

Practice-led Critical Reflection on the Ethics of ‘An Internet of Soft Things’

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper presents ethical issues that have arisen in ‘An Internet of Soft

Things’, a project which aims to develop a co-design methodology for multidisciplinary design teams working in the mental health sector, informed by the person-centred approach.

Design/Methodology/Approach: As an interdisciplinary project, we drew on craft and design (Textile), co-design (Computing) and person-centred (Psychotherapy) approaches. As such our methodology was to critically reflect on these approaches and to create a methodology that prized the participants’ wellbeing and phenomenological experience. The resulting methodology is informed by attitudes of openness and flexibility and empathic understanding and trustworthiness.

The paper discusses reflections on Phase 1 of the project, which included a pilot study, a series of smart textiles workshops at Bassetlaw Mind, and the creation of a film to capture participants’ experience.

Findings: We found that it was necessary and helpful to be flexible in the design of the content and delivery of the smart textile workshops in response to individuals and to the setting. We also found that the relationships developed between participants and facilitators could have a positive impact on both the making process and feelings of wellbeing, and that this could be a dynamic and flexible process. We found that transparent ongoing informed consent was linked to empathic understanding and trustworthiness. We found that researchers/facilitators’ self-care and capacity for reflexivity was enhanced by opportunities to debrief after the session.

Originality/value: As technology plays an increasing role in people's lives, it is important to bring the ethical values associated with psychotherapy in general and the person-centred approach in particular to research in the areas of design and technology. This is especially the case in areas of 'smart' design, pervasive computing and the Internet of Things, where human awareness is often designed out of the system.

Key words: person-centred, ethics, interdisciplinary, mental health, reflexivity

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