

Collaboration of Words

COLLABORATING FOR PRODUCTIVITY THROUGH WIGGIO

Prepared for
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April 22, 2010

Letter of Authorization

BISM 2100 Students, Spring 2010
Coles College of Business
Kennesaw State University
March 24, 2010

BISM2100 Group Project Team:

Your team has been authorized to complete a formal, analytical report for the specific purpose of evaluating a software collaboration tool and providing a recommendation as to whether the tool is feasible for use in a small-midsize business environment.

The goals of this assignment are:

- to expose students to emerging technologies
- to expand students knowledge of working within a team structure
- to provide students working experience with collaboration tools
- to expand students research capabilities, and,
- to create an opportunity for students to utilize their professional written business communication skills.

To successfully produce the deliverable (the formal, analytical report), your team should carefully review (at a minimum) the following materials:

- the course textbook: Planning, Writing and Completing Business Reports and Proposals
- the documents in the Team Project Learning Module in GaView, and,
- the project grading rubric.

These documents will be your guides for the planning stage of the 3-step writing process introduced in the BISM2100 course. As part of the planning process, your team should also decide what *approach* to use in writing the analytical report. Remember, the focus of this *analytical report* is to provide a detailed recommendation about how well the software tool your team selected would support the collaborative needs of virtual teams in the small-to-medium business environment.

Enclosed with this **Letter of Authorization** are specifications on report format, and the components required to fulfill the project deliverable. The *entire team* is responsible for insuring all components are included; the project manager and formal report coordinator should carefully review the final document prior to submitting it on the team assignment link.

Respectfully,

Debra B Geist, Support Faculty
Dept of Accountancy, Coles College of Business
Kennesaw State University

Letter of Transmittal

C.O.W. – Collaboration of Words
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Atlanta, GA 30058

Professor Debra Geist
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April 22, 2010

Dear Professor Geist,

The reigns of this project are now handed to you for a final review and critique. You should notice the in-depth research elaborating the following elements: Content management, workflow control, and communication types. The C.O.W. team has been working feverishly on each deliverable required for the assigned team project. We are excited to deliver a great report through countless hours of teamwork and collaboration. As you will see below each member's efforts will be reflected through an assignment breakdown per member.

Our detailed analysis of Wiggio will confirm our recommendation for its use as an effective collaborating tool in a virtual team environment. This analysis includes the overall interface, the communication channels Wiggio provides, and the methods used to store and maintain team data and information.

Cody Doody – Workflow Control

Sean Matthews – Communication

Benjamin Britzius – Content Management

Brittany Jones – Collaboration

Dejuan Simmunsia – Virtual Teams

Cordially,

C.O.W Team Members

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Executive Summary

This report analyzes Wiggio as a collaboration tool. Several measures are used to examine the usefulness, reliability, and efficacy of Wiggio over a period of roughly one month.

Communication

The most important factor in a virtual team's effectiveness is whether or not they can communicate efficiently without meeting in person. The two forms of communication used during collaboration are synchronous (instant, real-time) and asynchronous (delayed, non-instant). The Wiggio online collaboration tool allows virtual teams to utilize both forms of communication through mediums such as e-mail, chat rooms, shared workspaces, and collaborative content management.

Management of Workflow and Content

Workflow control and content management allow teams to get things done while working digitally. Workflow refers to the method a team uses to get from the start to finish of a project, while a content management system is what a team uses to store, share, and update their digital files in the most efficient manner possible. Wiggio facilitates the implementation of an efficient workflow control plan to interact with its online content management system, which allows for an efficient online environment for teams to complete projects.

Final Recommendation

We recommend Wiggio for the future use in your small to medium size business for purpose of collaborating online with a virtual team. Wiggio flourishes in all three main areas of collaboration: communication, content management, and workflow control. Most importantly, the financial cost for your business to implement Wiggio is zero.

