

Ethical issues and welfare technology

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Ethics is asking about what is good life

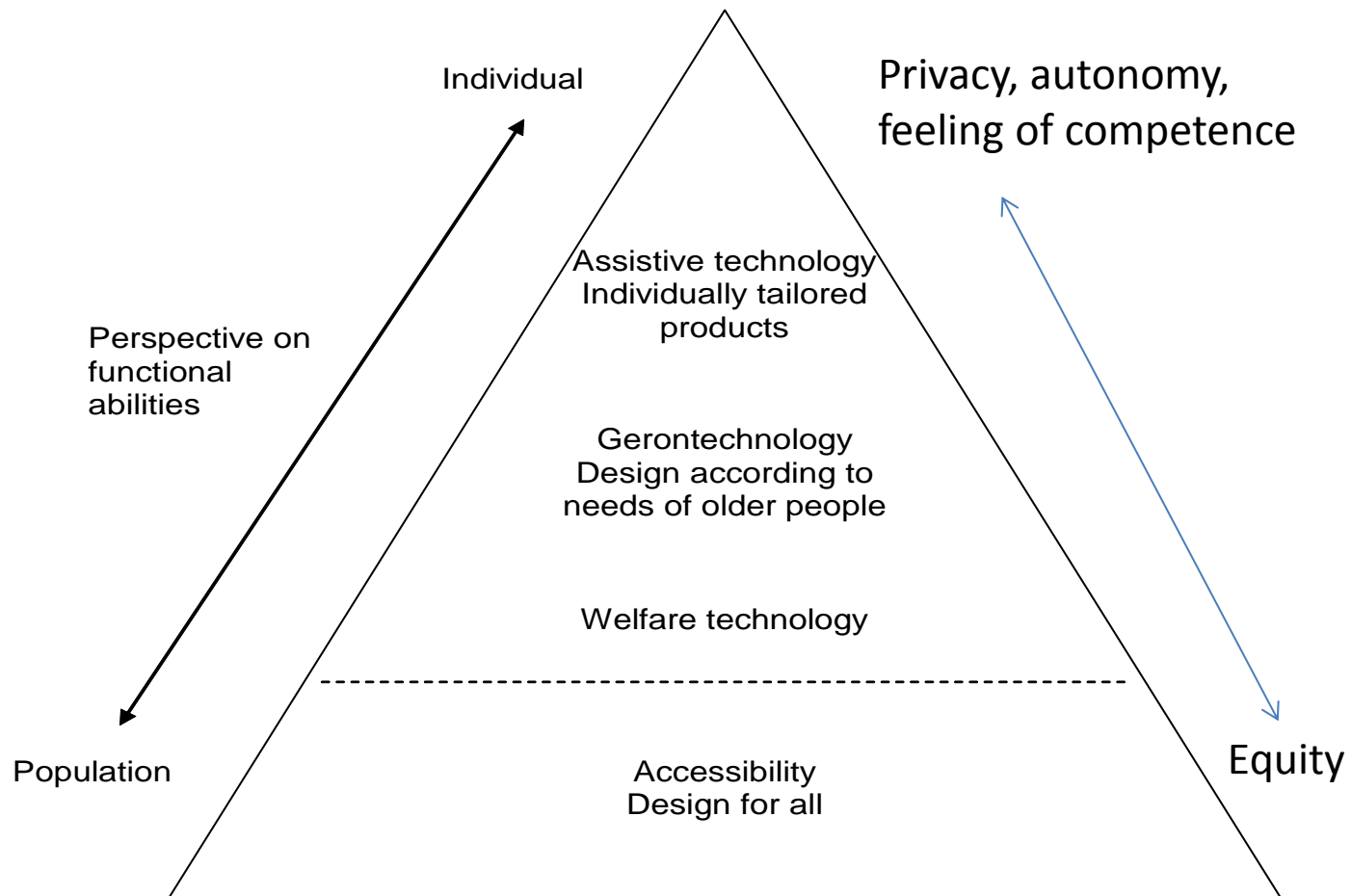
- Is welfare technology ethically sound because it aims to promote wellbeing?
- Thus, is there any relevance for discussing the ethics of welfare technology?
- *Vulnerable users*
- *Technology versus personal assistance and care*

Statements by the National Advisory Board on Social and Health Care Ethics (2011)

- ✓ The necessary technology is **equitably and easily available**.
- ✓ When used in social and health care, technology contributes to **supporting a good life**, human dignity, right of self-determination, inclusion, and humane care and caring.
- ✓ **The use of technology is agreed on together with the user** when drawing up the service plan. The plan presupposes a comprehensive review of the user's needs and life situation.

