EmployAble: Digital Technology and Innovative Employment

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Hi Megan, Give it the once over...I’m printing it out tomorrow morning.
Today’s Agenda

Overview

What is EmployAble?
Definition of Virtual Worlds?
Benefits and Challenges for PWD

Overview of Employment Issues for PWD

EmployAble Project Development
Pilot Study
Pre-Survey and Pre-Screening
Scenes of the Virtual Employment Center
Training Center
Midpoint Survey
What Have We Learned So Far?

“Guided Tour”
Overview

Who is EmployAble?

Staff at Center on Disability Studies EmployAble project:

Steve Brown, PI
Megan Conway, Co-PI
Tom Conway, Project Director
Rick Shankles, Veterans Content Specialist
Marylou Matsuura, AA

Partners: Virtual Ability, Inc & Abilicorp

Advisory Board

Funder: Kessler Foundation
EmployAble is guided by a belief that through a combination of technological innovation and collaboration with employers, representatives of the disability community and people with disabilities (PWD), a practical and sustainable employment tool can be created.

“EmployAble” is designed to be a model virtual reality employment orientation and support center to provide training, networking, mentoring and employment resources for people with disabilities and employers, using diverse virtual platforms.

EmployAble is funded by the Kessler Foundation and developed by the Center on Disability Studies at the University of Hawaii.
Overview

EmployAble is designed to meet the needs of people with diverse disabilities, with a particular emphasis on Veterans and those with Traumatic Brain Injuries.

However, people with many disabilities, of all kinds have engaged with EmployAble.
Overview:
Why we are interested in employment and disability?

A July 2010 Kessler Foundation and National Organization on Disability Harris Poll indicated 18-64 year-old PWD, are “less likely to describe themselves as working either full or part-time than are people without disabilities (21% versus 59%, respectively).”

This 38 percentage point gap is the greatest “measured in this survey, and helps to explain the persistence of gaps in other areas such as poverty and health care.”
Overview:
Why we are interested in employment and disability?

Trends in Disability Employment
National Update, August 2013

The employment to population ratio rate for people with disabilities decreased from 27% in August 2012 to 26.4% in August 2013 (down 2.2%; 0.6 percentage points). The labor participation rate is the percentage of people who are working or actively looking for work.

For people without disabilities the employment ratio increased slightly—70.5% to 71%, up 7%; .5 percentage points.

Report from Kessler Foundation and New Hampshire Institute on Disability
In August 2013, the percentage of people with disabilities in the labor force was 17.6. By comparison, the percentage of persons with no disability in the labor force was 64.2 (Aug. 2012: 18% PWD-63.8% PwoD).

Sept. 6, 2013  Source: U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)
What are Virtual Worlds?
Definition of Virtual Worlds?

Definition

“Computer-based simulated environment where users interact with other users through graphic or textual representations of themselves utilizing textual chat, voice, video or other forms of communication.”

Journal of Virtual Worlds Research www.jvwresearch.org
Benefits & Challenges for PWD
Benefits & Challenges for PWD

Benefits

• Social inclusion
• Practice and self-evaluation
• Safe and anonymous
• Targeted skill development
Benefits & Challenges for PWD (cont’d)

Benefits

- Realistic Environment
- Absence of Architectural Barriers
- Immersive
- Motivating
Benefits & Challenges for PWD (cont’d)

Challenges

For Users
- Accessibility for users with various disabilities
- Need for up-to-date computer equipment
- Need for computer skills

For Designers
- Ensuring Universal Design
- Capitalizing on interactivity
Project Development
Project Development:
Building EmployAble

Second Life© Virtual Abilities Island
ADA Compliant Simulation
W3C Accessibility Compliant Web-based Module

Using the virtual environment Second Life as one platform, EmployAble facilitates employment skills training, networking, mentoring, and employment resources for both persons with disabilities and employers.
Project Development: Overall Goals

50 people with disabilities supported to gain or retain employment.

• Prepare for a job search.
• Network and search for a job.
• Apply for and interview for a job
• Disclose a disability
• Identify and describe support needs
EmployAble Project Participant Flowchart

Potential Participant Contacts EmployAble

Takes Entrance Survey for Suitability

Accepted

Individual or Group?

