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Padlet: An Online Tool for Learner Engagement and Collaboration

Available at <https://Padlet.com>

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Padlet (previously known as Wallwisher) is a free Web 2.0 application that provides a virtual wall and collaborative space accessible from any Internet-enabled device. It is a live online bulletin board that has been described by its developers as “a living, breathing webpage” and “the easiest way to create and collaborate in the world.” Any number of participants can simultaneously view, add, and rearrange content on a Padlet, including text, images, and links to other web pages, videos, or documents. The bring-your-own-device application is easy for students to use and does not require an account or login to post on an existing Padlet. I consider myself technology-impaired, yet found it easy to teach myself to create and use Padlets to actively engage students at all points in the learning process. The biggest problem I faced was containing my enthusiasm and not over-using the technology!

Padlets can be created on computers; Android and iPad applications are also available. The instructor must first sign up for a free Padlet account, which can be upgraded to provide greater choice of backgrounds and formats. Instructors begin by creating one or more Padlets to support each planned learning activity by choosing an appropriate layout (freeform, grid, or stream) and creating any headings, instructions, or categories to which students will respond. The instructor makes a link to the Padlet available to students at the desired time by email, Blackboard, or QR code, then students post their contributions and view those of others using their own smart devices (phone, tablet, laptop). The instructor may choose to leave links to Padlets and their contents available throughout the semester for continued elaboration or to provide a useful resource for review before exams.

Padlet posts are anonymous unless students choose to add their names. However, as a way to encourage participation, instructors may ask students to sign their posts and count these contributions toward a participation grade. Padlet posts also offer a route to participation for those who are not able to attend every class but who contribute to pre- and postclass Padlets.

Below I describe a number of ways that I have used Padlets for preclass preparation, inclass activities, postclass consolidation, and group project work in an introductory human resource management (HRM) course. These examples serve as ideas for the many ways that Padlets might be used in other management classes at all levels from undergraduate through EMBA.

First, Padlets may be used for preclass preparation. When a case is to be prepared, students may be asked to post responses to questions before class, such as “what has gone wrong” or “what is the key issue?” This helps to assure that everyone has read the case prior to class. When articles are assigned, students may be asked to post key points or to give examples of how what they have read relates to their past experience or current job. When I tried this, my goal was for students to collaboratively create *CliffsNotes* for each assigned reading. Although fine in theory, two drawbacks I found with operationalizing this concept were that students sometimes missed the point of the reading or posted inaccurate statements, and that more motivated students felt that others were freeriding on their summaries and not reading the articles themselves. These problems may be overcome by requiring either everyone or a nominated subset of students to add signed posts for given articles, establishing a classroom culture that values thoughtful preclass contributions, or providing instructor feedback and recognition for high-quality posts.

Second, I have found that Padlets are incredibly useful for a variety of face-to-face classroom activities. In effect, a Padlet multiplies the available air time for a discussion by the number of

smart devices in the room. Students do not need to wait their turn to speak or compete with their neighbors to make a contribution, allowing many ideas to be put forward in a short space of time. Students from face-sensitive or nonEnglish speaking backgrounds may feel more comfortable contributing to class discussions through a written post than by making an oral statement to the class. Padlets are particularly helpful when the instructor wants to collect ideas and suggestions from the class (e.g., for brainstorming activities). Students may be asked to post their thoughts individually or on behalf of a group after preliminary small-group discussions. Most activities that would normally be conducted using whiteboards, butcher paper, or Post-Its work well with Padlets, with the advantages of better visibility to the class and creation of a lasting record of the discussion. In addition to collecting input before a discussion, Padlets can also be used to record and save learning points or the consensus reached after a large-group discussion.

For example, I use a Padlet exercise in class on the first day of the semester to introduce HRM. Students are first asked to post all the activities or functions they think are part of human resource management. The Padlet is displayed on the data projector in front of the class throughout the exercise, as well as being visible on each student's smart device. I use the freeform layout, which allows posts to be dragged and dropped anywhere on the screen. In the second step of the exercise, we consider the activities students have listed and then sort them into those that are done largely by HR professionals in the HR department on one side of the screen, those that are done largely by line managers on the other side, and those that are shared responsibilities in the middle. This provides a great chance to dispel misconceptions, such as the idea that HR makes most hiring decisions or conducts performance appraisals, and to demonstrate that *every manager* has substantial HR responsibilities with respect to their own staff.

