

## Ageing and Technology

Doevendans<sup>1</sup> has drawn a grim picture of the future of CREATE. CREATE aims at enhancing technology for older adults. The lack of confrontation with especially social aspects is assumed by Doevendans to lead to a misfit, unless corrected.

I fully agree with the concept that multidimensional work, besides natural and technical sciences also containing cultural and social sciences, has lots to offer to the gerontechnological community. As it is dedicated to a specific group of humans, gerontechnology is almost naturally restricted to more applied-types of research. Vice-versa, it means that the more fundamental issues are better served by a smaller research discipline.

The conclusion Doevendans draws is, however, also the Achilles' heel. The assumption that we can foresee the misfit that is growing on us, and can adjust it by taking the future into account, may lead to an equally bad misfit. Few have correctly interpreted, years before it actually happened, what computer use or Internet use would mean: addiction and isolation as well as (re)socialization and a new way of expression.

I would like to take the future with smaller steps. The technology-driven society may indeed be divided into groups of believers, sustainers and sufferers. To the first group any piece of technology will be a joy, whether it actually improves their way of living or not. The second group will pick from what is offered that which suits, works and goes; for the third group technology remains a Pandora's box.

In every group all ages are represented, but in the last mentioned group the older ages more than the young. As new technology is growing still, this third group is the one we

should look for. What can we offer them that will work?

An example from the building domain may shed some light here: the energy-awareness hype from the seventies and eighties of the previous century resulted in the (increased) use of double-glazing and in the eradication of air leaks, and in many cases in the installation of sophisticated ventilation facilities. Thus energy was saved and draughts were avoided, but health problems, like asthma and COPD were enhanced. Knowledge fell short, both at the user and the supplier end, although this knowledge was already common 100 years before<sup>2</sup>. To my opinion the solution lies in two directions: technology with a low profile, and education towards insight.

I define low-profile technology here as the kind of technology that interferes as little as possible with everyday life. As an example we could look at the vacuumcleaner. Although it had many disadvantages (heavy, noisy, smelly), its use was until recently hardly disputed. Even today, although we know that other cleaning techniques are much more efficient, the vacuum is a frequently used tool in almost all homes. New or technologically improved tools should be working without human interference, or be natural or logical in the way they take over or improve tasks.

That brings me to the second part of the solution: education. As was stated by Czaja et al.<sup>3</sup>, elder people did not use technology of which the function was not clear; learning, especially practice was important, but was slower than in the younger age groups. I would suggest that apparatuses or tools should be self-explanatory as far as possible, making practicing an easier job. More com-

plicated systems may be modelled and offered in a way that appeals to people's senses.

The work that CREATE is performing fills in the gaps of knowledge that are needed to know what drives older people confronted with technology. The knowledge thus gathered has a value that is limited to the era, decade or even year that it has been collected and the culture, society or locality it is obtained from. By keeping this in mind researchers may use results of other decades or locations. It also urges them to take notice of changes in society, as these may have implications on their work. By conscientiously taking these little steps, the extreme misfits that Doevendans warns us for, could be avoidable. Of course, the implications of

social changes are best deduced in a group including researchers of the structural dimension.

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## References

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