Gunnar Stevens; Bernhard Nett

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BUSINESS ETHNOGRAPHY AS A RESEARCH METHOD TO SUPPORT EVOLUTIONARY DESIGN

BY GUNNAR STEVENS AND BERNHARD NETT

1 INTRODUCTION

> Users must be treated as co-developers, in a reflection of open source development practices (even if the software in question is unlikely to be released under an open source license.) The open source dictum, 'release early and release often' in fact has morphed into an even more radical position, 'the perpetual beta', in which the product is developed in the open, with new features slipstreamed in on a monthly, weekly or even daily basis. It's no accident that services such as Gmail, Google Maps, Flickr, del.icio.us, and the like may be expected to bear a 'Beta' logo for years at a time.
>
> Real time monitoring of user behavior to see just which new features are used, and how they are used, thus becomes another required core competency. A web developer at a major online service remarked: 'We put up two or three new features on some part of the site every day, and if users don't adopt them, we take them down. If they like them, we roll them out to the entire site.'[1]

In today's software industry, production and consumption of software are often mediated in continuous distributed processes, in which innovation-in-use plays a central role. The related role of situated action for innovation, which was first studied by the evolutionary economy of the 19th century,[2] has thus become a research topic for different disciplines, for instance, Cultural Studies[3], Innovation Research[4] and Information Systems[5]. In Software Engineering, product finding was, for a long time, simply excluded from software development. However,

1 Cf. O'Reilly: What is Web 2.0.

2 Reinert/Reinert: "Creative Destruction in Economics".

3 du Gay et al., 1997; Hepp: Cultural Studies und Medienanalyse.

4 Rogers: Diffusion of Innovations; von Hippel: "Sticky Information and the Locus of Problem Solving"; von Hippel: Democratizing Innovation.

5 Orlikowski: "Using Technology and Constituting Structures"; Boudreau/Robey: "Enacting Integrated Information Technology"; Jones/Karsten: "Giddens's Structuration Theory and Information Systems Review"; De Sanctis/Poole: "Capturing the Complexity in Advanced Technology Use".

even in Software Engineering, pioneer works on the role of product development have contributed to increasing interest in the topic.[6]

Digital technologies allow for new forms of the mediation of innovation, in which software applications have become products themselves, and artefacts may serve as boundary objects.[7] However, this productive role of the artefact should not be taken for granted. In fact, it is still too little understood as an innovation potential, and thus remains a difficult challenge for researchers and practitioners as well. One has to add that even this challenge is not yet understood in necessary detail. Therefore, it is hardly astonishing that there is little methodological support even for those aware of the problem of product finding.

This paper describes Business Ethnography (BE) as one method supporting evolutionary design conceptions and related forms of product finding, and which attempts to overcome the static as well as the voluntaristic bias of today's mainstream design conceptions. The paper starts with a short description of recent trends in software development, from which it concludes the necessity for evolutionary learning within research & development in the form of reflexive development. After some reflections on challenges of theory building, appropriability is presented as general perspective on technology within evolutionary design conceptions.

In pragmatic terms, appropriability can be demanded from individual tools, from whole software infrastructures and even from software development itself. As a related method to support evolutionary technology development, *Business Ethnography* (BE) is presented as one contribution to make software development appropriable for users and stakeholders within technology-development projects.

2 THE EMERGENCE OF DISTRIBUTED DEVELOPMENT

For evolutionary economy, the need for continuous innovation is not a residual, but an essential one: "Creative destruction is the essential fact about capitalism, stabilized capitalism is a contradiction in terms"[8]. With increased competition, competences to innovate become a *conditio sine qua non* for organizational survival.[9] Therefore, almost any company makes considerable efforts to better commercialize their industrial knowledge, to create new ideas, and to provide sustainable growth to reach the competitive position they aspire.

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6 Floyd et al.: "STEPS to Software Development with Users Source"; Fischer: "Seeding, Evolutionary Growth and Reseeding"; Messerschmitt/Szyperski: Software Ecosystem; Raymond: The Cathedral and the Bazaar.

7 Star/Griesemer: "Institutional Ecology, 'Translations' and Boundary Objects"; Engeström/Miettinen: "Introduction"; Fischer: "Symmetry of Ignorance, Social Creativity and Meta-Design".

