




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## Echoes of Semiotically-Based Design in the Development and Testing of a Workflow System

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### Abstract

Workflow systems are information-intensive task-oriented computer applications that typically involve a considerable number of users playing a wide variety of roles. Since communication, coordination and decision-making processes are essential for such systems, representing, interpreting and negotiating collective meanings are a crucial issue for software design and development processes. In this paper, we report and discuss our experience in implementing Qualitas, a web-based workflow system. Semiotic theory was extensively used to support design decisions and negotiations with users about technological signs. Taking scenarios as a type-sign exchanged throughout the whole process, we could trace the theoretic underpinnings of our experience and draw some revealing conclusions about the product and the process of technologically reified discourse. Although it is present in all information technology applications, this kind of discourse is seldom analyzed by software designers and developers. Our conjecture is that outside semiotic theory, professionals involved with human-computer interaction and software engineering practices have difficulty to coalesce concepts derived from such different disciplines as psychology, anthropology, linguistics and sociology, to name a few. Semiotics, however, can by itself provide a unifying ontological basis for interdisciplinary knowledge, raising issues and proposing alternatives, that may help professionals gain insights at lower learning costs. **eywords:** semiotic engineering, workflow systems, information-intensive task-oriented systems, scenario based design and development of computer systems, human-computer interaction

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