

Governance, Social Policy and Communication

Going global with user-friendly gerontech: what's missing in business support? T. Palo, A. Kaipainen & M. Elomaa-Krapu. *Gerontechnology* 25(s)

Purpose This presentation examines the transdisciplinary support needs of companies developing User-Friendly GeronTech solutions and the types of business services required to scale these solutions to international markets. Europe is aging rapidly, and Finland—one of the world's fastest-aging societies—has become a hotspot for AgeTech innovation. Yet despite a vibrant innovation ecosystem, Finnish companies face a familiar bottleneck: small domestic markets and fragmented support systems that limit their ability to scale internationally. Higher education institutions (HEIs) possess underutilized expertise and international networks that could significantly enhance companies' export readiness [1]. This presentation uncovers the real support needs of GeronTech companies and reveals how higher education institutions (HEIs) could become powerful, yet currently underused, engines for export growth. Previous development projects have indicated that HEIs could provide valuable services for companies, yet these services have not been systematically identified or designed to meet the concrete RDI and internationalization needs [2]. Information about available services is fragmented, and gaps in the service offering limit companies' growth, slow innovation, and hinder access to both domestic and global markets. **Method** A comprehensive study is conducted by collecting information on a) Support needs identified by AgeTech companies through semi-structured interviews (n=100), including needs related to: improving solution functionality, ethical values, and alignment with sustainability goals; enhancing usability and user-friendliness; developing joint product concepts or integrations with other companies; promoting business growth and advancing exports and internationalization. b) Currently available business services, identified through website reviews and selected interviews with service providers such as HEIs, municipalities, ELY Centers, TE offices, chambers of commerce, Business Finland, entrepreneur associations, and research institutes. The data is analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Identified support needs and existing services are organized into predefined thematic categories, with new categories added inductively. The analysis focuses on identifying service gaps. Service gaps are defined as company needs for which no supporting services currently exist, are only partially emerging, or cannot be provided by the existing service-offering organizations. **Results and Discussion** The study provides a clear overview of the transdisciplinary support needs of Finnish AgeTech companies in relation to user-friendliness, growth and internationalization, as well as a mapping of the current business service landscape. Based on these findings, service gaps are identified, leading to a transdisciplinary co-development together with users, service providers and companies for services map, which help companies to produce user-friendly solutions. The results outline Metropolia's and students' transdisciplinary capabilities for domestic and international collaboration in User-Friendly AgeTech development and export, as well as its available testing and development environments and related services.

References

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