Instructional Innovation Grant Proposal

Integrating Cross Platform Social Media in Class Projects

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Request for Course Release for Summer 2011

I have reviewed the proposal and I support the request for a course release/cost reimbursement for the project.

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Problem Statement

Virtual teams are *ad hoc* collection of individuals, brought together for a specific purpose are used extensively in a wide variety of business contexts such as product design, software development, management consulting, and health care. In the dynamic business environment that characterizes most organizations today, managers rarely have the luxury of managing a project in a single location or organizing a project with a co-located team, making virtual teamwork essential. Business school curricula are increasingly integrating virtual teamwork in their curricula to expose and train students in the ability to manage and work in geographically and temporally distributed workgroups. In addition, the nature of the student body in RCB makes virtual teamwork in group projects a necessity, since co-location, though desirable, is often very difficult. Also, RCB is rapidly increasing the number of online and mixed mode (online and face-to-face) offerings. Consequently, many project teams never have the opportunity to meet face-to-face.

Courses in several disciplines such as management, marketing and CIS typically involve group work that require constant communication between group members as well with the instructor. Rarely such group work is accomplished in face-to-face meetings. With a geographically disbursed student body such as in RCB such physical meetings are difficulty to organize due to schedule constraints. Often such meetings are scheduled during weekends and are reported to be not very productive; hence the increased interest in the use of collaboration and communication through a variety of media including social media.

Social media have gained tremendous success in the recent years due their high accessibility and scalability. A variety of social media exemplified by Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, help individuals build and maintain complex network of professional and personal relationships. The widespread penetration of web and mobile technologies have enabled the creation of social media tools that facilitate real-time interactive dialogues, replacing asynchronous one-way communication in the form of email. The potential of social media to deliver business value ranks among the top priorities of senior executives today [1]. Given their strategic importance to organizations and their widespread use by our student body, it is very important for RCB faculty to integrate the use of social media in their courses [2]. Social media provide the following capabilities that will be of immense help for students engaged in group project in that they allow individuals to exchange ideas and concerns with the group members. Real-time
Objectives

Group work in RCB courses is typically restricted to online chat tools, email and shared file servers (say, using portals such as Sharepoint). A new breed of tools that support social media offer excellent capabilities to support virtual teamwork. These tools can help team members

- Interact and share information
- Collectively browse and collect information available on the web

This project is designed to achieve the following objectives:

Student objectives:

- To promote collaborative problem solving and group work in a flexible environment
- To increase the student awareness of the potential use and role of social media in virtual teamwork in everyday business situations
- To increase effectiveness of group work anytime, any place collaboration

Instructor objectives:

- To demonstrate and facilitate experimentation with a social media readily accessible to students and faculty
- To create an environment that brings the instructor closest to personal interaction with students beyond class meetings
- Allow intra and inter group collaboration
- Evaluate the roles played by different members of a group in creating project deliverables

Method

The project will consist of two stages:

1. Survey of current tools for supporting the integration of a variety of social media used by students. Social media have gained immense popularity due to the need for collaboration support, but the wide variations in their capabilities and focus make it impossible to select a single tool for use in an educational setting. Addressing this void, a new class of tools that help integrate the variety of social media are emerging (e.g., ping.fm, connectyard). Several such social media integration tools will be surveyed. Their capabilities will be evaluated based on their ability to support collaborative virtual teamwork, specifically in an educational environment. Several solutions available at no cost for non-commercial use will be carefully considered. The PI’s significant expertise in developing collaboration support tools and their use in research settings will be very valuable in this evaluation. A tool suite that provides the broadest support for
popular social media with the minimal infrastructure requirements will be chosen. It is expected that the students will need no additional hardware or software resources to adopt this technology.

2. Classroom Testing:

During summer and fall terms (2011), social media integration tools will be introduced and evaluated in CIS 8000 and CIS 3001.

These courses are chosen because they have a significant emphasis on group projects. Student feedback often indicates that these projects constitute a very important component of learning and offer valuable experience in teamwork and group problem solving. However, given the intense demands outside regular class meetings, these group projects are also a significant source of complaints from students. Social media integration technologies will be introduced to alleviate these problems and support effective group work.

Evaluation

During summer and fall terms (2011), at least two sections of these courses will be supported with social media integration tools. The performance of the groups will be compared with those not supported by this innovation. The impact of the innovation will be evaluated in the following ways:

1. An instrument to obtain student evaluation of the innovation will be created. This evaluation is intended to consider 1) perceived effectiveness of group work supported by social media integration tools, 2) desirability of introducing the technology in other RCB courses 3) effectiveness of individual components of the technologies 4) perceived impact of communication among team members, and with the instructor.

2. Analysis of the feedback from the students will provide insights into the most commonly used functionalities.

3. The instructors of these courses will be asked to assess the value of the innovation - whether the innovation was of value in improving the class content, in communicating with the students and improving the quality of the solutions developed and for sharing the knowledge with other instructors.

References