8 Schumpeter: Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy, p. 83.

9 Kelly/Storey: "New Service Development", p. 104.

However, empirical research shows that there is a constantly high failure rate in developing innovative products. Booz et al.[10] and Cooper & Kleinschmidt[11] claim that about 45% of the resources devoted to product development and commercialization are expended on unsuccessful projects. In addition, about 35% of all products launched fail in a commercial sense.[12] The actual work of Kuhn[13], who conducted a survey over current studies, draw a similar picture: failure rates are consistently significant, although the failure rate in literature varies to a large extent; e.g. some authors talk about a failure rate of 33%, Sividas & Dwyer[14] about 50%. In the case of consumer goods Andrew and Sirkin[15] estimate a failure rate about 50%-90%, Haber[16] even talks about a failure rate of 80%-90%.

In his historical survey on failed innovation (like the invention of microwave in the 1940s), Bauer[17] pointed out that there are no internal guarantees to create a successful innovation. There are good reasons why innovation development is not just empirically, but also theoretically an inherently uncertain and risky endeavor, where the possibility of failure is not an accidental but an essential feature. In spite of the inherent risk to fail, innovation can nevertheless be mandatory in at least two cases: in the case of novelty and in the case of market saturation. In both cases, product finding is a wicked problem that cannot follow conventionalized criteria,[18] because conventionalized knowledge either does not exist or does not lead to any interesting novel product.

In software production the need to innovate in a wicked situation is not an exception, but the rule. Here, to be innovative involves a structural dilemma: one has no experience of the future when being confronted with high expectations in regard of innovative applications. One strategy to deal with this dilemma is by improving the completion rate by smaller, more manageable projects and by reducing functionality.[19] Another strategy that also has become popular in the last years is to innovate cooperatively in open software ecosystems[20] to increase the efficiency of innovation development and spreading the risk to fail.

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10 Booz et al.: New Product Management for the 1980's.

11 Cooper/Kleinschmidt: "New Products".

12 Cf. Crawford: "New Product Failure Rates".

13 Kuhn: Markteinführung neuer Produkte.

14 Sivadas/Dwyer: "An Examination of Organizational Factors Influencing New Product Success in Internal and Alliance Based Processes".

15 Andrew/Sirkin: "Innovating for Cash".

16 Haber: Resistenz gegenüber Innovationen.

17 Bauer: Gescheiterte Innovationen.

18 Cf. Rohde et al.: "Towards a Paradigmatic Shift in IS".

19 Beck: Extreme Programming Explained.

20 Messerschmitt/Szyperski: Software Ecosystem; Raymond: The Cathedral and the Bazaar.

Due to its digital character, software can be easily reproduced and adapted. This may reduce costs of incremental changes dramatically. Software production is characterized by two concurrent, yet opposing trends: software becomes a continuously developed mass-product as well as a highly individualized artefact. These trends in software production are supported by the Internet, a ubiquitous transportation and communication infrastructure for digital goods, which enables new opportunities. Through the new production and consumption forms of software the managing of development in dynamic socio-technical 'ecosystems' has become a new major challenge for current Software Engineering.

Software artefacts may evolve in (institutionally) independent, but (functionally) interdependent development traces. Related absence or under-development of connections between these traces can be interpreted as fragmentations of socio-technical 'ecosystems'. Fragmentations, therefore, may be a source of undesirable effects. However, fragmentation is not just a technical problem, but closely related to the organisation of communication between the relevant social actors.

The increasing relevance of software evolution in complex, dynamic 'ecosystems' is only slowly influencing a paradigm shift in analytical as well as constructional research. Product finding within the development of software development and related problems and opportunities have received only limited awareness within the literature. Problems of software development have generally been interpreted along the paradigm of a problematic construction of unproblematic products, without reflecting the rationality of this paradigm at all. To overcome this lag, there is still quite some way to go from a mechanic to a truly socio-technical approach.

The mechanic view rests on the paradigmatic example of software as an isolated product in a static, fully known environment. In contrast, the socio-technical view rests on the paradigmatic example of software as an in-determined product in evolutionary socio-technical contexts, which are sometimes called 'ecosystems'. Especially in the beginning of computer science as a discipline of its own, theoretic reflection on software development mainly focused on the incorporation of known specifications into computer programs. This paradigm emphasized formal correctness, but neglected practical aspects of the development processes, such as the product finding as a whole. Even in the age of the 'perpetual beta'[21], the socio-technical view on software as an evolving artefact is in no way self-evident in Software Engineering.

