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Implementing Gerontechnology

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Implementing gerontechnology

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J.E.M.H. van Bronswijk, J.L. Fozard, W.D. Kearns, G.C. Davison, P-C. Tuan. Implementing gerontechnology. Gerontechnology 2008; 7(3):325-327. Master classes for PhD students in gerontechnology showed the need for a short guideline to help young researchers. To enable the gerontechnology enterprise to be implemented in design, engineering and research, some of the teachers in the master classes in Eindhoven (the Netherlands) and Nantou (Taiwan) developed together a step-by-step framework for gerontechnology projects to assist young researchers.

Keywords: gerontechnology, design, engineering, research, framework

No matter how we define gerontechnology, we always emphasize its interdisciplinarity and complexity¹. During master classes in both Taiwan and the Netherlands the authors observed the difficulties of young scientists with the design of their experiments and projects due to the complexity of the gerontechnology endeavor.

Although principles for research in gerontechnology are already published² a more concrete guideline is needed to lead the young professional through the phases of his/her research, engineering or design project. In this short communication we present such a guideline as discussed during the master classes (*Table 1*).

Implementing gerontechnology

Table 1. A framework for gerontechnology research, engineering and design projects aiming at health and happiness up to the highest possible age

Step	Question	Possible answers	
1	What is the main goal of the project? (Choose one item)	<input type="checkbox"/> Enrichment <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfaction <input type="checkbox"/> Prevention of later restrictions <input type="checkbox"/> Engagement	<input type="checkbox"/> Compensation <input type="checkbox"/> Substitution <input type="checkbox"/> Care support <input type="checkbox"/> Care organisation
2	Identify one target and one target population of the project	Target: <input type="checkbox"/> Physical functioning <input type="checkbox"/> Mental functioning <input type="checkbox"/> Emotional functioning <input type="checkbox"/> Social functioning <input type="checkbox"/> A combination, namely	Target population: <input type="checkbox"/> 1 st age: formative period <input type="checkbox"/> 2 nd age: main working phase <input type="checkbox"/> 3 rd age: active retirement <input type="checkbox"/> 4 th age: frailty & dependence
3	What is the application domain ? (Choose one main item)	<input type="checkbox"/> Health <input type="checkbox"/> Self-esteem <input type="checkbox"/> Housing <input type="checkbox"/> Daily living <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility	<input type="checkbox"/> Transport <input type="checkbox"/> Communication <input type="checkbox"/> Governance <input type="checkbox"/> Work <input type="checkbox"/> Leisure
4	What is the setting of the project aim? (Choose one item)	<input type="checkbox"/> The technical environment <input type="checkbox"/> The social environment <input type="checkbox"/> The person <input type="checkbox"/> The person-environment interface <input type="checkbox"/> A combination, namely	
5	What is the timing of the project?	<input type="checkbox"/> Before decline of the function addressed is measurable <input type="checkbox"/> After function decline	
6	Who will be invited in the interdisciplinary team ?	In addition to <i>members of the target population</i> : A gerontologist from: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ethics <input type="checkbox"/> Aesthetics <input type="checkbox"/> Physiology <input type="checkbox"/> Nutrition <input type="checkbox"/> Psychology <input type="checkbox"/> Social psychology <input type="checkbox"/> Sociology <input type="checkbox"/> Demographics <input type="checkbox"/> Medicine <input type="checkbox"/> Rehabilitation <input type="checkbox"/> Other, namely	And an engineer from: <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry <input type="checkbox"/> Biochemistry <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture or building <input type="checkbox"/> Information <input type="checkbox"/> Communication <input type="checkbox"/> Mechatronics <input type="checkbox"/> Robotics <input type="checkbox"/> Ergonomics <input type="checkbox"/> Design <input type="checkbox"/> Business management <input type="checkbox"/> Other, namely ...
7	Which are the theories addressed?	From gerontology: <input type="checkbox"/> Compressing morbidity <input type="checkbox"/> Maslow's motivation hierarchy <input type="checkbox"/> Situated learning <input type="checkbox"/> Technology Acceptance Model <input type="checkbox"/> Other, namely	From engineering: <input type="checkbox"/> Aging-in-place <input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive design <input type="checkbox"/> Management innovation <input type="checkbox"/> Targeted marketing <input type="checkbox"/> Other, namely
8 Design only	In which evaluation phase is the product under scrutiny?	<input type="checkbox"/> Computer simulation <input type="checkbox"/> Laboratory testing <input type="checkbox"/> Field pilot <input type="checkbox"/> Full scale field study	<input type="checkbox"/> Business plan completion <input type="checkbox"/> Marketing plan completion <input type="checkbox"/> Post-introduction surveillance <input type="checkbox"/> Other, namely

SEVEN OR EIGHT STEPS

It all starts with formulating the main goal of the project (Step 1), followed by identifying its objective or target, and the target population (Step 2), as well as its application domain (Step 3). At this stage the setting of the project is not yet clear. To address this, a principal investigator, designer or engineer will choose a setting such as the technical environment, the person, or the user-system interface (Step 4), and a timetable (Step 5).

After the choices of steps 1 to 5 have been made, the principal investigator forms an interdisciplinary team to realize the project (Step 6). Such a gerontechnology team always includes members of the target population, as identified in step 2, in addition to experts from specific technology and gerontology disciplines. In step number 7 the interdisciplinary team may choose a theory from both gerontology and technology that is most applicable to the project. Such a selection will not only enhance generalisation of results, it will also hint at the specific methodologies that are best suited to obtain them.

In the case of a design project, the interdisciplinary team must take an additional step: evaluation of the technical system, service, product or environment (Step 8).

In the first stages of design this will be limited to a computer simulation of one or more scenarios of intended use, followed by laboratory and field testing, and business calculations, until a full-scale post-introduction surveillance can be performed.

INTERDISCIPLINARITY AND COMPLEXITY

In the steps described above interdisciplinarity is clearly visible. Step 6 reminds the investigator to not only include delegates of the target population in the project team, but also members of both the gerontology and technology domain. Note that 'Ethics' must be considered in all gerontechnology projects.

The complexity of gerontechnology projects is classified in the steps 1 to 5. After a closer look, goal, target, target population, application domain, setting and timing concern human-machine interactions that are relevant in a number of technology and gerontology domains. This again points at the large array of disciplines incorporated in gerontechnology.

The authors hope that this simple guideline (*Table 1*) will support novice professionals in gerontechnology projects, helping them to assure success.

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