



FACEBOOK FOR THE FUTURE

VIRTUAL PROJECT MANAGER

**A study of Facebook's potential as a communication
platform for virtual project management**

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Thesis of 10 ECTS credits

Master of Project Management (MPM)

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Facebook for the future virtual project manager: A study of Facebook's potential as a communication platform for virtual project management

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: To evaluate whether Facebook could be a suitable communication platform within projects primarily comprised of virtual or remote teams.

Design/methodology/approach: Focus group survey, Interview, Case Study

The aim of this paper is to investigate whether Facebook is a suitable platform to support communications of virtual teams. Facebook, with its evolution over recent years, now offers so many and integrated functionalities and features, that in some cases it even surpasses other specialized tools. In this paper I focus on general communicative needs of virtual teams, alongside more specific communication topics such as relationship building. The research was conducted using a survey of students attending Reykjavik University, interviews with experienced project managers as well as case study review of companies using the newly launched Facebook at Work platform. The survey results showed that for project teams at an educational context such as the University of Reykjavik, Facebook is viewed positively as meeting virtual team communication needs. The vast majority had experience of using Facebook and an overwhelming majority felt it exceeded the usage of telephone and email in communication quality terms. The current configuration of Facebook seems to lend itself to certain contexts such as educational, non-profit organizations such as social and sporting clubs, and even in a start-up commercial context. However, a number of factors, including concerns over security and accessibility of data, means broader roll out is questionable at this point in time.

Keywords: Project, Management, Virtual, Teams, Social, Network, Facebook, Communication, Relationship-building

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1 INTRODUCTION

Virtual project management is a term used to describe the practice, exclusively or in combination with traditional face-to-face methods, of managing projects across distance with a reliance on IT communication and collaboration tools which enable remote team interaction. Virtual is rarely an exclusive category and all project teams can be said to display some aspects of virtual and face-to-face character. However, this paper is focused on those teams for which virtual interaction and communication is a predominant mode.

The internationalisation of projects has, in part, contributed to the rise of virtual project management practice. That and the increase in project complexity appears to be one of many motivators for the development of a variety of online tools and techniques designed to help managers plan, make decisions, and control challenging project tasks (Alojairi & Safayeni, 2012). It's evident that managers and professionals need to be technologically capable and quickly adopt new tools needed to communicate fluidly, in multiple social networks rather than being solely embedded in a single work group (E. L. Lesser, 2000).

Facebook, which has evolved significantly since its launch in 2006, offers a great deal of integrated functionality, close to and, in some cases, beyond those functionalities demanded by the suite of tools used by virtual project teams, which suggests that Facebook may present itself as an opportunity to be used as an enriched virtual team communication and collaboration environment. It possesses a number of potential advantages as a one-stop solution over other non-integrated tools. Firstly, Facebook is a well-known environment, already used by billions to interact, communicate and to maintain and build new social relationships with people from all over the world. Facebook's Messenger instant messaging feature is already widely used for communication both as a one to one and as a group communication tool. Familiarity with and the simplicity of Facebook could make it relatively easy for project teams to adopt for communication purposes as there is a high probability that individuals in the team are already familiar with Facebook and its features. Importantly, when the team members are not familiar with or do not understand how to use new technologies, work interactions can break down and project outcomes can be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve (Iorio & Taylor, 2014).

Many Facebook features are highly relevant for virtual project team communication and collaboration. Facebook groups, for example, with functionalities such as tagging, with its immediate notification, can easily be used to assign tasks and manage communications within a group in a process highly relevant to virtual project teams. File sharing in the form of uploaded voice messages, video, photos and files is also relevant and straightforward to administrate. Facebook has additional features, for example its app, which is available for all major types of smartphones, that offers it mobility which can be of value to project teams.

It is the author's opinion that Facebook offers a full range of communication and collaboration functions and features comparable to many existing tools available on the market designed for interacting, sharing knowledge, and solving project challenges via technology. Using Facebook as a project management platform seems to offer the opportunity for fast adoption by virtual project teams of a familiar integrated technical environment, with a number of features, many customised to support social connectivity, itself a key ambition for teams working remotely.

The main research questions is:

Is Facebook a suitable platform to support virtual project team communication?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following chapter the author has taken the approach to focus on and discuss the general importance of communication and relationship building within project teams, and the additional challenges presented to these core team processes by distance and the need for remote teams to interact primarily via technology. Features of Facebook given to its registered users are then examined in some detail to examine their relevance for managing these two dimensions of virtual project teamwork.

2.1 The role and importance of communication in project teams

Effective communication is vital to the success of a project (Harold Kerzner, 2013). Effective can be defined at a basic level, meaning that the right information is provided to the right person at the right time and in a cost-effective manner to ensure timely delivery of results. Right information can be seen as both big picture, with the description of a clear vision to support project delivery, and more granular in terms of clear scheduling and task assignment. Good communication also goes beyond simply content and involves process. Effective adaptation to cultural and psychological norms may require a highly flexible approach to communications in highly diverse teams. Management processes are also likely to be important with monitoring of team functioning and performance important as a leadership practice to determine corrective measures to prevent or resolve team issues; all of which implies that feedback, coordination and conflict management processes are a key part of a project manager's armoury (Kerzner, 2013). Studies indicate that project managers need to ensure that each member of a project management network can function effectively and that interactions are coordinated properly in order to achieve desired project outcomes (Hossain & Wu, 2009). Communication is a key to successful project leadership, and clear communication is even more critical in long distance work relationships (Sinclair & Smith, 2003).

2.2 Relationship-oriented project communication

Beyond transactions of data, or task-oriented communication, interactions focused on establishing and maintaining relationships within project teams are critical. A huge number of important affective relationship-oriented communication behaviours and processes can be identified as important within teams including finding a place for banter and emotions, disclosing appropriate personal information, expressing appreciation for ideas, apologising for mistakes, volunteering for roles and acknowledging role assignments (Cascio, 2000). Showing that you are interested in and care about others is also acknowledged as important (Comfort & Franklin, 2014). Duckworth also describes a number of processes or cues that support group interaction including behaviours such as listening or laughing, and using emoticons, for example, to indicate amusement when writing emails (Sinclair & Smith, 2003). Task and relationship oriented communication are also linked. Communication which maintains social ties between team members in collaborative work groups is suggested to be critical for effective knowledge sharing and improved project coordination (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001). Importantly, building relationship and social ties with our colleagues is held to be easier when individuals work in the same physical location because of opportunities for informal interaction, spending time round the coffee-machine or speaking over lunch getting to know one other. It is more difficult from distance, when relationships tend to become diluted and overly task-oriented (Comfort & Franklin, 2014). The diminishing effects of distance is said to reduce effectiveness during cooperative decision-making processes in global virtual teams (Kirchmeyer & Cohen, 1992) where conflict (Hinds & Mortensen, 2005) can be more common and trust more difficult to establish (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999).

Given the challenge to relationship-oriented communication posed by remote working, virtual project managers must have well developed interpersonal skills, an ability to build trust, be flexible users of different communication media, be result and outcome focused in the face of team communication challenges, and be collaborative culture builders with the emotional resilience to stand back from the action. Effective relationship-oriented communication and trust building capabilities are essential for virtual managers (Sinclair & Smith, 2003).

2.3 Technology and communication

Collaborative communication technologies are now pervasive in the workplace and are intended to support and improve collaboration in teams. Effective use of these communication platforms with associated technical support are now seen as necessary conditions to successfully complete virtual project tasks (Verberg, Bosh-Sijtsema, & Vartiainen, 2013).

Virtual project teams rely heavily on a number of diverse technical solutions to communicate, the most popular one still being email (Eyrich, Padman, & Sweetser, 2008). Despite its perceived inefficiency (Soucek & Moser, 2010), email is still used for a variety of core project communication purposes including simple information exchange, clarification and decision making on project tasks, aligning with stakeholders and calendaring. Instant messaging (IM) solutions are now also being increasingly used for collaboration within enterprise organizations, primarily for asking simple questions about specific aspects of work which require an immediate and straightforward clarification. IM focuses on immediate delivery with a “pop-up” mechanism to display the moment messages are received from a visible list of “friends”, compiled by the user with the option to see which are online as well as indicating whether they are available or busy (Quan-Haase, Cothrel, & Wellman, 2005). There are a variety of solutions trying to combine these two popular tools like Yammer³, Slack⁴, Skype for Business and Skype⁵, WebEx⁶ and etc. to satisfy teams collaboration and information exchange needs.

When virtual teams allocate project tasks and distribute and share information they are also presented with variety of software solutions. Asana⁷ and Huddle⁸ are web-based solution which focuses on tracking and assigning projects tasks to team members. Jira⁹ is often combined with a solution called Confluence¹⁰ to serve as an issue and project tracking solution combined with information distribution features.

Yet communication challenges connected to technology regularly arise, deriving from, for example, poor technical infrastructure, the inability of a particular technology to support the specific communication needs or necessary familiarisation when implementing a new platform for project communication. It is important for those, leading projects to use technology wisely, to manage the risks to communication and team relationships and at the same time maintain a balanced perspective on the actual drivers whether they are human or

³ <https://www.yammer.com/>

⁴ <https://slack.com/>

⁵ <https://www.skype.com/en/business/>

⁶ <https://www.webex.com/>

⁷ <https://asana.com/go>

⁸ <https://www.huddle.com/>

⁹ <https://www.atlassian.com/software/jira>

¹⁰ <https://www.atlassian.com/software/confluence>

technological (Iorio & Taylor, 2014), and not too quickly over-generalise issues as stemming from a ‘technical’ cause.

2.4 Facebook as an integrated virtual communication platform with multiple features

Facebook was first launched in February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, who was then a Harvard student. Initially, it was limited only to his fellow Harvard students, but since 2006 it has allowed anyone who is at least 13 years old to register their profile on the social website. Today Facebook is the world’s largest social network platform, with 1.04 billion daily active users and a total of 934 million mobile daily active users on average (Facebook I. , Facebook, 2016). It possesses a range of unique and uniquely integrated features, which present the clear opportunity to address core communication and relationship building needs of virtual project teams.

Powerful, personal and immediate social connectivity are part of the core customer promise of Facebook. Today’s Facebook gives users the ability to register a profile and with that the opportunity to connect to, and regularly interact and build relationships with any of its 1.44 billion users. The demand for internal virtual project team connectivity, fast communication and strong personal relationships could potentially be fostered within a Facebook context, alongside relations with key external stakeholders dispersed across diverse geographical regions and organisational units within a company.

Facebook offers a range of interesting functionalities which allows for differentiated communication strategies to manage project tasks and relationship communities. Registered users of Facebook have the ability to create Facebook groups with three varieties of privacy settings: Public, Closed and Secret. Table 1: Facebooks Group Privacy Settings below shows who can join these groups and what joiners can see (Facebook, Facebook, 2016).

	Public	Closed	Secret
Who can join?	Anyone can join or be added or invited by a member	Anyone can ask to join or be added or invited by a member	Anyone, but they have to be added or invited by a member
Who can see the group's name?	Anyone	Anyone	Current and former members
Who can see who's in the group?	Anyone	Anyone	Only current members
Who can see the group description?	Anyone	Anyone	Current and former members
Who can see the group tags?	Anyone	Anyone	Current and former members
Who can see what members post in the group?	Anyone	Only current members	Only current members
Who can find the group in search?	Anyone	Anyone	Current and former members
Who can see stories about the group on Facebook (ex: News Feed and search)?	Anyone	Only current members	Only current members

Table 1: Facebooks Group Privacy Settings

Posting on the public newsfeed is an important information sharing and rapport building channel on Facebook which enables targeted distribution of information in an open or more controlled manner, with options to limit viewing to Public, Friends, Friends except Acquaintances, Only Me with then a customisable setting which allows users to choose any individual registered on Facebook. In response to posts written on Facebook, a new feature was added in 2016 to give its users more authentic ways to express emoji “reactions” to posts beyond the well-known ‘Like’ option. Given the emotional disconnect generated by distance within virtual project teams, such communication features might be advantageous in maintaining important levels of open and positive emotional communication between team members.



Facebook also gives users the ability to track and see which user has seen posts written inside Facebook groups. This feature adds a traceability value for posts that need urgently to be communicated to specific individuals. It is similar in logic to the “Read receipt” feature of email, but the Facebook feature is automatic for every post inside a group and counts the number of people who have seen the post and hopefully read it. Facebook also offers automatic translation of posts which are written making the service highly appealing to and supportive of international social networks with language barriers reduced (Yeung, 2015).

Facebook’s file-sharing platform using the Facebook messenger service and/or through Facebook groups meets a key need for virtual project teams to share and disseminate information. It offers the possibility to upload files directly, with the ability to version control it, each file having a maximum size of 25Mb. There is an option to integrate the file management system Dropbox, which then allows users to upload directly from their computer and/or Dropbox account. Document creation is also a possibility. Creating a document directly in Facebook groups makes it automatically a Facebook document type. This approach adds more features, such as being able to view the history of a document, and opening a document without first downloading, ease-of-use features likely to be attractive to heavy users of electronic communication tools.

Overall, many of Facebook’s core features can be said to provide highly attractive functionalities for communication and relationship building within remote virtual project teams, attractive not only in and of themselves, but in so far as they reside within a single integrated platform which even adds unique features to some of its specific tools over and above those available in more classical tools. It is the author’s opinion that there are obvious benefits of using Facebook as the primary virtual team communication solution in a project management context.

3 METHOD OF RESEARCH

In order to research the viability of Facebook as a virtual project team communication platform, two primary research methods were employed. Firstly, a focus group survey was used; secondly, interviews with project managers face-to-face were conducted. The reasoning for this twin approach was that the author had experience using Facebook as a virtual communication tool within university projects and was confident that fellow students had similar experiences. Hence, the initial research conducted used as a focus group the entire student population at the University of Reykjavík, which consisted of 5.500 individuals. For the single month the survey was open I received a total of 266 responses; of those 266 responses, 3 were deemed not usable. That gave me 263 responses to analyse and a response rate of 4.8%. The first part of the survey consisted of obtaining the respondents' profile and finding out how familiar they were with Facebook and the features it had to offer. The second part was asking for their opinion on how well Facebook suited their university project needs in regard to virtual communication in general, virtual teambuilding or relationship management specifically, and also taking the opportunity to survey perspectives on Facebook' utility for a range of specific communication tasks including vision setting and scheduling. Lastly, respondents were asked for feedback on the use of Facebook in their work environment where projects usually involved potentially very different professional audiences and landscapes.

Initial research also consisted of face-to-face interviews with three project managers who had many years of experience in working on international projects in the IT industry and one which had experience using Facebook for his work. I wanted to get insights into current technological communication / collaboration solutions which are available today for virtual project teams, and respondent experience of how well virtual teams interact using the tools available, and whether Facebook was seen as potentially replacing any or all of them.

During the research process, my attention was brought to a project initiated by Facebook, called Facebook at Work (FB@Work) (Facebook, Facebook for Work, 2016). Facebook is testing this new enterprise social network at over 300 companies today. FB@Work is close to an identical version of consumer Facebook but designed for the enterprise market, allowing companies to harness all the functionalities of consumer Facebook with the addition of a screen sharing feature, with the ability to set up and maintain a separate Facebook profile which excludes all data which may reside on a personal Facebook profile. A high data security policy is upheld which means that companies have complete ownership of their data. This also permits companies to mine this data meaningfully by exporting and capturing information via an administrative API (Facebook I. , Facebook at Work, 2016). By reading online articles which cited comments from employees at some of the 300 companies testing this new enterprise version of Facebook, I hoped to gain insights into its current and / or potential use, and the more general use of Facebook, for virtual project management communication.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Focus group survey

The outcome of the personal profile of the survey respondents can be seen in table 2 and table 3. Out of those 263 respondents 98.48% or 259 had an account on the social network website Facebook which left only 4 who did not. These results supported my thesis that students were highly familiar with Facebook and used it quite frequently. When asked: “In a typical day, how likely are you to log into Facebook” 91.79% of the respondents said they were “Extremely likely” or “Very likely”.

Answer Choices	Responses (%)	Number of people
Male	43.35%	114
Female	56.65%	149
Total	100%	263

Table 2: Gender of the university focus group survey

Answer Choices	Responses	Number of people
18 to 24	38,40%	101
25 to 34	38,02%	100
35 to 44	15,97%	42
45 to 54	7,22%	19
55 to 64	0,38%	1
65 to 74	0,00%	0
75 or older	0,00%	0
Total	100%	263

Table 3: Age of the university focus group survey

The majority of the respondents did not have project management experience as seen in table 4.

Answer Choices	Responses	Number of people
Yes	31,94%	84
No	68,06%	179
Total	100%	263

Table 4: Project Management experience

In table 5 the positive versus the negative aspects of Facebook satisfactions are listed according to the respondent's university virtual project needs. Positive being a vote of “Excellent”, “Very Good” or “Good” vote and negative being “Not Good” and “Used another tool”.

