Social integration of people with disabilities: the development of an information technology model based on personal growth and achievement

John A.M. Earls
University of Wollongong

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SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES
- THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INFORMATION
TECHNOLOGY MODEL BASED ON PERSONAL
GROWTH AND ACHIEVEMENT

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

John A. M. Earls, M.Ed.

Department of Business Systems
1990
I declare that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and has not been submitted in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

17.05.90
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I would also like to thank Professor Winley, Head of the Department of Business Systems, University of Wollongong, for sympathetically taking me in when I almost became "orphaned."
This research examines the use of a computer bulletin board as a means of facilitating the social integration of people with disabilities.

The literature review identifies significant parallel research strands in the

- Social Integration of People with Disabilities
- Social Psychology of Information Technology.

To develop a model which draws these important strands together three groups interact using a computer bulletin board. The groups are people with disabilities, tertiary computing students and speech and occupational therapists. The study conducts pre, post and long term attitude tests, collects data via the operating system, records all textual data generated over a three month period (almost 6000 pages) and ultimately carries out longitudinal case studies with the disabled participants.

The short term (three months) attitude changes are inconclusive, but the longer term (two year) changes show a highly significant improvement in the attitude of people with disabilities who participated. The case studies showed that all participants with disabilities had improved their self image, their confidence and had made identifiable integrative gains. These included becoming politically active, living independently, gaining employment for
over fifty percent of those involved, publishing literary works and taking up further study. In addition the clearly demonstrated benefits evoked very positive changes in their peer group, in structural changes within the organisation, in Federal Government Department of Community Services and Health service delivery and in the provision of an "Access Australia" innovative award to the Redcliffe City Municipal Library.

Grounded Theory was used to identify a range of factors which supported or inhibited the Integrative process.

The study demonstrated the value of integrating the two research streams, the benefits of the process (with minimal disadvantages) and the efficacy of the model.

A significant issue emerging was the need for people with disabilities to be empowered, able to make their own choices and develop their own models. As a consequence the study concluded by outlining relevant areas of suggested future development in the mainstream and producing a skeletal model as a basis for future integrative work involving the participants themselves.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**LIST OF FIGURES**  xi

**LIST OF TABLES**  xii

**LIST OF APPENDICES**  xiii

1. **INTRODUCTION**  1
   1.1 **PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND NORMALISATION THEORY**  3
   1.2 **SOCIAL ASPECTS OF COMPUTING**  4
   1.3 **THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM**  6
   1.4 **THE SCALE OF COMMUNITY COST**  8
   1.5 **A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY**  9
   1.6 **METHODOLOGY SELECTED**  10
   1.7 **STRUCTURE AND PRESENTATION**  12

2. **NORMALISATION THEORY SOCIAL INTEGRATION**  13
   2.1 **THE EVOLUTION OF DISABILITY SERVICES TO THE NORMALISATION MODEL RELEVANT TO PEOPLE WHOSE DISABILITY IS CEREBRAL PALSY**  13
      2.1.1 **THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF SERVICES**  13
      2.1.2 **THE GROWTH AND IMPACT OF DISABILITY NUMBERS**  19
      2.1.3 **CEREBRAL PALSY-DESCRIPTION**  24
      2.1.4 **CEREBRAL PALSY-INCIDENCE AND INTELLIGENCE**  28
      2.1.5 **NORMALISATION-ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION**  32
2.1.6 NORMALISATION-MODIFIED AND ALTERNATIVE VIEWS 35
2.1.7 INTEGRATION OF SCHOOLCHILDREN 39
2.1.8 INTEGRATION IN EMPLOYMENT 45
2.1.9 ATTITUDES 48
2.1.10 SOCIAL LIFE AND SOCIAL STRUGGLES 52
2.2 COMPUTING USES BY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES 56
2.2.1 COMPUTING IN SPECIAL EDUCATION 57
2.2.2 COMPUTING USE IN EMPLOYMENT BY SPECIAL PEOPLE 62
2.2.3 COMPUTERS AS AN INDEPENDENCE ARTEFACT 63
2.3 SOCIOLOGICAL USE, PERSPECTIVES AND ISSUES IN COMPUTING 66
2.3.1 SOCIAL ASPECTS OF COMPUTER CONFERENCING AND E-MAIL 66
2.3.2 PROBLEMS FOR NAIVE USERS 70
2.3.3 SOCIAL ALTERNATIVES AND CHANGES IN THE WORKPLACE 72
2.3.4 THE ELECTRONIC COTTAGE 76
2.3.5 OTHER DIVERSE SOCIAL ISSUES 78
2.4 CURRENT SOCIAL AND TECHNICAL ISSUES WHICH MAY BE RELEVANT TO THIS STUDY 81
2.4.1 THE LINKING OF REHABILITATION AND COMPUTING 81
2.4.2 COMPUTING POWER: COST ADVANCES 87
2.4.3 WHO DECIDES WHO WILL USE - PROFESSIONAL OR CLIENT? 89
2.4.4 THE NEED FOR INTERPERSONAL CONTACT 94
2.4.5 COMPUTING AS A SOCIAL SERVICE SUBSTITUTE 96
2.4.6 INTEGRATION - ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF PROGRESS AS PART OF THE WIDEST COMMUNITY

