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The Design of Everyday Things

Research and Development Methods

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This book talks about the design of everyday things that we may take for granted. The example used was the design of a steering wheel in a car features the ignition key on the steering wheel itself. This is a logical placement for this because the steering wheel is where your hands rest while you drive. Keeping that proximity close is a good design layout.

Another concept that was touched upon in the book was mental maps. Mental maps are used by us when we are trying to understand how something works internally. We may not be able to see the inside of a product, but if we have an accurate mental map of how the product is constructed, we will be able to use it the way it was intended and be able to fix it, if it should break. The example that was brought up was the author's refrigerator. He was trying to find the optimal setting for his freezer so that his food would stay fresh. He was having difficulty understanding the controls for the refrigerator because his mental map of it was not aligned with the way it actually worked.

Folk theories are ways in which people make sense of objects and how they work. People try to make sense of the world and objects using the knowledge that they already have on hand. An example is the misunderstanding of how a thermostat works. Some people may believe that it is a timer, controlling how long the unit is on

and off. Others may believe that it controls how hot or cold the unit is. Although neither are correct, this gives designers a better understanding of how people interact with products and how to redesign a thermostat so that the user may know that a thermostat actually is actually an on and off switch.