EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Kamarin Bradley, Richmond, Product Innovation/VCU
Sally Clements, Richmond, Product Innovation/VCU
Lacey Hancher, Richmond, Product Innovation/VCU

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

There is a gap between those who have questions and need a network and those with answers and resources, leading to missed opportunities. True networks and connections require a deeper understanding of people and opportunities. Here at Grace Innovators, we want to make those connections - give users the confidence to create, collaborate, and innovate together.

VALUE PROPOSITION / SOLUTION

Our community-building tool helps opportunity seekers who want to meet and connect organically by reducing the opportunity gap and increasing accessibility to knowledge, resources, and expanding social capital, unlike Linkedin, which values metrics, and Facebook, which creates self-selecting siloed forums.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Problem Space Description

As mentioned in our project description, there is a gap between those who have questions and need a network and people with answers and resources, leading to missed opportunities. We want to help make those connections giving people the confidence to create, collaborate, and innovate in a space that drives connection, community and
encourages collaboration for learning. We focused on creativity during our initial research phase because the number one soft skill in the future workplace (Linkedin). Also, because in 2021, all jobs require creative problem-solving, with many tedious and laborious jobs moving to automation.

**Empathy + Research insights**

Gen Z social worker Christine — a first-generation college graduate — wants to use her art to promote social change. Christine begins with a Google search, a few YouTube videos, but she still is a one-woman team trying to connect with a community beyond the web. She doesn’t know where to begin or who to ask for guidance. Christine’s pain points were sentiments that recurred throughout our research. We found these pain points to be a part of a far-reaching problem that included potential entrepreneurs who lack the social network to gain access to resources and opportunities resulting in numerous missed opportunities. Our primary stakeholders are Investors, team leaders, professionals, or recruiters. Through research, we identified how social capital impacts opportunity.

Freelance designers that need to subcontract photography work reach out to their social network to see who their peers recommend. Our user-discovery found that: (1) people fear embarrassment if their “creative” skills are not “good enough.” (2) Time-consuming to find the specific person to solve your problem. (3) There are financial challenges associated with the cost (fees, meals, drinks, etc.) of networking. (4) Remote work has minimized the geographic barrier for networking. We reframed these pain points as opportunities to build creative confidence through mentoring, learning through collaboration, non-hierarchical, connection-driven community.

**Problem Statement**

The pain points led us to consider how we might create a tool that fosters a community with social connectivity where people help each other by sharing resources and ideas? How do we build social capital in a virtual setting?

**Design Insights**

Multiple platforms will integrate with our tool, including but is not limited to — Lumastic, LinkedIn, and Facebook. The tool displays as an icon that is accessible from the user’s navigation bar inside the platform. It has multiple navigation elements — co-collection, cloud, plugin, experiments, investors, recruiters, portfolio, and forum. Co-Collection is a
prominent element that allows users to connect with exciting opportunities. Software plug-ins and file storage can be integrated, making the collaborative work area more efficient. Investors and recruiters are two potential users separated to solve each stakeholder’s different needs. Investors will seek start-ups, individuals, and organizations to invest in, while recruiters will be able to view users who opt-in for employment seeking and contact them directly. The forum is the final element to this platform, creating a space for all individuals to share ideas and connect with others. Users will have direct contact with one another, breaking down those connection barriers.

Our tool will be a gamechanger that meets or exceeds our desirability, feasibility, and viability standards. Customers needing more networks, mentors, or collaboration than currently offered by their current platform will find value in the tool (desirability). The tool is feasible to produce. It builds on the strengths of existing technology platforms. It requires prototype iterations that test software development in potential target markets (feasibility). The goal is to license the integrated tool in a renewable subscription format (viability).

