This dissertation introduces an alternative perspective to the design of enabling technologies for older adults aiming to support the capabilities of the users rather than their disabilities. 14 different research explorations involving 542 participants over four years have been used as empirical grounding, and relevant research prototypes and products from these explorations are presented throughout the dissertation.

The research approach consists of the construction of a phenomenological design framework, an operationalization of the framework by informing a tailored Participatory Design methodology, and a reflection of research products to generate knowledge that can inform back to theory. The design approach suggested has been followed from conception of theory to long-term use of design outcomes in realistic settings to fully utilize the reciprocal interplay between theory and design.

Results from the testing of use after design in real environments suggest that this design approach can open up new opportunities to design long-lasting relationships between older adults and the digital artifacts they use in their everyday life by designing for capabilities rather than disabilities.