

Sus-IT: Sustaining IT use by older people to promote autonomy and independence

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Background

- Increasing pervasiveness of ICTs offers significant potential to sustain and improve the quality of life and independence of older people
- Many older people are already regular and enthusiastic users of ICTs. Over 65s are the fastest growing sector of internet users (Office of National Statistics, 2004)

BUT...

“there is a real risk that in the medium to long term, significantly more citizens will migrate from being digitally engaged to being unengaged than the other way round, as their capabilities change”

(UK Digital Inclusion Panel Report 2004 p. 79)

Why this research is needed

...People show me how to text, but I forget...

...I give up... (with technology) – I haven't got the confidence...

...You get a remote control and what do you press? I'm always afraid of pressing the wrong button and messing it up...

...The internet has appealed, but I've never plucked up the courage...

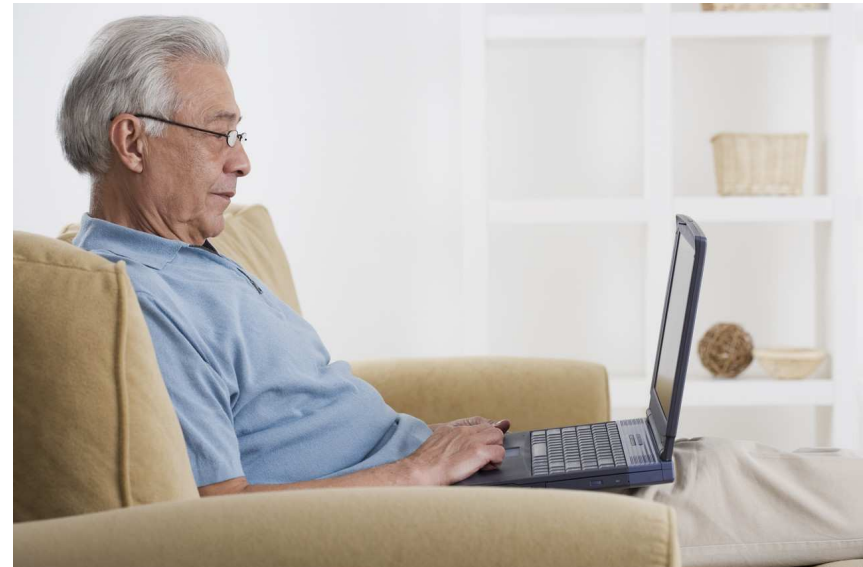
...My computer is in cobwebs...

...I'm familiar with the computer. You can do so much with it...

