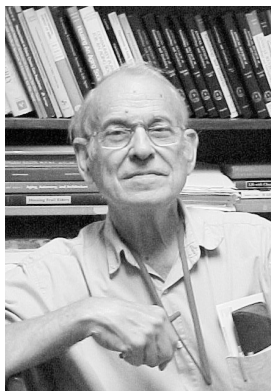


In memoriam M. Powell Lawton

One of the country's leading figures in aging research and most prolific and visionary scientists, M. Powell Lawton, Ph.D., died as a result of a brain tumor on Monday, January 29, 2001. Dr. Lawton, a behavioral psychologist, was a pioneer in environmental psychology who contributed a legacy of seminal theories, multi-dimensional constructs and widely used scales and assessment tools. Chief among his contributions was his ecological theory of aging and the competence-environment press framework that lays the foundation for gerontechnology.

His intellectual energy and breadth and depth of scientific discovery were unmatched. Indubitably, of most importance was his unrelenting passion guided by his Quaker background, to improve the life quality of older people and their families through research and action, and his personal mandate for intellectual integrity and reflective growth. This is most evident in his continual refinements to his core constructs throughout his productive career and the application of his principles to design innovations in nursing homes, special dementia units, and community-based programs.

A recent book of insightful essays in honor of Dr. Lawton written by those who worked with or who were mentored by him, underscore the many dimensions of aging research that he either initiated, influenced, or to which he significantly contributed¹. These critical dimensions include quality of life, environment and aging, affect, human development, care giving, community and program development, and end of life.



Dr. Lawton is deeply missed by his colleagues of the Polisher Research Institute of the Philadelphia Geriatric Center, where he was its first director 38 years ago and more recently a senior research scientist and director emeritus. He wrote many book chapters and peer reviewed journal articles and was the recipient of numerous grants from the National Institutes of Health and foundations. As an invited guest to numerous countries and international professional meetings, Dr. Lawton's ideas and research initiatives continue to live on in the many persons he mentored and the programs he influenced.

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Reference

1. R. Rubenstein, Moss, M., Kleban M. (Eds.) 2000. *The Many Faces of Aging: Essays in Honor of M.P. Lawton*. Springer, New York

Book Review

N. Charness, D.C. Parks, B.A. Sabel (eds.). 2001. *Communication, Technology and Aging. Opportunities and Challenges for the Future*. Springer Publishing Company, New York. ISBN 0-8261-1372-9. € 57,-

The book reflects a conference sponsored by the German-American Academic Council. The three editors and 21 other authors all work in Germany or the USA, most of them in university research, a few in industry. The title should be understood as communication issues for having technology (ICT) address needs and ambitions of older persons. The volume has three sections: (1) overview, (2) socio-cultural issues, and (3) training and compensation, with respectively four, three, and four papers. The book enables researchers, designers, and company directors of all countries to profit from the two-country conference.

Section 1 starts with a pragmatic view on the all-important human factors or ergonomic issues. Both functionality and user-interface of ICT are to be geared to the needs and

options of older people. Several design solutions are reviewed. Next, the development of language functions in older individuals is considered, with a view of an optimal communication format both in speech and in text. Then comes 'The view of industry' on design challenges, concluding to 'what really should be done', thus demonstrating the difficulty to get such questions addressed. Finally, a research view on design challenges in Internet points out the enormous potential of this communication vehicle for addressing needs and ambitions of older adults. Presently, the older segment of the population is left without adequate technological environment to turn potential fruit into real fruit.

Section 2 starts with methodological issues involved in the interaction between cognitive development in old age and cultural environment, for communication. This is the more important since the environment including ICT is in continuous change. The next paper illuminates the difficulties for people with visual or auditory deficiencies in dealing with their environments, both physical and social. The great potential of Internet is outlined. The final paper of this section describes a field experiment with people about to retire or just retired, which shows clearly the positive effects of electronic communication on contact density once barriers have been overcome. So this section illustrates the extensive diversity of the older population that is to be answered by options in the technological environments.

Section 3 starts with interface design again as crucial issue, now directed toward designers. Then comes the specific issue of face memory skill acquisition or face-name association, difficult in its own right. Next comes the very important issue of training older adults to use technology, dealt with in a systems approach; no matter how user-friendly or simple user interfaces will become, the need will remain for learning or training to use the wanted part of the available

functionality. The final paper deals with computer-based training of lost visual functions. Taken together, this section is an implicit plea for smart training devices for learning-while-doing.

In conclusion, high cost, complex functionality, and labyrinth user interface of present ICT are seriously hampering the usage of Internet for a majority of older people, thus blocking fulfilment of their needs, their opportunities, and their ambitions. The volume addresses several issues and proposes interventions.

What seems needed most of all is the ambition of industry to seriously address such problems. If this would come about, university researchers have already explored the field for further defining and solving the problems that industry itself cannot handle. This, I may add, is true for other countries as well.

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NEWS IN SHORT

Australia –

Design, Technology, SeniorNet Lounge

Plans are well advanced for the 6th Global Conference of the International Federation on Ageing that is to be held in Perth, Western Australia from 27-30 October 2002. One stream in the Conference is to be devoted to Design & Technology. Papers are being sought which address inclusion of all ages in design of the built environment, transport, equipment and technology.

On quite a different note, the Positive Ageing Foundation (a non-profit organisation) is working on two cyber programs for seniors. One, called the SeniorNet Lounge, provides access and operating assistance for seniors wishing to learn about and use the