Virtual Reality for Augmented Collaboration and Accelerated Learning among Process Plant Workers

Hakeem Adebola Lawal

1 Mads Clausen Institute for Product Innovation,
University of Southern Denmark,
Grundtvigs Allé 150,
DK-6400 Sønderborg, Denmark
{hakeem@itproducts.sdu.dk}

Abstract. When talking about learning at work, especially in industrial setup such as that of the Process Plant works, it is very crucial and important to note that most of the knowledge shared is tacit experiences of the competent worker, which he has to impart to the newcomer. This research work was focused on how to enhance this important aspect of social interaction. The research was initiated as a thesis dissertation of the author.

1 Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present how the empirical knowledge and observations of the author during the study of three process plants in Denmark namely: Tuborg-Fredericia, Sønderborg Wastewater Treatment Plant and Danfoss-Nordborg’s Electroplating Waste Control Plant, between November 2003 and April 2004 was transformed into design concepts through extensive use of video documentation which were later analyzed for design conceptualization.

The project was commenced with ethnographic field surveys, interviews and workshops at the process plants, with the aim of finding an opportunity for situated intervention.

The basic research questions, for the project were:

1. How can Pervasive Computing technologies be employed to enhance social interactions and other functions among process plant workers?
2. What is the best way to design, a functional, aesthetic and ergonomic artifact that will fit seamlessly into the work-context of process plant workers?

The project revealed to us that the day-to-day running of the Process Plants and relative ones is directly dependent on the alarm messages, documented logs of routine as well as special or uncommon alarms; and that the record of these alarms (Log records), were used to predict and hence plan ahead how to run of the plants.

The approach for executing the project was of two basic directions:
1. Concurrent ethnographic fieldworks [5], observations and interviews.
2. Participatory Design, which entails co-authoring of the emerging artifact through workshops and iterative [4; 2] refining of concepts by returning to the users.

1.2 Visualization as a way of effective communication

According to Davies: “A design method based around participatory design through visualisation and active involvement has previously been formulated and shown to be effective in a number of workplace design cases (Ehn et al., 1996; Wilson, 1999). The crux of this method centres on envisionment – using visual and experimental media to find a common language for a design team participating in the design of a workplace.” [Davies, 2004] This supports the fact that visual objects such as mock-ups, sketches, video cards, cultural probes, etc enhances dialogue [8] between all the stakeholders [2] in a design process.

1.3 Learning at work

The newcomer has to learn by doing, “It is follow the leader system here.” Poul, an experienced electrician at the wastewater plant, commented. They also said that the newcomer is gradually “charged” until he can start to do things by himself and that he would thereafter be ringing “home” if he is faced with a difficult situation.

The set goal of the project was how to enhance social interactions through tangible interface among process plant workers. How they communicate with each other and also perform their computer aided tasks daily, and how they build also their competence through collaboration and learning from one another [7].

1.4 Trying on the User’s shoe

As a way out of the design dilemma, it was suggested that the data from the fieldworks be presented to professionals (designers) for a collaborative analysis and hence prescription of design concepts as remedy to the identified workshop involving a group design professionals at the Mads Clausen Institute for Product Innovation (Held on the 29th of March 2004).

The workshop was targeted at inviting the participants, who were all design practitioners into the world of the process plant workers; to experience how these people are compelled to hear through another person’s ear, see with another person’s eyes and feel through other’s hands, everyday, because instructions and feedbacks are channeled via mobile phones and documented logs. Short video clips of the field studies [1] was presented to all the participants, but none of the video was on the collaborative design workshops with the user, for fear of influencing their creativity later on when they would be required to deliver 3-D sketches of three possible user interfaces for the process plant workers. Prior to this, there had been workshops in
which the plant workers were told to visualize a blank, white box as their communication tool and so show or draw on it to relay its functionalities. These were not disclosed to the designers partaking in the workshop.

A brief reflection [8] session was held to evaluate shared meaning. This was followed by participants’ comments, which revealed to me as the organizer that they had experienced something very close to what I observed with the real process plant workers. The session was a success for *immersing* the designers into the users’ world.

