

**“Our need is to do something about that problem” –  
Studying how researchers and developers interact  
with informal carers during an innovation project**

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Abstract: The author describes one research and development project from the perspective of participant observer. The project team members seek interactions with (future, putative, potential) end-users – in this case: people who provide informal care to a person who suffers from dementia and lives at home – to inspire and inform their innovation project.

It is shown that the project had several seemingly redundant activities: there were several series interviews with end-users, and articulating a problem to solve and a solution were repeatedly done. We can argue that these activities were necessary in order to gather “allies”, to create support for the project from the different participating organizations. It is argued that an innovation project is more like a *design* project, an iterative and messy process, and less like a linear, inductive study that we assume to be typical for engineering or social science. Furthermore, attention is drawn to how project team members apply different methods to understand end-users’ needs and to represent them: to portray them and to act as their spokespersons.

The paper closes with exploring one point of critique on science and technology studies, namely that it fails to speak of ethics. It is argued that making design decisions based on interactions with others (end-users or project team members) has *ethical* qualities, and can be thought of balancing the movements towards otherness (towards end-users or other project team members) and towards the self (project members’ own agendas, approaches and methods).

Requests to receive a copy of the full paper can be directed at: marc.steen at tno.nl