- ✓ Technology must be suited to the person's everyday life, and the disadvantages and **risks related to its use should be assessed** and the user guided and supported, as appropriate.
- ✓ At its best, technological monitoring enables an independent and safe life. The parties involved agree on its use together. Its **use does not violate personal integrity, nor restrict human contacts.**
- ✓ Development, assessment, purchase and utilisation of technology presuppose diversified expertise and **cooperation.**

Different approaches in designing welfare technology



Ethical principles help in understanding the nature of ethical questions in technology

- **Autonomy and respect for privacy**
- **Justice:** governed by values of tolerance, respect for others and equal justice.
- **Common good & avoiding harm to others:** beneficence and benevolence.
- **Efficiency**

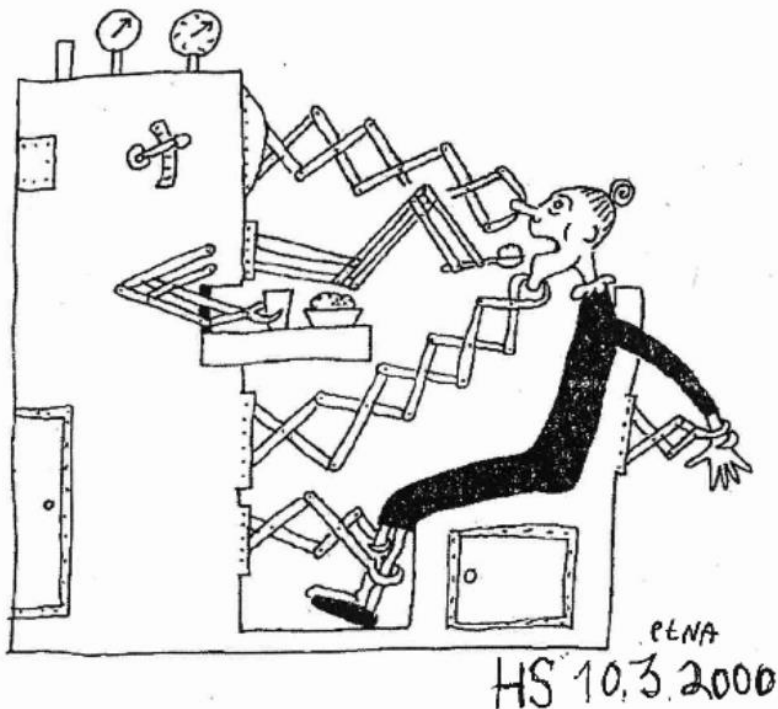
An ethical dilemma

- In technological design and use we often face situations where these principles guide to solve a situation in different ways: an ethical dilemma.
- It is helpful to analyse whether the difficulty to find a good solution is rooted in conflicting values.
- When we solve such a situation we try to combine our values and take into account the person's situation, i.e. the context. (Beauchamp, Childress 1994)

Perspectives and interests vary and can conflict: a tracking system

- **Persons with Alzheimer's:** *I can still go out alone with this surveillance device/I don't want to use any unfamiliar devices.*
 - **Family members:** *Because of this new system I don't need to worry so much. S/He will be found quicker than before.*
 - **Staff in the call centre:** *A new custom group which may need help immediately.*
 - **A company providing services:** *A small market segment which is growing. A challenge.*
 - **Emergency/police:** *If the system is reliable it can save time, money and lives.*
- > **Be aware of the possibility of harming the most vulnerable partner: unexpected consequences.**

Media images



Harmaa pantteri

Tieteellistekninen vallankumous on helpottanut ihmisen elämää monella tavalla. Toinen toistaan nerokkaammat laitteet ympäröivät mei-

”I hope that one day I won’t be left alone with a robot pet and a remote tracking system reporting my toilet visits”

Letter to editor of Helsingin Sanomat 17.1.2015

Personal help comes first

- Without personal help, welfare technology may have very limited potential in (social and health care) services for older citizens and those with problems in wellbeing/functioning/health
- “Self-service society”

If user needs & personal assistance are starting points technology has huge potential

- The largest Finnish nursing home implemented activating care model and appropriate technology
 - In 2004 100 bedridden residents, in 2014 only 10
 - 22%-38% decrease in use of psychopharmaceuticals
 - 50% less fall injuries
 - 83% increase in assisted access to toilet

(National Institute for Health and Welfare, THL 2015)

Some ethical questions in welfare technology

Do older people and people with problems in wellbeing/health/functioning get their fair share of the benefits of new technology?

