

The Role of Leadership in Assistive Technology: Guiding Successful Integration

In the dynamic field of assistive technology (AT), leadership is a cornerstone for success. My research with Leonard Cheshire and University of Stirling reveals how effective technology leadership fosters trust, confidence, and adoption of AT in Residential Care Settings (RCSs). This domain is vital to ensuring that AT fulfils its potential to enhance independence and become an empowering tool for disabled people.

Why Leadership Matters

Leadership within social care environments plays a pivotal role in shaping attitudes toward technology. Leaders who are competent and confident with basic technology not only set an example but also create a culture where technology is seen as an integral part of daily life rather than an unfamiliar or intimidating tool. In my research, participants described environments where leaders actively used technology themselves as places where staff and residents were more willing to engage with new tools.

In contrast, care sites that restricted the use of personal devices or lacked visible tech leadership often faced greater resistance to adopting AT. This separation between technology and daily practice not only slowed innovation but also undermined the trust and enthusiasm needed for successful integration.

Breaking Down Barriers

One of the greatest challenges for leaders in AT implementation is overcoming staff fear and unfamiliarity with technology. Many support workers possess more technological proficiency than they acknowledge, but without leadership encouragement, they may struggle to see the value of AT for themselves or the people they support. My research uncovered cases where leaders provided hands-on demonstrations and ongoing support to staff, which significantly boosted confidence and skills.

Furthermore, leaders must carefully balance the introduction of new technology with existing workflows. Technology should simplify and enhance tasks, not add to the complexity of already demanding support

roles. Leaders who involve staff in decision-making and ensure that technology meets practical needs are more likely to achieve sustained engagement and adoption.

The Impact of Leadership

Focus groups with AT professionals highlighted the critical role of leadership in ensuring the success of technology initiatives. One practitioner shared, “oh, [the manager] is all for it! However we can get creative with technology, we should do it, she is always on board!” This normalization of technology and psychological safety for innovation in support creates an environment where advancement can thrive.

Evidence from my research also shows that strong technology leadership correlates with better outcomes for both staff and disabled tech users. Leaders who champion AT not only foster a culture of confidence but also improve the consistency and quality of support provided.

A Path Forward

Building strong technology leadership requires intentional strategies, including:

- Training leaders to understand the practical and strategic value of AT.
- Empowering leaders to model technology use and address staff concerns.
- Encouraging leaders to create inclusive, technology-positive cultures in their organizations.

Through my work with Leonard Cheshire, I’ve observed how leadership can make or break AT initiatives. When leaders embrace technology with vision and determination, they pave the way for broader acceptance, better outcomes, and a future where AT becomes an indispensable part of daily life for disabled people.

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