Paradoxically, it was mainly the establishment of Software Engineering as a genuine research field that has broadened perspectives on development processes. When ethnographic research became part of its methodological portfolio, the importance of production conditions and human resources for the development process has become increasingly emphasized. Furthermore, while the *ce-*

21 O'Reilly: What is Web 2.0.

teris paribus assumption of mainstream approaches like the "waterfall model"[22] still ignore development processes outside production, conceptions like the STEPS model have overcome this static perception of software development. In particular, Floyd et al.[23] emphasized that during the entire life-span of a product, there is continuous development of the objects (the software artefact, the application field, etc.) as well as of the subjects (the user, the designers, etc.).

Thus the understanding of continuously evolving software has been further broadened from a bird and a worm eye perspective: from the birds-eye view research on open-source projects[24] and software ecosystems[25] increased our understanding of the mechanisms of innovation development in open environment and the division of labor in distributed evolving software. From a worm-eyes view, research on design activities of end user[26] and the appropriation of technology[27] elaborated our understanding of the production of situated innovations emerging in daily life.

The related new socio-technical perspective is not only a new way to interpret software development, but includes new opportunities to organize software development and software. For instance, the identification of *in situ* design activities was a prerequisite for the identification of related technology and process properties. To support the creativity of *in situ* design activities among users and incorporate these activities into the software development the approach of tailorable software products and evolutionary software production has been suggested.[28] Pipek[29] used the co-evolutionary character of material forms and interpretation schemes for the design concept of Use-Discourse Environments.

In spite of such innovative conceptions, the mainstream of existing design methodologies still neglects the fact that software is subject to continuous development, in which space, time, culture and the product families used may become causes of fragmentation. Therefore, the related competence to identify reasons for practical problems is still arbitrarily limited, and software products treated as trans- (or better: proto-) social nature.

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22 Royce: "Managing the Development of Large Software Systems"; Boehm: "Software Engineering".

23 Floyd, Christiane et al.: "STEPS to Software Development with Users".

24 Henkel: Offene Innovationsprozesse; Raymond: The Cathedral and the Bazaar; Scacchi: "Free/Open Source Software Development".

25 Messerschmitt/Szyperski: Software Ecosystem.

26 Mackay: Users and Customizable Software.

27 Orlikowski: "Using Technology and Constituting Structures"; Boudreau/Robey: "Enacting Integrated Information Technology"; Pipek: From Tailoring to Appropriation Support.

28 Wulf/Rohde: "Towards an Integrated Organization and Technology Development"; Wulf: Zur anpassbaren Gestaltung von Groupware.

29 Pipek: From Tailoring to Appropriation Support.

REFLEXIVE TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT

Particularly in design research, the relation between theory and praxis becomes very complex, because researchers are expected to produce artefacts that change given, problematic situations: unlike in historical research, pro-actively intervening into the field, therefore, is not *per se* a pitfall of design research, but an essential part of constructional research. Invention by inventing (a gradual, reflexive form of trial and error) is an essential part of design research as one may be able to design an artefact, but not its complete future impact. Therefore, to deal with the unexpected (for instance, use forms) has to be a part of any reflexive competence in scientific Research and Development.

Of course, evaluation has been an element of engineering, in a way, even its core. However, evaluation was reduced to expected features of fully understood (as: constructed) systems – not only in relation to their technical functioning, but also in their socio-technical nature as applications. Most R&D research in software engineering simply tried to avoid wicked problems and related methodological complexity, but practitioners did not have the same opportunity: for them, software engineering was like an attempt to optimize something the nature of which is fully unknown. Thus it was not the knowledge provided (i.e. the optimization schemes), but lacking knowledge (about the current, socio-technically constituted situation) which formed the problem. Design situations were not even identifiable in mainstream research, as they were simply taken for granted (better: as fully knowledgeable).

Therefore, also the evaluation schemes and testing in software engineering were about expected features. The value of such evaluation could be decisive and unveil problematic design decisions. However, it remained impotent in relation to other, practically often very important problematic design problems. Even worse: by assuming the excluded type of problems from software engineering, it appeared as if related problems could not be tackled in any rational form at all. Furthermore, in order to understand how the unexpected is treated in Research & Development projects and how it could become a means for reflexive proceeding, one needs related ethnographic research. The implicit but effective reduction of reproducible quantitative testing to the only legitimate form of empirical research in software engineering has for a long time prevented methodological progress towards more reflexivity.

