

Bookshelf

Intelligent technologies for bridging the grey digital divide

J. Soar, R. Swindell and P. Tsang (eds). IGI Global, Hershey, PA, USA, 2011. 362 pp. ISBN 9781615208258. A\$180. Reprinted from the International Journal of E-Politics (IJEP), with minor edits, by permission of the publisher.

This edited collection of cutting edge papers addresses a topic that, to the best of my knowledge, has not attracted much research: the utilisation of information technology for bridging the 'Grey Divide', namely, the divide between the ageing population and younger people. As the authors indicate, ageing is not new. However, older people are becoming a much larger sector of the population than ever before. As the challenges of caring for older people become more significant, so does the need to utilise information technology for this effort. Indeed, as this book indicates, information technology can be used in this area in a number of different ways, including connecting older people to their caregivers, providing them with social and emotional support from family and friends, assisting in the provision of medical care and enabling an independent and productive lifestyle.

This book is impressive in its scope and breadth. It compiles research from academics and practitioners from many countries, including Canada, Germany, the UK, Greece, the Chinese Republic, Korea, Singapore, Ireland, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Sri Lanka, Japan, Taiwan and Australia. The articles in this collection shed light on the role that technology can play in a range of emerging areas such as telehealth, telecare, robotics in home care, and mobile health monitoring. Many of the articles emphasise the use of technology in helping to alleviate some of the challenges associated with ageing, such as the effect of catastrophic events like falls, the accumulative effects of declining cognitive capabilities, and the ongoing need for monitoring physical functions. Technology's role in supporting the maintenance of relationships with carers, family and friends is also discussed. Articles in this collection also emphasise the role that information technology can play at the macro-level, by supporting decision-making and resource allocation related to the ageing population.

The book is organised in three parts. The first focuses on innovations supporting 'ageing in place', in this instance meaning those who choose to stay in their own home. Chapters in this section discuss ubiquitous computing for supporting independent living, smart homes, designing user friendly systems, and using robotics in the home. Regrettably, the collection does not include the exciting new developments in verbal and emotionally capable robots that can be cuddled,

played with and conversed with. A discussion of these cutting edge technologies would have rounded up this collection of papers.

The second part of this book focuses on innovations that support engagement of older people in daily life. The chapters discuss psychological frameworks for understanding successful ageing, online support groups and online learning that can stimulate and expand the horizons of older people, including initiatives like the University of the Third Age. Also discussed are the bridging of loneliness and isolation through social networking services, the promotion of digital literacy among older people, and the use of truly innovative technologies like three-dimensional gaming and virtual environments to bring older people closer to their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Finally, the third part of the book focuses on IT-related innovations that support care providers. This part of the book discusses the role of teleworkers in aged care and the technologies that are being used to help them communicate with their patients. Chapters also discuss the management of relationships within the family, particularly after an older family member is placed in an institution, and the impact of culture on how information technology can be used to assist family members in the often complex emotional issues that often result.

I strongly recommend this book to anyone with an interest in the social implications of information and communication technologies. In addition, academics and practitioners in areas related to health and medicine, including gerontology and ageing, should find this book thought provoking and useful. With the prominence currently given to the issue of ageing in society, this book is also a valuable resource for members of the general public who have an interest in technology and how it is changing the life of older people, as well as its possible uses in the future.

On a final note, even though the issue of politics is not mentioned directly in this book, I believe that it is central to any discussion of the digital divide. After all, the concept of the digital divide relates to power and to the unequal distribution of power between the digital 'haves' and 'have nots'. Up until recently, older people were considered the 'have nots', with the young being seen as the champions of the Internet. This book demonstrates the exact opposite, namely, that older people are becoming equals to the young in their participation in the digital revolution. Indeed, the chapters in this book demonstrate that older people are

embracing information technology with just as much enthusiasm as the young and for good reasons – they have so much to gain and in areas that are crucial to them. If we consider this book from a political perspective, we can argue that it outlines the building blocks of a transformation or a revolution that is changing the experience of ageing, enabling older people to be better integrated in mainstream society.

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A loving approach to dementia care: Making meaningful connections with the person who has Alzheimer's Disease or other dementia or memory loss

Laura Wayman. The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2011. 112 pp. ISBN 13: 978-1-4214-0034-1. ISBN-10 1-4214-0034-0. A\$22.95 (soft cover). Available from <http://www.press.jhu.edu>

Laura Wayman holds an associate in arts degree in gerontology and has over a decade of experience in, and a strong dedication to, quality ageing. She is the resident dementia expert and grant writer for Seniors First and CEO of the Dementia Whisperers. Although the author's experience relates to her work in the USA, the book is easily adapted to the Australasian situation. Where American organisations are mentioned it is easy to convert these to similar organisations in Australasia.

This book will serve well as an easy-to-read guide for either a family member caring for a relative or partner with dementia or a paid care worker. In simple language it provides information about Alzheimer's disease: its causes, warning signs, likely manifestations and differences from other forms of dementia and memory loss. The author then proceeds to demonstrate how understanding memory loss from the person with dementia's point of view can assist the carer in responding in ways that are conducive to gaining cooperation to get through the challenges of daily routines.

The format of the book supports its value as a learning opportunity. Early chapters provide a brief case study to emphasise an issue, which is followed by a section titled 'Lessons Learned' and by another titled 'Perceptions and Approaches'. Strategies to counter difficult behaviours make sense to the reader in light of the case study and outcomes.

There is a danger that the reader may tire of the format. But even if a reader gives up on one chapter due to lack of interest in that particular issue, nothing is lost, as the book may be used as a reference as different issues arise in the caring relationship. The format of the book further assists this with the excellent chapter, 'Lessons, perceptions and approaches: A reader's guide', which contains a synopsis of every case

study, and its lessons and approaches. This is very useful in finding again the exact story and strategies that are relevant as the carer and care-recipient continue on their journey.

The references and the index are extensive and useful. This book provides valuable information in a manner accessible to either a family member caring for a relative with dementia or a paid care worker, and lends itself for use as an ongoing reference.

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Practical person-centred approaches and ideas: The creative arts in dementia

Jill Hayes with Sarah Povey. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London and Philadelphia, 2011. 157 pp. ISBN 978-1-84905-056-2. £18.99.

This book is a timely and valuable contribution to the growing literature regarding creative arts therapies in a person-centred approach to dementia care and is particularly relevant to the current provision of care in Australia. Hayes and Povey regularly remind us that the creative arts offer people with dementia an opportunity to live 'stimulating and full lives'. They suggest that the arts offer people with dementia an invitation to consider their creative potential and a chance for a dignified ending to their lives. Undergirding the entire book is the deep seated belief that creative arts therapies are not optional extras to be offered over and above basic care for physical needs. Rather, the creative arts should be an integral component of offering truly person-centred dementia care.

Hayes and Povey begin the book by acknowledging a desire to transform the care and treatment of dementia, 'bringing humanity back to those who are sometimes considered as beyond help and reach'. They go on to explore some of the ways in which creative arts can reach people and describe activities that can be 'applied by anyone who is ready to give creativity a go'. This is by no means a definitive or exhaustive list of creative approaches but is a glimpse into the actual practice of this way of working. It is heartening to see that many of these suggested activities are actually for staff to engage with themselves. The authors remind us that, 'we need to reach our own creative hearts to work flexibly and acceptingly with the difficult and challenging situations which dementia provokes'. In saying this they are reminding us that being open to the experience of another is borne out of the acceptance of our own experience within the creative process.

It is particularly encouraging to read about the value of staff engaging in reflective practice through the creative arts. 'Dementia care can be exhausting . . . (and) we need to find

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