
Research-Practice Interaction: Building Bridges, Closing the Gap

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Abstract

Previous work in the CHI community has identified and explored gaps between theory and practice in HCI research [2]. The recently formed SIGCHI Community on Research-Practice Interaction aims to help bridge the gap between research and practice, by for example supporting practitioner-friendly dissemination of results, and serving as a conduit for feedback from practitioners to researchers. This SIG is an opportunity for interested CHI attendees to meet members of the SIGCHI RPI community, and engage in discussions on RPI issues including the CHI format, dissemination of results, and supporting practice-based research.

Author Keywords

Research-Practice Interaction; dissemination; practice-based research

ACM Classification Keywords

H.1.2 User/Machine Systems; H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous.

General Terms

Human factors

Introducing Research-Practice Interaction

While the CHI community is more inclusive of practitioners than many other scientific fields, there is a

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still a large gap between the HCI researcher and practitioner communities. In the literature this is described as the research practice gap [6]. Indeed, CHI2012 featured a workshop exploring gaps between UX theory in research and UX theory in practice [5]. One outcome of the workshop was the formation of the SIGCHI Research-Practice Interaction Community¹, which aims to help bridge the research-practice gap by for example supporting practitioner-friendly dissemination of results and serving as a conduit for feedback from practitioners to researchers.

Research-Practice Interaction is important: the HCI community produces a wealth of quality insights grounded in good research practice, and CHI is recognized as the premier venue for such research. Several barriers hinder practitioners from gaining access to key insights that CHI presentations and papers provide:

- The academic style of writing
- The inclusion of material that is irrelevant to practitioners
- The ACM pay wall

Furthermore, while we often talk about “implications for design” these implications are often very abstract, and the transition to something actionable is too time intensive for many practitioners.

The problem also goes the other way: practitioners in the field have a wealth of experience, needs and indeed

problems that would be of great use to the HCI researcher, yet once again the silos that arise within research and practice hinder potentially valuable communication and feedback between these two areas.

There exist some mechanisms for disseminating research to non-academic audiences. These include engaging with the media, holding outreach events, or sending students into industry to do internships. There is, however, a dearth of work examining how to support engagement between academia and practice.

The SIGCHI RPI Community

Existing work has found that attempting to alter the research and practice communities is a herculean – and unrealistic – challenge. What does seem to be achievable, however, is *bridging* the two communities [1]. The SIGCHI RPI Community aims to achieve this via mechanisms including the creation of:

- A repository for practitioners that “translates” research insights into more actionable principles
- A collection of examples, strategies, principles, and practices that can assist in “translation” between research and practice
- A forum to facilitate communication between the communities, offering the opportunities (for example) for practitioners to raise issues that research might address, and for researchers to seek participants, get feedback or disseminate results

¹ sigchi.org/communities/rpi

| Timing | Activity |
|---------------|---|
| 15 mins | Introduction from the organizers about SIGCHI RPI and the aims for the SIG session. |
| Up to 10 mins | Questions from the audience, alternative questions to discuss during the session |
| 35 mins | Groups discuss the 3 questions (or alternate forms / additions to them) |
| 15 mins | Groups report back to the room as a whole. |
| 5 mins | Closing remarks and any other business. |

Table 1. Planned timetable for the SIGCHI RPI SIG at CHI 2013.

There are many in the CHI community (especially in the Design and UX Management communities) who are deeply concerned with practice, although we recognize that some are not. We are aware that not all academic research *is* suitable for dissemination to practice (consider for example the proof-of-concept prototype that is five years from being ready for use outside research, or the theoretical paper about the direction our field is taking). We have a strong vision, but the SIGCHI RPI Community is in its infancy, and so in order to form a coalition of the willing we propose this SIG as a call for organization as well as some a specific call to action on three topics.

The proposed CHI'13 SIG

This SIG is an opportunity for interested CHI attendees, whether from research or practice, to meet founding members of the SIGCHI RPI community and explore (and elaborate upon) the community's goals. We have identified three major questions to guide SIG discussions:

- 1) RPI and the CHI format: how can we find (and advertise) space for practice-oriented research in the CHI conference as it exists now?
- 2) Dissemination of results from CHI to practice: what (non-pay wall) mechanisms exist? (SIGCHI RPI could play a part in this.)
- 3) Supporting practice-based research (PBR): what do we mean by PBR (i.e. what can we use from the likes of [3,4]? How do we support it? Can it be an explicit part of CHI that the RPI SIG reviews for?

We intend to keep discussions realistic. Considering for example our planned discussion of the CHI format, we are aware that the practicability of adding another track to the CHI schedule is low. We plan to encourage participants to brainstorm for innovative alternatives.

We also intend to ask participants to explicitly ground their suggestions and discussion in their own experiences. This will help us better understand precisely what mechanisms and practices help and hinder Research-Practice Interaction, and may help us later on find patterns across CHI and other academic conferences.

Table 1 shows our planned timetable for this SIG, in which the above three topics would serve as seeds for three group discussions, but participants would be free at the beginning of the session to suggest other topics. Should there be low attendance (fewer than 8 people), we would instead run the session as one serial event, in which the issues were discussed in sequence by everyone in the room. (Merging the 35 minute discussion time and 15 minute feedback time into one 50 minute discussion.)

We aim to attract researchers and practitioners from across the CHI spectrum, from UX to usability, interaction design to information architecture: the more diverse the backgrounds of our participants, the richer we expect our discussions to be.

Conclusion

Although, as we have observed, not every CHI contribution offers immediate benefit to the practitioner, much CHI material does provide insights that are valuable in this way. Our experience is that

there is a significant disconnect between the academic and practitioner HCI communities, and past work has shown that building bridges or conduits between these communities is the best mechanism to solve this issue [2]: this is why we have founded the SIGCHI RPI Community.

In this SIG meeting, we aim to a) make the SIGCHI RPI Community and its goals better known to CHI attendees, b) connect with CHI participants (from both research and practice) in order to collect their experiences in this area, and c) discuss solutions to specific Research-Practice Interaction issues.

We hope to use this SIG to help build our community, and as a community use it to explore ways to support and facilitate Research-Practice Interaction. This RPI SIG is a vital step towards establishing SIGCHI RPI as a fully realized community, and aims to discuss and plan for its future.

Acknowledgements

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References

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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL FOR SIG RESEARCH-PRACTICE INTERACTION: BUILDING BRIDGES, CLOSING THE GAP

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF RELEVANT COMMUNITIES

As stated in the submission this SIG is most relevant for the relatively new Research-Practice Interaction (rpi) SIG. See <http://www.sigchi.org/communities/rpi/> and <http://research-practice-interaction.wikispaces.com/> for more information on the SIG. There is a big overlap between the UX community and the rpi community, and the UX community has for several years supported the “practitioner” ribbon at CHI. We are coordinating with the UX community leaders to see the best ways to promote involvement and synergy between both communities.

ASSUMED ATTENDEE BACKGROUND

We assume attendees have some interest and/or involvement in practice as well as research and want to promote this interaction.

APPROACH FOR ORGANIZING AND PRESENTING THE SIG

We take an open, inclusive approach for organization and presenting. We have laid out the basic schedule in the submission and if the three questions we’ve formulated for the SIG don’t resonate well either in whole or in part we’re open to changing them as needed.

WHICH ORGANIZER SHOULD SERVE AS THE PRIMARY CONTACT

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