experience design. Mature organizations offer ongoing, regular, level-appropriate training opportunities to individuals across the organization.

*Showcase Projects* Mature user experience programs understand that usability awareness begins with exposure. Showcase projects are high-visibility projects that receive support and recognition throughout the project timeline across the organization. Mature programs create and distribute case studies to recognize, validate, and disseminate the successes of the usability group.

Since the publication of his book, Schaffer has added two additional components to the definition of maturity.

*Enterprise Knowledge Management* The usability knowledge management system should be the single, central repository for all resources and artifacts related to usability and the practice of usability within an organization. Usability groups aggregate and share their charter, strategy, standards, reusable research, and design artifacts (e.g., personas, graphics library) in a common location. Mature usability groups also share and cross-reference reports and observations, streamlining the research process, and creating cost efficiencies. When key learnings can be efficiently accessed and applied, organizations do not have to “start from scratch” with every subsequent project.

## The HFI UX Maturity Survey - 2009 / Findings

*Digital UX Strategy* Mature usability organizations have a clear, actionable Digital UX Strategy that identifies touch points and synergies of usability across the inward and outward-facing customer communication systems. The Digital UX Strategy prioritizes user experience as an organizational success driver by creating accountability for measurable success criteria which are reported to an executive governance committee at regular intervals.

Building these elements and resources takes leadership, time, and effort. But the first step is awareness. If you participated in the survey, at least one person at your organization is aware. Read on to find out how your organization's usability maturity compares with that of usability-aware organizations around the globe.

### The Survey

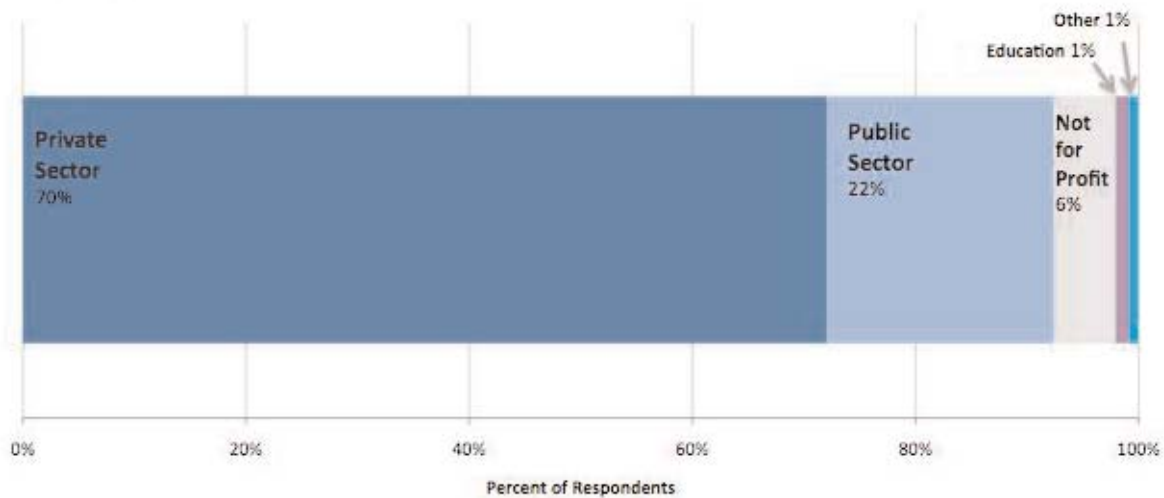
HFI developed the User Experience Practice Maturity Survey to capture a comparative snapshot of the maturity of usability operations around the world. The components of maturity were derived primarily from Schaffer (2004). These components were augmented by HFI's subsequent field research/consulting observing the sequence for emergence of key success components within developing usability practices.

Survey respondents were recruited through HFI mailing lists and various affiliated social networking channels. Some evidence of viral responding was observed. The survey was presented in 3 languages (English, Spanish and German). Individuals could respond from 1 April 2009 through 15 April 2009. In all, 1836 individuals initiated the survey. 1123 respondents completed the entire survey. The summaries presented here reflect completed surveys. In return for their effort, participants were entered into a drawing to receive a free 1 hour strategic consulting session with Dr. Eric Schaffer, Founder and CEO of HFI, and author of *Institutionalization of Usability: A Step-by-Step Guide*.

## Findings

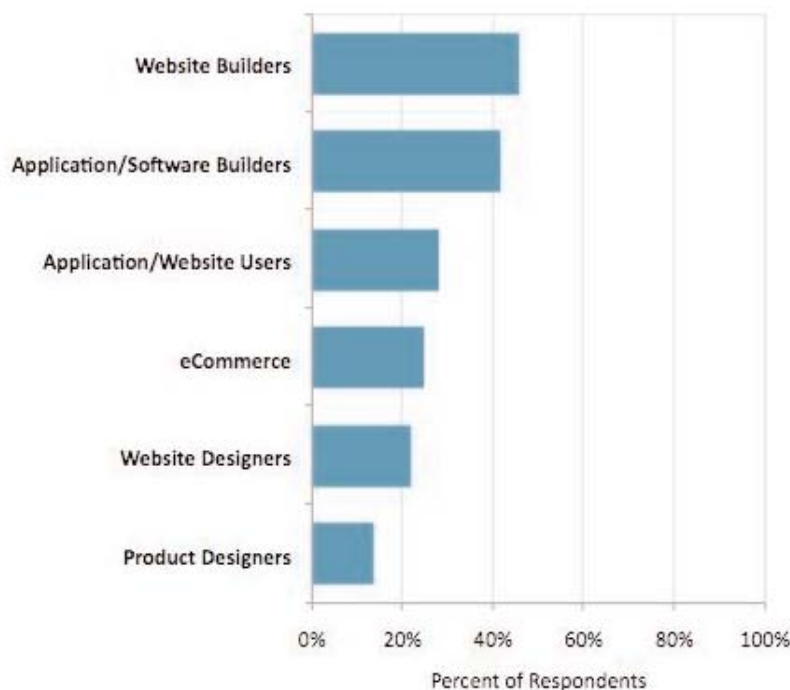
### Organization Type

Is your organization ...