Introduction

Fifteen years ago, one could only dream about the global and multi-lingual communication mediums used by organizations today. Today, there are various mediums that offer many tools to enable businesses to communicate with each other while being separated by time and geographical distance. Not only do these interfaces enable for efficient collaboration, but they also maximize productivity and eliminate travel expenses. Though there are some difficulties that accompany virtual teams, with structure and discipline it is easy to overcome any obstacle.

When people use virtual teams to collaborate, they are able to agree on a common goal in order to achieve success by sharing their ideas, resources, and knowledge. Much inefficiency revolves around miscommunication or lack of communication and opaque ideas. Clear collaboration creates an efficient environment for information sharing and a clear flow of ideas, and collaboration tools such as Wiggio create a platform for these efficiencies.

Virtual Teams

Virtual teams are very essential in the business society. Businesses that use this type of technology save a ton of money for their company. In addition, people are able to communicate more efficiently in a group. Individuals can share ideas and cover a wide range of material. Group members that have to complete a project can handle all their objectives in a timely matter. Virtual teams can impact a business production an activity in many ways.

To add, virtual teams allow members to communicate in different geographical areas and cities in the country. Group members can maximize their productivity all around the clock. Individuals could be living in different time zones around the globe and can manage to complete collaborative assignments (Campbell, 2008). Business tasks can be completed during every hour of the day. On the other hand, people would not have an excuse for an off day. Also, businesses do not have to worry about traveling expenses.

In the past, people would have to fly half way across the world for business meetings. Businesses did not have the type of technology as the present day. Flying to different countries and meeting people physically was expensive in the past and at the present time. In this day of age, the solutions for most traveling are virtual teams with the power of the Internet and video conferencing. However, virtual teams are a great advantage for small companies and large expanding companies with a large global presence. As companies grow, the traveling expenses will increase (Mealer, 2009). The virtual team tool will allow companies to decrease their traveling expenses.

However, virtual teams present challenges in the business world. Team members need to be more efficient in decision making because teams are not able to see each other physically. To add, people are separated from each other through time and space. Each member should have the ability to plan, solve problems, and handle their responsibilities effectively. On the other hand, creating a virtual team is harder than putting together a traditional team. An essential problem or challenge a virtual team faces is consistent communication throughout a project. Without the proper communication a project will become a disaster.

The biggest challenge that separates virtual teams and traditional teams are the relationship building. Members that are in a virtual team work on multiple projects and usually do not get to meet their group. In contrast, traditional groups can really have a verbal conversation with their team members and observe their body language. Also, members can find out who are serious about the project. Some people may say knowing your group members are irrelevant to the productivity of the project. People sometimes enjoy challenges on their own and figuring out problems they have and handling them independently. However, people can create a bond in virtual teams but it would take more effort and commitment.

People can overcome the challenges that virtual team presents by creating structure and discipline. Teams should create schedules and conduct meetings to reinsure that tasks are being carried out and members are working to their full potential.(Sasso,2008). Also, the group should make sure that the work accommodate to the whole group. Each individual should have a clear understanding of their task and the scheduling of the due date. In addition, team members should

attend their open meetings in their chat room to discuss their assignments or any other project related questions a group member may have.

Collaboration

Collaboration is an important skill to have in the business world. It is a process when two or more people or businesses work together towards a common goal. Without proper collaboration, it would be hard to be productive and successfully reach a common goal. There are many things that tie into collaboration, and when people use them and work together in an organized manner, it makes their success easier to obtain.

Collaboration involves team members on two or more sides working together towards a common goal. The point of collaboration is to achieve success in their business or project by sharing ideas, resources, and knowledge with the other team members. “When beginning the journey, it is critical that all existing and potential members share the vision and purpose. It is this commonality that brings members together to focus on achieving a mission. Several catalysts may initiate a collaboration - a problem, a shared vision, a desired outcome, to name a few. Regardless what the catalyst may be, it is critical to move from problem driven to vision driven, from muddled roles and responsibilities to defined relationships, and from activity driven to outcome focused” (crs.unm.edu). When a collaboration group is focused on vision and an outcome instead of the problems they are more likely to work harder because they have a more clear and precise picture of what they are working towards. Collaboration groups often form due to a problem or to improve a business or project in some way.

