



## 15-01-2025 RICARDA SCHLIMBACH – TRANSCRIPT

### 2 SPEAKERS

Fabian Tingelhoff  
Ricarda Schlimbach

Duration

26m 24s

### START OF TRANSCRIPT

#### **[00:00:00] Fabian Tingelhoff**

Hello and welcome to yet another round of DSR Academy interviews. Today I have the pleasure of being here together with Professor Doctor Ricarda Schlimbach, who is a professor for Information Systems and Digital Management at the Heilbronn University of Applied Sciences. Ricarda, from what I know, you research a lot about learning and also especially with the focus on DSR, but I would like to give you initially the stage of introducing yourself and telling us what you do in your research time.

#### **[00:00:30] Ricarda Schlimbach**

Yeah. Thank you. So my name is Ricarda Schlimbach, and I'm a professor for Information Systems and Digital Management at Hochschule Heilbronn at Campus Schwabisch Hall. We are a teaching institution, so it's very important to know that my main focus is teaching, and I only do, as a side business, some research. And therefore I always try to combine both areas. That means that I'm trying to do research and how to support learning by digitized artifacts such as learning companions and other chatbots or gamified artifacts like serious games or even different tools were just some gamified elements play a role. Therefore I use a lot of design science research to, on the one hand, get my students a little closer to the academic area and to find out that DSR is a paradigm and that they can do research within that paradigm with different methodical approaches. And at the same time, I use DSR myself as a tool to develop new models, new ways, new artifacts, to support my own teaching in three different majors that I'm teaching in.

#### **[00:02:06] Fabian Tingelhoff**

And I think there's already a very interesting and fascinating for us, getting your perspective from this dual role of both using DSR as a method of teaching and as a method of researching. I think you already touched a little bit upon this in your introduction, but my first question I want to ask you, we became aware of all the cool stuff you did through a paper called A Teaching Framework for the Methodically Versatile DSR Education of Master's Students. Initially, I really want to know from you why did you start your research in this area? What motivated you? And what was the need for this research, did you initially find to start your research?

#### **[00:02:54] Ricarda Schlimbach**

So initially we did a lot of courses for master's students where they just learned, I would say, the hard skills on how to do research. Like finding the right citations and doing a systematic literature review and stuff like that. But I wanted to see that more from a research perspective, research as a paradigm that they look about the combination of problems based finding and then coming up with a solution space and bridging both together. Because research shouldn't be, in my opinion, torn apart from the reality where there are real time problems that need solutions, but from a systematic research approach and therefore want to just have PhD students jump into the DSR methodology, but instead to start right away with master's students that they understand the paradigm behind, and that there are different ways on how to get closer to

research and always do it in a design oriented way. Because that's what makes information systems, in my opinion, a very special discipline that we are not just descriptively exploring how the world is working, how it is right now, but instead we try to create and make it a little better every day. Therefore, we need problems and research to improve that step by step.

**[00:04:34] Fabian Tingelhoff**

Cool. So you basically use DSR, um, as a means to make the research that master's students also do more applicable and impactful to the real world, right?

**[00:04:44] Ricarda Schlimbach**

Yes, exactly.

**[00:04:45] Fabian Tingelhoff**

Cool. And what is this versatility aspect in the paper that you were teasing?

**[00:04:53] Ricarda Schlimbach**

Originally, we were facing the challenge that we just had this five credit point course. But I wanted to somehow teach and also experience or have the students experience the variety of different methodological approaches that research provides us with. Therefore, I came up with the idea that we have one central problem that needs to be solved, like as a central research question every semester. But then I divided the course into different research groups, and each research group was responsible for one method, one approach. For example expert interviews in the one group and then in the other group, a more quantitative approach or mixed method or also systematic literature, whatever. I had very different pieces of a big puzzle, what you could do for getting an answer to a central research question. Then within that class, we always brought all the different groups together to have them mingle and speak and discuss and reflect on their different approaches and find out best practices, what did work, what didn't. That way they could experience the pros and cons of the different approaches and also the variety of different outcomes that you can find out that way and get a better first idea on how to combine these different approaches in a sensible way. I couldn't do that before when I had like every group doing different problems or every group with the same research approach because then the variety was gone. But that way they kind of taught themselves and reflected in an intertwined way about the different approaches, which was not only interesting to them, but also to me to see that from different perspectives.

**[00:07:10] Fabian Tingelhoff**

Yeah. I think it also really ties in nicely with what you read in most of the current DSR literature, like, for example, from Jan vom Brocke describing DSR as a journey where you take different steps that all build upon each other, but that are all in itself exclusive and that you can also conduct exclusively. So basically like having them experience the variety and also being part of this journey I think is also very cool educational step in this regard. So very, very interesting.