2.5 THE NOTION OF A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

3. THE STUDIES AND THE RESULTS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.1.1 BULLETIN BOARD OPERATIONAL DETAILS

3.1.2 TIMETABLE OF PRINCIPAL EVENTS

3.2 ATTITUDE AS A MEASURE OF INTEGRATION

3.2.1 ATTITUDES TOWARDS DISABLED PERSONS TEST

3.2.2 HYPOTHESES

3.2.3 METHOD

3.2.4 EFFECT OF INTERVENTION - HYPOTHESES (1) AND (2)

3.2.5 MEDIUM TERM INTERVENTION EFFECT - HYPOTHESIS (3)

3.2.6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

3.3 EXAMINATION OF USAGE PATTERNS OF THE BULLETIN BOARD BY THE DIFFERENT GROUPS

3.3.1 SUBJECTS

3.3.2 MEASURES

3.3.3 METHOD USED FOR ANALYSIS

3.3.4 OVERALL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GROUPS

3.3.5 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN DISABLED AND THERAPIST GROUPS

3.3.6 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE PARTICIPANTS

3.3.7 OTHER POSSIBLE COMPARISONS

3.3.8 DISCUSSION
5.7 GROUP DECISION AND COMMUNICATION SUPPORT SYSTEMS 266
5.8 NEGOTIATION SUPPORT SYSTEMS AND SOCIAL MESSAGES 271
5.9 DISABILITY ISSUES RE-VISITED 275
6. IN CONCLUSION 281
BIBLIOGRAPHY 285
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Hypothesised and Actual Result for Participants and Controls, Attitude as a Percentage</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Hypothesised and Actual Results for Disabled Groups, Attitude as a Percentage</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Discriminant Function showing Group Centroids</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. A x (B x S) Design Matrix</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Non Parametric Tests</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Social Integration Aspect of Identifier</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Key Identifiers of the Social Integration of Disabled People</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Hypothetical and Actual Result Over Time</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Overall Analysis of Intervention Using Participants vs. Controls and Therapists, Students and Disabled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Effect of the Intervention on the Disabled Participants and Controls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Participant/Control (A) by Pre and Post Data (B) for Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Participant/Control (A) by Pre and Post Data (B) for Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mean Attitude Scores Expressed as a Percentage for Males and Females on their Pre and Post Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Group Means and Standard Deviations for 5 Measures of Bulletin Board Usage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Means and Standard Deviations for 3 Sender Groups x 4 Receiver Categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The Effect of Intervention (Factor A) and Time (Factor B) on Attitudes Towards the Disabled</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF APPENDICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APPENDIX</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Information for Potential Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Matrix of Individual Person Interaction Linkages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Raw Scores for Attitudes of People with Disabilities Analysed in 3.5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Case Study Interviews - Semi Structured Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Centre News - Shane Macfarlane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Centre News - Cosy Conferencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Redcliffe City Council - Access Australia Award</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>