Though collaboration groups are mostly formed to bring an answer to a problem, “defining the vision and desired outcomes begins to give shape and direction to the future collaboration” (crs.unm.edu). They also say that focusing on vision driven solutions enables you to use more of your resources and helps prevent you from getting caught in stereotypes that blocks diverse members from being able to contribute. Crs.unm.edu talks about the tendency to fall into a “ready-made solution” when diverse members are prevented from contributing. This solution

doesn't address the fundamental cause of a problem nor challenge the group to think outside the box.

“Key features of collaboration tools are synchronous collaboration such as online meetings and instant messaging and asynchronous collaboration such as shared workspaces and annotations.” (AIIM, 2008). According to AIIM, “collaboration, at the conceptual level, involves: Awareness - We become part of a working entity with a shared purpose, Motivation - We drive to gain consensus in problem solving or development, Self-synchronization - We decide as individuals when things need to happen, Participation- We participate in collaboration and we expect others to participate, Mediation - We negotiate and we collaborate together and find a middle point, Reciprocity - We share and we expect sharing in return through reciprocity, Reflection - We think and we consider alternatives, and Engagement - We proactively engage rather than wait and see.” AIIM shows this as a life-cycle that just repeats itself over and over and all the contributing factors need one another.

Journal of Extensions has developed a self-evaluation tool to evaluate how well one is able to collaborate with others to discover “what key factors promote or inhibit the collaboration process.” They include a checklist with twelve questions that include topics like communication, sustainability, research and evaluation, political climate, recourses, catalyst, policies, history, connectedness, leadership, community development, and understanding community. It is important to know your teams' strengths and challenges along with your own personal strengths and challenges so you can know what to focus on and improve.

Crs.uvm.edu has developed a system called the “Framework” to guide new collaborations or enhance existing collaborations. It consists of four elements of collaboration which include: “Grounding, the bedrock of collaboration is the diversity with which the people, groups, organizations and communities share a desire to collaborate; Core Foundation, the shared purpose and destiny of the collaborative efforts; Outcomes, those which are achieved by implementing a collaboration; and the Process and Contextual Factors, those which affect the everyday activities of the collaboration.” Diversity brings a healthy balance to any collaborative effort and a reverence for a common goal is often shared. “People whose lives are affected by

decisions must be equally represented in the decision process.” The core foundation focuses on bringing people together by a shared common purpose. Building the core is very important but it takes time, effort, and care. In order to build a core foundation, it is important for the members to express their common interests around vision, mission, values, and principles; with this it describes why their task is important.

Outcomes are important because they express where the collaborative group plans to be and give them a better vision to work toward. “Outcomes are often, but not exclusively, defined following the development of the shared vision. A group focusing on defining the desired outcomes in the initial stage of building the collaboration is more likely to increase its effectiveness and the likelihood of engaging greater participation by a wide cross section of people and groups to create the vision.” (crs.uvm.edu). Contextual and process factors are things that can enhance or inhibit the collaboration process and the outcome itself. Process factors focus on specific skills that aid the members in building effective relationships with other members. Contextual factors are “are conditions that either exist or are lacking within an environment which can enhance or inhibit collaborations.” (crs.uvm.edu).

We don’t always know what we don’t know, so it is important to share the information we have with others so we can gain the information they have so we can all work together towards one goal. It is obviously important to first talk about that goal and make a plan to work towards it. When people come together in unity and work hard and apply themselves, there is nothing they can’t do.

Primary Collaborative Components

Communication

In examining what factors are essential to achieving successful collaboration with virtual teams, perhaps the most crucial one is effective and efficient communication. Communication can be both synchronous (with each communicating party taking part in real-time) and asynchronous (with communication occurring with lags, at different times.) While synchronous

communication is sometimes seen as superior to asynchronous, research and empirical experience indicate both play important roles in collaboration within a team; where the ability to take part in either one is lacking, cohesion and productivity within a virtual team will suffer. The collaborative tool Wiggio offers features which harness both modes of communication, allowing for effective and efficient communication.