In contrast, design-research has to address three independent, but related issues without *a priori* exclusions of phenomena:

- observing technology in use (working with the artefact)
- developing technology in reflective action (working on the artefact)
- building grounded theories (working on the concepts)

Related socio-technical research is confronted with the situation that the full elaboration of concepts is only reached from a retrospective theoretical reflection

of emerging practices and applications. An example is given by Kuutti[30], who mentions that forms of "direct manipulation" are used in practice as early as the sixties, while Hutchins et al.[31] only published their theoretical work on this praxis of 'direct manipulation' as a theoretic concept twenty years later. But even in retrospective, insight is in no way self-evident and often requires the reconstruction of practices and sense-making processes.

An approach that focused on the special relation between practical intervention and theoretical reflection is Business Ethnography (BE)[32], one fundamental of which is to acknowledge the historic contingencies of social practices that are developed, among others, in the interplay between the construction and the appropriation of artefacts. BE, therefore, often sees novel practices and artefacts co-emerging.[33]

Technical applications are not seen as merely theoretical deductions from a static, given and fully understood world of natural laws, but as socio-technical (and fallible) correlations to habitual human practices, as interpretative elements of fragmented, risky human experience. Applications are results of socio-historical contexts – and vice versa. Which nexus prevails is an empirical question related to the individual case at stake (which itself often needs reflexive identification). Therefore, the focus of BE is the purpose or business of the actors developing an application; this is why it is called *Business Ethnography*.

In this context, BE tries to study everyday practices not as static entities, but in their potential for general self-organized socio-technical development. This does not mean, by contrast, that related decisions are free of conflicts, power, or ambivalence. BE neither premisses a privileged access of science to truth nor a general right to decide for others nor does it deny that decisions for others may become a necessity in certain circumstances. BE takes research as theoretically and practically interwoven with practice and science as an institutional setting of power, but at the same time as an anticipation of human emancipation.

BE as an action-research approach confronts itself with its own decision-making when intervening into practice, which may turn out as contingent. It is not the aim of BE to avoid (value-based, but contingent) own decisions, but to use, analyze and discuss the rationality of the decision exemplarily among a scientific community that follows the logic of the better argument.

BE has a strong affinity to Grounded Theory in methodological as well as methodical terms. Methodologically, the affinity is given by the fact that both share the abductive stance of pragmatism when trying to build general theories on

30 Kuutti: "Activity Theory as a Potential Framework for Human-Computer Interaction Research", p. 18.

31 Hutchins et al.: "Direct Manipulation of Interfaces".

32 Cf. Nett/Stevens: "Business Ethnography"; Rohde: "Towards a Paradigmatic Shift in IS".

33 E.g. Orlikowski/Hofman: "An Improvisational Model of Change Management"; Pipek/Wulf: "A Groupware's Life".

the empirical ground of experiences within limited projects. Methodically, the affinity is given by the fact that both draw a similar conclusion from the evolutionary stance of pragmatism, arguing that research should be aware of its double nature as theory building and practical action[34]: Applications can be constructed within particular projects, but inherit (or demolish) social experiences. Due to the close affinity to Grounded Theory, the concept of reflective technology development can also be characterized as *Grounded Design*.

RE-CONSTRUCTING DISTRIBUTED CONSTRUCTION

Discussing the connection between the material and the meaningful reality easily leads to the question what comes first, the meaning or the material. Deterministic and voluntaristic technology conceptions give two different answers with the claim of generality regarding the causal structure: the deterministic position argues that the material objects came first and enabled related intentions. The voluntaristic technology argues the other way around that the intention came first and led to the forming of the material objects.

Another differentiation between a static and a dynamic perspective clarifies the rationality of the deterministic and voluntaristic arguments. In a static perspective, the artefact can be abstracted from its connections, and become a mere realization of intention. More precisely, in the static phase (which present the paradigmatic case for the static view), the material and meaningful objects collapse to a unity: the material side expresses the meaning and vice versa. In this case, it is meaningless to ask the question what comes first, which appears as a chicken and egg question. Furthermore, there are no critical incidents: the artefact is produced to function in the way it does, and the users use it in exactly this way. Everything is lucid in this perspective. The price, however, is that product evolution, innovation, is possible only as a planned, fully successful process.