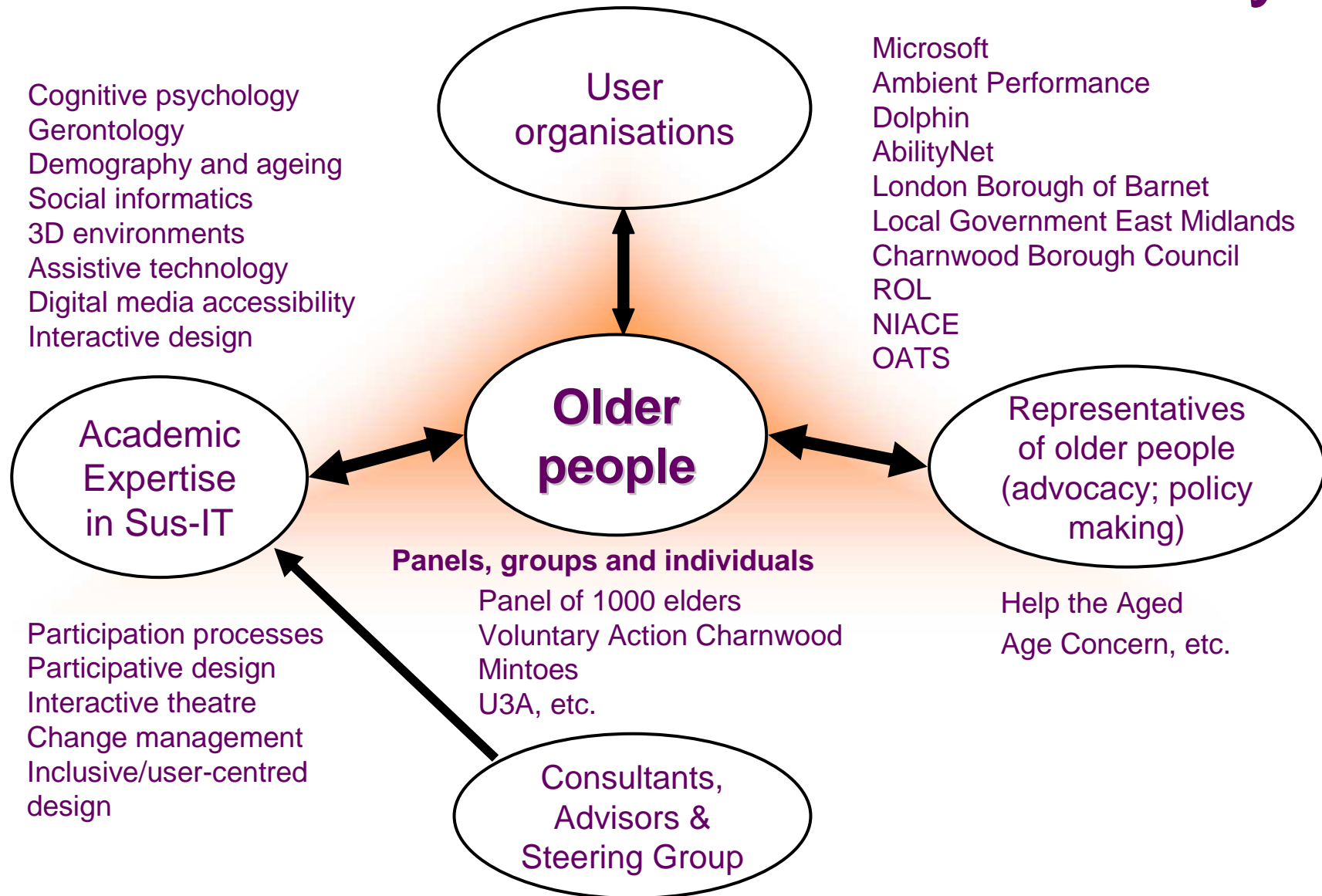
...I send emails daily to my daughter. It's great – there's an immediate response...

Sus-IT Research Questions

- What are the problems and support needs of older ICT users?
- What potential solutions are available or could be developed?
- How can a wide range of stakeholders, including older people, work together on this?



The Sus-IT research community



How this community came about

- Facilitated workshops were convened
- Contacts were established
- Relationships developed
- Conflicts arose
- Mutual understanding and trust grew
- Ideas emerged

.....serious work began

Roles of the Preparatory Network in bid development

The network enabled:

- Debate and critical review of existing knowledge and theory, and mapping of networks, existing research and development, priorities and gaps
- Knowledge sharing (identification of problems and gaps, understanding of the requirements and exploration of existing “solutions”)
- Consensus-building around potential solutions
- Consolidation of research partnerships
- Capacity building (teaching staff moving into research)

Network life course

- Followed stages of “*forming, storming, norming, performing*” (Tuckman & Jensen 1977)
- Attrition – over the 12 months of the Network: one bereavement, one move to US, one change of status (academic to practitioner), self de-selection

Key Roles of Preparatory Networks

- To grow communities
- To allow time for the constitution and development of multidisciplinary teams
- To enable proposals for ground-breaking collaborative research projects (CRPs) to evolve



Some Key Lessons

- Sharing a 'Big Vision' is a pre-requisite
- Importance of 'double loop' learning (learning about the learning) (Argyris & Schön, 1978)
- Collaborative working and knowledge sharing tools are essential
- Extensive co-ordination and communication activities must be resourced
- There are unresolved dilemmas to address
- Expert facilitation is critical for success

In conclusion ...

Preparatory networks are powerful catalysts enabling :

- crucial thinking-through of:
 - (i) Research strategy, design and methods
 - (ii) Theory into practice
 - (iii) Policy implications of the findings
- building of capacity for multi-disciplinary and participatory research by allowing time for shared learning and understanding to develop

A systematic review and evaluation of the role, value and resourcing of 'prep-nets' in supporting genuine multi-disciplinary research should be conducted as a matter of urgency to inform research council policy.

Acknowledgements

There are very many people who have contributed to the development of Sus-IT – all are sincerely appreciated and valued – but special mention must be made of two people:

Wendy Olphert for her insight in identifying the need for Sus-IT research and inspiring our endeavour

The late **Professor Colin Tully** who was a powerful influence in our network and sorely missed as an inspirational colleague and supportive friend

Thank-you for your attention

- and now your questions, please.

