

Chapter 61

Social Media Use within Project Teams: Practical Application of Social Media on Projects

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ABSTRACT

This chapter gives practical recommendations about the social media tools and applications for use on projects. It will introduce the reader to the most popular and widely used social media tools and will provide considerations for the selection of the best tools to integrate with projects. Platforms being described from a project management point of view are LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Yammer, Google+, Blogs, Wikis, Instant Messaging, YouTube, Webinars, SlideShare, Podcasts and Vodcasts. Best practice recommendations are given for each tool from a project manager as well as a team member perspective. Advice is given about dealing with various challenges such as security concerns and managing the culture change. The current trends that will dictate and influence the use of social media on projects are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Social media is reshaping the way we manage projects, by changing the way we connect and communicate with our teams and stakeholders. Social media provides instant access to a broader audience than was previously possible through conventional communication means.

Picture this scenario. As the project manager of a large multi-national, cross country project, you need to manage your virtual project team. In response to stakeholder requirements, teams are mobilized quickly and cheaply. The project manager makes use of cloud-based project management software with built-in collaboration capabilities. Meetings are held weekly or more regularly using video- and tele-conference facilities such as Microsoft Lync. A social media policy is in place and all team members have been briefed as to how it will be used, when and for which information.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0196-1.ch061

Social Media Use within Project Teams

The project manager uses a few selected social media tools as communication channels to engage with the team, to empower them to make decisions, to share information and collaborate, to streamline processes and engage the team with stakeholders, partners and vendors. A project Wiki is in place to collaborate on documents, intranet sites to engage the client and share the team's work, discussion boards to check the pulse across the team, as well as shared task lists to track the team's progress in real time. Formal progress feedback is provided through Dashboard reporting based on real-time project progress.

This is not a theoretical project, but a real-life scenario of how social media savvy project managers lead their projects and teams today, using social media as a communications and collaboration technology, in conjunction with more traditional methods.

The above scenario illustrates that one of the most rewarding aspects of social media is the ability to create virtual communities, allowing teams to share ideas and monitor all aspects of the project in real time. Communicating in this way builds community, trust and morale among team members.

This chapter will serve to educate project management practitioners about using social media within the project team. The objective is to provide best practice recommendations for using various popular social media tools from a project manager as well as a team member perspective.

The chapter starts with broad definitions of available social media tools for use on projects. It explains how to address social media concerns like enabling a new way of working and security. It then continues to provide practical advice on how to overcome challenges and how to establish rules of engagement. Recommendations are made for how to integrate social media onto projects. The most useful aspect of the chapter is the practical application of the popular social media platforms. It provides input to create a roadmap that is easy to apply on your own projects.

SOCIAL MEDIA AS COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Since social media lends itself to be participatory, community based and interactive, it is ideal for engagement among project team members. Various social media tools can be used effectively as communication channels on projects. Team members use it on projects to share information and status, to collaborate and to connect with stakeholders and fellow team members.

With the common adoption of mobile devices in the work place, it is not surprising to hear from Joseph Guarino, owner of Evolutionary IT, in his presentation: "Social media for project managers" (Guarino, 2012) that social networking apps are the 3rd most used smart phone apps. He also stated that social networks and blogs account for almost half of all time online.

When organizations consider adopting social media as a communication tool on projects, one of the first decisions required, is to select appropriate enterprise collaboration software that has social media incorporated into the project management information system. For this type of software, there is normally a choice between Software as a Service (SaaS) which is easy to deploy with a potentially lower total cost of ownership, versus locally installed traditional enterprise software which is more complex and costly to manage. The advantage being that you have more control and you own the project management solution.

In addition to using a project management software solution or even without having an enterprise project management solution, as is the case with smaller organizations, there are popular social networks to select as communication tools on projects. You can differentiate between social media tools for use by project team members versus tools to use as a project manager for thought leadership and to deepen networks.

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