Kat Tran -- *The Design of Everyday Things*

It's not Always Your Fault; Keep on Experiencing

The Design of Everyday Things suites my personality perfectly. The book eases the consumer's frustration from not knowing what to do with the *thing*; instead, it blames the designer. I'm curious of how things are the way they are and always asking questions and learning how things work. However, from time to time I found myself struggling to get a device or an object to work; something as simple as to pull or push an office's door, and blamed myself not to be able to operate such a simple, common daily thing. However, according to Norman, I should not feel that way because if it was designed appropriately, I would not have struggled. It should have been obvious for me to see how to use it.

Is it *always* the designer's fault though? Or is it us who think in a box? Norman calls humans the explanatory creatures. He says that we all have our "mental models" that we use to explain phenomena based on our experience, knowledge, and sometimes just coincidence; and we believe in those explanations rather than learning about the thing. However, when things don't turn out the way we think after a few tries, we get to the point of "learned helplessness" which is the giving-up-and-let-it-be point. He says "... learned helplessness may help to explain self-blame. It refers to the situation in which people experience failure at a task, often numerous times… they decide that the task cannot be done…" (Norman 42)

Well, what can I do if the design is crappy, and I cannot do anything but to deal with it and *make* it work? Norman uses the term "feedback" as a system which I had never heard of outside of my biology classes, but apparently I do it quite often subconsciously. He introduces "[t]he seven stages of action : 1. What do I want to accomplish? 2. What are the alternative action sequences? 3. What action can I do now? 4. How do I do it? 5. What happened? 6. What does it mean? 7. Is this okay? Have I accomplished my goal?" (Norman 71). The feedback is the answer to the last question: YES, great!; NO, perform it accordingly to one the alternative actions that I have formed previously. This feedback system works for not only consumers but also designers. Let's use a car key to demonstrate this system: in some old cars, the key has two faces and will only start the car when it is inserted into the ignition hole correctly. So, the users have 50% of inserting the key correctly. According to Norman's feedback system: 1. Our goal is to start the car. 2. Our alternative actions: either insert the key correctly or incorrectly. 3. We can insert the key into the ignition. 4. We can insert the key face up or face down. 5. The car didn't start. 6. It means we insert the key incorrectly. 7. I have not accomplished my goal which was to start the car. Here is the feedback: What if we insert the key the other way? Answer: We need to do the seven stages again, but because we know that there are only two ways to insert the key; hence the car will start -- unless something else is wrong with the car. However, in the newer designs, the key can be inserted either way, and the car will start. Perhaps, the designers saw this problem and fixed it. Those consumers with the newer designs, they

will have 100% of inserting the key correctly. There are even newer car models that do not need a key to start the engine; just press the “start” button! By going back and forth between these stages, the possibilities that the thing will not work is eliminated and leads to the evolution of newer models with more convenience.

In his book, Norman also talks about “perceived affordance”, meaning to make effort to see thing from the perspective of the consumers. I think this is the most valuable tip, particularly for all of us in this class. We are working on our projects designing a business model, an appropriate device to help someone. It would not be appropriate nor helpful if our target communities and consumers have no idea how to work it; “design like you give a damn[!]” (Cameron Sinclaire, 2006)