CoLab

Executive Summary

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Product and Context

CoLab is a web application that aims to improve the group work experience by helping groups work and communicate more effectively. Aiming to facilitate effective group management, CoLab expands on the connectivity features of existing applications, such as chat and file management, to incorporate a more “feelings” focussed atmosphere. The application allows users to connect with each other and form groups to aide in the completion of group goals and tasks, and also actively promotes continued engagement and contribution from all members.

As far as technical details go, CoLab was intended by the client as a web application, and has been developed as such, as to optimise its functionality and universality. The front end of CoLab is programmed in HTML, CSS and JavaScript, whilst the back end utilises PHP and interacts with databases via mySQL. CoLab is also built using Bootstrap and Laravel, which were decisions made by the previous design group. Bootstrap aids in providing aesthetic templates for the application and ease of scalability across multiple devices (e.g. phones and tablets), and Laravel facilitates easy PHP coding, with various features and templating options to promote flexible and reliable development.

The context for the application comes from the client’s desire for an application that targets the “soft”, emotional issues of group work, as there is a perceived market hole for these types of products. The problem is identifying the discrepancy between the “soft” and “hard” elements of group work, whereby “hard” elements include work quality and meeting deadlines, whereas “soft” elements encompass personal aspects such as whether or not group members are getting along and whether or not individuals are highly stressed.

An outcomes-oriented development process has been implemented as per the expression of the client, whereby emphasis is entirely upon the success of users being able to feel a heightened sense of group cohesion.The client has stressed that the application should strive for real-world marketability, and the focus upon the “soft” issues of group work is the defining factor in this respect.

Expanding on the connectivity of traditional, existing applications such as chat, file management and group management, the distinguishing features of CoLab that ensure its “soft” focus are its stress management and achievements features. The addition of these features means that users are more motivated to be engaged and interactive within their team, and more emotional investment into group work is generated.

The implementation of a stress management feature aims to address the difficulty of letting other group members know when you are anxious about the current workload or deadlines. The ability to self document stress and unintrusively let other teammates know how you feel is a feature that the client agrees will help in fostering a more prosperous and harmonious team environment. CoLab offers stress advice to users that report feeling higher levels of stress, and coupled with the support of other teammates, this mechanic aims to increase the ability for groups to combat anxiety and stress.

The achievements feature is the other main feature that is tailored to directly improving group cohesion and motivation, seeking to provide group members with a heightened sense of active involvement and collaboration when they complete their assigned duties. The ability to recognise members individually or as a group for the completion of tasks and milestones helps create a sense of purpose and drives users to maximise their contribution and effort.

Client Profile

The initial proposal for this project was presented by Dr Ralf Muhlberger from The Latest Tricks. Dr Muhlberger was previously a member of faculty at the University of Queensland and has an academic background in technology and education. His company, The Latest Tricks, is a consultancy firm that seeks to help clients gain a business advantage by helping them to incorporate cutting edge technologies into their business practices.

Throughout the semester, our contact with Dr Muhlberger consisted of meetings and emails. Dr Muhlberger was of great assistance to our process by clearly outlining his outcomes-based development philosophies, and educating us with his industry experience. From his advice on how we should sit down within our groups and talk about exactly what we aim to take away from the course, to his demonstration of his strategic planning framework, his prior knowledge of the course and process meant that he was an invaluable asset to our group.

Documentation Overview

This document seeks to thoroughly detail the process and results of our development over the course of the semester, including our user testing, evaluations and our own assessment of the finished application. The structure, as outlined in the contents page, consists of an executive overview, a user startup guide, a frequently asked questions section, a deployment and installation manual for administrators, functional testing results, a user experience review, an essay that critically evaluates our group’s experience in the course, and a set of appendices that include our exhibition poster and link to our kickstarter video.

The document represents a culmination of the semester’s work, and each team member has contributed to the sections that are relevant to their role within the group.