### Where Interface Design Fits

How does User Experience Research/Design fit into your business?



**Website Builders:** We design/build websites (including web-based applications).

**Application/Software Builder:** We design/build/sell off-the-shelf and/or customized software products.

**Application/Website Users:** We buy or build applications or websites to run our business, but our customers typically don't see them.

**eCommerce Business:** We do most or all of our customer-facing business via the web.

**Website Designers:** We design websites and/or applications, but we don't build them.

**Product Designer:** We design physical products.

# The HFI UX Maturity Survey - 2009 / Findings

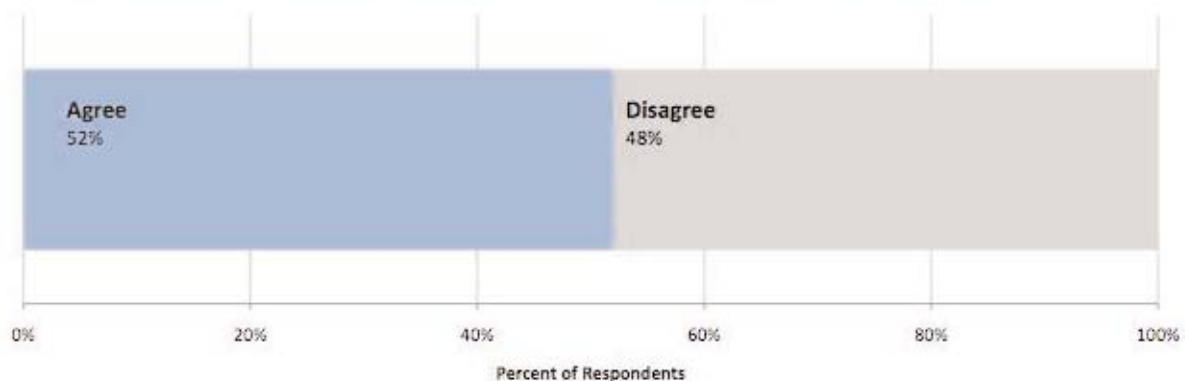
## Global Location

Where were the respondents from?

> 100 respondents	Argentina	Germany	Romania
40 - 99 respondents	Australia	Hong Kong	Russian Federation
10 - 39 respondents	Austria	India	Serbia
<10 respondents	Belgium	Ireland	Singapore
	Bolivia	Israel	Slovenia
	Brazil	Italy	South Africa
	Bulgaria	Lithuania	Spain
	Canada	Malaysia	Sweden
	China	Mexico	Switzerland
	Colombia	Netherlands	Taiwan
	Costa Rica	New Zealand	Turkey
	Country	Norway	United Arab Emirates
	Czech Republic	Pakistan	United Kingdom
	Denmark	Panama	United States
	Egypt	Peru	Uruguay
	Estonia	Philippines	
	Finland	Poland	
	France	Portugal	

## Executive Sponsorship - Champion

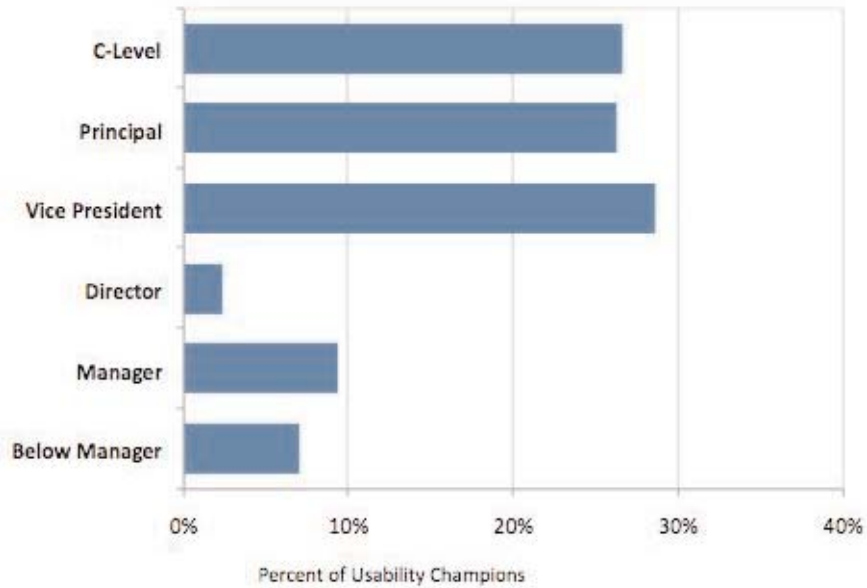
My organization has a visible, committed Usability Champion supporting User Experience Design.



# The HFI UX Maturity Survey - 2009 / Findings

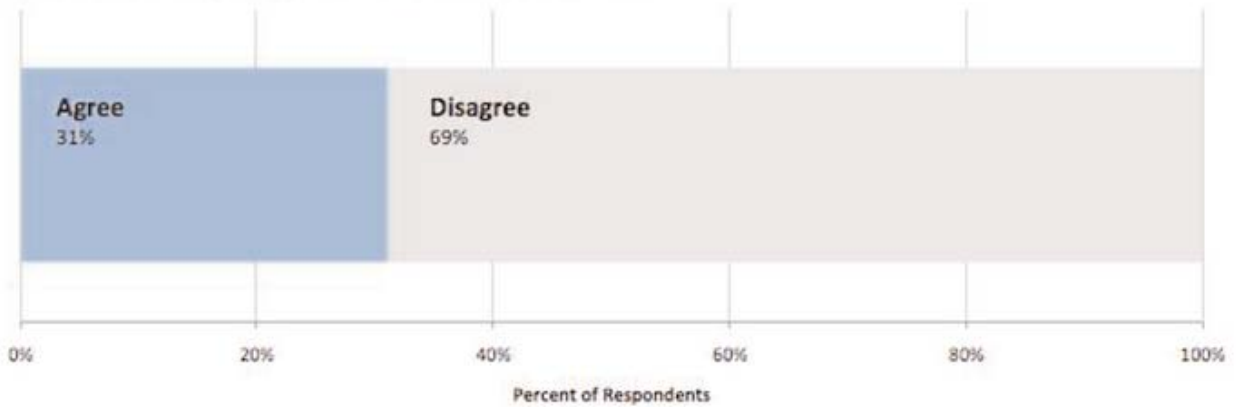
## Executive Sponsorship - Level

What level is your Usability Champion?



## User Interface Standards - Published

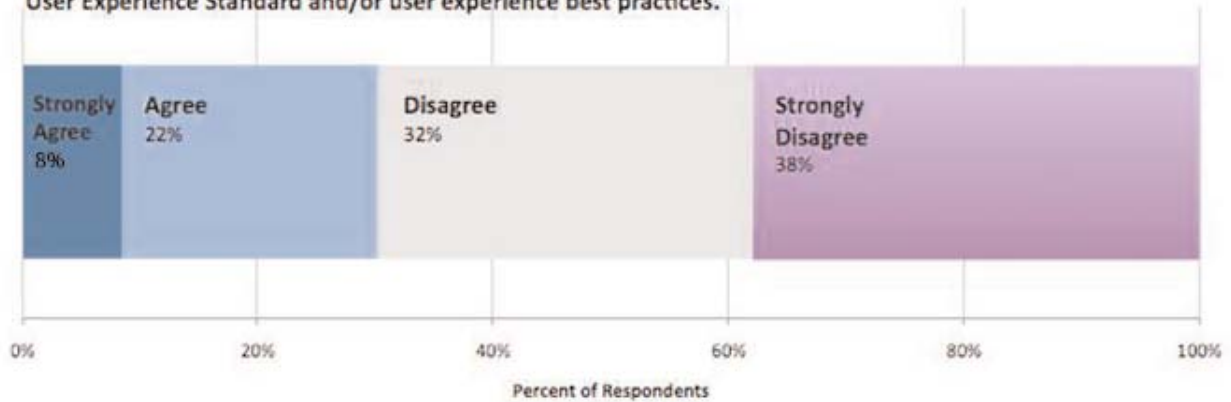
We have a published User Experience Standard.



## The HFI UX Maturity Survey - 2009 / Findings

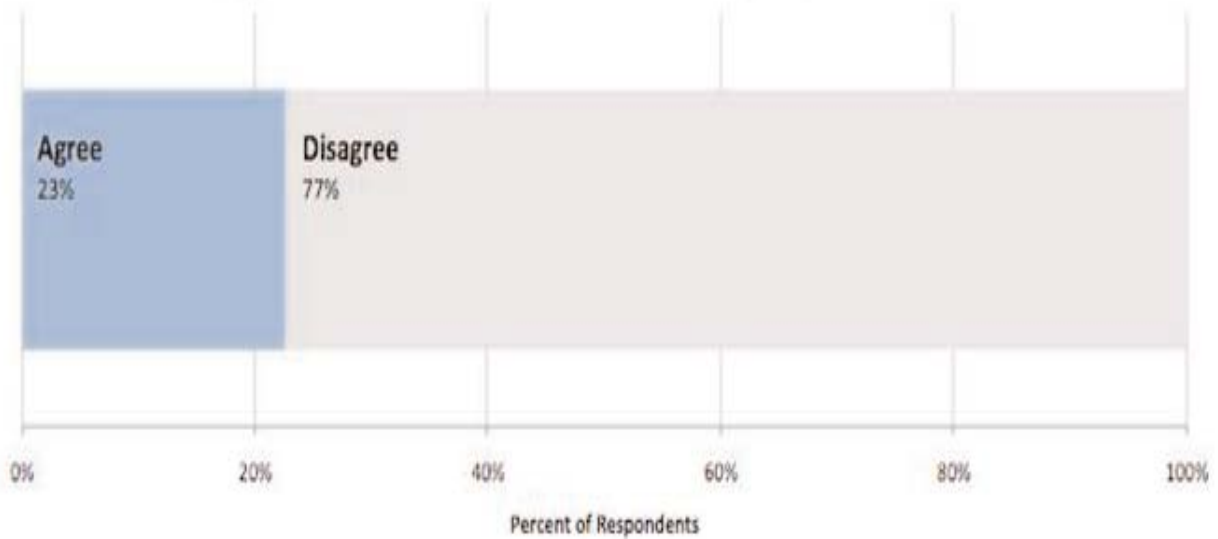
### User Interface Standards - Required

We have a required review process to certify that new and updated applications / websites reflect User Experience Standard and/or user experience best practices.



### Method - Common Method

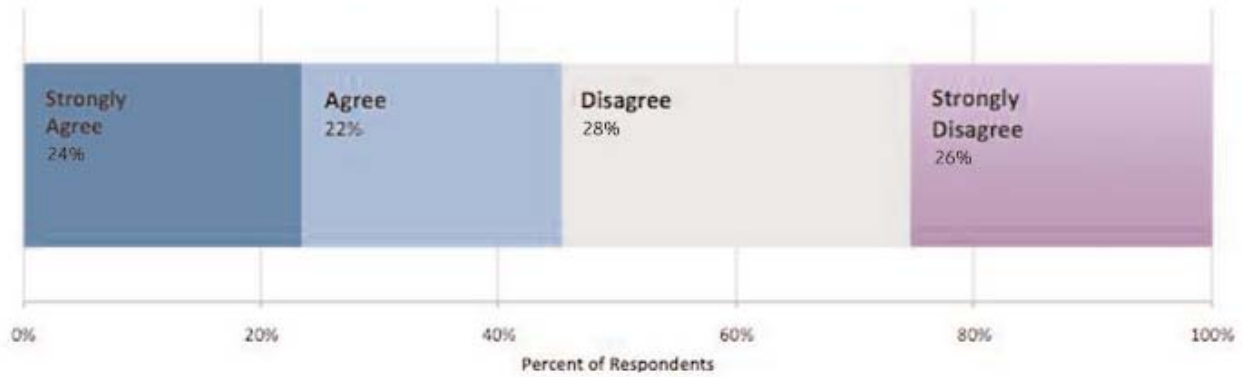
Practitioners in my organization use a common user-centered research/design method.



