Chapter V

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.
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