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Collegiate Leadership Competition: Deliberate Practice Leading to Expertise

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Collegiate Leadership Competition: Deliberate Practice Leading to Expertise

Prepared by: Courtney Randall, Mark Graham, Irene O'Leary, Katia Fonseca, Salina Mallory, and Matt Norris - LOS 399/599 Special Topics - Professor: Dr. Dan Jenkins

Abstract

Deliberate practice (Ericsson & Pool, 2016), the scientific process often attributed to developing expertise, requires a well-developed field and a teacher who can design, provide, and facilitate purposeful activities that target specific goals related to performance in that field. Components of purposeful practice include (a) well-defined goals, often related to skills that others have figured out how to do; (b) timely, continuous, and specific feedback; (c) deliberate practice outside of one's comfort zone; and (d) developing previously acquired skills through continuous improvement. USM students' participation in Collegiate Leadership Competition (CLC) practice sessions include components of deliberate practice aimed toward the goal of developing expert leaders. Through intentional learning activities grounded in applied leadership and specific performance outcomes, CLC practices include innovative strategies for leading and influencing high performing teams, solving complex problems, improving intergroup communication skills, and enhancing critical thinking skills; and each learning activity concludes with focused debriefing sessions that include feedback from the instructor and peer students. While 10,000 hours of deliberate practice in a leadership environment may be unrealistic for most college students, the CLC facilitates an accessible alternative.

Background Information

The CLC was originally piloted in 2015 as a "Leadership Olympics". The concept was to introduce a competition that would act as a leadership "practice field." This format allows for students to apply course content in a setting that challenges groups to perform. The current structure of the competition includes six 45-minute team challenge activities that encourage participants to master academic content, model process fluency, and showcase their leadership abilities. USM's team won the 2016 National CLC and the 2017 New England Regional CLC. On April 21st, USM will go head-to-head with SNHU, BC, BU, NYU, UMaine, and SMCC, at the 2018 New England Regional CLC.

Objective

The objective of our team, using deliberative practice techniques to develop and enhance our leadership and team building skills, is to successfully complete the 2018 New England Regional CLC, April 21st, at USM. These newly attained skills will provide our team members with proficient skills for the workplace of the future.



Figure 1. Team Norms



Figure 2. Practice Activity



Figure 3. Escape Room

Deliberate Practice

- At the beginning of the course a set of team norms (Figure 1) were established outlining expectations of performance, feedback processes, and behavior for team members.
- In each class meeting Dr. Jenkins walks the team through a series of activities geared to challenge the team dynamic as well as communication and critical thinking skills. Following the completion of each activity time is set aside to reflect and provide feedback to each team member based on process and overall performance.
- Each activity is intended to stretch our comfort zone by inhibiting our senses, restricting communication, presenting complex concepts and decision-making, or creating a sense of urgency.

Figure 2 depicts the activity "Catch!". The challenge: "...catch five balls in 30 minutes." However, both the thrower and catcher must be blindfolded, team members not blindfolded cannot touch those playing catch, and the only thing they can say is "yes, no, wow!, and/or blah!". Participants were challenged by limited communication, restricted vision, and an aggressive time limit.

- Concepts learned in previous Leadership Courses at USM are an asset in this setting. Practice activities test views and knowledge of concepts while providing the opportunity to exercise leadership skills.

In March, the team took time outside of class to visit the Escape Room in Brunswick, ME (Figure 3). This experience allowed the team to trial strategies and processes for problem solving prior to the April Competition.

Where We Finished...

Upon reflecting on our classwork, deliberative practice sessions and outside events, we can conclude that when an individual or group of individuals set specific and definable goals, following agreed upon norms and dedicating their time and energy they can be successful in improving performance and become more effective team members and leaders.

Acknowledgements

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References

Ericsson, A., & Pool, R. (2016). *Peak: Secrets from the new science of expertise*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin.