

I've Had It!

Group Therapy for Interdisciplinary Researchers

Brief Abstract

Bringing the Person-Centred Approach to Design Research; reflections on experience in the 'An Internet of Soft Things' project

'An Internet of Soft Things' is an interdisciplinary project led by a PI from Product Design, with Co-Is from Computing and Textiles. There are ten members of the team including two researchers who are person-centred psychotherapists. The aim is to develop a co-design methodology for the internet of soft things based on practice-led critical reflection on person-centred and dialogical approaches.

This paper focuses on the experiences of the two person-centred psychotherapists as they attempt to inform and support the rest of the design research team. The different aspects discussed are:

Fun aspects of the project so far have included:

- Participants (getting to know them over the course of 6 weekly workshops)
- Being outside the therapy room (psychotherapists having opportunity to develop relationship with individuals as part of group making smart textiles)
- Experiencing lightness as well as darkness (not focusing primarily on participants' distress)
- Sense of achievement: making; being part of a group; developing a relationship with co-researchers
- Laughter in sessions (especially contact with hard-to-reach individuals)

Frustrations have included:

- Not feeling heard or valued at times in the team
- Difficult to be congruent and feeling it might not always be helpful
- Feeling defensive (of approach, values, beliefs)
- Feeling compromised
- Lack of engagement with the material/data across the research team

Problems and Pitfalls

- Having to hold back (lack of shared language/values)
- Misunderstanding/miscommunication/not always on the same wavelength
- Compromise values/beliefs
- Differing attitudes to usefulness of reflexivity

Successes and best practices

- Completed workshops and positive experiential feedback (enjoyment/engagement)
- Breaking down assumptions about individuals based on their discipline/background
- Individual growth
- Increased congruence – movement away from role
- Challenges power dynamics and hierarchies of academic institutions

Some of the aspects above appear contradictory, featuring in more than one category; this paper reflects on this, focusing on the relational aspects of working with the research team as opposed to our experiences with the participating mental health community, which are published elsewhere. We finish with recommendations for future design research teams who recognise they may need to pro-actively support individual researchers in different ways.

Biographies

Richard Kettley is a Research Fellow in Ethical Design research for the EPSRC-funded 'An Internet of Soft Things' at Nottingham Trent University, UK. He is also a person-centred psychotherapist with particular interests in working with individuals and groups in the areas of mental health, trauma and creativity.

Rachel Lucas is RA in Ethical Design research for the EPSRC-funded 'An Internet of Soft Things' at Nottingham Trent University, UK. She works in both long-term client work and occupational health. She completes her MSc in Person-Centred Psychotherapy at the Sherwood Psychotherapy Training Institute in 2015.

Sarah Kettley is a Reader, and the Principal Investigator of the EPSRC-funded 'An Internet of Soft Things' at Nottingham Trent University.