Designing for Accessibility

A workshop for developing accessible thinking

The purpose of this workshop is to highlight the different accessibility challenges that exist when creating digital services. Digital services are varied, and include web applications; mobile apps; desktop software packages; video games; and more. The workshop is split into three different activities and features a mixture of tasks based on individual, team (3-4 people), and group (2-3 team) activities.

The workshop begins with a brief introduction to a practical model of different accessibility challenge areas. These focus on visual, cognitive, physical, communication, emotional and intersectional considerations.

Activity 1 – Permanent, Temporary, and Situational Impairments

The first activity in the workshop allows participants to broaden their current understanding of what constitutes an accessibility challenge. This is done through evaluating accessibility issues in terms of those that are permanent, those that are temporary, and those that are situational. Participants come up with sample scenarios for each of these and complete a grid that references accessibility categories against temporal context. This encourages participants to think about accessibility challenges in a more inclusive sense and situates the problems associated with these in a context that is relevant on a day to day basis.

Activity 2 – Current Awareness of Accessibility

The second activity is designed to encourage participants to explore their current awareness of accessibility issues and what methods can be employed to solve them. These methods might include education, policy changes, or the development of technical tools.

Participants are provided with a list of questions, and are asked to fill in a grid to map out their awareness of issues associated with each category. This is primarily an individual exercise, but opportunities are provided to collaborate and consult with others to pool and share knowledge. Accessibility is a profoundly embodied and contextual topic, and the life experience of one person may offer a lens on the challenges discussed that another may find useful. In doing this, we expect participants will deepen their appreciation for the different perspectives that peers and colleagues may have on how to best meet accessibility challenges.

Activity 2b – Combining Experience and Knowledge

The second part of activity two continues in this area, with participants asked to work in small teams of 3-5 people to produce a more comprehensive, collaborative view on their identified accessibility challenges.

Activity 3 – Developing Core 'Problem Areas' and Solutions

In the third activity, individual teams are asked to pick one of the six accessibility challenge areas they have identified to analyse more deeply. At this stage teams begin by evaluating their previous matrixes and are then asked to pick three activities related to an individual research challenge area that are:

- Currently implementable by everyone
- Implemented by some people
- Not implemented, or not capable of being implemented.

These activities (a total of 9 per team) will be written on colour coded (or similarly coded) post it notes showing to what category they belong.

Activity 3b – Collating Evidence and Moving Forward

In the final part of the workshop, teams are asked to join up with other groups that have picked a similar accessibility challenge area. Participants are then asked to place their post-it notes onto an *implementation graph* to visually show how easy/difficult items are to implement, and how important these are in relation to their perceived benefit.

Wrap Up

To conclude the workshop, teams are asked to briefly report back to the workshop on their discussions and to suggest some implementable 'take home advice' that can be carried out straight away in terms of making technology more broadly accessible. Participants should identify areas that do not receive the appropriate attention and identified techniques that have not yet been implemented. The plenary at the end of the workshop will provide a feed-forward overview of the conclusions reached by the workshop.