**PROTOTYPE / MVP**
MARKETS & SCALABILITY

Market for solution: Online platforms

Target purchaser: Lumastic, then competitors; Facebook, LinkedIn, Reddit, Instagram, Twitter,. Smaller potential purchases: Tumblr, Snapchat, Pinterest, Taringa (South American), Foursquare

Target consumer/user: Network users

There are 3 million social media users, who each have an average of 7.6 accounts. Last year, LinkedIn generated over $17 a user; Reddit made thirty cents a user. Facebook alone generated almost $60 billion in revenue, nearly 25 cents a user. The top nine social media companies generated nearly a trillion dollars in revenue.
Additionally, organizations large and small depend on internal social networks to cross-pollinate big ideas and generate the next great innovation. Our product can form an internal social network for employees to collaborate and grow ideas organically.

Beyond the current global pandemic, there is a need outside of traditional in-person networking to expand your current social and political capital beyond your current geographical areas. Social networks are the space to make that connection.

CUSTOMER ACQUISITION

Our first potential purchaser is Lumastic, a networking platform for creative professionals. We are currently meeting with Lumastic as we developing the tool that could meet their existing needs. With our first success underway, we will reach out to other social networks by attending social networking conferences such as the International Conference on Data Mining & Knowledge Management or joining professional organizations such as the IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers) or the Social Media Association.

COMPETITION

Existing Competition

Virtual —

Competition exists in various aspects of our problem space, including collaboration, connection, networking, mentoring, and creativity. Miro and Slack are collaborative tools that increase productivity. LinkedIn, Facebook, Skillshare are primary competitors in the virtual space focusing on making e-connections. LinkedIn connects professionals to other professionals, but in a way that can feel cold and transactional. Skillshare is a platform for teams to continue professional learning in various aspects of art, design, and creativity, and Facebook groups connect people with a shared interest together. The virtual space limits geographic barriers for a more inclusive community. The sense of community is a gain worth celebrating. Still, a virtual setting can lack personal connection, and it provides an
opportunity to intersect the ideas of community and connect people to feel more like humans than users.

Face-to-Face —
Our research focused on competitors building professional connections and mentoring. Creative Mornings and the Center for Innovation (CIT) and Technology are examples of the former, and GE’s reverse-mentoring is an example of the latter. Beginning with personal connections, Creative Mornings and CIT work to connect creatives in a social setting, driving social capital. The leaders are responsible for ice-breakers and various cues to foster conversation for building relationships among members. Moving to mentoring, in 1999, Jack Welch, former CEO of GE, launched the reverse-mentoring program. It flipped the traditional role of mentoring at GE. Until that point, mentoring used a hierarchical system rooted in the assumption the oldest person has all of the answers. Welch recognized the barrier this mindset had on team collaboration using reverse-mentoring to a shared sense of learning between the veteran and the novice. Discovering more about these companies working in this space helped to clarify the root problem for our team.

How are we different?
We are rethinking the collaborative workspace. Grace Innovation is looking deeper than the need for collaborating in a shared workspace as a means for building community. We are looking to create a non-hierarchical space that cultivates creativity, collaboration, and opportunity. Our team is developing a community-driven product focused on creating personal connections. Our customers will build warm contacts through conversations we spark and video chats we initiate. We are using a human-centered approach to design an experience that connects people to appropriate opportunities. Our tool aims to build social connection and personal and professional growth through consistent, intentional interactions.

TEAM REFLECTION

What worked well for us as a team?
We were able to divide and conquer all of the sprint elements and tasks – If one team member couldn’t attend and receive information, another could. We could lean on each others’ strengths, such as where one team member might’ve experienced a weakness, and we were able to learn from one another.

**What did not work well for us as a team?**

We couldn’t find a mentor for the sprints, and we not able to receive feedback or any critique from a third-party. Also, we would’ve loved to learn more about the design thinking process by attending sessions with an intended “design thinking” goal and capability of walking away with a deliverable for our project.

**What would I/we do differently next time? Consider this both for your own work and for teamwork.**

Individuals will be able to manage stress more efficiently to provide team deliverables on time. We, as a team, would have created a timeline or use a tool that would’ve helped manage our project tasks and sprints.

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**IF APPLICABLE: INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY**

Some of the products that are being considered may have intellectual property. If this is the case, please describe how you’ve thought through the intellectual property process.