University project needs	Positive	Negative
Creating a clear vision for the project	60,29%	39,71%
Allocating project tasks between team members	77,40%	22,60%
Scheduling team meetings	93,30%	6,70%
Distributing information	94,23%	5,77%
Problem solving / Making decisions	69,05%	30,95%
Organizing document repository (photo/text)	44,97%	55,03%
Teambuilding	78,15%	21,85%
Building relationships and trust	76,82%	23,18%

Providing feedback to the team	84,69%	15,31%
Communicating with project stakeholders	56,43%	43,57%
Communicating directly with team members (audio)	38,54%	61,46%
Communicating directly with team members (messages)	91,39%	8,61%

Table 5: Positive vs. negative aspects of university project needs

The positive responses shown here indicate that a majority of the respondents were relatively satisfied by Facebook's in relation to their university virtual project needs. There is confidence in its efficacy at distributing information and scheduling team meetings. Its ability to support teambuilding and feedback processes indicates that the platform enables relationship-oriented communication. Communication with team members via text messages also shows the value of Facebook's IM facility. There is a high probability that the majority of university users have smart phones which are constantly connected so quick responses to these message was likely the case given this high positive usage. This feature of Facebook definitely helped to support the success and the swift delivery of university projects which the students have to undertake, often under high pressure to combine personal, professional and academic lives involving a great deal of multitasking.

Despite these positive responses Facebook is just barely above the positive in some important project communication aspects with responses indicating, for example, its inability or unsuitability to create a clear vision for the project and to communicate with external virtual project stakeholders. Using Facebook to organize documents and photos and communicate directly with team members via audio calls is also viewed less than positively, with the latter task in particular noted by 61% of respondents as "Used another tool" or found it "Not Good" to use Facebooks Messenger for audio communication.

The overall ratings on Facebook as a useful platform for virtual team communication during university projects the outcome was that only 11.47% of the respondents rated Facebook as a "Not good" or "Poor". The total outcome can be seen in table 6.

Answer Choices	Responses	Number of people
Excellent	16,51%	36
Very Good	40,37%	88
Good	31,65%	69
Not good	7,80%	17
Poor	3,67%	8
Total	100%	218

Table 6: Facebook as a useful platform for virtual team communication during university projects

When considering how far Facebook could be as a better alternative to the popular technologies such as telephone and email, the overwhelming majority of this focus group found Facebook a better alternative to use over other technologies as can be seen in table 7.

Answer Choices	Responses	Number of people
Much better alternative	28,44%	62
Better alternative	48,62%	106
The same in comparison	15,14%	33
Didn't like the usage	7,80%	17
Total	100%	218

Table 7: How far do you feel Facebook as a better alternative compared to telephone and email, could get as a virtual team communication tool?

When looking at this focus group, those who seemed positive when considering Facebook for project communication in the corporate environment the outcome was slightly on the positive side with 58.93% indicating they would, and 41.07% indicating that they would not consider it. Some of the positive comments around Facebook's suitability for virtual project communication were:

"Fast and easy communication. E-mail to formal and phone calls don't allow people who did not make it to the phone to read up on what they missed."

"Yes, almost everybody opens Facebook regularly and will be informed directly if anything is going on. Better than having many programs ongoing. On the other hand, Facebook can be too personal for work and maybe not professional, that should be kept in mind."

"It has a lot of basic functionality that can be used to oversee projects, although I do think other programs can be more effective at this, the fact that most people already have Facebook and know how to use it makes it appealing."

Some respondents represented negative comments on the use of Facebook's such as:

"It's too distracting, if you log onto Facebook to work on a project you inevitably spend time browsing the newsfeed which is unrelated to work."

"Workplaces usually have more efficient means of establishing projects, Facebooks almost only upside is its popularity and ease of access."

When comparing the respondents with and without having a project management experience the total number of respondents who answered "Yes" to having project management experience and were positive with the idea of using Facebook was 51.32%. When looking at those respondents who answered "No" to having any project management experience, there seemed to be more positivity at 62.84%. Those that did not have experience were younger individuals which could support the idea that the younger generations are more open to the usability of the platform. They are brought up knowing this technology and are, therefore, perhaps more positive to using it in a personal and enterprise context.

4.2 Interviews

I conducted four face-to-face interviews with experienced project managers, two of them working for the software company Advania¹¹, one working for RB¹² and one interview conducted after reviewing the answers from the survey, I saw that some survey respondents were actually using Facebook for their work projects. I specifically tried to reach out to those people for a face-to-face interview. One respondent was willing to meet me, an experienced MPM graduate student, who could see Facebook's potential. The interviews took place at Reykjavík University and Advania.

