Discover Engineering
An International Journal
https://academicsociety.org/deij/ Discover Engineering 2025

Human-Centered Design in Engineering: Bridging Ergonomics, Cognitive Systems, and Artificial Intelligence for Safer Technologies

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Abstract

Human-centered design (HCD) has emerged as a critical paradigm in engineering, ensuring that technologies and systems are developed with direct consideration of human capabilities, limitations, and safety. By integrating ergonomics, cognitive systems, and artificial intelligence (AI), engineering solutions can enhance usability, reduce risks, and promote sustainable adoption across industries. This paper explores the principles of HCD, highlighting the interplay between physical ergonomics, cognitive psychology, and AI-driven decision-making in shaping safer, more adaptive technologies. It discusses real-world applications in transportation, healthcare, and manufacturing, along with challenges such as ethical concerns, human-AI trust, and system complexity. Finally, it identifies future research directions for creating engineering systems that are not only efficient but also inherently safe, ethical, and human-centered.

Keywords

Human-Centered Design, Ergonomics, Cognitive Systems, Artificial Intelligence, Safer Technologies

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Introduction

The rapid pace of technological advancement demands an approach that prioritizes human well-being and safety. Human-centered design (HCD) ensures that technology development aligns with human needs, abilities, and limitations.

Ergonomics and cognitive engineering form the foundation of HCD, addressing both the physical and psychological dimensions of human-technology interaction. These disciplines help engineers design systems that reduce fatigue, prevent errors, and enhance performance.

The advent of artificial intelligence has further expanded the scope of HCD by enabling adaptive and intelligent systems capable of learning from human behavior. AI-driven tools can personalize interfaces, automate decision support, and augment human capabilities.

Despite these advancements, integrating HCD in engineering still faces challenges such as complexity, ethical responsibility, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

This paper examines how ergonomics, cognitive systems, and AI can be combined to create technologies that prioritize human safety, reliability, and efficiency.

Subheadings

1. The Evolution of Human-Centered Design in Engineering

HCD has evolved from simple ergonomic considerations to a multidisciplinary framework encompassing physical, cognitive, and social aspects of human interaction with technology.
Engineering projects increasingly adopt HCD principles to ensure compliance with safety standards and user acceptance.

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2. Ergonomics as the Foundation of Safer Technologies

Physical ergonomics focuses on designing tools, workspaces, and systems that minimize strain and injury.
Proper ergonomic design reduces workplace accidents, improves productivity, and ensures user comfort in complex environments.

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3. Cognitive Systems in Human-Technology Interaction

Cognitive systems engineering examines how humans perceive, process, and respond to information in complex systems.
Designing for cognitive load, situational awareness, and error reduction improves safety in fields such as aviation, healthcare, and industrial automation.

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4. The Role of Artificial Intelligence in HCD

AI enables adaptive, context-aware technologies that can adjust to individual user needs and environmental conditions.
From predictive analytics to intelligent assistants, AI plays a pivotal role in minimizing risks and supporting safer decision-making in engineering systems.

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5. Challenges and Future Directions in Human-Centered Engineering

Challenges include balancing automation with human control, ensuring AI transparency, and addressing ethical concerns related to privacy and accountability.
Future directions point toward integrating digital twins, immersive simulations, and explainable AI to further enhance safety and trust in human-centered engineering.

Conclusion

Human-centered design represents a transformative approach in engineering, uniting ergonomics, cognitive systems, and AI to build safer technologies. By addressing both physical and psychological aspects of human interaction, HCD enhances system usability and reliability. While challenges remain in ethical implementation, system complexity, and trust-building, the integration of HCD principles will be essential in shaping the next generation of safe, adaptive, and sustainable technologies.

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