

Foreword

Developing a coherent conceptual framework and theoretical underpinning for how societies use technology can be challenging, particularly when it is focused on the complexity of innovation in public services. Individuals from the business, research, and policy communities who are engaged in development and application of technology-enabled interventions and solutions for public services understand the importance of having a comprehensive ‘systems view’ when trying to understand what drives variation in acceptance and adoption of technology. However, as Steven DeMello and Peder Inge Furseth point out in this excellent book, it becomes clear that a systems view in itself may be constrained if it focuses solely on internal organizational strategy, operations, and design of the customer experience. In fact, as the authors elegantly argue, the broader external factors of culture and societal values are likely to be more important contributors to the effective application of technology solutions for critical societal issues.

The basic thesis of this book is that cultural analysis matters in how we understand how technologies are viewed and accepted or not accepted by users, citizens, and institutions. DeMello and Furseth posit that this is true even in light of the fact that there is little or no integration of practical strategy and operational elements that is so often at the core of the successful delivery of services. They effectively help the reader understand that public sector innovation is rooted in defining and understanding societal differences in values, user experiences and funding models. In essence, in order for technology solutions in public services to be truly ‘disruptive’ they must successfully respond to the complex and dynamic environment in which they are developed.

In this era of global ageing, health and social providers as well as policymakers must be nimble and prepared to address a societal shift never seen before: the demands placed on societies by considerable changes in demography, chronic disease, work and retirement,

globalization, and a vast increase in data and information. The authors effectively use independent living, a critical indicator of how societies engage and support their oldest members, as a key barometer for how technology adoption varies from country to country. By looking at the intersection of technology solutions for services and residential programs for older adults, it becomes very clear that current service systems and human resources are insufficient to meet the demands of a rapidly ageing world. The authors make a compelling case that, regardless of geographic region, governmental structure, or economic resources, our current global economic, human, and environmental resources are insufficient to effectively sustain older adults in remaining independent.

The authors have raised an important construct for all of us who work in the public sector regarding what underlies and directs the rapid advancement of technology solutions in developing and developed economies. The acceptance and potential for acceptance of innovative technologies is driven by broad societal structures and values that operate well beyond our understanding of market-driven and social beneficence. In the increasingly complex world of health and social services, policymakers, payers, corporations, and providers alike must take notice; rather than assuming that society will benefit from one-size-fits-all technology solutions, it is increasingly becoming clear that technology solutions will only be successful with attention to the customization and the cultural environment in which they are being introduced. Successful use of technology solutions in the future will ultimately be determined by societies, institutions, and corporations that can find that proper balance of ‘matching a willing market to a disruptive service platform that is embedded in a solid business model and a supportive public policy environment’. DeMello and Furseth deserve credit for raising our awareness to the true driver behind the successful integration and acceptance of technology in this increasingly innovation-driven world: culture.

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