The Usual Tasks:  
A Library for Ad-Hoc Work in iTasks

[Extended Abstract]

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For many day-to-day tasks of a white-collar worker, generic applications like e-mail, word processors or spreadsheets, suffice to get the job done. Moreover, the cost of having specialized tools for every task does not outweigh the overhead of using generic applications. If an organization implements a workflow management system (WFMS) to support their business processes, it will only support those tasks for which the benefits outweigh the cost of implementation in the WFMS. Hence, the tasks of a worker are divided into a set of tasks under control of the WFMS, and a remainder ad-hoc set using generic tools. This division can be undesirable for both workers and managers. For workers, it means working from two task lists and having information in multiple systems. This can be inconvenient especially when ad-hoc tasks supplement tasks in the WFMS. For managers, it reduces the accuracy of the information that a WFMS can provide for resource planning and control. Since not all tasks are visible to the WFMS, a worker who appears to have no ongoing work, may have an overflowing e-mail inbox and a large to-do list. This paper presents a library for the iTasks WFMS that facilitates common ad-hoc tasks within an iTasks based system. The library provides tasks for creating groups of users, e-mail like messaging, creating and sharing lists and simple group decision support. This selection of ad-hoc tasks has been derived through analysis and clustering of the ad-hoc work involved in organizing a small conference, collected through a workshop with a group of faculty members experienced in this area.