Demonstrating "Workchat: A Virtual Workday" and Its Initial Implementation Process Outcomes

Presenting Author: Matthew J Smith
Full list of 28 authors:
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INTRODUCTION

- During dissemination of study results evaluating virtual interview training for transition-age youth, autistic transition age youth, their teachers, providers, and parents requested that the research team build a simulated role-play focused on soft skills in a professional setting for autistic youth and young adults engaged in services.
- Thus, our team partnered with 18 autistic youth and adults, 10 vocational counselors, and community, diversity, and scientific advisory boards to develop *WorkChat: A Virtual Workday* through an iterative feedback loop.
- WorkChat is a safe virtual space where trainees practice talking with virtual customers, coworkers, and supervisors (depicted by actors) with varying personalities and needs. WorkChat provides four levels of automated feedback to help enhance workplace conversations.

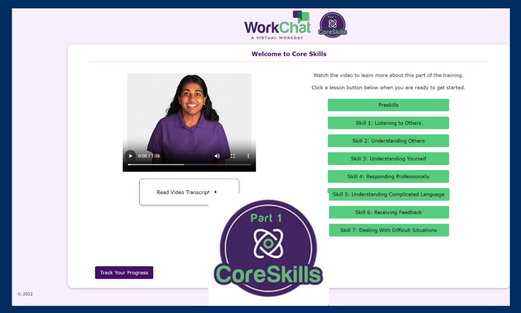
PRIMARY AIM

- To demonstrate WorkChat and share the initial implementation process outcomes.

METHODS

- We surveyed and interviewed Pre-ETS staff at 3 sites.
- 15 of 18 WorkChat participants completed acceptability and usability surveys with 8 of 15 providing answers to open-ended questions asking about their WorkChat experience
- Quotes from the qualitative are shared to contextualize the high levels of participant acceptability and usability

WorkChat Simulates and Gives Feedback on Conversations in the Workplace



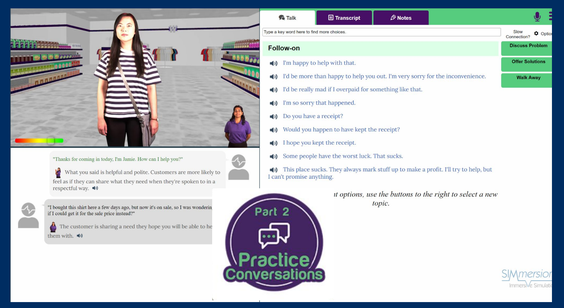


Table 1. Participant-level Implementation Process Outcomes

	Mean (SD)	Range (Max)
RCT Participants (n=15)		
WorkChat Acceptability	20.3 (3.0)	16 - 25 (25)
WorkChat Usability	29.4 (3.9)	21 - 35 (35)

Quotes about their favorite aspects of WorkChat:

"My favorite thing about work chat is the virtual chat on part 3 how to communicate and customers when practice before the actual job"

"[My favorite thing was] being able to walk around the place like an actual employee getting to do jobs, practicing talking to customers and other employees, plus having a sort of real interaction with a supervisor."

"Helped learn how to be professional in a workplace."

Quotes about improving WorkChat:

"Have it span to other types of jobs and have more co-workers to talk to and practice more social skills."

"I also felt many of the answers led to the same end results which didn't make me feel like there was enough risk or realistic consequences for my actions (or inaction like not doing my job or being super rude). It took out the immersion a bit for me. Better graphics would help too..."

Table 2. Staff-level Implementation Process Outcomes

	Mean (SD)	Range (Max)
Staff (n=21)		
WorkChat Orientation Acceptability	29.5 (4.0)	20 - 35 (35)
WorkChat Appropriateness	21.0 (3.1)	15 - 25 (25)
WorkChat Delivery Feasibility	34.0 (5.1)	23 - 43 (45)

Quotes about Acceptability, Appropriateness, and Feasibility

"The biggest obstacle will be scheduling times to meet with them as the students are typically done after class."

"If the team can come up with a facilitator's guide then that would be helpful as of now it [the delivery strategy] is piecemeal."

"I like that the students can work independently and get feedback from a neutral source."

"I like the flexibility of delivering it [WorkChat] outside the scope of the regular."

"Once we get our computers up and running, we shouldn't have any issues."

"The part I'm going to struggle with is the [student] motivation part because it is volunteer."

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RESULTS

- Quantitatively, WorkChat trainees reported the tool was acceptable and usable.
- Qualitatively, WorkChat trainees noted they appreciated learning tangible skills while talking with customers, coworkers, and supervisors during the virtual work day.
- Quantitatively, staff were appreciative of how they were oriented to deliver WorkChat and perceived it as appropriate and feasible to deliver.
- Qualitatively, staff identified some key barriers to overcome to improve the feasibility of delivery.
- Staff appreciated that students could work independently with WorkChat and its flexible delivery.

LIMITATIONS

- These are preliminary results and must be interpreted within the context of its limitations.
- Implementation processes were limited to pre-implementation as staff were unavailable to support delivery as designed.
- The use of select quotes doesn't represent the results of thematic analyses which are ongoing.
- Only 8 of 18 WorkChat trainees shared qualitative data.

IMPLICATIONS

- Autistic youth and young adults engaged in Pre-ETS reported that WorkChat was acceptable and usable, while noting multiple ways to improve their experience.
- Pre-ETS staff feel they were trained well and the tool is appropriate while noting multiple barriers to delivery that need to be addressed prior to implementation..
- Evaluation of the determinants of implementation that occurred during delivery is still ongoing.

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