Language correlates of group trust and its relationship to group effectiveness

Overview
The degree of trust among members of an online group provides a tacit measure of the group’s likely effectiveness and resilience to external disruptions. This PhD will capitalise on recent developments in language analysis to: i) identify reliable markers of trust among group members; ii) identify how dimensions of trust, as measured by language, change across established phases of group development; and, iii) identify the resilience of these phases (and thus trust) to external factors.

Thesis development
Trust may be defined as a person’s willingness to rely on another based on positive expectations of the other’s intentions or behaviour. In offline contexts trust has been shown to comprise multiple dimensions and develop from observations of a range of nonverbal and paralinguistic behaviour¹. In online contexts, studies of trust have focused primarily on the methods used to gain trust and elicit information². In these studies, a key determinant of people’s willingness to trust is the content of the influencer’s presentation. Given that at least part of this presentation is language based, these finding suggest that language may provide a useful way to measure attempts to gain and maintain trust in online groups.

Recent developments in text analysis have shown the value of language as a measure of latent factors such as trust. An individual’s use of language can reveal aspects of personality and deceit³, and it has been used retrospectively to infer states of trust during the Oslo I peace accords⁴. Collectively, this evidence suggests that a reliable measure of trust may be derived from language use. Such a measure has not yet been developed.

Building on these recent developments, this thesis will pursue 3 objectives:

1) To identify a set of language markers that provide a reliable and valid measure of trust among online group members
2) To develop an understanding of how trust, as measured by language, changes across established phases of group development
3) To examine the resilience of trust to contextual changes in each of the development phases, as indicated by certain language markers

Theoretically, this research will provide insights into what language may tell us about trust, and how different aspects of trust change over the stages of a group’s lifecycle. Practically, it will contribute a novel, unobtrusive measure of trust that can be used to understand online groups.

**Working environment**
This PhD will be based at Liverpool University, however the student will be part of a collaboration in applied/social psychology that crosses Liverpool (Dr. Stacey Conchie, [http://www.liv.ac.uk/psychology-health-and-society/staff/stacey-conchie/](http://www.liv.ac.uk/psychology-health-and-society/staff/stacey-conchie/)) and Lancaster (Dr. Paul Taylor, [http://www.psych.lancs.ac.uk/people/paul-taylor](http://www.psych.lancs.ac.uk/people/paul-taylor)). This group comprises 12 PhDs, 2 Research Associates, and 2 software developers (who have developed language analysis software that can be used in the project). The group offers a stimulating environment where the candidate can develop an exciting and unique research project in this timely and topical area.

The DTC centre incorporates an area of expertise and excellence in Security and the Department of Psychology at Lancaster has an exceptional reputation in this regard. The Department has an outstanding track record of successful PhD submission within 4 years of registration – over 90% of students of recent students successfully submit on time.