![Figure 1](image1.png)

**Figure 1.** Tinkering session and two of the emerged early prototypes

### 1.5 Why involve the Users in the design process?

It is necessary to involve the potential users in the design of the artifact from the very beginning because “Complex design problems require more knowledge than any single person possesses because the knowledge relevant to a problem is usually distributed among stakeholders. Bringing different and often controversial points of view together to create a shared understanding among these stakeholders can lead to new insights, new ideas, and new artifacts.” [2] Inasmuch as the people expected to use the final product would do so in the context of their everyday work, it is quite logical to visit their work places, where all the action is taking place, [2; 4] for context-awareness for the emerging artifact.

![Figure 2](image2.png)

**Figure 2.** Some of the white boxes used to provoke the user’s creativity and facilitates dialogues that led to design concepts

### 2.1 Taking it a step further.

It was revealed after a new careful re-examination of the workshops, interviews and field works, especially the success of putting the camera in the worker’s pocket, it became apparent that there was room for re-designing the interfaces and the interaction styles in a manner that will make the artifact to blend seamlessly, through RFID tagging, etc into the day-to-day activities of the user. This led to a new concept:
• Direct mounting of the device on the user’s head is generated from the synthesis of all the desirable functionalities and also as a way to favor complete freedom of the hands, good positioning of the camera and the possibility of generating larger view of desired information as a superimposed holographic images of similar repair exercise in the view of the worker as virtual guide for the task at hand as a form of “see and copy” concept.

Figure 3. Head-mounted concept for Flashback device, with its foldable visor, projecting networked Logs of the equipment’s history like hologram in the view of the worker; the projected image can also be pictures or video footages of past repair activities by the experienced for situated, peripheral learning at the scene of the task a novice worker

References


Augmented reality and virtual reality will transform workplace experiences. Market leaders are using these technologies to change customer experiences, sales and employee access to information. Augmented reality superimposes computer-generated images and overlays information on a user's real-world view. Virtual reality takes this a step further by creating an immersive, computer-generated environment. Major vendors of the technology include Oculus, HTC, Microsoft, Samsung, and Sony. Companies should take a cue from the leaders above and evaluate what processes could be enhanced or transformed by using technologies such as augmented and virtual reality. Next, the IT and Line of Business managers should build a scoped use case that's easy to prototype.

Augmented and Virtual Reality Definitions. Virtual Reality Definition. Taking a common definition per the American Heritage Dictionary, virtual means. Within educational processes, augmented reality will allow students to work by increasing their creativity without fear of manufacturing risks and costs. (Di Serio, Ibáñez, & Delgado Kloos, 2013). Through imitation, collaboration, and exchange of experiences. In particular, the main risk of virtual reality within education focuses on misunderstanding, technology as the end rather than a means to the end: improving student outcomes in their learning process.

Current Technology Landscape. Currently the state of the art of both virtual reality and augmented reality technologies is... how virtual reality can enhance the learning process. The main goal of VR in education is to provide context and create a more natural environment for students to learn new information and most importantly interact with it. 93% of teachers confirm that students would be excited to use virtual reality in the classroom, according to BusinessWire. These are the three subjects that may currently offer the best room for collaboration using VR devices. From 360° interactive virtual tours to magnetic field visualizations or emergency situation scenarios, students can develop both hard and soft skills using the power of visually appealing and interactive environments in VR. Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are two technologies that are changing the way we use screens, creating new and exciting interactive experiences. Virtual reality uses a headset to place you in a computer-generated world that you can explore. Augmented reality, on the other hand, is a bit different. Instead of transporting you to a virtual world, it takes digital images and layers them on the real world around you through the use of either a clear visor or smartphone. With virtual reality, you could explore an underwater environment. With augmented reality, you could see fish swim. Both virtual reality and augmented reality have reached a point that we are seeing them practically implemented throughout our lives. Pokemon Go was perhaps the biggest way we have seen augmented reality used and we've probably all seen virtual reality video games or even amusement park rides. To fully understand each industry and the main differences, let's dive into the complexities of each. [Image Source: Pixabay].