ABSTRACT

Because of the evolution of community supported collaborative learning (CSCL), the online community has become a necessary aspect of most companies and organizations. Previous research has indicated that employee community commitment is the fundamental function of an organization, which has proven to affect a person’s teamwork performance. However, research focused on how the online community-supported collaborative virtual environment, such as enterprise social network (e.g., Yammer) or virtual working space (e.g., SUN’s Wonderland) might alter community commitment to affect a person’s teamwork self-efficacy is scant. The authors examine the mediating role of community commitment with emotional social support as an independent variable and teamwork performance as an output variable. World of Warcraft (WOW), a dynamic high-fidelity virtual environment that can support hundreds to thousands of people collaborating together, serves as the research platform in this study. The authors conducted hierarchical regression analysis to explore the causal-effect relationship among the factors of emotional social support, community commitment, and teamwork self-efficacy. In total, 558 current company employees selected from WOW participated in an online survey. The authors’ findings showed that individual commitment positively influences teamwork self-efficacy. To increase individual commitment, the online community can provide a high level of emotional social support to members.

Keywords: Computer-Supported Cooperative Learning, Learning Organization, Social-Network, Emotional Social Support, Teamwork

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays the emergence of social networking service (SNS) has enabled a shift from collaborative learning in contiguous learning organizations to collaborative learning in asynchronous distributed learning organizations by utilizing asynchronous and synchronous computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) environments connected to these networks. To achieve such organizational learning purpose many governments and not-for-profit organizations have embraced both of these modes making use of synchronous techniques based upon broadband technology applications such text-based technologies for chat, discussion forums, and e-mail. Many bodies of literature argued the learning technology applications should encompass a set of well-studied steps that combine both individual and teamwork, aiming for enlarging the diversity of learning tools and skills for team members. The online community enables enterprises to build employee virtual space to cooperate and work together. Conventional teamwork has shifted the paradigm of computer support collaborative work (CSCW) with “community” support collaborative learning (e.g., Yammer & SUN’s Wonderland) (Kang, Lee, Lee, & Choi, 2007). Therefore, understanding the role of online communities is an important issue for the shaping of learning organizations. To work for the organizational goal, members are expected to participate actively and frequently in a community to build membership with their colleagues, and to extend community commitment. Community commitment forms when people and organizations share similar values (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000; O’Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991), when they feel that their contributions are important and valued by the organization, and when they believe they can fulfill their personal needs and goals through the employment relationship. Studies have also proven that member’s commitment is critical to organizational functioning (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001). Maintaining and enhancing personal commitment is crucial in the team environment to foster and enable essential teamwork collaboration (Mathieu, & Zajac, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Online community commitment comprises two main dimensions: normative commitment and affective commitment. Normative commitment reflects a person’s sense of obligation to continue employment for the current organizations (Meyer & Allen, 1991). People with a high level of normative commitment feel that they ought to remain with an organization at the behavioral level. Affective commitment cultivates through member’s social-exchange processes that lead people to trust their organization, feel fairly treated, and feel support from others (Eisenberger, Fasolo & Davis-LaMastro, 1990). Affectively committed employees have a sense of belonging and identification that increases their involvement in organizational learning activities, their willingness to pursue organizational goals, and their desire to remain with the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Eisenberger et al., 1990).

To form affective commitment among all team members, Eisenberger et al. (1990) indicated that emotional social support increases team members’ affective commitment to work with others and to build methods of negotiating their personal and shared goals. Particularly for newcomers, emotional social support plays a social bonding function to assist them to familiarize with other employees. Research has also indicated that emotional social support establishes supportive relationships and alleviates users’ feelings of social isolation (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2005). Emotional social support is also related to various positive work outcomes, such as lower work stress, greater work efficiency, and enhanced self-efficacy (Zellars & Perrewe’, 2001). Employees who sense higher levels of emotional social support have higher self-efficacy than those who sense lower levels (Zellars & Perrewe’, 2001).

However, certain differences exist between the physical and the virtual teamwork environment. The physical teamwork environment enables all team members to communicate with face-to-face interaction, eye contact, and body
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