- Are there enough solutions to meet their every day needs?
- Are their interests taken into account in technological development?
- Do people outside of labour force have access to information society skills?
- Do services based on ICT include relevant information for them?

Some ethical questions concerning ageing and technology

- Is technology developing too fast to meet older people's needs and needs of those with difficulties in learning?
 - Are there real alternatives to modern technology use?
 - Is technology going to replace human services?
 - Is technology easy to use?
- What kind of data is collected on our every day life and how is it used?

Ethical issues in the use of technologies in social and health care services are similar to those raised in the discussion concerning these services in general :

- What services are provided and used?
- Who has access to these services, who uses them?
- What is the quality of the services?
- How the services are targeted?

It is more challenging to identify ethical issues concerning the use of technologies in services because of the novelty of many solutions.

- Sensor pads, carer call systems, panic buttons, fall and movement sensors, temperature and gas sensors, flood alarms and controls, electronic tagging systems, video surveillance, intruder alerts etc.
- Intrusive technology. Extensive information collection on the person
- Who has the right to track and in what circumstances? Who has time to use the information? Is it useful? How the information is stored and deleted? Who has access to it?

Ethical questions: tagging

- Is the person's situation assessed carefully?
- Is the situation followed up by someone?
- Does the use of surveillance technology increase or decrease autonomy of a person?
- Does the use of such a device decrease access to personal care?
- Is the system technically reliable?
- Who takes care of the maintenance?
- Who trains new staff?
- Is all staff informed about the confidentiality of their work?
- Who covers the costs?

(see for example Bjoerneby et al. 1999 & 2004)

Efficiency

Is technology used in a way that an optimal result can be achieved from the public resources invested?

Technology should not be used if it increases the costs but does not improve the quality of services or the quality of life of the older citizens.

> If it is expected that **the wellbeing** of an older person will be better when living at home, there is a good reason to invest more in services supporting living at home than are the costs of institutional care .

Ethical issues in the use of technology use in social and health care services summarised

1. Right to use skills (competence), right to autonomy, and respect for privacy

2. Right to receive help and care (beneficence and benevolence)

> Balance between these principles causes ethical dilemmas

> Both of these should be taken into account to avoid

1. abandonment or
2. over-protection

Technology is a social product

- It is reflecting and representing our view of the world
- It also shapes our action, perception and values

Hearing the users voice is a prerequisite for successful design. The importance is even more essential when the user has severe problems in functioning (Rauhala 2007).

”Technology is fantastic!”

Comment by a woman 85+ living with advanced dementia after using touch screen for the first time of her life to play Karaoke programme

Picture Gramophone

(Topo et al 2004)

User involvement – some ethical remarks

- Partnership: equal rights and responsibilities?
- Has the user accessibility to project materials?
- Is qualified staff provided to all users?
- Are users involved early, and are methods appropriate & acceptable?
- Is confidentiality respected?

(Rauhala 2009)

Ethical issues in welfare technology development studies

- Participation does not necessarily mean any benefits for users.
 - Obtaining informed consent from users may be problematic, needing special attention.
 - Participation can be risky and create costs.
 - Participants' post-study situation with regard to the new technological device is uncertain.
 - The privacy of their personal data needs protection.
 - Participation of groups of people with specific needs.
 - There is a risk of raising unfounded expectations.
 - Studies may require the approval of an ethics committee.
- (Rauhala & Topo 2003)

Easy to raise expectations - hard to meet them

- People with problems in wellbeing, functioning or health should get a fair share of the technology development.
- There are huge, urgent needs but not enough ***reliable and useful products*** in the market.
- More basic research & development and assessment studies are needed.
- A promising trend towards ***enabling products*** and ***products that can be used for preventing*** manifestation of symptoms/problematic situations.

Thank you!

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