

Technology Supports for the ASD Employee

Assignment 3: Design of an Online Community

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Tech Support for the ASD Employee
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Introduction

There is a need for life long supports for those identified under the umbrella of Autism spectrum disorder (ASD), a neurological, sensory, communication disorder affecting around 50,000 young adults departing K-12 educational programs yearly according to 2015 report published by A.J. Drexel Autism Institute of Drexel University. The National Autism Indicators Report: Transition into Young Adulthood focused on the need for continuation of support services for ASD individuals to increase their successful transitioning into this new stage of their lives. Employment and other factors such as independent living and quality of life for ASD young adults are impacted by their unique characteristics which manifest differently within each ASD individual. Government regulations (Americans with Disabilities Act) and initiatives (Employment First) require that employers, when informed by an employee with a disability, supply accommodations that support their ability to perform productively within the workplace. Tech Support for ASD Employees (TSASDE) is an online community designed as a community of practice for those who share an interest in identifying innovative technological related supports for the ASD employee.

Purpose and Audience

A community of practice (Wenger, 1998) describes not a community lodged in a physical location but a series of interconnect relationships that are not constrained by a physical setting in which its members by the act of belonging acknowledge a shared group interest. Combatting workplace issues related to communication, social skills and behavior for the ASD employee and employer, are areas covered by researchers, advocacy organizations, and social media. The

possible supportive use of technology has also found a place within these conversations. The TSASDE online community acknowledges technology as important in defining possible solutions

This online community mimics a community of practice through the development and recruitment of its membership from those who share an interest in the employment of ASD workers through the role of an employee, employer, layperson, educator, and or ASD advocate. Palloff and Pratt (2007) suggest that participants in an online learning community require opportunities and access to a space in which to learn how their environment fits their needs, a place in which to relay their concerns, accomplishments and share new information learned. Through the design element of an online forum, TSASDE community members are provided with a safe place to express these needs.

Design and Methodology

Elements of design incorporated in the TSASDE online community are based on defined best practices described by Fogelson, Brown, and Touchberry (2013),

- adding valuable content,
- identifying the audience,
- engaging others using social media,
- ease of use in site design,
- making friends with organizations with a shared interest
- incorporating the human element and
- designating a community manager.

Each design element was considered for impact, manageability, and cost effectiveness.

Selecting to present the face of the community using subdued colors, simple but bold print while

appearing minimalistic, addresses possible issues of sensory overload that some ASD individuals experience.

The design of the TSASDE online community was structured around four design alternatives for community structure as described by Kraut, Resnick, and Kiesler (2012). As a new community, size matters, which was addressed by utilizing analytics which will be an important aspect of determining the growth of the community. This will also have the additional benefit of identifying areas receiving the most visits. Which will be important to the person or persons designated as community manager(s) when reviewing and managing content rotation. Failing to remain aware of how the community interacts with the information available can have a negative affect on the retention of current and new users.

The option of viewing the community as a lurker is important for the building of word of mouth visits. Selecting to allow the community to remain open to visitors as opposed to utilizing access controls as described by Kraut, Resnick, and Kiesler (2012) can be reassessed once the community becomes more established. The designated community membership from those who have joined, participate frequently in discussion and contribute to the maintaining the growth of the community can address when it would be appropriate to incorporate member only sections and measures to ensure public versus private areas.

As a community of practice opportunities for social learning and sharing of information are paramount to encouraging membership to develop and delve into experiences that foster growth. The TSASDE online community utilizes community comments within its forum section to motivate and encourage contributions from its membership. Selecting starter topics that are open to all registered members chosen from a range of topics found throughout the community site is design to encourage exploration. Utilizing this approach visitors and members are more

likely to view all areas of the community. This design aspect ties the selection of content together to promote sharing, communication, and discussion which are essential components in a community of practice.

The TSASDE online community when compared to other online communities that are geared to ASD topics, covers an undeveloped niche by focusing primarily on how technology can be used as an employment support for the ASD employee. While sites like Hacking Autism.org, offer a wide range of topics including an area on employment, the broadness in the scope of topics may prohibit a true immersion into the topic that results in the development of discourse which foster innovation and solutions to the issues facing the ASD employee and employer.

Conclusion

The activity of designing and building the TSASDE online community, showcases the application and understanding of the course objectives; A, B, D, E, F, G, K and M. Selecting elements of designed supported by utilizing tools available within the online community structure is demonstrated by evaluating the technologies appropriate for the purposes of forming a community of practice. Whereas, by maximizing the interconnection of related topics, discussions, and opportunities for learning through sharing knowledge within the community within the forums, commenting on research, and delving into links to related communities and content effectively demonstrates comprehension of categorizing activities taking place in an online learning community. Selecting topics and content, designing roles for members and opportunities to take on leadership roles is infused through the selection of community activities. Every aspect of the design of the TSASDE online community is reflective of content learned through this course.

References

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