In the dynamic case an artefact is a somehow 'untrue' realization of the idea which motivated its production: the product shows unexpected impacts. In this case, the voluntaristic and the deterministic position can be interpreted as two sides of emerging innovation. While possible innovations can be constructed by scrutinizing the static perspective, wicked situations, crises, in which the material and meaningful object do not express each other in cases of existing technology, can be used as a means to elaborate existing experience about their limitations.

The notion of Software Engineering as applied science has been interpreted in a deductive way, in which theories are seen as bases of applications. This tendency to an instrumental rationality is increased by the fact that theories were simply considered as externally defined and fully given and not outcome of a reflective practice. Due to two reasons, the engineering disciplines, therefore, are confronted with the critique that they are applying a reductionist, merely instru-

34 See Strübing: Grounded Theory, p. 14.

mental view on the world: The exclusion of contingencies (of which emergence is a special case) prohibits, on the one hand, the development of systematic practical expertise, and any critical scrutiny of decisions in design which are related with contingencies, on the other.

This leads in some part of Information System (IS) and Design Research[35] to a *pragmatic turn* of the discipline. This turn emphasis the situatedness of action[36] and leads to the adoption of ethnographical methods[37] as well as, recently, to a focus on aesthetics.[38] For instance, the structuration approach in IS explores phenomena of innovation-in-use by explaining phenomena of non-intended use with the help of the appropriation concept. However, the way it uses the appropriation concept makes it sometimes fall back onto the established perspective which sees the intended use forms are closer to some 'true' application than the emerging ones.

As another example, Suchman[39] interprets situations as irreducible, constitutive settings of human action, but has no concept of development, such as, for instance, Peirce could provide. Last, but not least, Star and Griesemer's[40] notion of the artefact as a *boundary object* mediating between different realities treats them as a "black box" and thus does not ask about material preconditions which could make the artefact to become a better boundary object.

The *pragmatic turn* in Design Research increases awareness of the contingent and situated character of praxis. However, there is still a lack of discussion of the constitutive structure of evolution and the resulting methodological consequences design research should draw from it. Here design research could profit from the Peircean logic of the dialectic of organic synthesis (presented by perceptual inferences) and controlled analysis (presented by abductive reasoning) as essential parts of (knowledge) development.[41] From such a pragmatist stance, it is evident that one important form of theory building on innovation is based an analysis following a reconstructive logic where the existence of phenomena is taken as a point of departure for questions concerning the necessary conditions of their possibility. In regard of technology development, the following forms of mediation phenomena become relevant:

35 Harrison: "The Three Paradigms of HCI"; Wulf: "Theorien sozialer Praktiken zur Fundierung der Wirtschaftsinformatik".

36 Suchman: Plans and Situated Actions.

37 Randall: Fieldwork for Design.

38 Sengers/Gaver: "Staying Open to Interpretation".

39 Suchman: Plans and Situated Actions.

40 Star/Griesemer: "Institutional Ecology, 'Translations' and Boundary Objects".

41 Cf. Baltzer: Erkenntnis als Relationengeflecht; Müller: Die dynamische Logik des Erkennens von Charles S. Peirce; Hoffmann: Erkenntnisentwicklung.

Generalizations of situated innovations

One phenomenon that needs explanation is how emergent objects become of general interest. Corresponding to this issue is the transition of the artifact, where it becomes a common object, mediating the interest of different parties.

The communicability of situated innovations

A second issue that needs explaining is how to communicate about an emergent object, using existing concepts without liquidating the innovative element. Corresponding to this issue is the transition of the artefact into an indexical object, that itself mediates experience.

The experienceability of situated innovation

A third issue needing explanation is how emergent objects appear in established reality constructions. Corresponding to this issue is the transition of the artefact into a present at-hand tool, mediating between own and foreign reality conceptions.