The interviewees were asked to list the technical tools which they primarily used for project management tasks with a special focus on those used for virtual team communication. For the three interviewees working for Advania and RB their primary project management communication tool was e-mail, but one interviewee noted that he could "sense the shift away from email in the past couple of years after the IM messaging collaboration tool started to evolve with the introduction of Lync from Microsoft" (Sverrisson, 2016). All stated that they used Skype for business or Lync internally, primarily because the solution comes

¹¹ <https://www.advania.com/>

¹² <http://www.rb.is/english>

integrated with the Office product suite. Both companies were using the Jira ticketing system to delegate project tasks and keep track of time spent but the reason behind using e-mail was mainly because of the issue-tracking ability, the formality of it and to keep all the communication information in one place.

One of the interviewees preferred to use WebEx communication tool when communicating with stakeholders outside of the organization. The interviewees from Advania preferred to use Skype for business and/or regular Skype which was mainly due to the fact that not all companies they needed to maintain communication with were using Skype for Business and/or they did not have a federation cross-organization connection to those companies. Sometimes for big meetings and communicating to suppliers they also use other solutions such as Adobe Connect¹³. In summary, what is clear is their current need to manage projects communications by switching between at least 2 or 3 technical communication tools available depending.

Communication through IM tools for them “was like having that person standing next to you so they prioritised that message over e-mail”, and they utilized that solution instead of using the phone so they utilized IM for short communication, quick questions which required immediate responses. The response time for an email was often around 1 or 2 hours but they expected a carefully thought out response. The decision to send an email was determined by the amount of information to get across. Interestingly, the ability to write more information in an email may make it more likely to generate increased levels of misunderstanding compared to an IM. “Communication misunderstanding tends to happen when email communication is being used and sometimes it takes three or four emails before the message I’m trying to communicate gets properly understood but if I had the choice of picking IM messaging for this communication I would still prefer e-mail due to the traceability and having a central repository for all my communication” (Eyjólfsson, 2016).

The respondent’s views on Facebook’s ability to manage projects was that they could all see the benefit due to its huge user basis, so communicating with stakeholders could be straightforward. Two respondents, one of the interviewees from Advania and the MPM graduate who had experience using Facebook to manage sporting events, were quite positive regarding Facebook’s potential. The two of them also had experience using Facebooks filesystem for posting documents and photos. The MPM interviewee shared his experience on how he used Facebook exclusively to manage a junior soccer league in a football club in Reykjavík. He used Facebook groups communicating and distributing information to 250 parents and attendees, their training schedule’s, minutes and agendas of meetings and other matters related to coaching. Other coaches for this soccer team also used Facebook primarily to collaborate within that organization. His view was that Facebook’s role in this aspect was excellent and served as his customer relationship management (CRM) tool. He never used email and everything was posted directly on the Facebook groups newsfeed. If he were to start a small company he would highly consider using Facebook although once the company would grow he would consider buying an enterprise CRM and file-system solutions mainly because Facebooks filing system would soon be problematic, with old information and posts not easy to find, making Facebook an unlikely solution for issue tracking and file management. This fact was shared by a couple of the survey respondents one commenting:

¹³ <http://www.adobe.com/products/adobeconnect.html>

“Information is easily lost into the void. Not good for projects that might last more than short periods.”

4.3 Facebook at Work: Case studies

Companies which currently use Facebook at Work include Club Med, Heineken, Century 21, Kenshoo and Similarweb, Hootsuite, The Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) and Weber Shandwick (Facebook I. , Facebook at Work, 2016). RBS is interesting insofar as it has established sufficiently stringent data and security standards to feel confident using a Facebook solution. FB@Work is used within RBS to create Facebook project groups that users are able to join, which then requires approval. The platform functionality includes messaging, making voice and video calls as well as screen sharing. Interestingly, information which is now being shared by virtual teams in the Facebook at Work network might in the past have been posted in an email or on the company’s website. Indeed, there is an explicit focus on trying to dampen email usage (Lunden, 2016). Kevin Hanley, head of design at RBS (Royal Bank of Scotland) says about the usage of Facebook at Work: "I think Facebook lets us communicate, discuss and solve problems that other solutions, such as email, simply can’t; we love the fact that Facebook at Work gives you the ability to opt-in to forums and groups you want to be part of rather than being on the receiving end of email distribution lists that you want to opt out of." (Slater-Robins, 2015).

