

Chapter 4

Capacity Building for Different Abilities Using ICT

Ina Freeman
Rockford College, USA

Aiofe Freeman
University of Calgary, Canada

ABSTRACT

Social enterprises are expected to contribute to the well-being of society. One way this is done is through assisting individuals to become productive citizens. For those enterprises that work with individuals with disabilities, this is accomplished through education and assistance with various daily tasks. The disability population is increasing as the population ages and faces an increased potential for disability through disease and biological events as well as higher rates of diagnosis of developmental disability throughout the life span. When coupled with the increasing integration of individuals with disabilities into the community, there is a greater need for ways by which these individuals are included and supported. While technology is prevalent in today's society, there is little training for those working with clients and little money to purchase the technology, leading to limited access. With few purchasers, little effort is expended to enhance the accessibility of existing technology and create more productive forms of technology. To decrease the costs to society, the role of social enterprises might research the necessary technology to further develop and facilitate the engagement of individuals with disabilities into society.

INTRODUCTION

Social enterprises are often envisioned as not-for-profit and dependent on the tax payer for operational costs, resulting in decreased funding during times of economic hardship. However, for some

not-for-profit social services enterprises serving clientele with disabilities (including intellectual, cognitive, psychological, developmental, and/or physical impairments), information and communication technology (ICT) can be utilized to assist, train, and educate their clientele to prepare them for working and living in society. The ultimate goal

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of using ICT in this milieu is to encourage quality of life in the community with a potential focus on independent living and employability skills. This goal ensures that persons with disabilities successfully live and function as part of the larger community and continue to contribute to society.

While the costs of social enterprises appear to be sunk costs, some of the enterprises that work with or include persons with disabilities utilize ICT in training their clients and staff members to better function while working in the world of commerce. This responds to the increasing presence of ICT in all aspects of life and encourages organizations to communicate with society and industry about the benefits of employing their clients. Doing this requires conducting research to stay abreast of new trends and best practices, as well as other capacity building activities. Overall, the inclusion of ICT in the lives of those with disabilities benefits both the individuals with disabilities and society (Heywood & Turner, 2007).

To individuals with disabilities, the benefits of having employment include increased independence and greater involvement in the community reducing social isolation (Schur, 2002). It can also improve self-concept encompassing self-worth, a sense of self, and self-determination (Schalock, Verdugo, Bonham, Fantova & van Loon, 2008). Many countries recognize these benefits and fund some vocational rehabilitation and counselling to best fit the skills of the individual to be integrated into the workplace. For many, this requires some physical changes in the workplace such as ramps and braille on elevators. For others who have intellectual challenges, integration into the workplace can result in placements in a variety of industries such as food service, offices, retail stock rooms, housekeeping, grounds keeping, and some repetitive factory jobs as well as jobs that require computer skills. Many of the jobs offered to people with developmental or intellectual disabilities require extensive training and opportunities for the individual to develop new skills. Depending on the severity of the disability, these job opportunities

may or may not be appropriate. However, if the individual is capable of more challenging tasks and/or desires a more complex career, limited opportunities may result in depression or feelings of worthlessness because the individual may never be offered the opportunity to work towards their dream, like other abled individuals.

While there are a number of specially developed software programs and some specially developed hardware such as picture or large print keyboards, large trackballs, word prediction software, touch screens, keyboard overlays, speech synthesis screen readers, and others, many social enterprises and individuals with disability are unable to afford or contemplate purchasing these tools due to the high costs. While the costs for many technological advances are often high, the increasing amount of purchases and commonality of usage frequently decreases the price. However, the specialization of these tools has kept the prices high, eliminating the opportunities for those with disabilities to benefit from these technological aids.

To compound this, the training of many working in this field does not include accessing these aids, ensuring the knowledge of how to use these aids is unavailable to the client. Thus, the training of persons with disabilities remains at a basic level; denying these individuals the training to expedite the process of gaining the necessary skills to live independently as part of the community. Training people with disabilities to participate in the online world allows the individual to reach out to others, to work for the benefit of themselves and others, and to enhance the independence and interdependence of this population. Although the need for proper technological training and access to ICT is clear, little research investigates how this can be done effectively in a practical setting.

Therefore, this chapter discusses the role of technology insofar as the employment and training of individuals with various forms of disabilities. This requires training and solidifying skills including basic computer skills such as the writing and

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