

# What relationship do users have with their computer?

## The Hotliners point of view

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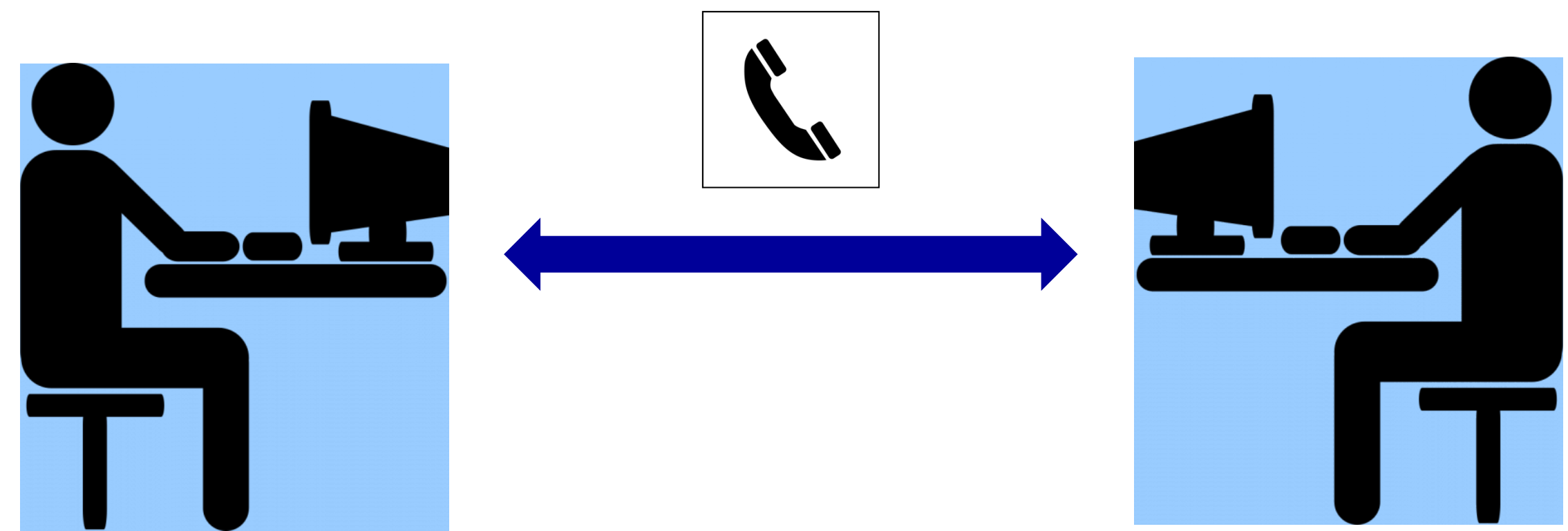
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#### IT Hotline

IT experts consulted over the phone by users when facing problems with their IT tool (software and/or hardware).

- Technical support is provided for users/clients over the phone, via a single number,
- « Proximity at a distance » services allow to save time by avoiding excessive travel,
- Contributes to the firm reputation and to client loyalty.

→ Remote troubleshooting, by phone and/or through remote maintenance.



#### Methodological approach

- Observation of an hotline everyday activities in 2 IT service centres (« Inbound » type: receiving incoming calls),
- Recording of the phone conversations between users and hotliners,
- Collective and individual interviews with hotliners.

→ Main axes investigated: the institutional and professional context, group membership (belonging to the « team »), customer relations, place of the tools (computers, phones...) and relation to them.

#### Theoretical background and reflexions

- Interest for remote and mediated work situations.
- As any technological tool, computer transform working conditions, create new professions (hotliners are a good example of this!) and produces new forms of interpersonal relations... (Lambolez, 2009).
- Computers are to be considered as both an objet of relation and in the relation (Perret & Perret-Clermont, 2004). They can seen as interlocutors (with popping error messages, confirmation requests...).
- Computer have an instrumental value and seem to have an evocative value: potential mirror, they can challenge our representations of ourselves (e.g.; Pochon & Grossen, 1994).

#### Reflexions from the preliminary results

- Computers, partners or constrain in the interaction: they give direction to the dialogue, can facilitate diagnostic and problem resolution (through its feedbacks or messages...) but can also prevent troubleshooting (error messages, procedures to be followed in a certain order,...).
- Computers, users' friends or enemies: positive vs. negative relationship (motivational and generational issues, imposed or chosen tool, training, familiarity ?...).
- More or less personalised tool depending on the user.
- On one hand, some users are very comfortable with their computer (sometimes too much: wrong manipulations...), on the other hand, some users are afraid and/or suspicious of it.
- Special relationship when problems arise: the computer (or printer, server) prevents them from working normally, make them waste time...
- Users speak to their machine... and of it as of a person : « elle [l'imprimante] refuse de recevoir les travaux d'impression » (1); « il [l'ordinateur] a senti que je téléphonais » (2).  
→ Attribution of mental states, intentions, flaws (often in negative terms).  
→ Form of emotional contagion : « ouais remarquez s'il [l'ordinateur] est comme moi il est peut-être bien fatigué » (3).

(1) « It [the printer] refuses to receive print jobs ».

(2) « it [the computer] felt that I was calling ».

(3) « well, note that if it [the computer] is like me, it might be very tired ».



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