

Chapter 33

Investigating the Intention to Use Social Media Tools Within Virtual Project Teams

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ABSTRACT

Enterprise social media tools are becoming more prevalent in project management, particularly where project teams have to operate on a global and virtual basis. It is becoming more critical that organisations understand the key attributes of such technology to encourage their teams to use them in order to achieve the perceived benefits. In this chapter we search for answers to the factors that influence the adoption of such tools in a virtual project setting by testing the applicability of the much cited technology adoption model known as the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). The model is modified to suit the sphere of virtual teams and focuses on the behavioural intention to adopt social media technology. The purpose of examining such a model is to see if it can explain some of the key factors that may influence the adoption of social media within virtual project teams.

INTRODUCTION

Virtual teams have become a common entity in today's business world and the growth of virtual teams is increasing due to improving technology, globalization (Beyerlein, Johnson, & Beyerlein, 2001), the growth of the knowledge economy and the search for talent regardless of location (Lepsinger & DeRosa, 2010) as well as increasing rates of outsourcing (Harrin, 2010a). Virtual teams also contribute to the tightening requirements of cost efficiency (IFIP, 2004) and external global pressures continue to demand that organizations be fast and more responsive. Given these trends, it is no surprise that virtual teams are now commonplace in project management.

Social media or collaboration technologies are also becoming much more common place within the corporate organization due to the perceived benefits of adoption. In a 2007 study of 2100 corporate organizations, Melcrum (2008) noted that the two biggest benefits perceived to arise from internal use

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of social media were improved employee engagement and improved internal collaboration. Taking these benefits into account, it is clear that within project management that the use of social networking tools will become much more prevalent amongst project managers over the next 10 years. Project management may be particularly suitable for the adoption of social media given for instance that Camarinha (2009) considers project management to be a social effort in the first place and due to the importance of project collaboration quality in project management (Dietrich, Eskerod, & Sandhawalia, 2010). Celik, cited in (Dinsmore & Cabanis-Brewin, 2010) notes that social media can also help speed up the internal communication process, referring to social media as “being parallel processing for people rather than computers. Given the huge role people play in project management, the potential for social media to improve communication structures in project management is strong and as a result improve the outcomes of projects in terms of success and contribution to organisation progress and growth.

Although the use of social media tools is becoming more popular in project management, it is still a relatively new trend and hence there is little in the literature on factors influencing the adoption social media within project management. A reflection of the growing importance of the intersection of project management and social media is the formation within the PMI organization of a new media council whose main aim is to develop and gain an understanding of the role of tools such as social media have to offer project management. Given the growth of virtual teams in project management and the increased importance of collaboration and management across borders, social media tools may be seen as an effective solution to improve project communication and hence improve project effectiveness (Binder, 2007). The unique importance of collaboration and information sharing to project management means that many companies are beginning to deploy social media tools to help project teams as they can easily justify the benefit (Walkey, 2009). With the increased importance of communication in virtual teams it is clear that the internal adoption of social media is of particular importance to virtual project teams.

Aside from the perceived benefits of social media for use in project management, it is also a key fact that many young people joining the workforce today (members of the Y generation) will become project team members of the future and are very familiar with social media as a technology and a communications framework and as a result almost demand and expect the use of it internally in companies and in reality will see enterprise social media as an extension of a communication channel that they use every day outside work. It is important the organization understand this, as the youth of today are the project managers of the future and in today’s fast moving and fluid world, it is important that organizations can plan and adapt such new communication channels to support the next generation.

With the increased emphasis on project management’s trend towards virtualization as well as continuing need to deliver project success, the author believes that the adoption of social media can help project communication and hence improve project success rates. Taking into account the potential benefits, this chapter will focus specifically on the actual factors that affect behavioral intent to use social media in general amongst virtual teams as knowledge of the key adoption factors will be critical to understanding the attributes that must be in place for successful adoption. In particular the chapter will focus on the search for answers to the factors that influence the adoption of such tools in a virtual project setting by testing the applicability of the much cited technology adoption model known as the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). The model is modified to suit the sphere of virtual teams and focuses on the behavioral intention to adopt social media technology. The purpose of examining such a model is to see if it can explain some of the key factors that may influence the adoption of social media tools.

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