



CONLEAGUE

Connecting Colleagues

Team SpeedUp

Solution

In order to solve the sense of isolation and loneliness of remote workers, we focus on two approaches: increasing social and interpersonal interaction and creating colleagues' sense of presence to distributed workers. According to the studies (Marshall, Michaels, & Mulki, 2007; Garrett et al., 2017), lack of casual conversation, affective bondings, and social support are the main reasons that lead to the sense of isolation of virtual employees. To fill in these social voids, we intend to shape a channel which allows colleagues who are geographically dispersed to conduct "water cooler talk". The system we design increases the availability and accessibility of other colleagues by providing an extra opportunity to establish non-work related interaction, and thus enhances the feeling of being supported and reduces the sense of isolation.

Secondly, we find out that a tangible object, either in the format of a synchronously-responded representative of a certain colleague (Lee, & Takayama, 2011) or solely an indicator of receiving asynchronous messages (Beacker et al, 2014), can be helpful in proliferating other's sense of presence and alleviating loneliness. Consider the context of use of our system mainly lies in work setting, we decide the physical object in the system will serve as a role of notification of particular status of the socialising channel, which can boost the sense of presence of others in the channel while not being too disturbing, but still supports certain extent of physical interaction between the object and the user. By presenting an object for remote workers to have something concrete to interact with, we hope it can visualise the sense of the presence of others and hence, reduce the feeling of isolation.

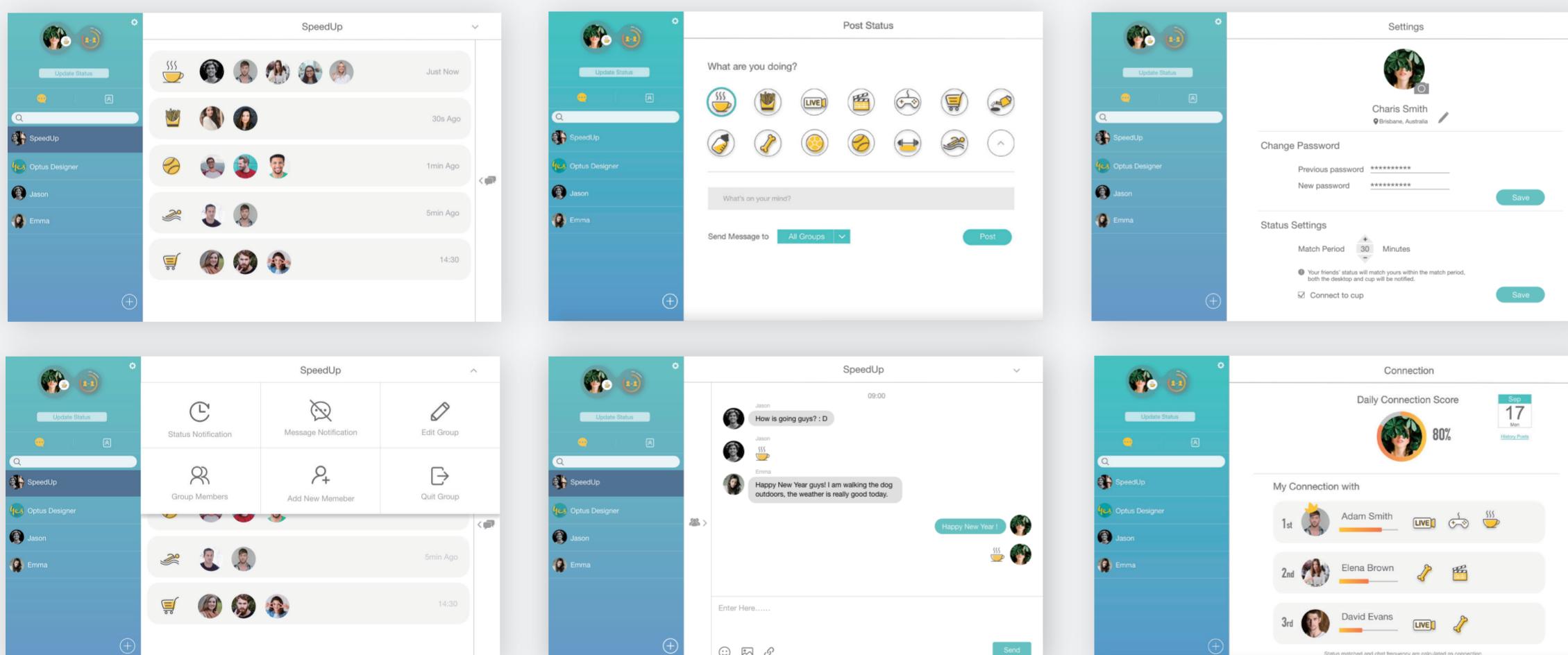
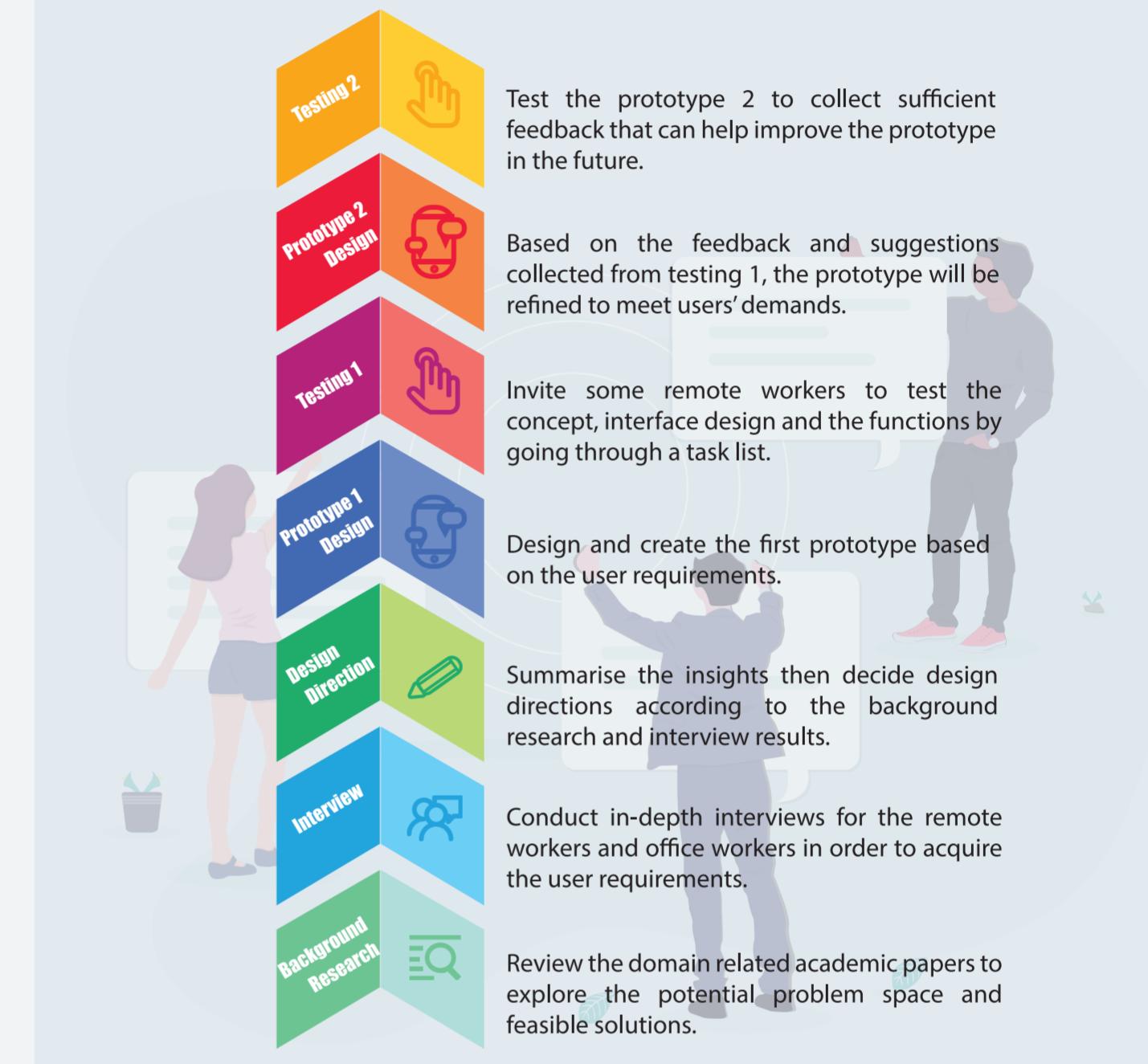
Design Description

