AN EXERCISE TO DEVELOP INITIATIVE: POSSIBLE DREAM?

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ABSTRACT

At the 1999 Philadelphia ABSEL meeting, Alan Cudworth conducted a team exercise workshop during which we were to begin developing an exercise. Four, then two, of our group of seven continued working on our exercise, and this paper describes that work-in-progress as follows: Alan Cudworth's exercise assignment and our responses; research on self-motivation or initiative; and an individual exercise to foster initiative (based on exercises developed by Heermann).

This is definitely a work in progress, based on the 1999 Philadelphia session. ABSEL is not unique in encouraging further work on research projects, but having such a large group of exercises begun one year for presentation at the next year's conference is a very creative idea and we are interested in how others also developed their exercises.

INTRODUCTION

This paper describes the process of developing an exercise to foster student self-motivation or initiative. While there is a large body of literature on motivation and leadership training, less has been written about developing individual initiative. Those of us who work with student teams realize that getting students to take on tasks by themselves without a lot of instruction and direction is 1) extremely important in developing strong students who are also good workers when they graduate, but at the same time 2) extremely difficult because it is hard to measure, hard to test for, and doesn't seem to offer students a direct reward.

We think it is possible to develop exercises that help develop initiative--but in a sense, initiative is like entrepreneurship, something that people have within themselves. We can strengthen it but not insert it where there is not already a spark.

ALAN CUDWORTH'S PHILADELPHIA KEYNOTE EXERCISE OUTLINE

Alan Cudworth's keynote exercise had the following segments we worked with:

Subject Matter: developing initiative (how to encourage each person to take on tasks by themselves)

Intended Audience: undergraduate (inexperienced) students, but could be used with new employees, line workers

Resources: 60-75 minutes of class time, classroom that can be reconfigured into team seating, one instructor per 40 students, opportunities for students to "solve" a problem or situation (cases?)

Materials: paper, copying

Context of Use: start in class, may finish out of class; consider iterative process

Aims and Objectives: to instill initiative in a person, learn to find the action behind the intent, learn to take on tasks without direction

Conceptual Map: the "message" is buried in the exercise itself, not explicitly stated. Students will retain new ideas about initiative rather than get an explicit statement of "how to get it."

Evaluation: student evaluation of learning about initiative, as there is not way to measure change in this area in such a short exercise

Emotions: ultimately, self-esteem is built by accomplishment, such as taking on and completing tasks successfully without constant guidance. The exercise is more analytical than emotional in content and action.

Freedom of Roles: dyads and triads can work with printed instructions. