Scenario

Professor Lin is teaching a Leadership Honors Seminar. The course involves a lot of group work and requires students to collaboratively manage a project in small groups during the latter half of the course. Students are graded on various aspects of their project performance including online project meetings, and work distribution and planning. So far, Professor Lin has mostly relied on the discussion forum tool built into the course LMS and various social networking tools such as Google Hangout and Facebook. However, they do not fulfill all the students' needs and makes it difficult for her to evaluate their collaborative skills.

By implementing *Trello* in her course Professor Lin provides a way for her students to collaborate through a dedicated project management tool that is also used in real-world companies. This means they are better able to visualize and organize the tasks that need to be performed and assign them to individual team members with deadlines for their completion. By being a member of each group's *Trello* board Professor Lin can follow their work in real-time through her own account and see when tasks are planned, executed and finished. Because *Trello* integrates well with various mobile platforms she also feels she can better ask students to integrate other resources and media, such as photographs and audio clips that they create during their work.

1. What is it?

A web-based organization and collaboration tool that students may use to manage group and project work.

2. How does it work?

Users sign up for accounts and start collaborating on 'boards' which contain lists of task organized into various columns such as 'To do', 'Doing' and 'Done'. Various parts of a project can be split into their own lists for increased granularity. Each 'list' consists of various 'cards' (tasks) that can be color coded, assigned to specific members, and given a deadline, just to name a few options. Each card expands when clicked and can contain detailed to-do lists, attached files and pictures, and labels. Cards can be dragged and dropped in different lists such as from 'Doing' to 'Done'. *Trello* works in any web browser and has apps for all iOS devices, Android, Windows 8 and Kindle.

3. Who's doing it?

Because *Trello* was conceived and marketed as a project management tool many online reviewers focus on its applicability to personal task management and group-based project management. However, *Trello* is also currently used by big companies such as The New York Times, Adobe, Tripadvisor and Tumblr. Some teachers have also found *Trello* useful for posting resources for students and having them create cards to demonstrate completion of tasks. Because of its simple graphical user interface it is fairly easy and intuitive to start using and students may find it a valuable group project management tool.

4. Why is it significant?

Many courses utilize pair- and group work and have students create group projects that help them practice how to work together, distribute tasks and take responsibility for individual parts of a project. By utilizing technologies that students already possess and are proficient at using, such as mobile devices, students can practice using a project management tool that helps them organize and improve their group work and increase their collaboration skills. In addition, *Trello* provides important functionality that standard LMSs like BlackBoard do not. The graphical user interface with different 'boards' is one example of this. Another example is how cards that represent tasks can be

dragged and dropped for organization into different lists.

5. What are the downsides?

The tool is free, so some may be concerned with its longevity or staying power. However, it is supported by paid subscription models for 'Gold' and 'Business Class' users as well as other commercially available software produced by the Fog Creek Software company that created *Trello*. Trello may change pricing at any time, and refunds are granted in the first 90 days only.

Being an online tool *Trello* should work with different screen reader technologies, but full functionality cannot be guaranteed. Instructors should always keep accessibility issues in mind when using new online tools like this in their classroom. In case of any doubts or concerns, please contact the relevant offices on campus for advice and assistance.

Trello may terminate access for you and your students for any reason at any time. It is unclear what happens to user content in a terminated account, which could impact the user' ability to use that content in the future unless saved otherwise. *Trello* will hold you responsible for all activities occurring on your account so you should protect your password diligently.

Trello makes no promises about the system's availability, performance or security. For the free service, *Trello* will pay nothing if something goes wrong with the service. If something goes wrong with a paid service, the most *Trello* will pay is one year's fees.

6. Where is it going?

The company behind *Trello*, Fog Creek Software, is actively and rapidly developing *Trello* and has released a developer API that allows others to create apps, plugins and extensions that work with *Trello*. It recently reached 1 million users and has extensive lists of sample projects and other ways to utilize *Trello*. Most of these are submitted by users and show very creative uses relating to such different topics as software development, research projects, law and education.

7. What are the implications for teaching and learning?

Group- and project-based learning are used extensively in higher education and students often need to know how to collaborate and organize projects when they enter the job market. Consequently, they can benefit from learning how to use a tool such as *Trello*. Another advantage is the fact that *Trello* works on various mobile device platforms that students often use daily. This makes it better suited for their busy lifestyles and makes it more likely to be adopted by them. Finally, *Trello* provides a graphical user interface and a visual approach to project management that a conventional LMS such as BlackBoard cannot match.

8. Where can I find out more?

Visit the *Trello* website at https://trello.com/.

Visit the public *Trello* board with lots of tips and sample uses of *Trello* at https://trello.com/b/nPNSBZjB/trello-resources.

You may also contact Jacob E. Larsen (jlarsen@iastate.edu) in IT Services to discuss how *Trello* can be used with your students.

Additional legal information.