# The HFI UX Maturity Survey - 2009 / Findings

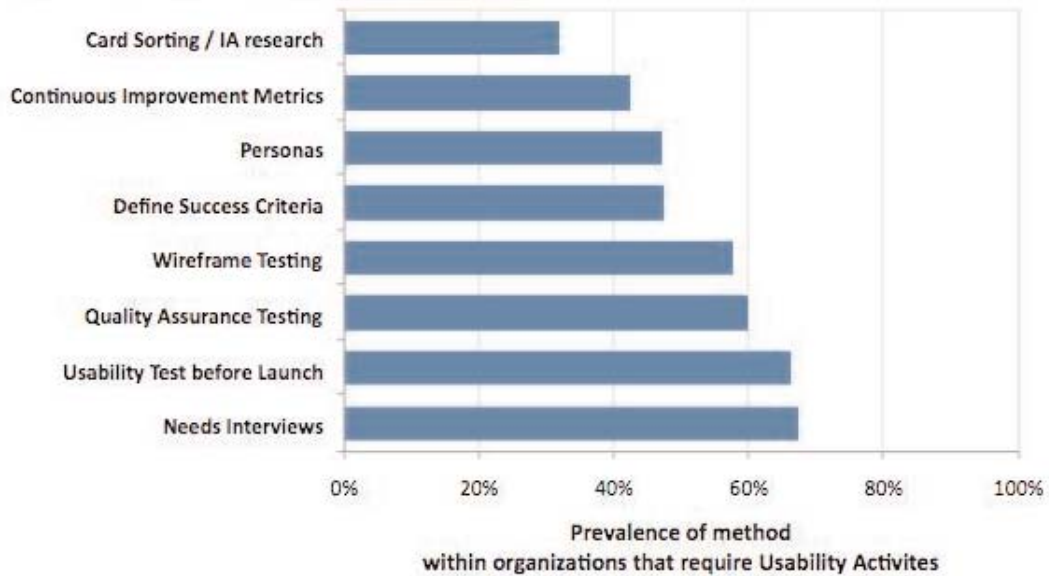
## Usability Method - Required

User Centered Research / Design activities are required in our Software Development Process.



## Usability Method - Required Activities

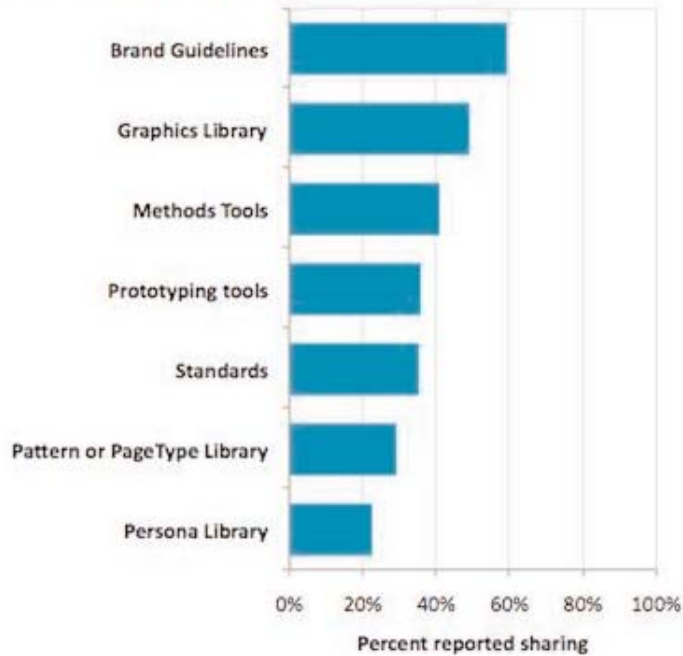
Which User Centered Research / Design Activities are required?



# The HFI UX Maturity Survey - 2009 / Findings

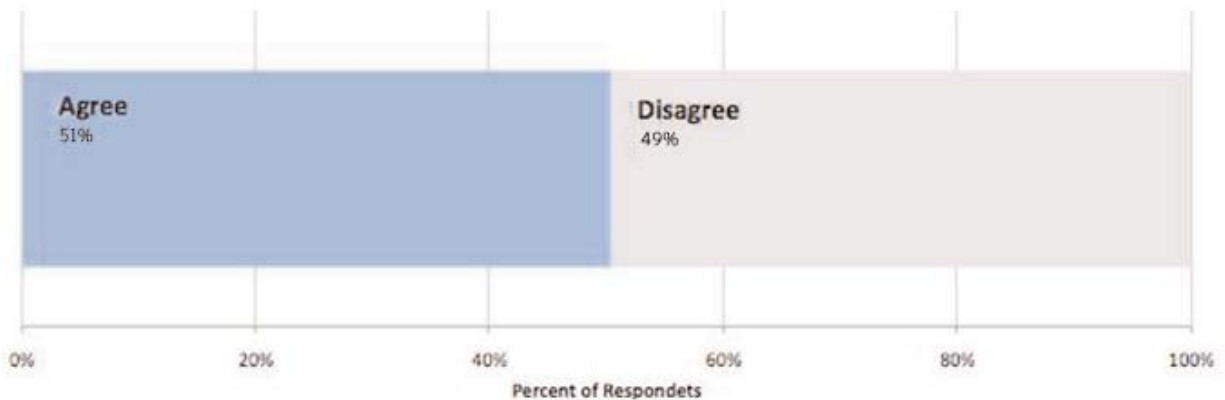
## Tools - Shared

We share the following User Experience Tools/Resources, either formally or informally.



