

Karen Wilkinson

Welcome to Age Innovators, a series from the Healthy Ageing Challenge Community of Practice, in which we spotlight pioneering innovations in longevity. We asked leading researchers and innovators what inspired their work and how it has the potential to impact people's lives. I'm Karen Wilkinson from Innovate UK KTN And in this episode, Julia Glenn, Design Innovation Lead from the Innovate UK Healthy Ageing Challenge, talks to Toby Venning and Caleb Adamu from Elate which is an initiative from Cross Digital Ltd, which is helping people navigate the complex world of care.

Julia Glenn

Good morning, everyone. So I'm Julia Glenn and I'm the innovation lead, the design innovation lead for the Healthy Ageing Challenge. And I've had the real pleasure on the Design for Ageing project to work with Toby and Caleb who we'll be talking to today. So Toby and Caleb are from Elate and have done some amazing co-design work to bring some really intelligent technology into the care market. So Toby, I'm going to start with my first question to you. So first of all, let's set the scene. So can you tell us a little bit about your project and what inspired you to start.

Toby Venning

Thanks Julia. Yes so it started with a personal experience back in early 2020. I think listening to my parents struggle with looking after their, both their set of their parents and my grandparents from a distance. We're based here in Devon and both sets are in Ireland and in Kent. And it is really difficult to hear how they were struggling to look after their own parents from a distance. How do they find the right care? Should it be support? Should it be care? Should it be domiciliary, which is from their own homes, or should they go into care homes? And all of their needs were very different. So I think that was the catalyst, I suppose, to actually trying to help them figure out how to go about navigating that really complex landscape, I suppose. Fortunately, Caleb and I and our business had already had clients in the care sector, so we were well-equipped to understand part of the problem. But we set about going, trying to help them and noticed there are some huge challenges within the existing system. You know, those things called care needs assessments that local authorities do. But as we all know, local authorities who have got funding that's been cut. And so that combined with the ageing population in this country was really what we decided that we needed to actually do something about it. I mean, so there's a great praise, opportunity lurks where responsibility has been advocated. And so we decided that we actually felt compelled to do something about this. And so I think that was when at the start of the concept of what we'll talk about today was born, and basically how we could support older, older people throughout the country.

Caleb Adamu

Yeah, just to add to that Julia the vision of Elate really is to enhance the lives of a million people, the big vision and we are doing this to enable them to access the care that they need seamlessly by integrating technology, data analytics and user centric design and our approach to produce something that works for them rather than something that was forced on them.

Julia Glenn

Yeah, and I think that's such a good point isn't it Caleb, because as we grow older so many of our choices are taken away from us. So where we and our loved ones can help design our own

care in a very personalised way, it has to be a good thing. So Caleb, my next question is going to be for you. So I know some of the amazing co-design initiatives and co-design work you've undertaken to make sure that your technology is applied sensitively. So through kind of that work and working with some of the end users within your project, tell us a bit about some of the challenges both paid and unpaid support workers and carers face.

Caleb Adamu

Yeah, Covid has made us realise how important the NHS and the care sector is to us, and it's definitely the people in this health sector who's doing the most intensive impacts on the lives of people who are verbal or cannot really take care of themselves. So our co-design sessions have really been engaging with our user groups. We've got four user groups who are the care providers themselves, the care workers, both former paid and unpaid care workers, people receiving the support and their family and friends. So getting them in a room, sometimes individually in groups all together has helped us to get the feedback from them about what the pain points are, what challenges they're going through, and it's been really insightful in helping us to define or create this software as a service platform that will make their lives or work easier. It's also support planning assessments as well as your final recommendations that best suits the end users needs, so that caring is very much at the forefront of improving the welfare or wellbeing of the carer is at the forefront of what we are doing.

Julia Glenn

That's so good to hear, isn't it? Because so often the carer is forgotten in our kind of search for how to add value to the end user. The care, the carers role is, becomes less important and it's so, and your work has been so valuable because you've been able to promote the role of the carer and how important it is in the whole care paradigm. So your strapline is amazing, isn't it, the "grace, joy and dignity" and I think as a company you really live by that and I think your work really kind of lives by those tenets. But Toby perhaps on the kind of grace, joy and dignity themes, can you tell us some more about the key aims of your initiative?

Toby Venning

Yeah, absolutely. So as you mentioned, our Elate's mission is to empower people to live with grace, joy and dignity and Caleb mentioned that includes their friends, their family, older people themselves and also vulnerable people in the future. So the actual aim is to revolutionise elderly care in the UK and with that, empowerment. So we're doing that by integrating technology, data analytics, user centric design, those Caleb mentioned having all those user groups actually in the co-design sessions, making sure that the technology works for them. So initially someone will actually complete a care needs assessment, have a bespoke support plan built for them, and then those products and service recommendations. So it's a whole ecosystem and we're at a stage where we've got users on the platform. We're going to have the hard launch in 2024. And so we've got three beta test partners that we're working with at the moment. So we're really excited by that as an opportunity. They're in assisted living and domiciliary care, as well as care and support, but we're also working with other charities. There's some amazing charities down here in Devon, in the South West, where there's a high demographic of older people, but also there's lots of unpaid carers and so we're connecting with all those groups. So I think the main aims of the initiative is, as Caleb said, is long-term a million people benefiting from the platform. But the way we know we have to do that is to create this partnership, work with charities, businesses that also align with our values and our mission. How can we help them and how can they help us as well.

Julia Glenn

Now that's interesting. I think the reach in terms of the different organisations and different kind of stakeholder groups you've put around you has really added the kind of real insights and sensitivity into your project. So I'm really glad that you've been able to talk a bit more about that today. So Caleb, my next question is going to go to you and I kind of feel like I know the answer to this question, but it would be brilliant if you can explain for our podcast listeners today. So how do you feel that your work and your in your research and innovation, how do you feel that it is set apart from other kind of care platforms? What makes you different as an organisation and your initiative different?

Caleb Adamu

Yeah. So the Elate platform has been developed to answer the pain points of our user groups and clients in the care sector. So the design of the platform and iterations and changes are demand led, based on the, what we've identified from these co-design sessions that we've had. We are very much a design led company and we adopt the double diamond methodology of Design Council, which are the four steps of discover, define, develop and deliver. So in the develop, discovery phase is allowed us to be a sponge to get our input from all these user groups and be in the same room with them, empathise with them, have empathy of what they actually experiencing and when they either need care or are delivering care and that has been very valuable in making sure that we have the right product specifications. When we come to the definition stage, we then take this back design with our design tools and then do the code developments and then presented back to the users, to test whether the assumptions that we came up with during the co-design session are actually really valid and would work in the real world. And it's not, it doesn't end there. It's an iterative process. It goes back to the start of discover whilst we present stuff and it will be ongoing throughout the lifecycle of this product. And so that's been really, really invaluable. And also this software is a service product. So and we've built it to be web based, so that it's accessible on any device as well. For even the lowest level IT literacy should be able to use it effectively.

Julia Glenn

That's so important isn't it? And I think as kind of like someone who's worked with you over the last year or so, I think what you as a project have been able to do, which is probably why you have so much empathy and such great market understanding, is some adapt your language, learn the type of language that you need to be using to draw the most out of your users and the co-design process. So I think that's been very, very impressive, that kind of real authentic empathy in terms of using language in a way that's accessible for people, so that your technology can be accessible for people. And I think that's incredibly impressive. So Toby, I'm going to take the next question to you. And this is kind of quite high pressure question, but so based on everything that you've been saying in terms of like your reach and the kind of technological ease in terms of accessing the platform, how do you see in terms of your long term vision, how do you see your innovation benefiting society in the broader economy?

Toby Venning

Yes, it is a really good question. I think as you mentioned just now, we we do start with humility and empathy. And I think that's why our product has been designed for those user groups we mentioned. And ultimately we're trying to keep people in their own homes for as long as possible, you know, empowering people to live with grace, joy and dignity exactly means that. And so if we can help older people access the products and services they need and be

empowered to help themselves with their own support plans, with their own assessments, and also to give their friends and family that confidence and autonomy to support them as well, means that there will be a hopefully reduction in healthcare costs, you know long term. There's less people going into hospital, there's less burden on the NHS. And so, on an individual level, it's going to be better for people. But on a sort of societal level, they'll be better. And we want to promote longer, more productive working lives and remain independent. And we know how much of an impact, as you know, stress as well on the friends and family when you know your loved one is perhaps not receiving the support or care they should be through no fault of it necessarily any care workers but just because they're not able to access that support. And so ultimately, we think that there will be a huge cost saving to the NHS and there will be a better benefit to actually individual person and their friends and family. And on top of that we've, from our from our co-design sessions and from some of the legacy systems that the care workers are using after some of the design sessions showing them the product, working with them, literally we've had people that were very despondent for kind of closed arms at the start of the session, you know, walking out at the end of it, literally sort of cheering for us. You know, that's a very humbling moment, but we wanted that to continue as we build the product out. So, yeah, we think there's going to be huge benefits longer term as well.

Julia Glenn

Really, really interesting. So I suppose people who may have kind of given up or wanted to kind of disengage from the whole kind of care strategy or care plan, have kind of been able to re-engage because of the accessibility of your platform and the kind of language that you use to help people engage with designing their own care pathways. So that's a really kind of wonderful thing to hear that you've been able to kind of re-engage people in terms of taking an interest in their care, because I suppose so many of us just want to park it don't we, because we don't know what options we have and what those best options might be. So that's some that's very impressive and very interesting. So Caleb I suppose leading on from what Toby has been saying, I think what's always really interesting to hear in these kind of narratives, is kind of like individual case studies and success stories that really bring to life how you've been able to kind of like draw users in and help engage with their care journey. So perhaps from your co-design experiences, it would be really interesting to hear about a bit about some kind of stand out cases that have kind of, you know, at the end of the day, you've gone home and thought, Wow, today was a great day. So it would be really good to hear about some individual success stories if you're able to talk a bit around that.

Caleb Adamu

Great. So as Toby mentioned, we have three businesses as partners and about 200 users on a platform now. And the feedback has been really, really good. Any time we've had a session, either training or feedback session or just getting more insights from them, it's been really positive, (*inaudible*) to them because the main thing that carers especially or supports workers are using at the moment is the support plan functionality that is sort of integrated with a calendar. So that allows them to be more efficient in delivering care when they go to visit rather than spending so much time on either replicating the same known steps, take time and time again. We've made it really easy for them to predefine the tasks that they need to do, tick them (*inaudible*) and then add additional context notes if needed. But then you then spending all their time doing paperwork rather than actually interacting with the person you're supposed to be supporting. So that's been really good feedback on that point to help them stay organised with caring, especially when delivering care. Also, cleaning up the platform for family and friends and even the person receiving support as well to contribute or see what's happening in

the carer's schedule has been really impactful. It was then we had cases where people wouldn't actually know what's happening with their care. Well, as I said, it's either about, Elate allows them to see what's happening into the future on the schedule - who is coming to visit me, who's on doing what around the support that I need and that's been really good feedback in that regard.

Julia Glenn

That's really interesting because I suppose by having that information and knowing kind of like what your day is going to look like or what your week's going to look like, it removes all of that anxiety, doesn't it? And That's on both sides, isn't it? Because it's the carer worrying about whether they're going to do a good enough job or do a sensitive enough job. And then it's also the end user. So that's really interesting to hear. So Toby following on from Caleb's insights into some of the kind of individual success stories, can you talk a bit about what's on the horizon for Elate? I know there's been some really interesting discussions within the project team about how you're going to use technology to provide even more kind of intelligent and sensitive insights, so I think would be exciting for our podcast audience today to hear more about what's on the horizon.

Toby Venning

Yeah, so we're, as we mentioned before we're in the soft launch phase at the moment, collecting lots of user data from those 200 users with three beta test partners and the hard launch will be in start of 2024, where we're looking for more care providers such as assisted living or domiciliary to work with so we can keep refining the platform, keep building it. Beyond that, we're also looking to expand our partnerships. We are currently working with Exeter University and Lancashire University, who endorsed the business and supported us as well Set Squared and the Academic Health Science Network and local charities here in Devon such as West Bank who support unpaid carers. So we're looking to expand our partnerships and work with other research institutions or care providers who we can help you know, sell their pain points. You know, also some of the big problems that they might be trying to solve in the healthcare sector, you know, hopefully that's something we can work with and potentially other organisations that are working with wearables as well. We know there's some great work going on in terms of stopping or reducing falls in people's homes and also helping them with everyday tasks. So we would love to work with businesses and charities and care providers who are all trying to solve the same problems that we are. So that's really exciting. And yeah, we're really open to partnerships and collaborations.

Julia Glenn

Very interesting because I suppose by making those partnerships and collaborations you get better insights. You understand kind of people's pain points, you understand the conversations that perhaps are difficult to have direct one on one. So that's really interesting. It's really interesting about the charities that you've worked with. Do you think those charities have given particular insight in terms of kind of the unsupported and unpaid carer kind of view?

Toby Venning

Yeah, it's been incredible how generous people have been with their time, and I think that's obviously our mission resonates with a lot of people and it's very authentic and they know that we are trying to do that because we're willing to sit down and have those difficult

conversations. And I think that one of the things that's really difficult for unpaid carers or informal carers, which there's at least 4 million of in this country and could be up to 8 million, it's hard to define, is that often these people are, you know, daughters, sisters, fathers, husbands or wives. You know, they don't necessarily see themselves as an informal unpaid carer. They're simply a family member or a neighbour or a friend. So actually getting people to sort of understand that in order for them to gain some support, financial support, mental health support, all of those sort of things is very difficult because of the language that the government or organisations are using to define that kind of person, because they don't necessarily see themselves in that way. But absolutely they are, you know, along with paid work, is the bedrock of looking after people in this country is paid and unpaid carers and you know, at some point we might all need that support and so we need to be able to support those people, you know, during the times where they are looking after their loved ones or our loved ones. So, yeah.

Julia Glenn

I think it's really obvious that the kind of level of emotional intelligence in your project and in terms of your project design and the way you offer your technology and service it's really obvious, all of that kind of empathy and engagement work you've done. And I think that that's really, really obvious from the service that you provide. So I hope other innovators who are listening kind of pick up on those tips that kind of like talking wide and really having empathy for your end user, and the broader stakeholder community, is such a huge part of building something successful. So in the interest of time, I'm going to come to my last question and Caleb, I'm going to take this to you. I wonder whether you both might want to comment on this. So, what in terms of your involvement and this project and your journey so far and going back to that point about where there are gaps, there's a responsibility to provide something for society to make things better for us as we age, what would be your overarching message to support entities like the government in terms of what you know and what needs to be done to make businesses like yours a success? What would be the key points you'd like to say to kind of finish this podcast with some clear message?

Caleb Adamu

Yeah, without rustling any feathers, we believe everyone needs to live a fulfilling life and we are doing our part by trying to make that happen with our app, our web app and we are committed to providing the best possible service or support but continued funding in the area and be more empathetic to the needs of vulnerable and older people. This will be good to have more insights into. There has been low funding for that same sort of thing, and more funding in that area will be, will help as well. I don't know if you have anything else to add Toby.

Toby Venning

No, yeah. Just to add to that is that, you know, older, vulnerable people do have a voice and they do want to be listened to. And whether they're still working, you know, obviously, some of the most important people in the world, leaders of countries are you know well into their eighties. So, you know, it can be done. And people, you know, they want to give back still and they want to contribute, whether they're still working or not working. And, you know, I think just having that empathy, as Caleb mentioned, listening and being kind and wanting to actually solve the pain points that they are experiencing and that their friends and family are

experiencing is a great place to start. And that's where we started and that's where we'll continue.

Julia Glenn

Brilliant well, I think that's a wonderful kind of message to wrap up today's podcast on. And it's been my pleasure both working with you and to talking to you today. And it's really, really inspiring to hear how, you know, listening, co-design, empathy and offering platforms differently and having that willingness to adapt to what the market tells you. It's been really inspiring to hear those clear messages, so thank you Caleb and Toby and I look forward to talking to you again soon.

Caleb Adamu

Thank you very much Julia

Toby Venning

Thank you very much Julia

Karen Wilkinson

Thanks for joining Age Innovators and watch out for more episodes. This series is brought to you by the Healthy Ageing Challenge Community of Practice hosted by Innovate UK.