

Chapter 7

Understanding Persuasion Mechanisms for Effective Communication in Online Educational Environments: Persuade Your Students by Empowering Them!

Camelia Marinela Radulescu
University of Bucharest, Romania

ABSTRACT

This chapter aims at explaining the mechanisms of persuasion for effective communication in online educational environments. It starts by bringing awareness on the particularities of online educational environments and the psychological prerequisites of online studying. It tackles issues of digital skills as well as emotional intelligence abilities for online teaching, specific mindset and digital readiness, result expectations and assessment. Moreover, principles of microlearning and hybrid learning are explained as major approaches in online education. It then addresses issues related to technology-mediated communication with young ages vs. adults. It makes a brief analysis of mediated communication vs. direct communication in terms of adopted strategies according to age, adaptation of message, and feedback according to the online channel of factors affecting communication in online environments vs. face-to-face communication. Particular attention will be given to digital stress.

INTRODUCTION

The dogmas of the quiet past, are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise -- with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew (Lincoln, 1862).

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The humanity has been facing once again a worldwide crisis affecting all sectors of our lives, including education. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the words of Lincoln seem to remind us that each new challenge needs to be responded to with a new mentality and more creativity in finding the appropriate solutions for the new reality. After the start of the pandemic, we soon began to realize that applying old rules and norms would not help us become more effective in our endeavor, but we needed to change radically the way we think of our work online and the way we act in order to reach our educational objectives.

As a social constructivist, the author believes that one's way of seeing and interpreting the world is influenced by 'our emotions, intentions and purposes', in other words, our attitude to existence (Young, 1992: 29). From this perspective, our constructions of the world determine our expectations, mediate our experience and set parameters to our subsequent understanding of experiences. In this way, making sense of the world is a construction process made in interaction with the physical and the social world. The challenge it creates is the problem of multiple perspectives as we do not all see the world in the same way; reality is not fixed or given (Richardson, 1997).

From a social constructivist perspective, understanding the issues involved in changing to adapt to the new reality involves first an understanding of the phenomena through the lenses of one's own experiences in particular contexts, as these would determine the way further encounters will be interpreted in other contexts. Learning to adapt involves ongoing reconstruction of these representations as people make sense of the world in ways that are personal to them and each individual constructs his or her own reality (Williams and Burden, 2004). It is suggested that learners actively construct and test their own representations of the world and fit them into a personal framework, in a learning cycle (Richardson, 1997). These constructions of reality determine an individual's expectations, mediate experiences and set parameters for subsequent learning (Fosnot, 2005). For these reasons not only thinking anew, but also acting anew is a challenge and a radical rapture from previous beliefs.

This chapter aims at explaining the mechanisms of persuasion for effective communication in online educational environments. It addresses experts, teachers, parents, students, trainers, decision-makers, researchers and ordinary people interested in education, who want to understand the phenomenon of change and the psychological prerequisites of learning in online environments and/or make informed decisions about acting in terms of their own behavior, appropriate planning, curricula or policy to increase effective communications with others.

The Process of Change

Change is an external process, most of the time imposed to us by external forces and responded to with resistance, resilience and skepticism. People oppose change for various reasons that vary from rational to emotional, but it always affects our personal psychological safety. The strength of the resistance to change depends on many factors, among which the perception of risks that change brings and the personal interests that may motivate people to adopt it or to remain in their old position, the fear of failure or the power of the formed habits. The transition within the change process is internal and happens at psychological individual level. There is always an emotional response to change, which follows a pattern for all individuals: unfreezing, change, refreeze (Cummings et al., 2016). This three-stage model of change was created by Kurt Lewin and developed into a more comprehensive one by Edgar Schein. The first step is related to becoming motivated to change and involves disconfirmation of prior knowledge which at emotional level is accompanied by learning anxiety, defensiveness and resistance due to the challenge of

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