From the constitution-theoretical point of view, experienceability, communicability and generalizations are necessary mediation instances of innovations in their genesis from an ephemeral emerging object that appears in (wicked situations) to a permanent new social structure (incorporated in artifacts and routines). Structurally, they correlate to corresponding organically given constitutions of man to appropriate and realize innovations. In concrete cases of technological innovation, all three categories play a role in different degree and should be systematically included in development process. However, the given research approaches are not able to tackle all issues or draw a too individualistic picture of the needed competency of men, and hypostatize a structural model based on 'great men' in history (either in the form of the romantic 'genius' or in generalizations about Schumpeter's 'dynamic entrepreneur'). Therefore, existing concepts have to be further elaborated related to the question how these forms of innovation can be realized in a social manner of a particular project or in society as a whole, taking into account both embodied experienceability and discursive rationality.

This requires a related reconstruction of social experience in relation to the anticipated application. The analysis of possible applications and existing experience on their limitations only informs about technological opportunities, not about technological feasibility or social acceptability. But therefore it may contribute to related techno-political sense-making on the social and on a micro (project) level as well.

In what follows, we would like to give an outline of how this issue is taken into account in BE. In addition we will give a brief outline what this means in terms of evolutionary technology development.

BE: RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT ON TECHNOLOGY PROJECTS

Business Ethnography (BE) was originally developed as the empirical part of the action-research oriented design conception of Integrated Organization and Technology Development (OTD).[42] OTD is a process model to support a technology expert in his efforts to identify and tailor technology dedicated to help a client's self-organization instead of replacing it technologically. Related projects were based on a set of workshops, in which researchers and organization members took part to analyze and define requirements or to discuss design alternatives.[43] BE was to inform the technical experts about the status quo in the given setting. As a research & development method of its own, BE remained conceptualized as a visible intervention into the field established by the cooperation of the project partners.

BE tries to understand development as an evolution of praxis into the flow of an open future, where non-standardizable, situated learning process can occur. The methodological consequence drawn by BE is that rigour in such cases cannot be reached by 'hypothesis-testing' methodologies. In this point BE differs from other action-research approaches like Canonical Action Research (CAR)[44] that based on hypothesis testing methodology. The argument is that new qualities of novel applications emerging in research projects cannot be adequately ascertained if they are subsumed *ex ante* under pre-defined categories. Instead, the categories have to be abducted from the emergent phenomenon itself. It is by abductive rather than deductive reasoning that rigour is achieved.

The qualitative research undertaken originally was based more on interviews than on the researchers' own field observations. This did not only help the ethnographers to understand the given situation and possible boundary objects,[45] but additionally helped them to establish social capital[46] between the actors in the project and supporting experts[47].

The goal of BE is to understand everyday work practices in a particular context. One of the most important elements of BE is the central role of interviews with project partners on their cooperation practices, which form the basis of analyses. The interviews not only give insights into the distributed, sometimes even contradictory character of the organizational model(s) guiding the actors, but also into deviations from 'normality', either perceived by the interviewees or

42 Wulf/Rohde: "Towards an Integrated Organization and Technology Development"; Wulf et al.: "Improving Inter-Organizational Processes with Integrated Organization and Technology Development".

43 Cf. Rohde: Integrated Organization and Technology Development (OTD) and the Impact of Socio-Cultural Concepts.

44 Davison et al.: "Principles of canonical action research".

45 Star/Griesemer: "Institutional Ecology, 'Translations' and Boundary Objects".

46 Ackerman: "Communities and Technologies".

47 Nett et al.: "Neither Essence nor Accident".

deduced by the interviewer from analyses of the perspectives and experiences of different actors.

BE differentiates between formal organizations, on the one hand, and practices enabling them, on the other. It thus focuses on differentiations between routines, disturbances and normative aspects in everyday-work practices. BE aims at the actors' perception of the situation in the field, but helps to produce a new picture at the same time: an integral part of the BE is to confront the project partner with the analyses of the interviews, and ask them to comment.

The reason for that is two-fold. First, this is a common method in action research to validate the analyses, adapted in BE. Secondly, this strategy is used to allow for self-organized learning processes: the feedback confronts the interviewees with a perception of their situation that has undergone a methodological interpretation by the ethnographers. Therefore, it is perceived by the interviewees as an expropriation of the experience they expressed. This expropriation allows for BE analysis to detect and analyze multi-perceptivity in the field and reconstruct alternatives that are potentially given through, but not realized in practice. This *un-practical* expropriation is a form of alienation (*Verfremdung*) of the project business for the actors. The feedback of this alienated picture of the project business (including, for instance, anonymous views upon the anticipated product, its impact for the various actors and their related fears and hopes) to the actors allows the project to discuss from a distant (alienated) position, and thus to become able for discursive 're-' and 'ap-propriations'.