Our prototype consists of two parts, including a laptop-based application and a smart cup. Considering the role of informal communication in teleworking, we design an application to encourage remote workers to share their life activities with others by updating what they are doing. They can post a corresponding icon to represent their status. When someone else in the team is doing the same thing with the user, both of them will be matched and the smart cup will notify them by changing the colour. Besides, the users can update their status by placing the cube which contains six most common activities on the top of the cup. Then the system will synchronize the information to the application. Additionally, a daily report that shows the connections with remote colleagues will be provided to users, which aims at making the social relationships more visible.

Problem Space

Teleworking is becoming increasingly popular in the modern era since it is concerned to be a more cost-effective mode of occupation and grants people more flexibility compared with conventional work patterns. Nevertheless, adequate investigations have reported that remote workers are more likely to encounter occupational isolation and related negative influences on the aspects of emotional wellbeing, mental and psychological health, personal belonging, and organizational attachment. Our project is dedicated to exploring the opportunity of enhancing the sense of belonging and social connectedness of teleworkers through a tangible interaction, and ultimately improve their quality of lives.

Design Process



Future work

We will make the cup more interactive and show more information. For example, we will add a small LED screen on the cup to tell users who are matching with them and what activity is matched. And we will also design a sound for each activity. When the activity is matched, the cup will notify the user with a sound corresponding to the activity. Finally, we may design more functionality to facilitate users to have informal communication with others in order to strengthen social relationships.

References

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