

# **Social Media: Just the Next Technical Agility Challenge!**

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# Agenda

- Technical agility:
  - Personal
  - In a profession
- Technical tools and their barriers to adoption
- Research on social media adoption:
  - Questions
  - Method
- Preliminary data analysis:
  - Quantitative
  - Textual
- Future research and conclusions

# “Technical”

- As in “technology”
- The use of tools whether or not computerized
- Heidegger wrote of the hammer and the hand/arm “as one”:
  - Transparency of tool use
  - Opaque only when tool “fails”
  - Medical librarian example: If working solo in hospital library, the librarian would email a STAT article request to MEDLIB-L

# “Agility”

The ability to change rapidly in response to customer needs and market forces; adaptability, flexibility, responsiveness.

OED

Technical agility in social media communication environments:

**What are the barriers?**

# Technical Agility Barriers

- Personal technical agility barriers:
  - Geek; nerd; curious; industrious?
  - Second nature?
  - (Short answer: Know your personality!)
- Professional technical agility barriers can be traditionally subdivided:
  - Technical services
  - Public services

# Professional Tech Use Solves Problems

- Technical Services:
  - 1850s: Charles Coffin Jewett at Smithsonian using “[stereotype plates](#)” to print out union catalogs efficiently
  - 1960s: Using early computing to [automate production](#) of Index Medicus efficiently
  - General history of [library automation](#)
- Public Services:
  - Adaptation to [search engines](#) ([PDF](#))
  - Previous example of hospital librarians and MEDLIB-L
    - Communication sent **across a network of professionals**
    - **Documentation trail** left by virtue of email usage

# Educating SLIS Students for Tech Agility: My Early Lessons Learned

- My experience deploying Web 2.0 (read/write) tools in the classroom dates to 2002.
- Lessons learned along the way:
  - Blog posts are discoverable by search engine spiders!
  - Overreliance on external service providers can be a hair-raising experience!

# Making the Case: Stuff Piles Up!

- LS 500: Organization of Information – required course that has weekly writing assignments:
  - Emailed weekly assignments from 30 students each semester was a nightmare
  - Students new to the idea of conceptual writing
  - No possibility of collaborative learning
- Advanced courses – how to prepare modern professional social media communicators:
  - LS 566 Metadata
  - LS 534 Health Librarianship



# Overcoming Barriers to Tool Introduction

- Requiring adoption:
  - Making the case using problem solving
  - Providing use scenarios
- Encouraging agility:
  - Overcoming time challenges
  - Deploying what you know to new tool contexts
  - Tools that come and go

# Making the Case in LS 534

- Health librarians monitor various communication channels:
  - For their own professional development
  - On behalf of their clients
- Proliferation of socially-based communication channels must be tamed:
  - Through adaptation: Resetting “popular” notions
  - Through agility: Preparing to deal with changes

# Technical Tools

- Blogs:
  - b2bevolution
  - WordPress (local SLIS installation)
- RSS:
  - Bloglines
  - NewsGator
  - GoogleReader
  - ?
- Social Bookmarking:
  - Delicious
  - Twitter (with hashtags)

# Technical Tools (cont.)

- Learning management systems:
  - Open website
  - BlackBoard Learn
- Social networks:
  - Facebook
  - LinkedIn
  - GooglePlus and Hangouts

# Research on Social Communication Tool Use in the Classroom

- Students keep a blogged semester diary of thoughts, questions, and answers about SM use.
- Use their choice of RSS aggregator & subscribe:
  - To each fellow students post and comments feeds
  - To at least 30 health-related blogs
- Set up Twitter account to be used primarily for disseminating article links found during semester (course hashtag #LS534).
- At close of semester, an informal 2 page reflection on their blogging, RSS aggregators, and Twitter use.

# Questions

1. What evidence of affective changes in students when dealing with challenges of new social media tool adoption?
2. What evidence of ease of use?
3. What evidence of agility?

# Method

- Analyze end of semester “Student Reflections on Social Media Use”
- Thematic analysis of emergent themes pertaining to:
  - Affective changes
  - Ease of use
  - Agility

# Quantitative Data

- Fall 2007 – 27 student assignments (100%)
- Spring 2008 – 19 student assignments (100%)
- Fall 2010 – 8 student assignments (100%)
- Spring 2010 – 3 student assignments (60%)
- Fall 2012 – 7 students assignments (100%)
- Spring 2012 – 5 students (83%)

TOTALS: 69 (96%)



# Student Self-Classification

- Age of student across full range:
  - Net gen/Millennial
  - GenX
  - Baby boomer
- Previous experience with social media across a full range:
  - High
  - Some
  - None

# Identified Affective Themes

- Student self assessment at beginning of course included:
  - Nervous
  - Concerned
  - Afraid
  - Confident
- Student self assessment at end of course included:
  - Confident
  - Surprised

# Identified “Ease of Use” Themes

- **Convenience:**
  - From “How am I going to keep up [with these tools]?” to “Combination of tools worked well”.
  - Very convenient spending 30 seconds [with aggregator] rather than taking 40 minutes a day [without using it].
  - A great way to save time and review your various feeds at your convenience.
- **Invisibility/transparency:**
  - [Regularly visiting RSS aggregator] became a matter of routine and hardly took any time at all.

# Identified “Agility” Themes

- **Connecting new knowledge** of social communication tools with prior experience:
  - Now I can keep current with the library world in very mobile way ... desktop or iPhone.
  - I learned about Twitter compatible tools to organize my feeds ... I learned to use folders in GoogleReader to organize my blogs.

# Identified “Agility” Themes (cont)

- Emergence of **learning community** and resulting responsiveness to asking and answering fellow students’ questions:
  - I was blogging for my class. It felt like a small network of people dealing with a controlled subject matter... The combined exercises were an integral part of my learning process this semester.
  - What made [my fellow students’ blogs] valuable was looking at things from their perspective

# Situational “Agility” Theme

- Bloglines temporary demise during fall 2010:
  - One student, who had prior experience in social media, reported no difficulty changing
  - Another student, who had no prior experience with aggregators, made the shift to GoogleReader noting the differences and then switched back.
  - Another student, who did not remark on prior aggregator experience, had no difficulty changing

# Conclusions for MLIS Education

- Educating technologically agile MLIS grads requires an understanding of barriers to adoption and pedagogical strategies for addressing these barriers.
- Follow up with former students to check on current levels of social technology usage.

# Conclusions for Today

- Draw sustenance from the technical agility of your colleagues both current and from the past
- Technology with a purpose:
  - Solve problems
  - Be more efficient
- Consider the network of your fellow professionals
- Document your professional social media activities:
  - Easier said than done
  - We need better tools!
- **BOTTOM LINE:** Social media adoption is merely the **NEXT** technical agility challenge!