

Gnome Usability

Research Paper |

User Workflow

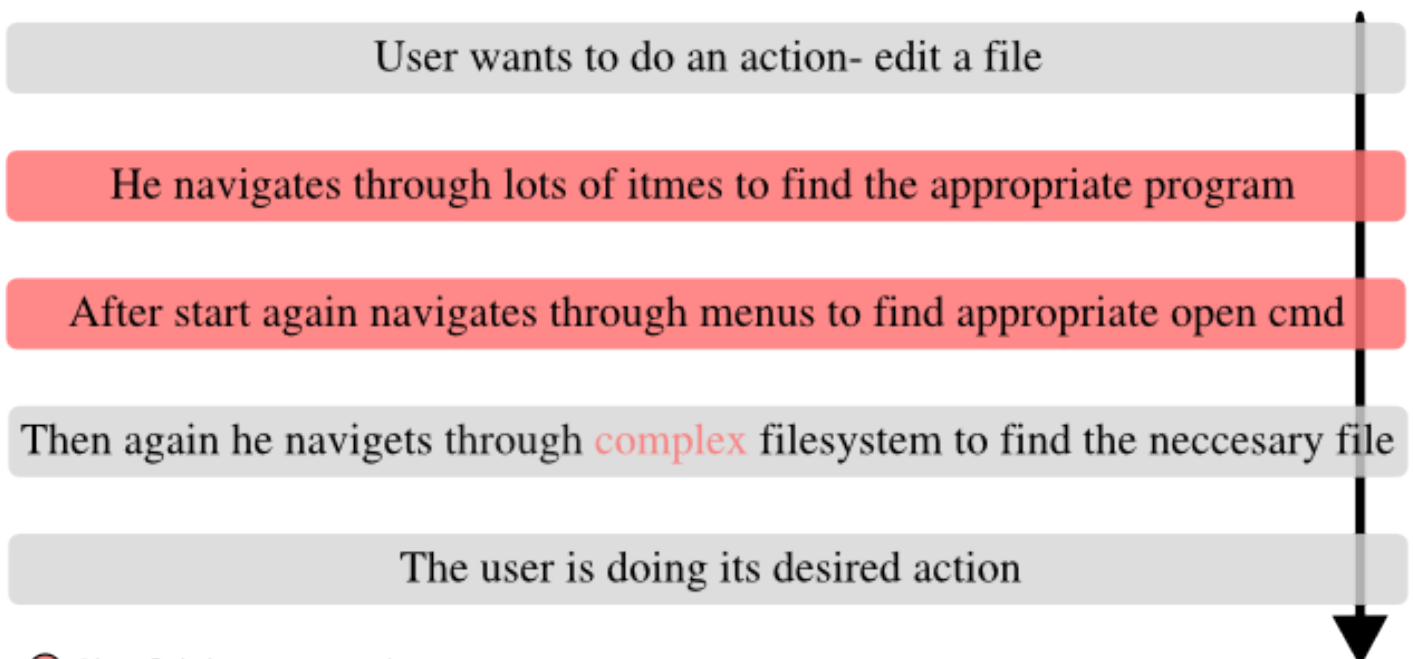
The workflow of the user is one of the most important things that the designers and implementors of the upcoming Gnome Shell should consider. It is such an important “feature” because it mainly affects the usability and productiveness of a piece of software. If there is something wrong with the workflow (as it is now with the current gnome in some cases), most vulnerable will be the user.

In order to make a good design for workflow a lot of **research is needed**. I suggest here several ways to go:

- Make a *sociological research* that is gathered from a common web sites that Gnome users visit such as UbuntuForums, Gnome-Look, and any topic specific ones (use polls).
- Provide a stable *application to test* and give it to lots of people for testing. Assemble good feedback mechanism so that users can give their comments as easy as possible.
- Ask for paid sociological research by an agency specialized in that area.
- Create *brainstorm site* that resembles the GIMP brainstorm and let visitors push their ideas as pictures.
- *Compare with old* Gnome 2.x and see the mistakes that have been made and find good solutions to them.
- Think for *the future* and what will the users need and use (hard/software) in nearly 2-3 years from the release of Gnome 3.0

As time is short I think that we should start doing some of these points right away so that results come in time to be analyzed and conclusions to be made.

What are the current workflows we have? In the picture provided below you can see one of the major drawbacks of the current system – the messy file/open system:



The mistake of KDE

To make the initial research full we need to mention other projects that have gone through similar changes soon. I think the mistake the KDE team made when developing/deploying 4.0 was that they did not introduce new workflow concepts when they had the chance to do a major API break. That might seem good for keeping more old users but it is not good as this model for interaction with the user is **nearly 20 years** old and people have certainly change a lot since then. Breakthrough in this area has arrived from the most unexpected side – the cheapest laptop in the World – the XO one. With their Sugar Journal UI they introduced something unseen before and very, very usable in my opinion. One simple example is that if I want to send a file over the Internet to a person near me I have to have a special program and registration in the worst case. The sweet thing about the XO's Sugar is that you don't need to think about the details of an operation and just do it - send the file to the buddy displayed on your monitor (automatically found in your WiFi region). So back to the problem – we should not repeat what the KDE guys did, revamp the user interface and keep the old interaction methods if we don't want to fail. Of course there is some risk in this but the things that are riskworthy prove to be worthy (payable) later if executed right.

User Inspirations

I believe that we should make computers **serve us** not we to serve them! Having said that with the new UI we should encourage people to spend as less time in front of their computers as possible. That might not be the case for workstations but my solution is this – provide a **complex theming system** never seen before that includes:

- Theming of gtk
- Theming of the shell (proper metacity and matching animations theme)
- Matching sound theme
- Wallpapers
- Icons (good ones as base to allow small modifications to make them different)
- Optional Gdm theme
- Optionally usplash/plymouth

All of the above items should be provided in **one package** that is easy to install and configure. Thus the office will use one theme, the home user – another. The first one will inspire him to work and the second to go out and enjoy life as often as possible!