Synchronous communication clearly plays a critical role in the development and continued success of any business team, virtual or otherwise. One obvious reason is that inevitably problems or issues will arise that can only be properly resolved by the immediacy and instant exchange of ideas synchronicity affords. Furthermore, if a virtual team's communication is set up in such a way that only asynchronous, electronic communication is available, it may become difficult for team members to convey complex information effectively; attempts to adapt communication tools to address in turn may in fact prove counterproductive (Kock, 2008). Synchronous communication is also uniquely important for virtual teams, in that it helps build chemistry and rapport between members, preferably via in-person interaction. If a virtual team is composed of personnel who have never met in person, and then rarely interact other than through asynchronous emails and file exchanges, it will be difficult for them to form the type of cohesive bond seen in truly effective teams (Shin, 2005). While this would not necessarily be a problem if dealing with a temporary workgroup or task-force, long-term virtual teams would suffer. In the context of small to mid-sized businesses, where team members likely will have had previous interactions, or will be able to have informal meetings, this concern is diminished.

The collaborative tool Wiggio addresses these concerns by providing several different synchronous communication options. Three different synchronous communication meeting types are available: online chats, conference calls, and virtual meetings. These options, for team members which likely will have informal alternative means of communication and interaction, provide a comprehensive set of tools. This allows Wiggio to effectively deal with concerns over lack of synchronous communication within virtual teams for small or mid-sized companies.

Asynchronous communication is seen at times as a drawback to virtual team collaboration, and indeed there are negative aspects to it, particularly in the absence of any other form of

interaction. At the same time, however, asynchronous communication also has a number of advantages, particularly when used in conjunction with synchronous communication. Berry has identified several advantages electronic asynchronous communication offers a team, including increased overall member participation, flexibility and cost-savings, more thorough and full reflection during debate, and the ability to have an evolving archive of discussions (2004). Wiggio's specific capabilities and tools harness the advantages that asynchronous communication offers; the ability to coordinate and archive email, and to provide easily organized data-sharing is particularly productive.

Having examined the role that synchronous and asynchronous communication plays in virtual business teams, it becomes apparent that the availability of each is crucial to a successful and productive team. In assessing whether given collaborative technology helps individuals achieve desired tasks, Maruping and Agarwal examined a number of different options, ranging from face-to-face, to video conferencing and email; they found that each different mode of communication offered varying degrees of efficacy in different areas, as shown in the following illustration (2004). This illustrates why Wiggio is so successful, as it integrates a wide-range of modes of communication and collaboration, both synchronous and asynchronous, thus providing a virtual team the opportunity to succeed.

