

A Meta-Communication Model for Reflective Practitioners

Fahri Yetim

Information Systems Department, College of Computing Sciences,
New Jersey Institute of Technology, Newark, NJ 07102- 1982, USA

Email: *Fahri.Yetim@njit.edu*
http://web.njit.edu/~yetim

Position Paper: CHI 2004 Workshop: “reflective practitioner”

Developing any kind of information system embodies reflections about the desired features of the resultant system. The reflective practice becomes more important the more the differences in technologic standards, social values, norms, assumptions and interests, etc. in global contexts interfere the sphere of the Information Systems Development (ISD). To deal with such issues and underlying validity claims in a rational and reflective way, previous approaches to rational and reflective practice in ISD have already emphasized that a rational practice requires not only knowledge and its successful transformation into efficient and effective action but also justification of normative implication for those involved and affected.

I have extended the framework for reflective practice proposed by Ulrich (2001) by integrating – among others – discourse-ethical concepts advanced by J. Habermas (Habermas 1984, 1996) and suggested a model of meta-communication for reflective practice, which provides a wider spectrum of concepts for dealing with global challenges in a rational and reflective way. The operationalization of the model towards the practice is illustrated by the concept of communicative genres (referred as to ‘communication action patterns). The argument is that meta-communication processes guided by discourse-ethical principles promote a legitimate definition, design, and development of such patterns, and thus increase the legitimacy of resultant norms and contents of patterns for communication, especially in intercultural interaction contexts (Yetim 1998).

In my approach (Yetim 2004), I distinguished between three different types of meta-communication:

- Ex ante meta-communication (taking place before action),
- Meta-communication in action (taking place during action), and
- Ex post meta-communication (taking place after action).

The meta-communication model itself consists of two levels:

- Clarification level (where conversation for clarification takes place). At this level there are eleven clarification issues to be reflected on.
- Discourse level (where the discursive examination of contested claims takes place). At this level, there are eight discourses, which are related to the clarification issues.

This diversification also allows us to easily relate the discourse ethical differentiation of discourses of justification to ex ante meta-communication, and discourses of application to meta-communication in action. Ex post meta-communication remains related only to breakdowns that occur when an action has taken place.

The approach contributes to the advancement of the previous research dealing with reflective practice by providing additional concepts. These concepts allow renegotiations of system features and thus can support the continuous co-evolution of a system.

References

- Habermas, J. (1996). *Between Facts and Norms*. Cambridge, MA, MIT Press.
- Habermas, J. (1984). *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. Boston, MA, Beacon Press. (Vol. I)
- Ulrich, W. (2001a). A Philosophical Staircase for Information Systems Definition, Design and Development. *Journal of Information Technology Theory and Application* 3 (2001), 55-84.
- Yetim, F (2004). Meta-Communication for Reflective Practice in Information Systems Development: A Discourse-Ethical Approach and its Operationalization by Patterns of Global Communication. To appear in: *Information and Organization*.
- Yetim, F. (2001): A Meta-Communication Model for Structuring Intercultural Communication Action Patterns. *SIGGROUP Bulletin* 22(2), 16-20. (Reprinted from the Proceedings of the Sixth International Workshop on the Language-Action Perspective on Communication Modeling.
- Yetim, F. (1998). Interkulturalität und Informatische Gestaltung – Eine Interdisziplinäre Annäherung. *Informatik-Spektrum* 21 (1998), 203-212.