
Lifestyle Teleworkers Speak Out!

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Abstract

This panel brings together HCI researchers who are primarily remote workers, in order to discuss their technological solutions and social practices. We aim for an engaging, fun, and informative discussion appropriate for researchers interested in remote collaboration and computer-mediated communication.

Author Keywords

Telepresence; teleworking; video communication.

ACM Classification Keywords

H.4.3. Communications Applications: *Computer conferencing, teleconferencing, and videoconferencing.*

Panel Topic

Remote work is an increasingly common part of the life today. Remote workers work from home or from a “third place,” away from their organization’s facilities. For some, remote work is a transient, exceptional thing, for example to take care of a sick child, to avoid a nasty commute, etc. For others remote work is the norm: Collocated time with coworkers is a rarity. For these people, remote work is a lifestyle.

Remote work is made possible by combining technologies and social practices to meet the needs of the remote worker and their collocated teammates. Lifestyle teleworkers and their teammates develop rich, subtle patterns of interaction with and through the

technologies that support their joint activities. While some research has focused on these experiences [1][6][7][10] most of this lived experience is “tribal knowledge.”

We propose a panel to bring this knowledge to light by selecting panelists who are both lifestyle teleworkers and HCI/CSCW researchers. We will bring together panelists with different approaches to remote work over the long term. Through the position statements and discussion among the panelists, we expect to compare and contrast among the approaches and draw out advantages and disadvantages of each approach. This discussion will not only help us as a community reflect on how telework practices have evolved over time, but will also give concrete guidance for others who are facing a telework situation on current best practices for consideration in their own work. Even more importantly we believe that long-term lived experience leads to insights that can inform research. The panelists will discuss ways in which research has informed their approach to telepresence, and ways that their experiences inform research.

Panelists

We have approached the following panelists for participating in this discussion.

Tom Erickson

Tom Erickson is currently a Research Staff Member at IBM Research. Tom has worked remotely from his home in Minneapolis, MN with his team at the T.J. Watson Research Center in New York throughout his 16 year career at IBM Research. He also worked remotely at Apple in California before that. Tom’s expertise in studying how people use collaborative systems and

designing collaborative user experiences have made him a highly sought collaborator.

Tom uses traditional collaboration tools, including email, groupware, and audio conferencing. He has occasionally used research prototypes that his group develops to support their own collaboration, such as Babble [3] and a personal electronic notebook [1]. Tom has also reflected on the experience of teleworking [2].

John C. Tang

John Tang is a Senior Researcher at Microsoft Research. While he is part of the neXus team in Redmond, WA, he works out of Silicon Valley, California since he joined the group 5 years ago. John’s career research focus has been on supporting distributed collaboration, and has worked on distributed teams throughout his career, including at IBM Research and Sun Labs before that.

John has typically used research prototypes created by the group he is working with to stay connected with his research team. Currently, he uses a Proxy [10], a video conferencing terminal on wheels that can be moved to meeting rooms, and provides a physical proxy for the remote worker to enable them to more fully participate in meetings and be more socially integrated in the team over time. Before that, John used video [8] and texting [9] prototypes that his research group created to keep in touch with his distributed team. John has experienced distributed work in a number of different contexts, ranging from teams within the same time zone to globally distributed teams in a few different organizational work cultures.

Ben Mazza

Ben Mazza works as the Creative Director and UI Designer at Suitable Technologies. He uses the Beam remote presence system made by Suitable Technologies to connect remotely from Dearborn, MI to their main site in California. He has worked remotely in the past using traditional phone and video conferences, and finds the Beam to be better at supporting his creative work, developing trust and cohesion, and enabling impromptu collaboration to afford an active sense of remote presence.

The Beam is a recent telepresence system that provides a mobile video conferencing terminal that the remote user can pilot so that the Beam can independently get to the site of collaboration within a building. The Beam provides an interface for participating in the meeting through video as well as remotely driving the unit around. This affordance not only offers the remote person more independence, but also allows them to continue conversation going to and from meetings.

Susan C. Herring

Susan Herring is a Professor of Information Science at Indiana University. In addition to her research interests on analysis of computer-mediated communication, Susan recently began researching telepresence robots for academic professionals. She has been exploring a couple different robotic form factors that support distinctly different use cases that are common for academic professionals [4]. A VGo telepresence robot will be used within her department to remotely teach, participate in meetings, and interact with colleagues and students one-on-one. A KUBI tabletop robotic stand that holds an iPad will be used to travel to

remote conferences, courtesy of a colleague who is going to the conference. Susan's work focuses on the needs of academic professionals, especially when they have limited mobility that adds challenges to traveling.

Format and Structure of the Panel

The panel will be run as a semi-structured, moderated discussion. It will consist of the following segments:

1. Each panelist will briefly outline their history as a lifestyle teleworker.
2. Each panelist will describe in detail their current telework technologies and social practices.
3. Each panelist will recount their best and worst telework stories.
4. The moderator will ask the panelists a series of questions – both prepared and arising from the discussion. Panelists will be encouraged to discuss and ask questions of the other panelists during this time.
5. The audience will be invited to ask questions of the panelists.

Technical Requirements

At least one of the participants will be attending remotely via Skype. This should offer an interesting real time perspective on the lifestyle telework experience. We will require a large display (26-42" diagonal), two available power sockets, and a reliable Ethernet connection to the internet.

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