Chapter 6.22
Peer Coaching and Reflective Practice in Authentic Business Contexts:
A Strategy to Enhance Competency in Post-Graduate Business Students

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ABSTRACT

The development of managerial expertise is a combination of acquiring further knowledge and integrating it with past experience and beliefs. To do so in isolation limits the potential for positive outcomes in one's management development. Peer coaching is one experiential learning method that can be used to enhance the depth of learning in managerial education. In this chapter, the experiences of 43 students who participated in a peer-coaching program as part of their post-graduate management education are revealed. Powerful learning effects are reported as well as characteristics of successful peer-coaching relationships.

INTRODUCTION

The achievement of competence as a manager is an ongoing process and may never be achieved given the constant change that takes place in the modern workplace. Hence, lifelong learning is a key component of effective managerial practice. Acquiring this mastery has been described by Quinn, Faerman, Thompson and McGrath (1996). Citing the work of Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986), Quinn et al. (1996) describe a model of managerial competency that commences at the novice stage and moves through the stages of advanced beginner, competent, proficient practitioner and culminates at expert status. Achieving expert status is an ongoing learning process and requires

a high degree of self-awareness. Adequate knowledge, cognitive skill and meta-cognition are the key ingredients leading to mastery. Weaknesses in any one of these three dimensions reduces the competency of the manager and interferes with further development. Authentic learning strategies that maximise the development of these key ingredients are important if managers are to improve.

THE ROLE OF KNOWLEDGE, COGNITION AND METACOGNITION

Knowledge as the first domain of competence can be represented as propositional and non-propositional knowledge (Higgs & Titchen, 1995a, 1995b; Higgs, 1997). Propositional (declarative) knowledge is derived from research and scholarship and is supported by the professional body. It encompasses book knowledge as well as abstract, logical, and formal relationships between constructs and contexts. Non-propositional knowledge is divided into two categories (professional and personal). Professional (craft) knowledge incorporates "knowing how" and the "tacit" knowledge of the profession. It encompasses the practical skills within the profession. Personal knowledge is influenced by the personal experiences and reflections of a manager and helps them to understand the perspective of their team. Personal knowledge, such as individual beliefs, values and convictions, also influence propositional and professional craft knowledge. These three forms of knowledge constitute a manager's unique knowledge base.

The unique knowledge of the manager is developed using a variety of cognitive strategies, which are a subset of the knowledge domain. These strategies have been described in the literature and illustrate how knowledge and cognition work hand in hand to develop the unique skill base of the manager (Boud, 1988). The strategies are:

association, integration, validation, and *appropriation*. Association involves connecting ideas and feelings that are part of an experience and tying it to existing knowledge. Integration involves processing associations to see if there are patterns or linkages to other ideas. Validation and validity testing looks at evaluating the internal consistency of emerging concepts and again tying these to existing beliefs and knowledge. Lastly, appropriation involves making new knowledge an integral part of how one acts or feels. Through this process, the manager constructs higher forms of learning which influences his or her competency.

Metacognition is the third component of the professional reasoning framework used by managers. It has been defined in a variety of ways, making its interpretation broad and vague. For example, terms such as cognitive monitoring, self-communication, metamemory, metacomprehension, and learning strategies have been used to describe metacognition (Strohm-Kitchener, 1983; Pesut & Herman, 1992; Worrell, 1990). Pesut and Herman (1992) define metacognition as the self-communication one engages in, or the internal dialogue that one conducts before, during and after performing a task. Hence, metacognition includes such things as knowing what one knows, knowing when and how one comes to know it, being able to think and plan strategically, the ability to represent knowledge effectively and in ways that permit efficient retrieval, and the ability to monitor and consistently evaluate one's own competence. It is the application of metacognition that leads to expertise (Nickerson, Perkins & Smith, 1985) as it is used to self-evaluate the knowledge framework of the manager.

Flavell (1979) was one of the first people to formally describe the concept of metacognition. Flavell notes that novel situations offer numerous opportunities for thoughts and feelings to emerge about one's own thinking. The metacognitive processing that surrounds these experiences lead to new goals or to the abandonment of old goals

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