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Jobs for Inclusion

Project Implementation

The first phase of my project involved researching the needs of the organization. To do this, I spent the first weeks of my project interviewing key employees and stakeholders in the organization. A few people who I spent extensive time speaking to were Joanne Raymond and Lisa Dunker. Joanne Raymond helped connect me to contacts within the organization and also helped me set up meetings. Lisa Dunker is the job coach for Opportunities for Inclusion clients who are employed. She supports members by helping them find jobs, apply for jobs, and resolve any challenges that employees may have at work with their managers or with their job responsibilities. She was my main point of contact at Opportunities for Inclusion. I also worked with OFI clients for several weeks in which I would teach them basic job skills through games like role play activities. After speaking to OFI clients and other staff at OFI, I decided to build a tool that helps people with disabilities search for job positions and filter based on environmental considerations like auditory or fast paced environments.

In the next phase of my project, I attended a Hackathon where I met a few programmers and a volunteer who works with OFI. Together we designed the different features of the prototype and also built a prototype. The tool uses 9 basic "tags" or environmental conditions to label job postings and identify strengths and weaknesses of employees. These tags are people skills and interactions with customers, standing for extended periods, physically demanding, teamwork, manual dexterity, tactile stimuli, fast paced, auditory stimuli, olfactory stimuli, and mental stimuli. These tags were created based on our collective experience working with clients at OFI. A job seeker and their job coach will take a series of yes no behavioral questions on the site. Based on their responses, the site will identify strengths and weaknesses of the job seeker in the 9 main areas. The site will then match the job seeker with job openings that match their behavioral requirements. Employers will be able to submit job postings to the platform and the job will be automatically marked with different tags.

Needs addressed

At the moment, OFI manually matches its clients with jobs. Additionally, job matches do not consider fit and whether the client will be able highlight their skill set at the job. In speaking with the clients at the job, I had learned that many times when they left a job it was due to social conditions. For instance, one person left their job working as a cashier at Star Market due to "too many chefs in the kitchen" or being overwhelmed by multiple managers giving them responsibilities. Another person spoke about conflict between different genders at work. In identifying these potential social concerns before matching a person to a job, the likelihood that the person leaves their job or feels uncomfortable at work is reduced.

Assessing the Impact

I presented my prototype to Dunker and Raymond for feedback.They seemed optimistic about the idea. They also indicated to me that this is a tool they would use. Dunker in particular could do a better job of matching her clients with jobs and spend less time facilitating the job search process. I plan to further investigate the impact when the tool is fully built out, and I can test it on employees and their job coaches.

In hindsight, I could have done a better job of assessing my impact. But, I plan on going through this process in the Fall where I will interview users on their experience with the tool.

Unexpected Obstacles

One unexpected challenge I experienced was working alone. There were many times when I felt unmotivated, and I believe that having a second person to bounce ideas off of and collaborate with would have helped me stay focused and accomplish more. I also lacked the technical skills to build out my idea. I'm currently looking for another person, but I believe this is something I should have addressed sooner on. Having the perspective of a technical person would allow me to understand what is feasible to build and have a more realistic expectation of what can be built.

Future plans

I plan on recruiting a programmer with the funding and working with them over the summer to build out the tool. I would like to test the tool with OFI in the Fall, and then modify the tool based on the testing feedback. I would like to offer this as a resource to other organizations like OFI serving communities of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Reflection

I have some regret in the way I approached this project, but have a better idea of how to approach another project like this in the future. I don't think I did my best work and struggled to stay motivated on this project at various times. As previously mentioned, I think it would have helped if I worked with someone on this project. I realized I'm not someone who enjoys working at a project alone. It was especially isolating due to the pandemic and participating in activities mostly virtually. I also would have picked an area in which I have more of an understanding of the needs. Working with people with disabilities is not space I have prior experience or connection too.I think I should have worked on a community need that was more closely related to what I have experience or a vested interest in.

I'm still extremely grateful I received this opportunity. Going forward, there are a few personal lessons I will take away from this project including finding the right person to work with on a project, identifying my areas of interest and how I could solve a problem in that space and finally, being more honest with myself throughout the process. I think my timeline was overly

ambitious. I still plan to meet the milestones I initially set primarily building out the tool although that is happening later than expected.

Final Budget

For my final budget, I would like to use my $1,600 budget to recruit a programmer for the summer to build out the tool. I did not use any of my budget during the semester.