

INTUITIVE WAYFINDING AS AN APPROACH TO RESEARCH DESIGN

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Introduction

This paper describes intuitive wayfinding (Bas and Sinclair, 2018) as an approach to research design, stemming from *research indirection* (Dörfler et al., 2018). We illustrate our argument with an empirical study that explored the use of intuition by analytical thinkers; to this end, we originally set out to interview software engineers. Initially, the research design seemed straight-forward: find a clear research question and through the interpretivist lens, in a qualitative cross-sectional inquiry collect data via interviewing, code and analyze data, and abductively find an explanation that fits the observed data patterns. COVID-19 pandemic hit during the literature review stage, and we resorted to intuitive wayfinding (i.e. “knowing *as* we go”, not *before* we go (Ingold, 2000: 229)) to reshape the research project. We sensed that there is value in looking at lived accounts of medics who worked through the first wave of COVID and see whether there is evidence of intuiting.

Practitioners and scholars alike resort to wayfinding, as well as intuiting (i.e. direct knowing without conscious reasoning or knowing *how* they know (Dörfler and Ackermann, 2012; Sinclair and Ashkanasy, 2005: 357; Vaughan, 1979: 46)) when faced with lack of precedent, insufficient information, time pressure and high complexity. *Intuiting* as a process of sensing and sensemaking (Dörfler and Bas, 2020a) can lead to creating a higher quality of viable ideas than deliberate decision-making in research design (Dörfler and Eden, 2014; Khatri and Ng, 2000; Kump, 2020). Wayfinding is often intuitive and sense-based (Strati, 2007) when analytical support such as sufficient, reliable data, and fast, reliable processing is unavailable (Dörfler and Bas, 2020b). The term wayfinding has been widely used in various disciplines including management (Chia, 2017; Spiller et al., 2015). It draws on using one’s whole body as an instrument (Tantia, 2011), attending to affective and somatic sensations (de Rond et al., 2019), and rapid recognition that bypasses analysis, all of which can shape research design.

Intuitive Wayfinding in Research Design

Intuitive wayfinding approach to research design guides scholars in advancing from curiosity to a completed project while “knowing *as* they go”, without needing to know everything “before they go”. Unlike in a typical flexible research design, intuitive wayfinding approach does not require a precise research question to drive the project, and instead, can begin with just a spark of curiosity. In intuitive wayfinding approach, the inquiry is expected to continue morphing throughout the research process, with the ultimate research questions surfacing only when the answers to them are almost attained. Research design shaped via intuitive wayfinding is rooted in researcher’s own intuition (Dörfler and Eden, 2014), incorporates intuition-based inquiry (Akinci and Sadler-Smith, 2020) in all phases of the research process, and allows for input from sensing of which the sense has not been made of yet (Gendlin, 2004).

Wayfinding calls for orienting in one’s environment, determining desired direction when possible, gauging distance to a known location if such exists, choosing a path for the journey, and recognizing the desired destination upon arrival (McVey, 1989). In research design, this means negotiating your philosophical stance through learning and reading rather than just picking a typical one for one’s area; let the research question be driven by observing data and its context; get a sense for the data and dwell in the data rather than simply operate it; select methods for data collection and analysis which can reveal an interesting destination beyond the researcher’s initial research journey planning.

Our current study is an example of utilizing intuitive wayfinding approach to research design. Traditionally, even a flexible research design presupposes a certain order of operations: literature informs a clear research question, which in turn dictates the approach to study design, ultimately leading to a new conceptual framework. In our case, a conceptual framework for the *intuiting process as sensing plus sensemaking* emerged (Bas et al., 2019;

Dörfler and Bas, 2020a) during the course of a thorough literature review, through a Gestalt approach and meta-analysis. Then, COVID-19 pandemic presented an opportunity for a short-term longitudinal study by exploring medics' lived experiences, so the idea of interviewing software engineers in a cross-sectional study was set aside. As New York area became a COVID-19 epicenter in the US, Facebook feeds began filling with accounts of local medics who documented their experience of dealing with an unprecedented situation. They mentioned resorting to intuition and "knowing as we go", indicating use of intuitive wayfinding. The first author finalized literature review, and collected 261 publicly shared Facebook posts by 20 medics in greater NYC area. We did not begin this project with a research question, but rather, with curiosity about spontaneous vs. deliberate use of intuition. The research question emerged only after data analysis: what do analytical thinkers do when nothing they know intellectually is working?

This research project exemplifies intuitive wayfinding approach to research design: starting out with a loosely penned movement toward an understanding of a softly defined phenomenon, orienting to see what is out there and what may be a sensible way to get to the essence of the phenomenon, stumbling upon an unexpected source of rich data, exploring it and seeing whether our conceptual framework explains the observed patterns, and how our model should be modified.

Conclusion

The unique value of this paper is discussing *wayfinding* in a methodological sense rather than in a conceptual sense. Intuitive wayfinding in research design creates transparency about the research process, reducing the shame of "not knowing everything before we go" and eliminating false retrofitting of project elements. Intuitive wayfinding approach is customized to each project, shaped by each researcher's sensibilities, environment, team, and self-awareness.

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