

Chapter 89

A Close Look at Trust Among Team Members in Online Learning Communities

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ABSTRACT

Trust is one of the important factors either fostering or damaging students' online teamwork learning experience. Building trust among team members has become a necessary step for a successful collaboration experience. The purpose of the article was to understand students' learning and teamwork experiences and further to investigate the relationships of learner-centered instructions, team trust, and social presence in an online learning community. Also, this article adds to the research on the role of social presence in promoting cognitive and affective trust. The results indicated there were positive correlations between learner-centered instructions and trust, between learner-centered instructions and social presence, and between trust and social presence. The study could provide suggestions for instructors teaching online courses for the implementation of learner-centered instructions and the importance of creating a social presence and building trust for students in a collaborative online learning environment.

INTRODUCTION

In the online learning environment, students are taking increased responsibility in the learning process and they are at the center of learning when all kind of activities and tasks are taking place. Learner-centered teaching approach includes but not limited to constructivist learning theories, authentic learning, and collaborative learning. Each has its own objectives and goals. For faculty who teach fully online courses, collaborative learning is considered to be an effective pedagogical practice and teaching strategy. A well-designed project that requires collaborative and team effects encourages students and faculty to work together, share, and exchange ideas (Xu, Du, & Fan, 2015). However, Hsu, Ju, Yen, and Chang (2007), and Ridings, Gefen, and Arinze (2002) have argued that due to the drawback of fully online courses, as known as limited opportunity of communication and interaction, students' cohesion and relationship in a fully online course are more fragile than on campus courses. Therefore, online instructors should also develop students' effective collaboration skills, such as clear communication, team trust building, decision making, and organization (Cheng & Macaulay, 2014; Kleinsasser & Hong, 2016).

Many studies showed that students' online teamwork learning experience was positively related to team trust. (Cheng & Macaulay, 2014; Taylor, Santuzzi, & Cogburn, 2013). In addition, team members' relationship is associated with group climate and a sense of community. Lee (2004) studied students' sense of community in an online collaborative learning environment and discovered that once a sense of community was established, trust was developed among team members. This study intended to investigate the effect of learner-centered instruction on the trust amongst virtual collaborative teams and to understand students' teamwork experiences and their perceptions of social presence in an online learning community. Moreover, this study sought to investigate the role of social presence in facilitating cognitive and affective trust. Not much has been done regarding social presence in virtual team setting. In real world practices, the questions remain as to whether social presence actually takes place in virtual collaborative teams and whether learner-centered instruction may influence online students' perceptions of trust.

This study began with addressing this gap in research by reviewing literature on trust in virtual collaborative teams and how interaction and relationship amongst team members would influence trust building. Also, this study reviewed literature on learner-centered instruction and social presence and their influence on changing the dynamic of collaborative trust.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Trust in Collaborative Teams

In online learning environment, trust has been identified as an important parameter (Anwar & Greer, 2012; Pelet & Papadopoulou, 2012). Group information elaboration and learning can be effectively improved by persistently building and maintaining team trust (Peñarroja, Orengo, Zornoza, Sánchez, & Ripoll, 2015). Schilke and Cook (2013) specified trust as "a process theory is based on a narrative explaining the temporal sequence in which change occurs to produce a given outcome.... It identifies separable stages and transitions between these stages...(and) consists of explanations of how, why, and in what sequence a process unfolds over time" (p. 283). This appropriately described the characteristics of trust in the ongoing group developmental process. A group climate or collaborative learning environment is centered on trust and it provides necessary factors for the development of group cohesion (Coogan &

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