Individual

Pre-Test Interview Module

EmployAble Interview Web-based Module

Post-Test Interview Module

Group Member

Virtual Ability Training

Designated Group Online Meeting

Sent Notice Thanking for Interest in Project
Pilot Study

Goal for Participants

• 50 adults with disabilities who are looking for a job or want to retain a job.
• At least half veterans or people with TBI.
• Have basic computer skills and access to a computer and the internet.
Pilot Study

- June - Oct 2013
- 2 hours/week Online
- Individual or Group Participation
- Mentoring, Social Networking, Curriculum, Resources, Practice
A majority of the initial 34 survey respondents had:

- a college degree (70%)
- were currently looking for a job (83%)
- have been looking for over 6 months (68%)
- have had no job offers during that time (51%).
- have moderate or advanced computer skills (88%), but only 43% use assistive technology.
Pilot Study: Screening and Pre-Survey Data (cont’d)

Forty-five percent (45%) of participants are currently using vocational rehabilitation services.

Self-identified barriers to their employment included:

- job readiness (49%)
- the need for mentoring and peer support (51%)
- the need for technology skills training (20%)
- employer or colleague attitudes about disability (57%)
- identifying job fit (57%)
- understanding work culture (48%)
Scenes of the Virtual Employment Center
EmployAble Second Life Headquarters
"Skill Builder" enhances participant skills in areas employers have identified as critical to employment success. These include tools that allow participants to:

a. Identify current employment skills and challenges;

b. Build a resume;

c. Identify interview skills and practice in a simulated interview situation; and

d. Learn about job search techniques and tools, and look for a job using these tools.
Skill Builder

Tools employees will find here:
- Training videos about assistive technologies, corporate culture, resume building, interviewing & social interaction in the workplace
- Simulations to practice & refine skills learned in the training videos
- Training situations such as work ethic, time management, attendance, & appropriate dress
"Access Info" provides employers, employees and job-seekers with information for supporting hiring and retention of people with disabilities. Information exhibited in this area includes:

a. Benefits of hiring people with disabilities,

b. How to recruit and retain people with disabilities, and

c. Creating an accessible workplace. This area will also have a list of general employment resources, including resources targeting specific populations such as Veterans.
Access Info
"Match Maker" is devoted to making connections between people with disabilities, mentors, and employers. This area:

a. Connects employers with employees via Social Media (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter) and email announcements;

b. Encourages application submission and review;

c. Promotes actual interviews;

d. Connects people with disabilities with successful mentors who can help guide them through the interview and employment process.
Match Maker
Job Interview Module: Google Sites

https://sites.google.com/a/hawaii.edu/interview-module/
Module: Job Application and Interview
Pilot Study: Mid-point Survey

Mid-point Survey:

One example: Are there any changes in your personal goals for participating in EmployAble since you started the program?

I would like to work in ADA related field. Would like to be a paid mentor.

Yes. My goal is to at least volunteer instead of earn a wage.

Yes. I began thinking I could get a job and start a business on the side. Now I am concentrating on starting a business.
No, as this is entirely new to me, networking for employment is still a goal. No changes. I am committed to the job searches and mentoring.

I need to get more contacts and job offers.

I am at a crossroads of sorts. The field for which my education focuses on is cyclical, and is going into the off-season very soon. I am trying to use the EmployAble resources toward figuring out other employment options that are more indirect but transferable to my background.

No.
My mentor was great at getting me to arrive at my own conclusions. I would have liked some specific concrete advice on employment leads.

I am appreciative of getting constructive feedback from my mentor as I am working on my CV, cover letter and other aspects of a job application process.

I like that my mentor is willing to actually help me.

So far a great match and fit. Just wish we could meet more!

I have not met my mentor. I have spoken with her by phone twice.
Pilot Study: What’s Next

Pilot Study
• Post Survey
• Observations
• Conclusion
• Continuation of EmployAble
Project Outcomes: What Have We Learned So Far?

- Need is vast
- Technology has steep learning curve
- Mentoring/individual attention crucial
- Need for employer involvement
Project Outcomes

Model Virtual Employment Center that is sustainable and replicable.

• Demonstrate innovative use of technology.
• Model can be built upon with additional programs and curriculum.
• Model can be customized to specific professional fields or populations.
Guided Tour

Second Life© Virtual Abilities Island
EmployAble Project
Questions?
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