## Professional Staff - Recognize Usability

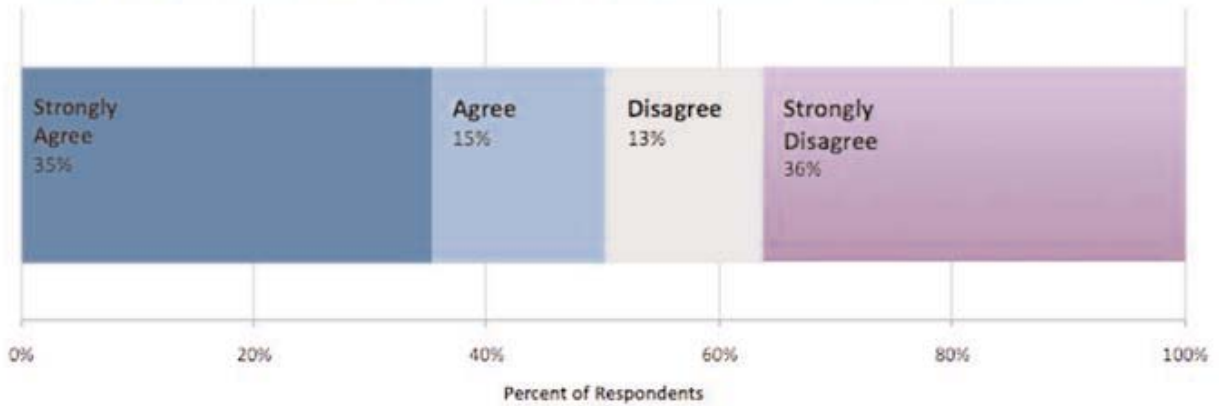
My organization recognizes User Experience Research/Design as a discrete and unique skill set in job descriptions and performance reviews.



# The HFI UX Maturity Survey - 2009 / Findings

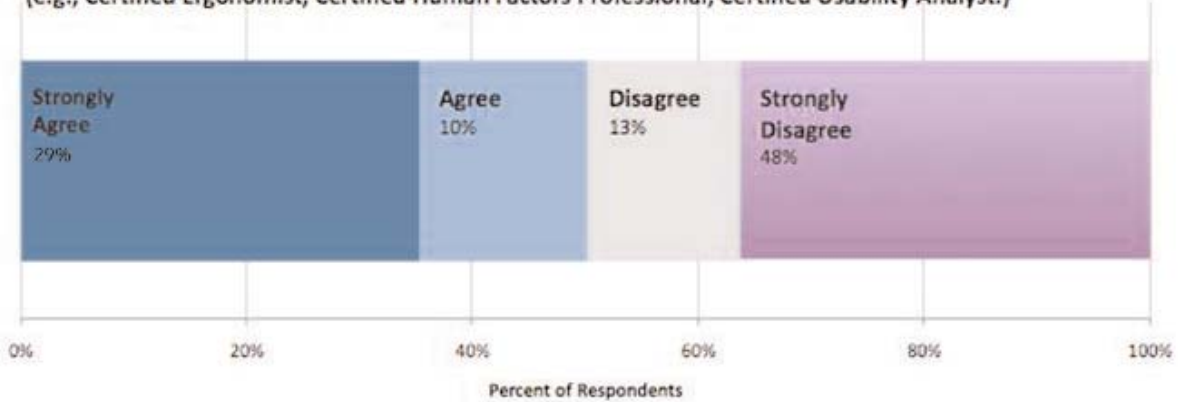
## Professional Staff - Full-time Practitioners

There are individuals who spend 100% of their time on User Experience Research/Design activities.



## Professional Staff - Certified Staff

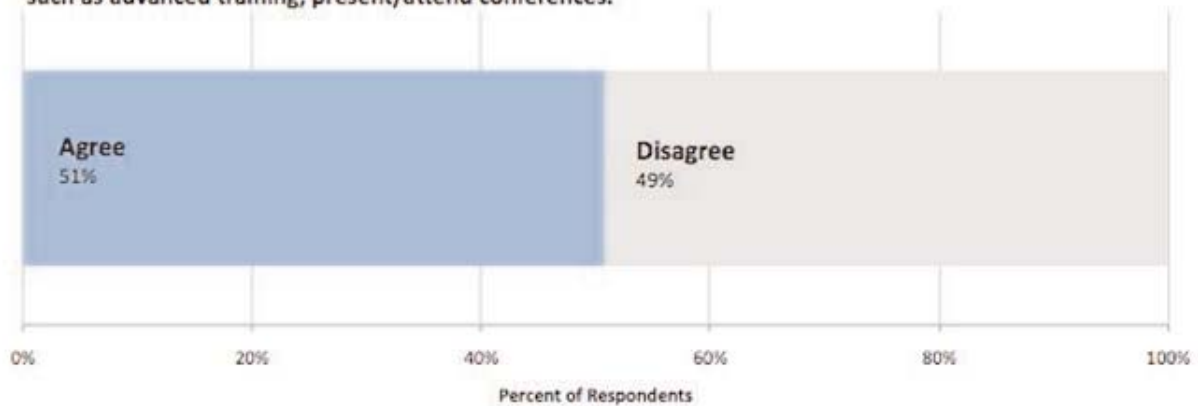
One or more individuals working on User Experience Research/Design in my firm is certified (e.g., Certified Ergonomist, Certified Human Factors Professional, Certified Usability Analyst.)



## The HFI UX Maturity Survey - 2009 / Findings

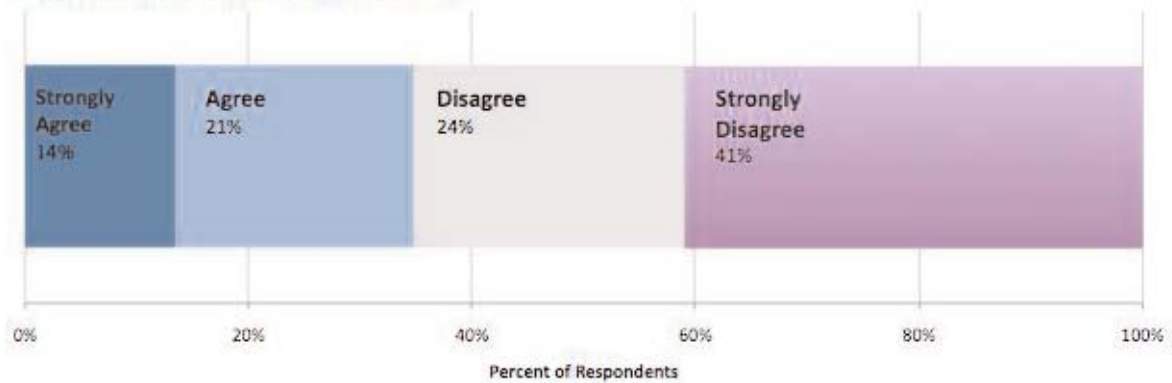
### Training - Advanced Training (Practitioners)

User Experience Practitioners receive support to engage in professional development activities such as advanced training, present/attend conferences.



