

Position paper, Jesper Simonsen

Dagstuhl Seminar:

Social Thinking – Software Practice: Approaches Relating Software Development, Work, and Organizational Change, September 5th-10th, 1999

My background is rooted in the Scandinavian tradition for Participatory Design (PD). I am employed as an Associate Professor in Computer Science at Roskilde University. Prior to joining the University, I worked a number of years as an IT designer within Danish industry. My main research interest is the study of work practices of users and designers for the purpose of offering theories and methods for systems design in an organizational context.

Since 1991, I have worked within the MUST-research program along with two of my colleagues, Keld Bødker and Finn Kensing. Within this research program, we are currently finishing a textbook describing the MUST-method. The MUST-method is concerned with the early stages of systems design: The idea behind the method is that users and their managers in a specific organization can decide which IT systems are needed and relevant, and how they can be provided, i.e. purchased, and/or developed, and implemented. During the coming 4 years, I will be involved, together with 15 Danish researchers, in a new research program, DIWA – Design and use of Interactive Web Applications.

In an organizational approach to PD, technical aspects are seen in their organizational context. This means that organizational aspects like work processes, work organization, like skills, qualifications, and competencies, like organizational cultures, policies, strategies, and politics, and like latent and manifest conflicts, etc., become relevant and important to the design process.

The MUST-method aims at taking organizational aspects seriously by combining design intervention with the use of ethnographically inspired techniques, such as unobtrusive and participant observation, (in-situ) interviews, thinking aloud experiments, and audio or video recordings. The method introduces these techniques to the designers, in contrast to other approaches where "real" ethnographers cooperate with designers.

As pointed out in the MUST-method above, I take a highly pragmatic approach to software development, work, and organizational change. I belong to the generation of researchers following the Scandinavian PD union/researcher projects with the political ideology of enhancing democracy at work. In my opinion, the criteria for success in normative research within design must be that the research results are industrially applicable also in a relatively short term horizon. This involves the following:

- That researchers develop their own experiences with new design approaches by action research and by playing the role of designers themselves.
- That the researchers take their starting point in today's practice of designers, try to understand the conditions of an industrial and commercial design practice, and develop, align, and apply new approaches to this practice.

- That this research influences practice – in the short term horizon – by proving its value (for example through experiments in cooperation with designers) as well as – in the long term horizon – through educating new generations of designers.

References

MUST-research program, URL: <http://www.must.ruc.dk>

DIWA-research program, URL: <http://www.diwa.dk> (active from September 1999)

My home-page, URL: <http://www.ruc.dk/~simonsen>

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