**[00:07:38] Ricarda Schlimbach**

Yeah. Being part of that journey was super important too, because what happened before I started this approach was that many students thought after their mini project that they were done and that was design science research. They didn't think about DSR as a paradigm, but instead as one method. The method I had chosen before to use in the course. But once they got introduced into the versatile approach where they saw the different mechanics, working methods that they applied, they also gathered new ideas, for example, for

their upcoming master thesis on how they could progress on the same topic, but with additional research, like with other methods or target groups to still fit that into the same problem. They got this idea of research is never done. Instead, DSR is an iterative cycle and you kind of never stop. You just keep improving. And that was a very, in my opinion, a very important learning too.

**[00:08:44] Fabian Tingelhoff**

I totally agree. I mean, you documented this all in your paper, which we just talked about. Do you quickly want to also introduce us to the contributions and main conclusions you could draw from your experiments in class?

**[00:09:03] Ricarda Schlimbach**

I mean, some of the conclusions that really matter to me is that you need to get students excited about the central problem. It really is important that you come up with a problem that also, from their opinion, has an impact ideally on their person, or at least that can make a change in their environment. Because then they have not only the knowledge, but also the spirit and drive to really work hard towards that game. On top of that, it was very important that you get this dynamic in the group that they exchange a lot between the different groups and share their experiences. Also, the bad ones, like where they have had challenges coming up and how they could tackle them, because very often students just want to talk about the good stuff because they think that this will higher their grade if there were no hurdles and everything just went perfect. But I wanted to implement this course to also speak about the pros and cons of the different approaches. I think that was very central too. Then finally I came up with some design principles. What to do, but I don't know all of them by mind anymore. I would have to look into the paper as well.

**[00:10:50] Fabian Tingelhoff**

No, I mean like on that level of detail, people probably should also just read the paper by themselves. But now I want to turn it a little bit away from the teaching part and more from your experience of researching using the DSR paradigm. I mean, you have already executed quite some projects using the DSR methodology. I'm very curious about knowing whether there were some learnings you could pin down from your very first DSR projects that you might still remember to how you conduct DSR today. Like what kind of development, what kind of learnings did you go through to be the DSR research researcher that you are today?

**[00:11:36] Ricarda Schlimbach**

What you have to know is that I do not have a very strict, forward academic path like many researchers do because in between my master's degree, and then I completed my first PhD when I was already working in the automotive industry. Then I worked for almost 11 years in the automotive industry and was not in academia. And then from this practical perspective, as an engineer, because originally I'm a mechanical engineer, I moved back to academia. That was quite a huge step, because if you work in the industry, it's all about problem-solving and not so much about the systematic way on how to get there. It's more about the outcome. Like your bosses care about the KPIs and how to make more money and that the problem gets solved. From that perspective, it was in the very beginning when I then moved back to academia it was very straightforward to just come up with very rigorous and strict research frameworks where I felt like you had no freedom on what to do. It was so different from what I experienced in the last decade in my daily business life. Therefore, in the very beginning DSR was a very comfortable framework and eye-opener for me, because it gave me some orientation on how to still stay rigorous and use approved and evaluated methods from the literature, but at the same time, just see it as a way of orientation where I could put the

pieces together, as I tend to always pin it back to the problem I want to solve and then try to, in an iterative way, find a solution with an appropriate method to get that path done. Therefore, it originally fitted very well with my engineering mindset I would say, to start from a problem space and then come up with ways to look for solutions and come step by step, a little closer to have an impact and like solve the problem and contribute. When becoming a little more, I'm still not a senior researcher, I would say, but when becoming a little more mature and having done some of the research projects it was that I got farther and farther away from these patterns from other literature. They helped me in the beginning very much. From other literature pieces where step by step they explained, for example, on how to derive design principles or design guidelines or whatever, and more think of DSR as a tool where I can build myself a methodology or a thinking framework on how to then teach others to use it like building blocks. So that kind of changed that. I got more independent and not just following kind of rules but instead seeing it as a big box with tools that I can take out whenever I need them, but still keep my original mindset of trying to solve real problems and make an impact instead of just doing theoretical research that is never serving the practical world.

**[00:15:47] Fabian Tingelhoff**

And what would you say are some general pitfalls or complications when using DSR? Also, when maybe using DSR as freely or exploratory as you might do it?

**[00:16:02] Ricarda Schlimbach**

In my opinion, especially for early researchers, they often see it like a recipe. Something I'm seeing is that it's going in a wrong direction kind of. DSR, especially for younger researchers, becomes more and more towards just coming up with new design principles for problems that have already other design principles or other design artifacts. They are not really contributing to research. They just need that to get more papers published and have a problem from there, for example, PhD thesis sliced down to micro problems, and they come up with very subjective design ideas. Let it be principles or guidelines or whatever. But it doesn't stick enough to rigorous, grounded theories that are also needed to build all this knowledge upon. I feel like we need more focus again on quality instead of quantity. Also make sure that grounded theories still go into this research instead of just publishing basically implemented projects and then retrospectively frame DSR cycle into a project that was originally not even done with that paradigm in mind.

