

Assignment 1: Gathering Information with Questionnaires, Interviews, Observations

Course ISE 323: Information Systems Engineering 1

Due November 16, 2009

Information systems are complex and involve many modules, parts, and features. Often certain paradigms of systems emerge with time. In the first lecture we discuss several paradigms for systems.

When working to introduce a new information system to an organization (or update an existing one), it's essential to have a good picture of the details of the current system. Knowing what kind of system you are examining is a start, but it's essential to get feedback from users, both current and potential, to know what is needed. Surveys, interviews, and observations are important tools that you can use to gather such data. In this assignment you will work to design surveys and interviews about some existing web-based information systems. Based on your feedback you will come to conclusions about how the system is used and where it can be improved.

1 Teams and Organization

For this assignment, you will break into groups of 8-10 students during the first Targil on October 19, 2009. Each group will be divided into two teams of roughly equal size, Team A and Team B. Teams A and B will each become users of different systems which have the same paradigm.

Each group should select a pair of information systems to learn and evaluate. I provide four potential pairs of systems for groups to choose:

1. Google Gmail versus MS Hotmail
2. Office Live versus Google Docs
3. Blogger versus LiveJournal
4. Myspace versus Facebook

All of the systems are free to use and freely available online.

The group should select one of the above pairs of systems to compare. Students who are already experienced users of a given information system should join a team which is associated with the system.

2 What to do

For the purposes of discussion, I will assume that Team A has chosen Gmail and Team B has chosen Hotmail, but the process is identical for any pair of systems.

2.1 Learning the Systems

After dividing into groups and teams during the first Targil period, the students should start learning and using the systems that they have been assigned. Each student in the team should open an account with the system chosen, if he doesn't already have one. The students should use the systems regularly for at 1-2 weeks, acquiring experience and comfort with its interface, features, and behaviors.

For example, each member of Team will open an account with Gmail and use it for sending and receiving emails over the course of 1-2 weeks. Team B's members will open an account with Hotmail and use it for sending and receiving emails for 1-2 weeks. During the course of the use, both teams' members should try using the shared calendar, chatting, mapping, and other communication features that both systems offer. They should read relevant documentation and online help from their systems to become acquainted with the capabilities and features of the systems.

2.2 Planning Change

For the sake of the assignment, Team A's job is to investigate replacing a company's (Team B) Hotmail-based email system with Gmail. Having studied the features of Gmail, Team A has a good idea of what the replacement system offers. They need to get feedback from Team B to find out about the existing Hotmail system. Team A may have superficial knowledge of Hotmail, of course, but their goal is to find out more about the system and how it is used. This involves several steps for Team A to do:

1. Planning two interviews with members of Team B to ask them about the Hotmail system. The interview must be planned and structured ahead of time and should take no more than 20 minutes.
2. Planning two user observations of Team B members using the Hotmail system. The observation must be structured and planned and take no more than 20 minutes of the user's time.
3. Planning a set of questionnaires to give to the Team B. The questionnaire shouldn't take more than 20 minutes to fill out.

We discuss the steps for planning a questionnaires, interviews and user observations during the second and third lectures.

2.3 Execution

During the Targil on **November 9, 2009**, the groups will carry out the planned interviews, observations, and questionnaires.

Team A will select one or two team members to interview the members of Team B. The other members of Team A will observe the interview. Team B will select two team members to be interviewed.

Team A will select two team members to observe two Team B members using Hotmail. Each Team A member will observe one Team B member. They must not include students who were interviewers. Team B will select which team members will be observed. They may not be the same students who were interviewed.

All members of Team B will receive a copy of the questionnaire prepared by Team A, will fill it out, and submit the results.

Team B will similarly interview, observe, and survey the members of Team A about their system.

Note: The Survey Monkey and Survey Gizmo websites offers free tools for creating questionnaires and gathering responses online. You may find them useful.

2.4 Feedback

After the the interactive portions of the session are done, all of the groups will gather for a collective discussion of what was learned during the session. Comments on the effectiveness and clarity of the interviews, observations, and questionnaires from both teams will be welcomed.

The comments given and meant to help groups better compose their reports and will not affect the grades of any group or team.

2.5 Report

Each team will use the results from their interviews, observations, and questionnaires to prepare a report. The report will contain the following elements:

1. The names of each member of the team, the roles they performed (designed interviews, performed observations, etc.).
2. The approximate number of hours each member worked on the assignment.
 - Barring exceptional circumstances, each team member will receive the same grade for the assignment.
 - This information will be used at the end of the semester to help decide borderline grades
3. Interview plan and interview questions. Notes from responses to interviews.
4. Observation plan and notes from the observations performed.
5. Questionnaire plan and questions. All responses to the questionnaires.
 - If the questionnaires was delivered online a link to the survey questions and responses will suffice for the question contents, but the team must still deliver the questionnaire plan.
6. 2-3 page analysis of the results reflecting on the following issues:
 - Summaries and conclusions from the interviews, questionnaires, and observations.
 - What are the important features of the system to be replaced? (For Team A, “What are Hotmail’s main features?”)
 - How are those features supported (or not supported) in the new system (For Team A, Gmail)
 - What would the effect of replacing the old system with the new one be? (For Team A, replacing Hotmail with Gmail).
 - Any additional factors the team feels relevant.
7. The analysis’ conclusions should be explicitly supported by evidence which has been gathered from experience with both systems as well as the interviews, observations, and questionnaires used.

3 Grading

The report is due by the end of November 16, 2009, to be submitted by Telem or in person during the recitation.

The purpose of the exercise is to gain experience in designing and executing questionnaires, interviews, and user observations. The grading is broken down as follows:

- 30% - Questionnaire plan, questions
- 30% - Interview plan, questions, notes
- 30% - Observation plan, notes.
- 10% - Report (conclusions reached, analysis based on responses)

Students are requested to contact the instructor with any questions or clarifications needed. I will try to respond to email in a timely manner (mjmay@kinneret). For faster response, please include the number 323 in the email subject.

4 Online Resources

- Gmail - www.gmail.com
- Hotmail - www.hotmail.com
- Office Live - www.officelive.com
- Google Docs - docs.google.com
- Blogger - www.blogger.com
- Live Journal - www.livejournal.com
- MySpace - www.myspace.com
- Facebook - www.facebook.com
- Survey Monkey - www.surveymonkey.com
- Survey Gizmo - www.surveygizmo.com