### Training - Outreach & Awareness

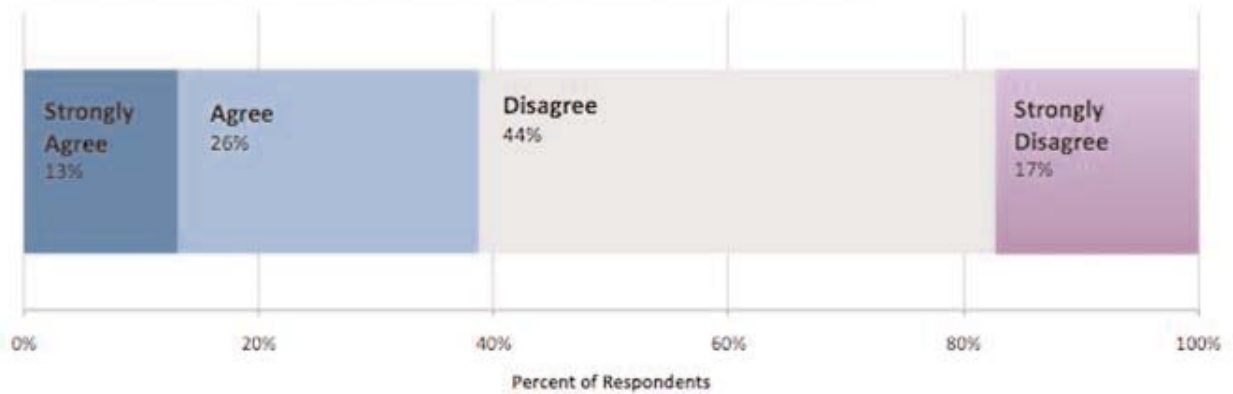
My organization sponsors/presents UX education sessions for individuals who want to learn (more) about Usability.



## The HFI UX Maturity Survey - 2009 / Findings

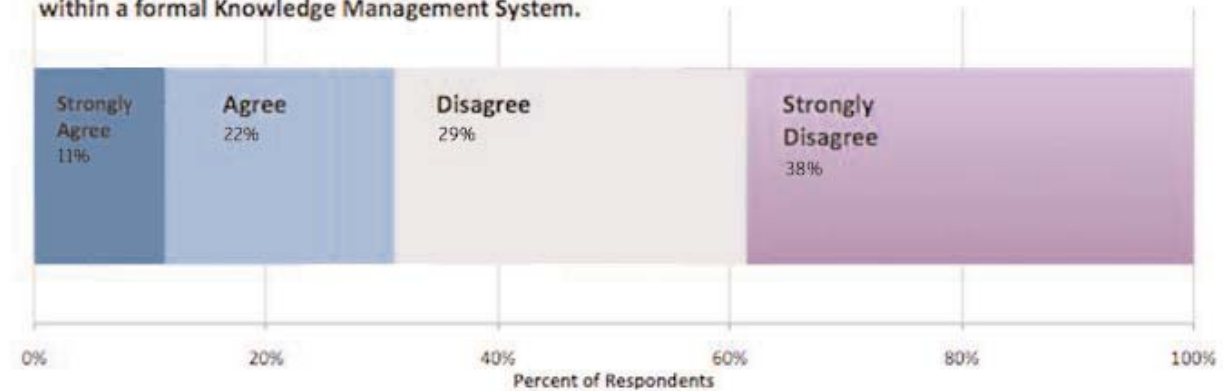
### Showcase Projects - Recognized

**My organization values and visibly recognizes User Experience Design success.**



### Knowledge Management - Collected & Shared

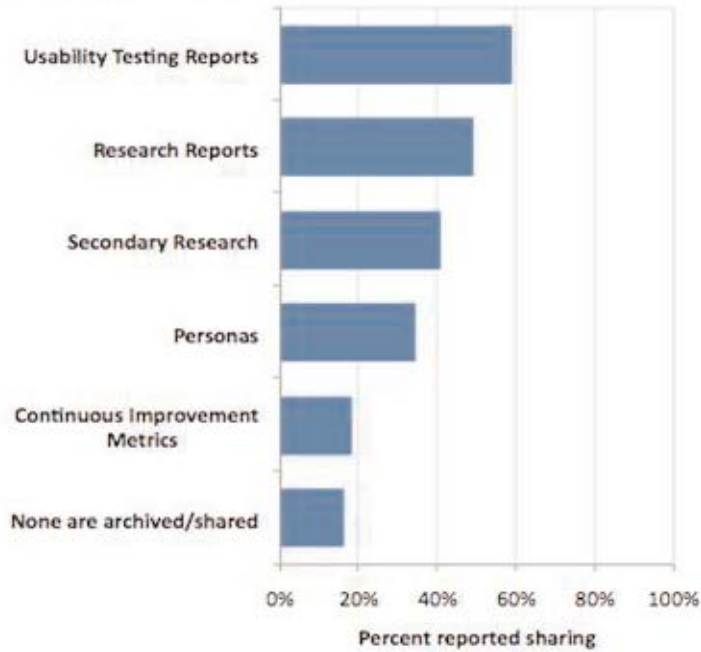
**Our User Experience Resources are collected and shared in a common location or within a formal Knowledge Management System.**