The basis for possible re-appropriations of shared anticipations is their alienation, which is not organized as some amorphous 'irritation', which simply shatters normal perception. Instead, BE analyses and the feeding-back of potentiality and multi-perspectivity into the field foregrounds a vagueness covered behind a shared anticipation before. The alienation of shared anticipation is the unveiling of one's own speculations, which had substituted knowledge and was related to the vagueness of one's former own anticipations. Alienation is therefore not a goal in itself, but a prerequisite of more insightfully shared product anticipations, and an important issue in product finding.

BE also offers data for analyses of learning processes and organizes common discussions of the interview partners about the validity of their anticipations, their impact for the understanding of the given situation and for the common project, as well. As a compound of action research and ethnography, BE has been applied in several projects, in which the ethnographer cooperated with the project partners to achieve common project aims. Organizing expropriation/re-appropriation loops of related knowledge with the project partners helped them to reflect on their local expertise and develop new strategies.

APPROPRIABLE SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT: ARTEFACT AND CONTEXT FOCI

Analyzing factual technological innovation processes demands dynamic analyses that include static ones only in between dynamic innovation processes, since within the static conception, there is generally no innovation. Analyses of technological innovation are rather complex issues, demanding a highly differentiated conceptual framework to understand the cases at stake. In the context of technology development, the complexity involved does not allow for simple solutions. In the case of product evolution, for instance, missing product features may result in innovation blockades, but a lack of understanding of the product, as well.

The concept of appropriability interprets the artifacts as a proper entity in the triadic structure of *product, consumption, production*, and therefore demands detailed analyses which cover developer as well as user and artifact perspectives. The concept is not an 'empty' one, as it allows for the identification of different strategies for evolutionary development. Appropriability is demanded for different sides of technology development. With regard to the individual artefact, it implies that the application should be tailorable by the end user (or some of her representatives, for instance, a software gardener.[48] However, an application does not make a lot of sense when it has been tailored to end user demands, as long as it does not remain inter-operable with other tools, at least on the level of the given platform. Therefore, the demand on appropriability reproduces itself on the level of the software infrastructure.

Again the concept of appropriability turns out to have different dimensions. To begin with, the most demanding challenge, the development of *software infrastructures,* has to analyze existing ones according to the differentiated conceptual framework described before. Analyses of contradictions in respect of related expectations can unveil implicit opportunities of given infrastructures. This challenge is the basis of Grounded Design. When grounded theory understands the given structure of problems and solutions (in medicine, the origin of theories: diseases in diagnoses and therapies) as a point of departure, but not necessarily as the result of analyses, grounded design uses established applications and related contradictions of expectations as a means for development.

On the individual application level, related analyses can be conducted more easily. However, one is confronted with the question how to make sense of shifting and contradictory expectations here. In this regard, there are again two options. One option is to use a technological solution to deal with contradicting expectations. For instance, Guittard et al.[49] try to deal with changes of perceptions in projects by displaying the evolving 'socio-semantic web'. Automatically generated representations of central concepts leading project activities are shown

48 Gantt/Nardi: "Gardeners and Gurus".

49 Guittard et al.: "Socio-Semantic Web".

among others to support the reflections on what happens within research & development projects.

Another option to deal with shifting and contradictory expectations is also drawing upon the confrontation of the actors with the multi-perspectivity at stake without automatizing analysis, but by basing it upon 'classical' qualitative analysis. The double function of the researcher&developer as a member of the individual project and the scientific community becomes a source of analyses: as a project member, the *Business Ethnograph* is oriented to produce a project-related perspective of the commonly anticipated application; as a scientist, he later describes the contradictions and problems he had to face when attempting that.

A superficial view upon this approach of confronting project members with their own anticipations and expectations might hardly perceive it as a constructive one. In fact, although the related procedural means to support reflexive development turned out to be highly successful in practice, it took some efforts to understand the nature its benefits, the cycle of ex- and re-appropriation of project aims and product anticipations by means of alienation. *Business Ethnography* (BE) turned out to be one of the most elementary forms to support evolutionary product finding and may be combined with other attempts presented.

