An Introduction to the Person-Centred Approach as an Attitude for Participatory Design

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towards an Internet of Soft Things...

- how can a radically connected world be designed to benefit human wellbeing?

- what types of experience will be enabled by smart textile interfaces as part of this vision of the future?
why this project?

• Mental wellbeing
  – Because design tends to lack awareness of:
    • different models of mental health
    • the landscape of service provision

• eTextiles
  – because it’s the future of ubiquitous computing
    • but it’s hard to design
    • and hard to build well
What is the Person-Centred Approach?

• Power dynamics: **non-expert**
• Relational
• **An attitude** - not a skill set

• Core conditions:
  – **empathy** (trying to put yourself in someone else’s shoes);
  **UPR** (unconditional positive regard aka acceptance, prizing);
  **congruence** (being genuine/real)

• Person-Centred Therapy
  – ‘**clinical phenomenology**’ (Spinelli, 1989)
The Phenomenological Attitude

• ‘put aside pre-existing ideas and assumptions and be ready to be filled with curiosity and wonder’

• ‘phenomenology begins in silence’ (Finlay, 2011:4;15)
Activity (in pairs)

- A takes something out of their bag
  - B is an alien
- A describes what it is and what it means to them (thoughts, feelings etc)
  - B listens
- B then repeats back to A as much as they can remember
  - and A corrects/fine-tunes them
Subjective experience

• ‘objects only make sense because we have responded to them subjectively (which includes shared interpretational structures and unique interpretative tendencies resulting from particular life experience)’ (Spinelli, 2005)

• Some of the description of your object relates to our shared reality
• Some is uniquely interpreted and relates to individual experience

• Reflecting on this can develop our self-awareness and inform our use of self
Person-Centred Approach

• **Power dynamics**
  - co-researchers experience empathic attitudes and positive regard from researchers
  - researchers communicate own presence (ie self-awareness and transparency)

• **Holistic**
  - experience is all that is available to awareness
  - cognitive; psychological; emotional; physiological; behavioural
  - ‘organismic valuing process’

• **Movement**
  - from stuck/rigid to openness/flexibility
Person-Centred Approach

- Experiential PCA
  - co-researcher directs content
    - principled non-directivity rather than instrumental
  - researcher may direct process
    - important for skills-based activities
  - both explore and co-create meaning
    - The narrative (interpretation) does NOT belong solely to the researcher
case study: An Internet of Soft Things

networked systems/ubiquitous computing

mental health and wellbeing

smart textiles

Research in the Wild project
Sept 2014- Feb 2016
case study: An Internet of Soft Things

- **Challenges of multidisciplinarity**
  - Human science / Natural science
  - Qualitative / Quantitative
  - Subjectivity / Objectivity
  - Process / Outcome

- **Methodology**
  - Openness
  - Inclusivity
  - Tolerance of difference and ambiguity

- **Evaluation**
  - By co-researchers as well as researchers
  - ‘locus of evaluation’ internal not external
The number of people living with depression in England has increased by nearly half a million in three years, according to an analysis of NHS data.

The total number for 2010-11 stood at 4.7 million people.

BBC News: 17 October 2012

- Many more people are turning up to services without a clinical diagnosis
- **Dual diagnoses** are on the rise
  - Conditions are constructs and in many cases overlap (mood and personality disorders, psychosis)
- ‘watch out for depression’
  - lack of emotional support in coping with recognised stressful events (eg major surgery)
what are we doing?

- working with Nottinghamshire Mind Network to co-design e-Textile objects and services
- giving people a voice in envisaging a future infused with technology
  - the Internet of Things
- these are people who are used to not being heard in society
- they are the people who are most likely to lose any agency they have in an Internet of Things
who is working with us?

- Mind service users
- an inclusive model of mental health
- we are all on a continuum – I am, you are
- we understand mental health issues as constructs
- we are not interested in pre-defined conditions
  - we are not dealing with pathologies or solving problems
- we did not know before starting the workshops exactly what conditions participants had
• Mind represent a particular kind of community
• people come of their own volition
• they can access one to one therapies
• or attend groups
• they have very often been through the National Health Service and may have finished a course of CBT or drug treatment
• they may still be on medication
• they may be experiencing any kind of mental health issue
• and are frequently dealing with more than one
• our co-research team turned out to include people living with:
  – psychosis
  – Korsakoff’s Syndrome
  – Depression
  – anxiety
the nature of this group

- a pre-existing group
- maximum 7 participants; minimum 4
- includes the facilitators and researchers
- we are all co-researchers and group members
skills and non-directivity in participatory design workshops

• personal experience is brought as and when an individual is ready to share it

• disclosure tends to happen in smaller pairs or dynamic triads

• pairs formed organically
how is it informing design?
criteria for evaluation?

evidencing impact

- it is hard to evidence the impact of this kind of work
- by definition we need to protect the identities of the people involved
- we can’t show you happy smiling faces
Person-Centred Approach to Research

- ‘is characterised by a developing rather than a pre-theorised mode of inquiry’ (Tudor and Merry, 2002: 123)
Bassetlaw workshop reflections
a film by Salamanda Tandem for IoSofT

Director/researcher: Isabel Jones
Film/photography: Geoffrey Fielding

With thanks to:
The Bassetlaw Mind Tuesday Art Group, staff
Chris, Elaine and Meg

Workshop planning:
Martha Glazzard, Richard Kettley, Rachel Lucas and Sarah Walker
your experience of these films

- some voices may be indistinct
- there are some long pauses
- the facilitators appear to lead or jump in
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YixEuzl0Wfc
issues for researchers

- unpredictability
- informed consent
- scattered narratives
- willingness to disclose
issues for participants

- unreliability
- informed consent
- abstract ideas
- expectation to disclose
some positive impact

“During the sessions my concentration has been much higher

I have only left once for a cigarette – it would usually be much more frequent”

Chris

• new skills and achievement
• reduced reliance on other (unhealthy) distractions
• relationships with new people
• confidence in a group
what do we actually want to achieve?

- empowerment in the moment?
- empowerment in life?
- beautiful - or significant - design concepts?

“you’ve got to keep looking, looking, looking, all the time...”

Meg
tips for design research with mental health participants

- flexibility in approach
- group agreement
- check-in; check-out
- constant self-reflection
- build in supervision
- creative tools for feedback
Further Reading


• Finlay. L. (2011) *Phenomenology for Therapists*. Wiley and Blackwell: Chichester

