VIRTUAL- TEAM- COMMUNITY- OF- PRACTICE (VTCoP) THEORY CAN INFORM ONLINE COURSE DELIVERY

Dr Elly Philpott
Elly.philpott@beds.ac.uk

Mr David Pike
University of Bedfordshire, UK
Drop out rates

• In the UK in 2011, 8.6% of students quit higher education after 12 months… Some 21.6% were expected to fail to complete their degree

  (Source: HESA, 2011)

• For online courses this is thought to rise significantly but no recent national figures are as yet available
Overview

• Online Learners = Virtual Team, Community of Practice
• Literature – theory of online motivation
• Mapping theory to practice
• Guidelines for improving motivation / reducing drop out
• Ongoing activity
Online Learners

VLE course unit
Online Learners

Community of practice

VLE course unit
Online Learners

Virtual team

Community of practice

VLE course unit
Literature

• Ardichvili model (motivating factors, barriers and enablers in VCoPs)
• DeLone and McLean (ISSM)
• Use and Gratification theory
• Social Exchange theory
• Bond theory
• Identity theory
Participation: motivations, barriers, enablers

Motivating factors
Personal benefits: U&G theory
Community-Related Considerations: Identity theory
Normative Considerations: Bond theory
Reciprocity: Social Exchange theory; Identity theory

BARRIERS
Interpersonal: fear of criticism; fear of misleading others (Member Characteristics)
Procedural: lack of clarity on best ways of sharing; lack of clarity on what knowledge cannot be due to security and confidentiality considerations (ISSM)
Technological: Lack of technological aptitude or acceptance of technology as a means of communication (ISSM)
Cultural: In group orientation; face-saving; modesty; power-distance (Member characteristics)

ENABLERS
Supportive corporate culture and supportive leadership: U&G
Trust: institutional and knowledge based. Face to face meetings. Social Exchange theory
Tools (ISSM)
Comparing online learning to a successful project

### Table: VTCoP zone

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### Theories

- **ISSM**
  - Social Exchange theory
  - Identity theory
  - Bond theory
- **U&G theory**

### Project planning and initiation

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Induction

- Use and Gratification theory:
  - Motivators for participation: Personal benefits
  - Enablers for participation: Supportive corporate culture and supportive leadership
  - Barriers to participation: Cultural and Inter-personal characteristics

- ISSM:
  - Motivators: None
  - Enablers: Tools
  - Barriers: Procedural and Technological issues

- Social Exchange theory:
  - Motivators: Reciprocity
  - Enablers: Trust
  - Barriers: None additional
Guidelines

• Highlight personal benefits e.g., alumni success, likely salaries achievable, increased network size, life experience
• Demonstrate the supportive university culture by perhaps offering additional pastoral support, the support of student mentors etc
• Demonstrate course leadership by making clear the course and unit tutors and their responsibilities
• Introduce and facilitate activities to create an awareness of cultural differences with other students and encourage the need for civility
• Create an environment that encourages and rewards questions and constructive criticism e.g., FAQs, credit for contribution to discussion, sanctions for those trolling others
• Provide opportunities for students to assess and improve their interpersonal skills e.g., language, assertiveness, negotiation
Course delivery and assignment completion

- **Bond theory:**
  - **Motivators:** Normative considerations
  - **Enablers:** None additional
  - **Barriers:** None additional
- **Identity theory**
  - **Motivators:** Community related considerations, reciprocity
  - **Enablers:** None additional
  - **Barriers:** None additional
Guidelines

- Provide opportunities for students to assess and improve their use of online tools prior to use.
- Provide clarity on the methods and processes of sharing information in groups, e.g., file sharing, file naming, protocols for the use of groupware.
- Provide clarity on the type of information and data that is to be shared using university systems e.g., protocols, what is acceptable and what isn’t.
- Provide clarity on the technical requirements of hardware and software required.
- Design activities which will enable / encourage reciprocity.
- Design activities which will enable trust.
Ongoing activity

• Undergraduate portfolio under review Jan 2013
• New undergraduate DL course to be launched Feb 2013
• New postgraduate DL course to be launched September 2013

Recommendations to be fed into new course implementation and results monitored