

Could wearable technology give 'super powers' to humans?

March 14 2016

More than just a fad, wearable technology (WT) can change the way we work and give us 'super powers' – according to a new study in the *International Journal of Fashion Design, Technology and Education*.

Deepika Raj and Jung E Ha-Brookshire of the University of Missouri interviewed people employed in the WT industry – with its unique collaboration between apparel and technology specialists – to find out how creating the devices changed the way they worked. They also wanted to find out what the designers themselves thought of the items they were creating.

As Raj and Ha-Brookshire explain: "Despite the significance and popularity of WT in today's market environment, little research has been done to understand what WT employees think about WT when developing new products. We also know little about the knowledge-creation processes that WT employees may go through to develop innovative WT products and specific work environments that are ideal for WT innovation.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the respondents were very positive about the benefits of WT. Replies like 'it makes you do more with less', 'creates fun and meaningful solutions to everyday problems' and 'solves multiple problems' were common.

The notion of WT giving people superpowers also cropped up repeatedly. "For the less-able bodied, [one of the respondents] believed

WT could help them hear, see, or speak better. For able-bodied people ... WT could help them do things they could not do before," the authors note. "In both cases, WT gave a sort of superpower to human beings."

The workers were also clear on what made good WT: it had to be easy to use, 'fit the curve of the body', improve connectivity with the outside world and, ideally, solve problems for the user.

Perhaps fittingly, working on WT also changed the way the WT specialists themselves worked. As good WT needs to draw on different knowledge bases, the workers found themselves collaborating more and understanding better both the terms and working practices of other disciplines. "New knowledge was created within WT firms through the process of socialisation by personal communications, internalisation and by trial and error," the authors observe. And just as WT can empower its users, 'innovation in WT firms seems to be possible by empowering the work force and giving them a productive atmosphere to foster creativity and collaborations.'

Certainly for the WT workers themselves, it would appear that WT can change lives in more ways than one.

More information: Deepika Raj et al. How do they create 'Superpower'? An exploration of knowledge-creation processes and work environments in the wearable technology industry, *International Journal of Fashion Design, Technology and Education* (2016). [DOI: 10.1080/17543266.2015.1133720](https://doi.org/10.1080/17543266.2015.1133720)

Provided by Taylor & Francis

Citation: Could wearable technology give 'super powers' to humans? (2016, March 14) retrieved

21 June 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2016-03-wearable-technology-super-powers-humans.html>

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