## The HFI UX Maturity Survey - 2009 / Findings

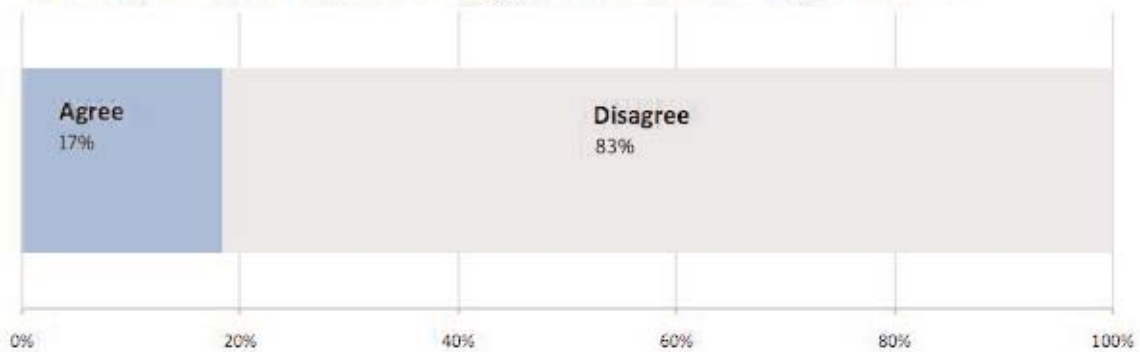
### Knowledge Management - What is Shared?

We share the following User Experience Reports/Findings, either formally or informally.



### Digital Strategy & Governance - Vision Statement

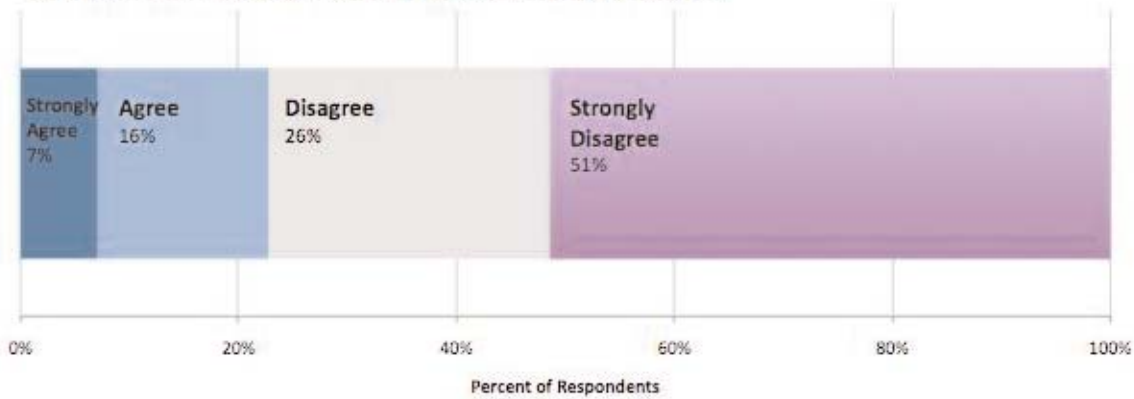
We have a published User Experience Strategy / Vision Document that everyone can access.



## The HFI UX Maturity Survey - 2009 / Findings

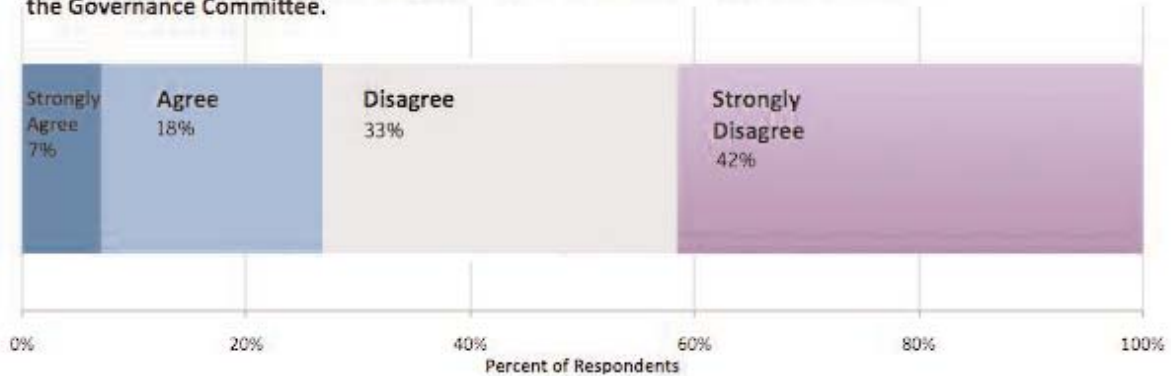
### Digital Strategy & Governance - Governance Committee

My organization has a User Experience Governance Committee that defines the vision and sets the business improvement targets for the User Experience Program.



### Digital Strategy & Governance - Reporting to Governance

We aggregate and report User Experience performance metrics to management and/or the Governance Committee.



### Conclusions

If you eavesdrop in elevators, you will hear that usability has transformed from a business differentiator to a routine component of business practice. To some extent this is true. HFI's UX Maturity Survey indicates that stable, visible, internal usability and user experience groups with executive support have become significantly more prevalent since Schaffer (2004) outlined the elements of a mature usability/user experience practice. But having a presence is not the same as having a practice.

The most common challenges faced by developing Usability Practices today are:

*No Real Executive Champion* Over half of respondents indicated that their usability efforts lacked a true executive champion. Because of the lack of organizational recognition and, by extension, funding, these teams are constantly in “triage” mode. They do great work – but it is just-in-time. Because they are just keeping up, the group rarely has time to develop – much less disseminate – the foundational research or tools that could benefit the organization as a whole. Over time, teams in this situation lose their momentum. Team members are reabsorbed into roles that *sound* like usability roles (e.g., Business Analyst) or related components of the organization. Cultivating a true executive champion is the necessary next step for usability practices at this stage.

*No Centralized Function* Organizations – even those with usability awareness – can fail to recognize the importance of a visible, centralized function. Free-floating talent improves user experience, but in a spotty way. Usability practitioners tend to find themselves doing other types of work (e.g., coding.) Further, the lack of visible recognition that usability/user experience represents a discrete skill set reinforces the myth that usability is just common sense. Individuals without a usability background continue to “do usability.” Even with a real champion, distributed professionals can rarely achieve the momentum necessary to build the resources that mark a mature practice. (Those who do, find themselves part of a centralized group.) Creating a centralized practice or function is the next step for organizations at this stage.