**[00:18:01] Fabian Tingelhoff**

Yeah, that sounds really interesting. So what would you recommend, after all, to young researchers that are trying to get into the methodology of DSR, that maybe want to set up the first DSR research project in order to, after all, circumvent these pitfalls that you just laid out?

**[00:18:20] Ricarda Schlimbach**

I would say don't start with a project that is too big and too complex, so rather come up with a very small project you can identify with and then do that in depth instead. That means, like with my versatile approach, for example. Just do not use just one method, but like different approaches, maybe pick one quantitative, one qualitative approach. There is of course also some literature work where you look deeper into the theories that exist in that topic. Then, secondly, you need a mentor who really has experience. I still need that. I'm not a senior scholar, either. Someone who has more experience in that domain and get a lot of guidance and mentorship to then learn every time a little more and do that as a co-work. Don't do it all by yourself. Instead, you should also have people who are more mature to learn with every project. Then, third, I would say it's a process so differently from learning something by heart. It's not going to work that you do

like one project and learn the methodology and the theory behind and once you have understood it, you are done, and then you are a DSR researcher. Instead, you need to apply it several times and also review, review, review as a young scholar. Because that way in this case, of course, DSR papers, because in that way you get a better idea of how other researchers structure their research problems and how they write it together in their papers. Maybe you can get ideas from that, and that you could also transfer and apply to your own future DSR problems.

**[00:20:24] Fabian Tingelhoff**

Thanks for that advice, Ricarda. I think it's probably going to help a lot of people, especially combined with all the pitfalls you just laid out beforehand and how that fits. So before we close, I have one last question, which is a bit broader, a bit more general so to say. Because what we were asking everybody at the end is what do you desire for the design science research field as a whole, like in terms of future developments? Do you have any particular desires there?

**[00:20:54] Ricarda Schlimbach**

Yeah. I'm afraid that design science research is still not taken seriously by many other disciplines. Often they don't see it as real research, because it's so design oriented and sometimes perceived as very subjective and not as descriptive, reliable and transferable as other disciplines. Getting to that stage, I think that we as a field need to look more into also the teaching part, of course, so that there are new researchers coming up with DSR, but also to look deeper into the grounded theories behind or new models coming up that give you guidance like DSR building blocks, for example, also for young researchers because I don't want that there is more and more a plethora of different DSR publications so that the quality is suffering, but quantity is just going up. Then there is a flood of different design principles and design requirements and guidelines, and nobody is taking any of them serious. Therefore, we need more reusable design outcomes, I think. That we have more focus on the models, the processes and the reusability behind and see it again, more as an orientating framework instead of a paper publication machine where young researchers just try to get, you know, as many conference papers out of it as possible. And I'm not saying that I'm different, you know, like I was also in this publish or perish role during my PhD and postdoc phase. It's kind of the field itself that needs to change as well. If we as a field and information systems change the values that care for us, and that's not only about quantity, but also to have students reflect more and give them young students the time to spend more on like reading, understanding, reflecting, talking to senior researchers instead of just writing new stuff. Then the field itself could become more rigorous also in other disciplines. That's what I'm hoping for, because originally the thinking approach is, in my opinion, from engineering where I come from. But it could be applicable to so many different fields, and that's a big, big opportunity. We have to work as a community together towards that goal and educate junior scholars to apply it in a rigorous but still impactful and practically applicable way.

**[00:24:19] Fabian Tingelhoff**

Very nice closing words, Ricarda. Thank you so much. I think we're leaving it at that. So thank you so much Ricarda for taking the time. Thank you so much also for sharing all your insights. And I'm sure we're all very excited and stay on alert for what you publish and what you teach in the coming years. So thank you so much.

**[00:24:39] Ricarda Schlimbach**

Yeah. Thank you. I'm just interested in like what is the idea behind this research? Like, is this going to be like a new research paper on advice for young scholars on how to apply DSR or kind of what is the purpose behind them? What to expect from the outcome from the different interviews?

**[00:25:06] Fabian Tingelhoff**

Yeah, sure. So as I have written to you this is part of the DSR Academy, which is an Erasmus+ project. Basically what we want to do is develop new teaching materials that can be used in order to give some guidance to young and emerging researchers to basically teach the basics of DSR, but also to understand how to potentially apply it in order to become a successful DSR researcher and basically free up the time of educators to not being forced to spend so much time on just teaching the basics, but rather being able to focus on applying DSR to actual projects. So to learning by doing instead of just learning all the dry content. Therefore, we're doing and conducting this interviews in order to gain various perspectives on the nature and the usefulness and the applicability of DSR in order to provide this to the students.

**[00:26:09] Ricarda Schlimbach**

Very cool. That's that's interesting. I like always if there's an impact behind it.

**[00:26:15] Fabian Tingelhoff**

Yeah, definitely. We do too, and therefore we're so thankful for you taking the time and contributing to this project.

**[00:26:22] Ricarda Schlimbach**

Yeah. Thank you so much.

END OF TRANSCRIPT