

Let go of the one-size-fits-all definition

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Anyone familiar with the term serendipity will recognise that it is a vague one. In recent years, we have seen a proliferation of frameworks and theories attempting to capture the nature of serendipity and its antecedents. Nevertheless, despite these efforts, designing for serendipity in practice remains a significant challenge. This means that, especially in information systems design, we tend to fall back on operationalizations of serendipity that are highly context specific.

However, when surveys and reviews are conducted to consolidate all the knowledge we have about the concept, all these context-specific implementations are oftentimes aggregated once again. This is a significant problem, as serendipity manifests itself differently in various contexts.

In order to mitigate this issue, I propose to let go of the one-size-fits-all definition of serendipity. Inspired by theories on how to design for values like safety or fairness, I develop an account of serendipity that allows researchers and practitioners to more systematically capture the nuances of serendipity in each context. This would allow for a more accurate representation of how serendipity is experienced and can be designed for in different situations. By doing so, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of this complex phenomenon and its many manifestations across different domains.

In this talk, I argue that by letting go of its definition, we get a better grip on serendipity.