*Energy and Executive Support, but No Strategy* An unanticipated number of organizations have established usability groups which operate with no clear charter, governance, or accountability. Within this configuration, usability groups can drive substantial and valuable improvements to user experience. But these improvements are not optimally linked to the current business strategy or priorities. As such, time-sensitive opportunities can often be missed. Engaging the executive suite to create a vision & direction document and engage in strategy is the next step for organizations at this stage.

*A Team that Reinvents the Wheel* Organizations – including those with mature Usability practices – systematically fail to recognize the value in reusable work.

Reports are generated but rarely collected and categorized for future use. Without a central repository to gather findings and an infrastructure that supports metatag and access, organizations may gather the same insights over and over. The insights are there – if you know the right person to ask. Longtime team members can become a “warehouse” for insights on a given consumer group or product. The perceived contributions and value-to-cost ratio of usability groups in this situation is limited. Organizations in this situation need to create a system to archive and tag their output that encourages findability, use, and reuse.

As many survey participants (and readers) know, having a talent and passion for usability is not enough. For a team to be truly successful, senior leadership must participate actively. Ultimately, each of these scenarios reflects a failure of executive leadership to understand and commit the necessary energy, support and resources to realize the full promise of usability.

### What's next?

Where do you stand?

Human Factors International conducted this survey to develop a snapshot of the user experience operations within usability-aware organizations around the world. Then we developed the User Experience Maturity Checklist (see Appendix A). The checklist evaluates your own organization's usability maturity and acts as a next-step guide. Even with Schaffer's usability maturity criteria, however, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to usability maturity. In the final analysis, the set of usability challenges your organization faces is unique. The size, structure, market and culture of your organization all determine the path it needs to take to usability maturity, in addition to its present level of user-centricity and the types of management “syndromes” that must be overcome.

For some organizations, the results of this survey will clearly suggest a user-experience strategy that will move it towards the institutionalization of usability. For many, however, working with the experienced user experience strategists at Human Factors International will be the most effective way to interpret and apply the survey data from this survey to their present level of usability maturity.

HFI's long-standing relationship with numerous Fortune 500 companies – half of the Fortune 50, in fact – enables us to perform ongoing research on the synergistic benefits that long-term institutionalization of user experience, supported by continuous executive championship, is providing successful enterprise organizations. Usability maturity is by definition long-term rather than a quick fix, and our analysis consistently reveals increasingly deep levels of benefit that accrue to the organization.

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## The HFI UX Maturity Survey - 2009 / Findings

Contact HFI for a tailored approach to applying these benchmark results to your organization, or to develop a usability maturity strategy specific to your requirements.

By phone - 1.800.224.4480

By e-mail - [hfi@humanfactors.com](mailto:hfi@humanfactors.com)

### References

Schaffer, E. (2004), *The Institutionalization of Usability: A step-by-step guide*. Addison Wesley: New York.

Straub, K. (2004), On the Meta-Usability of User Interface Standards (or If the developer can't use it, the standard is not there). *User Interface Design Update newsletter*, available from [www.humanfactors.com/downloads/aug04.asp](http://www.humanfactors.com/downloads/aug04.asp).

## Appendix A User Experience Maturity Checklist

- Do you have Executive Support?**
  - We have an executive who sponsors and champions User Experience Initiatives.
  - She or he is at the VP- or C-level.
- Do you have Organizational Governance?**
  - We have a User Experience Governance that defines the vision and sets the business improvement targets for the User Experience Program.
  - The Committee includes leaders from across the company and individuals from different levels within the organization.
- Do you have a User Experience Strategy?**
  - We have a published User Experience Strategy / Vision Statement.
  - It is reviewed and updated regularly.
  - It states that User Experience is an organizational success driver.
- Do people doing user experience work in your organization use the same methods and tools?**
  - Everyone in my organization uses a common User Centered Research / Design Method.
- Is User Experience Research a required and quality assured step?**
  - User Centered Research / Design activities are required in our Software Development Process.
- Does your organization have a use experience standard?**
  - We have a published User Experience Standard.  
Note: User Experience Standards include specifications/patterns to ensure that users experience consistent interactions and flows.They are sometimes combined with visual or brand identity guidelines However, a UX Standard addresses interaction not visual identity.
  - We have a required review process to certify that new and updated applications / websites reflect User Experience Standard and/or user experience best practices.
- Do you value and recognize user experience successes?**

- Does you measure and manage improvement?**
  - We identify and define specific measurable success criteria and performance metrics for each website or application we develop.
  - We measure at pre-defined points in the development lifecycle for key applications / website.
  - We aggregate and report metrics to management and/or the Governance Committee.
  - We calculate/report Return on Investment (ROI) for User Experience Efforts to the management and Governance Committee.
  
- Is User Experience Knowledge managed and shared?**
  - Our Standard is published in a common location or within a formal Knowledge Management System.
  - Our Method and research tools are shared in a common location.
  - Our Design Tools are shared in a common location.
  - Our Personas are shared in a common location.
  - Our Graphics Library/Identity Style Guide is shared in a common location.
  - Our Research Reports are shared in a common location.
  - Our Continuous Improvement Tools and Reports are shared in a common location.
  
- Is User Experience Design recognized as a unique and valued skill?**
  - User Experience Research/Design is identified as a discrete skill set in job descriptions and performance reviews.
  - There are individuals who spend 100% of their time on User Experience Research/Design.
  - One or more individuals in my firm is certified as a Usability/User Experience Specialist (eg, Certified Ergonomist, Certified Human Factors Professional, Certified Usability Analyst).
  - User Experience Practitioners receive support to engage in professional development activities such as advanced training, present/attend conferences.
  
- Is User Experience exposure / training available to non-practitioners?**
  - My organization sponsors/presents User Experience education sessions for individuals who want to learn (more) about Usability.
  - The education sessions are level- and role- appropriate.  
For example, we present a business benefits/ROI presentation for Executives versus best practices/how to sessions for developers.



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