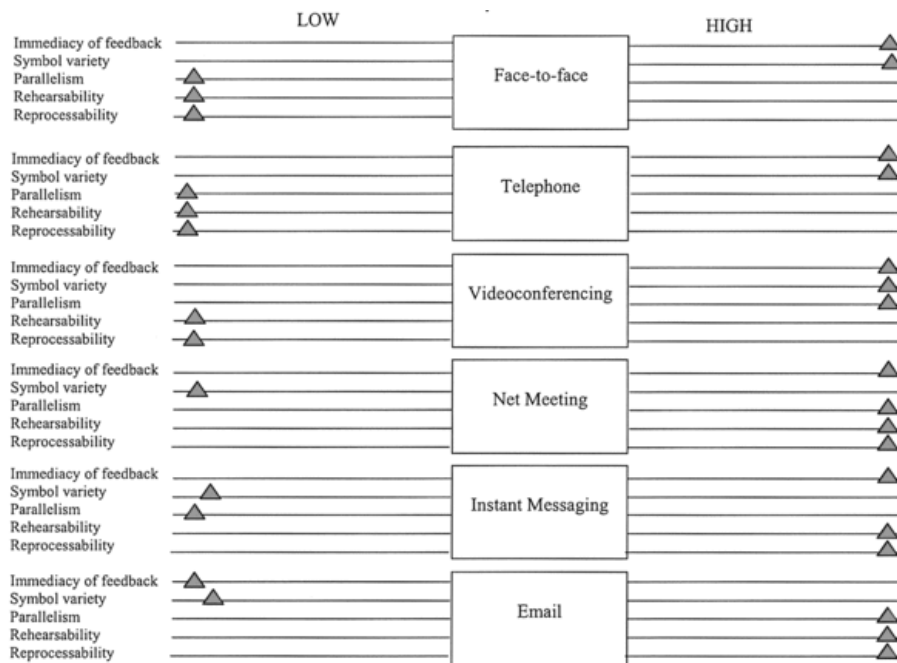


Figure 7.1

Content Management

Content management and content management systems are integral parts of businesses in today's digital age. The term content management refers to the process of collecting and organizing large or small amounts of data in a manner which makes the data easy to use for other purposes internally and externally. According to Pullman and Gu (2008), a content management system, which in the present day is most often software-based, "is any systematic method designed to organize and distribute information" (p. 1).

When computers first started to proliferate the business world, many organizations saw immediately the need for digital content management. In those days, when creating documents digitally was not the common method, digital content management was important because "the organization can leverage the digital information without 're-keying' it, and if the hard-copy 'original' of the information is lost, the organization can more easily recreate a copy" (Attinger, 1996, p. 16). Now, content management systems are almost second nature in large businesses and there are tools available to make it easy even for small businesses to have systems in place.

A dynamic content management system is a necessary tool for modern businesses because of the ways it allows companies to improve their efficiency. Three main areas in which a content management system helps businesses are collaboration, consolidation, and compliance ("An overview of," para. 3). When groups within businesses are collaborating, using a content management system helps them create and share their knowledge more effectively. In both large and small companies, a content management system helps in organizing and consolidating large amounts of data for easy search and retrieval. Also, a content management system can help businesses deal with things like audits, both internal and external ("An overview of," para. 5).

An important part of content management systems are what have become known as version control or revision control systems. With the collaborative nature of content management, keeping track of edits made to content can become an extremely important process. The core functionality of a revision control system allows a project's members to track changes made to files; "people can see who made a change; understand when and why it was made; inspect the

details of the change; and re-create the state of the project at the time the change was made” (O’Sullivan, 2009, p. 58). A revision control system, even in a simple form, is very important for a virtual team where multiple team members will be working on documents together.

Workflow Control

Every successful business has experienced efficiencies and inefficiencies in its processes. The management of information and communication is vital to its prosperity. This flow of information used in a working capacity is called workflow control. A leading organization on the forefront of setting workflow standards is the Workflow Management Coalition. This organization defines workflow as the automation of a business process, in whole or part, during which documents, information or tasks are passed from one participant to another for action, according to a set of procedural rules (WFMC, 1999).

Companies are spending big bucks on the details involved in workflow management for several reasons. First, automating many business processes will eliminate unnecessary steps in each process. This will create provide efficiency throughout each process. A certain level of standardization is created once automation begins. When a company operates with standard processes many inconsistencies are eliminated because a degree of individual reasoning is eliminated. Next, customer service is directly affected by the consistency or response time and answers. Business processes are streamlined and always flow with the same accuracy. Time management of these processes is greatly reduces (Baeyens, 2004).

Many companies are now seeking to automate many processes to reduce costs such as labor. In doing so, the business world we live in is drastically different from that of 20 years ago. If calling into a business today, you are more likely to hear an automated recording before a human voice. This is the result of workflow management control. A survey taken from 74 different companies across many market sectors verify this heightened focus on automation. The survey tracked how much money was invested in different segments of each business and then compared how the businesses as an aggregate were investing in each segment. Customer service ranked the highest among the group at 49 percent. Why would any company have that much

investment in customer service? The time and energy saved to automate answers and provide general information is worth the investment (Palmer, 2007).

