Personal Development Plan Ph.D.

By Rutger Verstegen

Design is a very big and general term. In order to specialize, it is important to know who you are as a designer. On the next pages of my PDP, you can read who I am as a designer and what my vision is on design. I will communicate my strengths and weaknesses and how all of this relates to my personal view on design and my competency development.

Identity

I am driven by a desire to create and explore, shaping me as a design researcher. I believe that design can be more human and intuitive, which is why I position myself as a research-driven designer to bring this change. I believe more natural designs not only omit the need for a manual, but can also take less effort, have more natural interactions and leave more attention free to enjoy life. As designers we control how users interact with daily life, and thus we should not design interactions that negatively influence life by taking too much attention. I do not like to take things for granted, and like to explore how I can help humans and technology connect with less effort. I learned that I am a critical bridge builder in a group project. I try to bring elements together, in a coherent product, which is supported by my multidisciplinary knowledge. With my natural interests in technology and human interactions, I feel most comfortable working on design realization and studies with humans.

As designers, we are not only responsible for exploring options and following our instincts, but also validating this by research. My strengths lie in creating designs and then validating them appropriately with users to gain new knowledge. For this reason, I have a strong focus on exploratory user research, concept realization and development of testing procedures. My strengths lie in researching future technology for gaining new knowledge, not in the design for today, such as art or the development of the next pair of scissors, there I lack passion and a deep understanding of production processes.

'The same technology that simplifies life by providing more functions in each device also complicates life by making the device harder to learn, harder to use.'

- Don Norman, 2013

Vision

My belief is that good design is not intrusive. Most products should be made so that you are not forced out of your real-life experiences. The usage of technology should facilitate a valuable experience, and not be at the center of attention. This vision is supported by concepts such as flow [2] and operating in the present [3].

With that in mind, I am critical of the visions behind existing products such as navigation screens in cars, which take you out of your task to let you change basic functionality. To realize these better interactions with technology, we not only need good designers with a strong sense of intuition and design but also research to validate these designs. With the increasing importance of technology, I believe that my view on interaction design has an important position in the future.

I envision a world where I contribute with data-driven design focussing on intuitive interactions between humans and technology. The societal impact of intuitive, effective, and minimal design lies in clear interactions that give users the opportunity to focus on what they find important, resulting in mental space for users to manifest. After all, driving a road trip is less fun when all your attention needs to be on the car, it's more fun seeing the road and being in the moment.

I strive to enrich lives, by creating products that do not pull you out of the current moment'

[1] Norman, D. (2013). The design of everyday things: Revised and expanded edition. Basic books.
[2] Csikszentmihalyi, M., Abuhamdeh, S., & Nakamura, J. (2005). Flow. Handbook of competence and motivation, 598-608.
[3] Kiken, L. G., Lundberg, K. B., & Fredrickson, B. L. (2017). Being present and enjoying it: Dispositional mindfulness and savoring the moment are distinct, interactive predictors of positive emotions and psychological health. Mindfulness, 8, 1280-1290.

Improvements upon current development

As a future design researcher with a focus on technological interaction design, I feel this is a good moment to work on my skills as a researcher. I feel that as a researcher I could contribute to the world with my skills and interests. On the next page, I have formulated my direct goals for the upcoming semester, which stam from my vision, identity and current development.

PhD Goals and planning

I set the following goals for the first year of my PhD:

Goal #1

To improve my scientific writing, I want to complete a course on scientific writing and apply this knowledge to a new publication I am working on, within the first year of my PhD.

Goal #2

For building a good knowledge base of papers to use during my PhD, I want to further explore managing systems to store papers, references and annotations. I will have completed this goal once I have made on overview of available options and selected my program of choice.