Club Méditerranée, with 13,000 employees in more than 40 countries worldwide, is one of the first global tourism companies to offer FB@Work. Club Med employees have to work across the globe, regardless of time zones, languages and devices and they focus on mobility-first making the FB@Work platform particularly interesting for them. They can use this technology to connect all of its teams, which represent more than 110 different nationalities. Silvie Brisson, Senior Vice President Human Resources at Club Med said: “We work to make our colleagues’ everyday life easier. With “Facebook at work”, we will be all connected in a more fluid way, favouring the cooperation on projects, ideas propositions that each and every one will enrich: a new proximity for the company, that also offers visibility to each collaborator.” (Méditerranée, 2016).

5 DISCUSSION

The survey results indicate that people are interested in using Facebook for communication in virtual project contexts indicating it can replace and even surpass current tool functionality: *“It's more interactive and faster than emails”* and *“it offers more than mail.”* These comments correlate to a general abandonment of traditional communication media such as email by the younger generation in favour communicating through social media. Facebook's DNA is around social connectivity and the building and maintaining of relationships by regular and personal communication. This feature is recognized as a positive in one respondent's comments: *“Communicating through Facebook is more relaxed (informal), people seem to be willing to share more.”*

Interestingly, some contexts of Facebook use may be more appropriate than others. One interviewee indicated that Facebook may have greater suitability in a start-up company. However, when the need arises to build a more structured organization system Facebook would be abandoned in favour of other solutions. Additionally, if we take into account the responses of some of the survey respondents, Facebook as currently configured may also suit non-profit organizations such as social and sporting clubs, academic and educational learning environments which are based around group projects.

My research also showed that there are doubts about the viability of Facebook, for example on the issue of security and accessibility. There is the issue that many enterprise systems as part of their IT policy will restrict or even block entirely access to Facebook. This may be even more problematic in countries where the government actually prohibits access to such social platforms. One respondent of the survey with an extensive project management experience rejected the use of Facebook for projects at work on these grounds:

“I am not convinced Facebook is a secure platform. In a business setting, failure to safeguard confidential information can cause significant liability issues.”

User scepticism is also present in the form of a fear of mixing personal life with work life as expressed by one of the interviewee and respondent's comments. One respondent commented:

“Don't think of Facebook as a good work related platform. Most people would probably be distracted by other things it has to offer.”

Facebook has been focused on marketing and advertisement almost since its inception. Doubts of this form are likely to be shared by many who fear the intrusion of technology in the workplace. Additionally, there is the risk that a lack of discipline and transfer of personal browsing behaviours to a working context may result in lost productivity. Many of the respondents raised their concerns that Facebook is a distraction to use in the work place and favoured the use of specialized solutions instead.

But as shown by the FB@work case studies it clear that the potential for migrating to large enterprise situations is there, and is recognized by Facebook. The current high levels of positive feedback indicates that it is likely that Facebook will rollout FB@Work more strongly. Positive features are clear: it offers enterprises the ability to allow a multitude of various stakeholders to easily communicate.

The question is open as to whether new and distinct skills are required to make Facebook work in a professional context. At the very least, project managers would likely need to reflect on how best to use this social platform as an effective communication tool.

6 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to research whether Facebook was or could be a suitable platform to support virtual project team communication. After carefully reviewing the focus group survey results, the interviews and case studies, the conclusion is that Facebook is a suitable platform to support virtual project team communication within a specific subset of work and non-work environments. For those environments where data security and privacy considerations are of high concern, other technical solutions which reside entirely within the enterprise network and infrastructure would likely be chosen over Facebook. According to my research, however, there are many environments where it is viable and it is already productive and enthusiastically deployed, with significant appeal particularly to younger generation users. If Facebook decides to roll out FC@Work more aggressively, with core features free, organizations in a more commercial context might begin to consider it as a viable choice for virtual project team communication. However, despite its significant offering in terms of dynamic relationship building aspect and immediacy of communication, key features lacking such as file management and tracking, and ongoing concerns on security may delay take up even by users for whom it may be an appropriate solution. Further research would be useful, particularly to investigate the affective and behavioural enablers and limiters affecting Facebook's adoption as a tool. Given the strong associations and habits of Facebook among users of it as a wholly social platform, there may be cultural factors affecting roll out beyond wholly technical.

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