To manage workflow within this group project, a standard format has been established. First, the information submitted to the team will be formatted for Microsoft Office 2007 products. The information is then sent through a local information channel that all members have access to. This allows concurrent alterations of the material to be made by team members and each member to know when an update is made. A team review of a first finished draft will be discussed in group meetings. After corrections are made a final compilation of data and information will be used to produce a final product. The area of automation is not a concern for the group on this project due to low data and information volume.

One area of improvement the tool could update is the initial setup process a user goes through. When logging in the first time, one of the teammates had trouble with accessing the team portal and another had password issues. A better explanation for accessing a group for the first time user is needed. The use of several passwords should be consolidated to one. Another feature that would be useful is a real-time interface such as an instant messenger portal for group members that are logged in at the same time. More ideas and collaboration would be available with this feature.

Evaluation of Wiggio

Virtual teams are a new way of communication through business transactions. Overall physical communication is very essential in business, but applying virtual teams to your business will make jobs more efficient. Wiggio is a virtual team collaboration tool that works effectively through business projects. The virtual tool gives members an opportunity to upload and save documents and submit assignments. Also, the tool allows members to communicate effectively throughout assignments.

It has been shown that communication, both synchronous and asynchronous, plays a critical part in any successful business collaboration. This is particularly true in the context of virtual teams, where an absence of either type of communication can seriously hinder productivity. Wiggio offers a variety of modes of communication, encompassing both asynchronous and synchronous communication—allowing team members to be efficient and effective.

Wiggio is great for tracking the flow of information. Using a series of version control measures maximizes efficiency without too much overlap between teammate updates. A chronological order is provided to help track information and data flow. Every submission includes the time submitted and the team member submitting it. Another useful element Wiggio provides is the ability to itemize each task. Our team created folders offered by Wiggio for each separate graded project and submitted only items that pertained to the task in its specified folder. This allowed our items to be sorted out instead of appearing as a blog of submitted work with no apparent application.

Wiggio also allows for in-browser viewing of many different file types, including Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint documents. Along with this way to quickly view files, it is also possible to create and do simple editing of Microsoft Word and Excel documents directly in the web browser. Also, Wiggio allows users to send direct links of files to people outside the group for downloading to local machines.

One area of improvement the tool could update is the initial setup process a user goes through. When logging in the first time, one of the teammates had trouble with accessing the team portal and another had password issues. A better explanation for accessing a group for the first time user is needed. The use of several passwords should be consolidated to one. Another feature that would be useful is a real-time interface such as an instant messenger portal for group members that are logged in at the same time. More ideas and collaboration would be available with this feature.

The only significant area of concern for Wiggio is the dependability of its server, and reliably having access to uploaded files. Some team members encountered problems uploading and

accessing data at times, though, on the whole, these issues were limited. Due to these concerns, those utilizing this tool should be sure to back-up data separately from Wiggio.

Overall, Wiggio handles content management very well. It has a robust and dynamic file management system that allows users to create folders and manage their files like they would on their local machine. A big advantage of Wiggio is that it automatically handles version control for the group if they do not already have a system of their own in place. When a file with the same name as one already stored on Wiggio is uploaded, the system automatically creates a list of all versions of the file with the most recently uploaded version first. Wiggio also automatically tags each version of the file with the name of the member who uploaded it so that the whole group will know who edited that version of the file.

Final Recommendation

After a detailed assessment, team C.O.W. would recommend Wiggio to any small or mid-sized business. The flexibility of logging in at different times and places, while viewing the same info and sharing ideas, is priceless. Although some concerns exist regarding reliability and server dependability, these issues are outweighed by the many positive aspects of Wiggio. A variety of easy to use communication tools and built in content/workflow management systems make Wiggio an asset as a virtual collaboration vehicle. All of this, coupled with Wiggio's affordability (it is currently a free service), make Wiggio the perfect collaborative tool for small to mid-sized businesses.

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