Instructors can use Padlets for opening activities in any class session, perhaps by asking students to post questions stemming from their preclass reading or to give an initial opinion on an open-ended question related to the day's topic. For instance, at the start of my first class on legal issues in HRM, I have students simultaneously post every way they know of that governments regulate any aspect of the employer–employee relationship. In just a few moments, the Padlet and discussion that follows tell me what students already know and provide a brief overview of the topics we will be covering in depth later. I tidy up the Padlet after class to remove redundancies or incorrect entries and add topics that were missed so that the Padlet provides a complete resource for review.

When teaching a case, Padlets can replace the usual whiteboard if instructors create one or more Padlets prepopulated with the questions or headings they plan to use in the case discussion. A few students may be designated as scribes, freeing the instructor to moderate the discussion rather than writing on the board. Again, a lasting record of the discussion is produced.

Padlets can also be used to provide a backchannel for questions, feedback, or comments on anything going on in class: an exercise, a video and associated listening assignment, the lecture, or a presentation by another student or group. If students work in study groups or syndicates, they may wish to create their own Padlets to facilitate collaborative note taking during class.

Padlets are also useful for “exit-ticket” activities at the end of a class or after an experiential exercise to review, summarize, and apply key points. For instance, I ask the class to populate a Padlet on “the five most important things to remember about the topic we've been discussing today” just before the class finishes; to record the best advice they can give themselves on how to conduct a performance appraisal interview based on the role-play exercise we've just

completed and discussed; and by way of review, to post three true statements about each of several selection devices I've listed on a Padlet.

Third, Padlets may be used after class. End-of-class summary activities such as those listed as exit tickets can be done on Padlets after class if there hasn't been time in class. Further reflections on how students might apply what they have learned may be required or requested on postclass Padlets. Padlets created throughout the semester are also useful resources when students are studying for exams.

Fourth, students can be assigned to create their own Padlets on specific topics as a longer term graded individual or group assignment. In fact, I first discovered Padlet while searching for a platform for a *Wiki*-like group assignment. Padlet is not the best choice if an instructor wants students to create a detailed *Wiki* with a great deal of text, but can be very effective if the goal is to create an interesting "resource wall" with a variety of types of content. I have HRM student groups prepare and present a Padlet on a topic chosen from a list I provide. Sample topics are

1. Design a Padlet to teach supervisors how to effectively conduct on-the-job training for their staff.
2. Design a Padlet to teach the managers in a restaurant chain about workplace bullying and how to manage it, including both prevention and dealing with incidents.
3. Design a Padlet to educate managers and other employees about the purpose, processes, and outcomes of good succession planning.
4. Design a Padlet to teach branch managers in your large bank why and how to conduct exit interviews with staff who resign.

The aims of the assignment are for students to delve deeper into a class-related topic, thoroughly research it (including reading articles and reviewing videos and websites), *selectively* summarize and assemble the most useful resources into a creative, engaging, and logically organized Padlet, and then present the Padlet to the class to share what they have learned. Good Padlets include links to well-chosen (or even self-produced) videos with a bit of explanation about why to watch each, text, images, links to articles or relevant websites, and often something interactive, such as a test-yourself quiz or flashcard application. Although Padlets are presented to the class live, they are also designed to serve as a free-standing training or review resource. The assignment not only helps students learn about their and other team's topics, but also provides practice in self-teaching about a new topic, evaluating the quality of the information and resources found in terms of both content and value-per-unit-of-time, thinking about how to apply what they learn in a practical setting, and creating a compelling tool to educate others. A side benefit for me is that students find some very good materials that I can include in lectures in future semesters. Students appreciate the capacity to virtually collaborate on the Padlet assignment, either synchronously or asynchronously, and consequently the reduced need for face-to-face team meetings.

Last, I use Padlet administratively to manage the choice of group assignment topics by student teams. Students simply post the names of their team members next to their topic choice on a first-come, first-served basis on a Padlet I provide for this purpose. This allows other students to immediately see which topics are taken and which are still available, and lets me monitor whether any students are not yet on a team.

In sum, Padlet is a very easy to use technology that can be applied to engage students in a large number of ways both inside and outside of the classroom. FAQs and links to articles about Padlet can be found at <http://jn.padlet.com/> Links to some of the group project Padlets produced by students in my class can be found at https://padlet.com/cynthia_fisher/examples.