Team Learning in Technology-Mediated Distributed Teams

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ABSTRACT
This study examines technological, educational/learning, and social affordances associated with the facilitation of project-based learning and problem solving in technology-mediated distributed teams. An empirical interpretive research approach using direct observation is used to interpret, evaluate and rate observable manifested behaviors and qualitative content (i.e. discussions) associated with project-based team learning. The theory of affordances and social impact theory are integrated to develop a conceptual model that asserts that collaboration mode (collocated vs. non-collocated and videoconferencing supported) will dictate the quality of information exchange, progressive elaboration of ideas, and the social processes that influence team learning. Team learning is then suggested to yield better productivity and higher perceived interaction quality. Results showed that collaboration mode can impact team information exchange and interpretation and ultimately task outcomes. Further, collaboration mode can also create a social structure that influences the capacity for a team to maintain a mutual supportive and positive climate needed for successful project-based task outcomes. The results offer some extended insights into the technology-mediated collaborative learning process among students in a higher education context as well as in organizational settings. Theoretical, methodological and practical implications of the study are discussed.

Keywords: observation research, social impact theory, team learning, technology-mediated collaboration, theory of affordances