CONCLUSION

BE is a contribution to reflective technology development and thus can be characterized as an evolutionary-design conception. At the same time, it is also a design research approach. By fostering a (voluntary) expropriation of technology-related experiences, ideas and feelings (such as related expectations and fears), it allows for an analysis of the multi-perspectivity of the given field and may uncover potentialities incorporated in the work routines. By feeding back this analysis, BE develops an alienation ("*Verfremdung*") of shared anticipations. This subdues common re-appropriation of anticipation to common scrutiny, in the technology-developing projects at stake, mostly the product anticipation as the "incorporation" of the project goals. While this process allows for a more detailed picture of the singularities at stake in the given project, BE also aims at possible generalizations of the given innovation, which it discusses in the scientific community. The basis of the generalizations is the reconstruction of failed assumptions, which caused unexpected results in socio-technical practice.

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AUTOREN

Stephan Habscheid ist Professor für Germanistik/Angewandte Sprachwissenschaft an der Universität Siegen. Seine Forschungsschwerpunkte liegen im Bereich der empirischen Erforschung sprachlich-medialer Kommunikation, besonders in institutionellen und organisationalen Kontexten. Publikationen u.a.: „Sprache in der Organisation“, 2003; „Über Geld spricht man … Kommunikationsarbeit und medienvermittelte Arbeitskommunikation im Bankgeschäft“, 2006 (zusammen mit Werner Holly u.a.).

Thomas Kamphusmann, zunächst Ausbildung zum Krankenpfleger, mehrere Jahre Arbeit im OP. Künstlerische Arbeiten (Literatur, Performances, Computerinstallationen, Fotografie, Veranstaltungsorganisation, kulturpolitisches Engagement). Studium der Germanistik, Kunstgeschichte und Linguistik an der RUB, Abschluss mit einer Arbeit über „Algorithmische Textanalyse“. Freiberuflicher Programmierer und Systemadministrator. Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter u.a. am SFB 240 „Bildschirmmedien“. Promotion an der Universität Siegen mit einer Arbeit über „Literatur auf dem Rechner“. Wissenschaftlicher. Mitarbeiter, Gruppen- und Abteilungsleiter am Fraunhofer Institut für Software- und Systemtechnik, Dortmund. Aktuell: Elternzeit und Habilitationsprojekt zu organisationeller Kommunikation an der Universität Siegen.

Bernhard Nett promovierte in Soziologie, Politikwissenschaft und Wirtschaftswissenschaften an der RWTH Aachen (1997). Er arbeitete an den Universitäten Aachen, Bonn, Freiburg, Berlin (TU), St. Augustin (Fraunhofer-FIT), Siegen und Troyes, Frankreich (Gastprofessur). Seine Forschungsinteressen liegen in Business Ethnography, Software Engineering, CSCW, CSCL und ICT4D.

Dave Randall ist Principal Lecturer für Soziologie an der Manchester Metropolitan University. Er hat langjährige Erfahrungen in der ethnographischen Praxis in einer Vielzahl von Kontexten, u.a. in Organisationen. Er hat zwei Monographien und etwa 100 Aufsätze über Theorie und Praxis ethnographischer Forschung und über verschiedene andere Themen publiziert.

Martin Reisigl studierte Sprachwissenschaft und Philosophie. Er ist Angewandter Sprachwissenschaftler und arbeitet derzeit an einer wissenschaftstheoretischen und wissenschaftshistorischen Metastudie über einflussreiche Ansätze der Diskurstheorie und Diskursanalyse in der Sprachwissenschaft und in benachbarten Disziplinen. Zu seinen Forschungsgebieten zählen neben der Diskursforschung (im weitesten Sinn) die Pragmatik (insbesondere die Funktionale Pragmatik), die Soziolinguistik, die Textlinguistik, die Rhetorik (insbesondere die politische Rhetorik), die Argumentationstheorie, die Semiotik, wissenschaftliches Schreiben und das Verhältnis zwischen Sprache und Politik (unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Nationalismus, Populismus und Rassismus), Sprache und Geschichte sowie Linguistik und Literatur.

Gunnar Stevens wurde an der Universität Bonn zum Diplom-Informatiker ausgebildet und promoviert nun am Institut für Wirtschaftsinformatik der Universität Siegen. Nach langjähriger Tätigkeit in der Industrie leitet er zur Zeit ein Projekt zum End-User Development an der Fraunhofer FIT und ist am *Eclipse* Open Source-Projekt beteiligt.