

MASTER THESIS: The Impact of Instant Messaging Features on a Collaboration Platform's Usability

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Room for improvement? Collaboration software from the user's perspective

With more and more people opting for remote work from the comfort of their own homes, collaboration platforms have seen a massive surge of new users. The most popular platform, Microsoft Teams, reported an astonishing quarter of a billion active users in 2022. With such a wide reach, it's increasingly important to design these types of software with consideration for those who use them. In this work, we examined how to apply this user-centered approach to design and how it can lead to a better final product. It turns out, just adding one new feature can make a big difference!

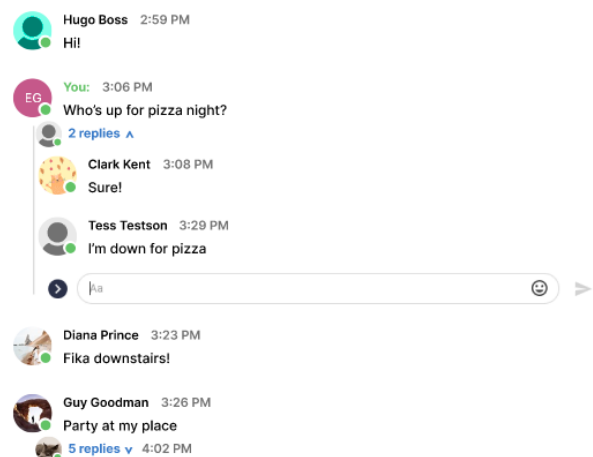
Popular scientific summary by **Erik Gilbertsson & Julius Malmström**

A collaboration platform with bare minimum functionality can work great in smaller teams and has certain advantages over more complex platforms, such as having little to no learning curve. Although, as a business scales up and teams grow, a lack of core features may lead to annoying situations. By applying user-centered design to an existing collaboration platform from the telecommunications company Telavox, we tried to find what sort of features could be considered "a must" and how big of an impact they can have on people's experience of the platform.

Results from testing with 33 participants showed that users of the platform were about **15% more satisfied with their experience** after the addition of a new prototype feature. This prototype consisted of a new way to respond to chat messages by adding the response to a "reply thread" under the message. The feature was developed entirely based on input from experienced users of the platform who participated in interviews and testing. Applying this methodology for just one new feature seems to make a big difference on how the entire platform is perceived.

"So why don't you implement it right away?" In some cases, business decisions prohibit things from being made right away. The research might instead contribute to a broader view of things to keep in mind when designing new features. For example, throughout the design process it seemed that

users of the platform appreciated features that allowed them more freedom in how they organize and look for information in the chat. This can perhaps be used as a guideline for future development of collaboration platforms.



An interesting detail discovered during the design process was two pieces of conflicting feedback given by interview and test participants. There was an expressed wish for features that would let the participants decrease the number of messages that they are bombarded with on a given day. At the same time, some were also skeptical about any changes that could make it more likely for them or their colleagues to miss out on important information.

How does one go about balancing these two requirements? It is an interesting question that was left unanswered for future research in this area.