
Researchers' Personal Growth in Research through Design

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Abstract

In this paper, I reflect on the notion of recognizing the personal growth of individual researchers involved in research-through-design (RtD) projects. If RtD methodology acknowledges the temporal nature of RtD research, it may be beneficial to recognize not only the evolving nature of design projects and artifacts but also the growing nature of the researchers conducting the RtD research.

Author Keywords

Research through design; Personal growth; Individual knowledge gap.

CSS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing~Human computer interaction (HCI);**

Introduction

I reflect on the issue of recognizing a researcher who conducted research through design (RtD) and acknowledged their limited knowledge of all the relevant information when reporting RtD projects.

Temporal aspects of RtD encompass the design process and the discoveries made during it. A temporal aspect that I pay attention to in this paper is the personal growth of RtD researchers. As a design project

progresses, researchers may gain new knowledge through their practice. This knowledge can manifest as discoveries or enlightenment gained through reflection, which is one of the expected form of knowledge generation in RtD practices. In some instances, researchers may come to a moment [2] of encountering materials or situations that require new knowledge, then the researcher need to seek knowledge in the literature or encounter existing knowledge that they are unfamiliar with. This is another common form of encounter and knowledge acquisition process in RtD. The type of personal growth is that the RtD researcher is growing and come to know some knowledge that is new to them. There may be conflicting views on whether to report the growth process of individual RtD researchers.

More specifically, I reflect on the question of whether academic researchers who conduct RtD projects should acknowledge and explicitly state their limited knowledge (I mean knowledge or theories they personally lacked, not existing knowledge in the literature) in their academic writings, such as published journal papers.

Researchers are unique individuals, and it's natural for them to have limited knowledge and awareness of certain theories or concepts. Acknowledging one's limited understanding is a sign of accountability and a commitment to continuous learning and improvement.

There is an assumption in academic research and reporting that design researchers are already "well-grown-up" researchers when they begin conducting their research. If RtD methodology acknowledges the temporal dimension of RtD projects, which leads to the

design artifacts, the researcher(s) conducting the research may evolve in terms of their perspective through enlightenment and discoveries. Furthermore, the researcher may also grow due to the gained experience in the research project and the ongoing encounters, such as encountering existing knowledge that is new to them. In essence, the question arises is whether we recognize that the researcher conducting RtD research is not static but rather constantly growing, evolving, and becoming a "newer version" of themselves.

One idea is that researchers should hold themselves accountable to readers by acknowledging their own limited knowledge. This acknowledgment serves as a form of accountability [1] for the readers of their research reports, particularly other researchers, who are one of the primary target users of the knowledge produced. By acknowledging their own limitations and reporting the growth progress of a researcher, researchers can demonstrate their accountability to other researchers.

However, there will be a challenge in identifying researchers who have not done their homework properly, as it will be difficult to determine which researchers have reviewed the relevant literature to a sufficient level or scope before engaging in research.

As a research community that accepts acknowledging its limited awareness of existing knowledge needs to collectively reach an agreement and periodically review it. This would be an ongoing negotiation process facilitated by social interactions like workshops, gatherings, and paper reviews.

One advantage of accepting researchers to acknowledge their limited awareness is that it can potentially provide new researchers with a unique perspective and experience. By starting with their own lens, they can offer a fresh viewpoint that well-informed researchers might miss. This is because well-informed researchers may be “blinded” or heavily influenced by the established knowledge in the literature.

Another factor to consider is how personal growth manifests in the artifacts produced through a RtD process. If the personal growth is in crafting skills, it may result in inconsistent polishing levels across different parts of the artifacts, leading to a RtD project with visible inconsistencies. These inconsistencies may be apparent if all parts are external. However, if some parts are internal (e.g., electronics) and others are external (e.g., housing case of electronics), the traces of personal growth may not be very visible. If the personal growth is on the knowledge level, meaning personal growth in the form of making and correcting mistakes. Consequently, the traces of such personal growth in the resulting artifacts may not be visible or even non-tracable. In such cases, researchers must articulate the personal growth in their reporting of the RtD process and in the presentation of the artifacts themselves.

Acknowledging my Limited Knowledge

I’m relatively new to the RtD methodology and the RtD community. My previous experience has limited relevance to RtD. I am gradually learning and catching up with the RtD literature. The reflections and discussions I have shared are based on my limited knowledge and experience of RtD. I have also found

that the reflection process of writing this manuscript is a growing one for me.

Initially, I believed my focus was on the personal knowledge gap in the RtD process. However, upon reflection, I came to realize that I am advocating for the acknowledgment of personal limitations alongside personal growth within the RtD process. As I examined closer to this concept, I understood that from this perspective, the RtD researcher engaged in a RtD project is essentially evolving. Consequently, I realized that the central message I am conveying is one that acknowledges and recognizes the evolving nature of RtD researchers throughout the duration of RtD research.

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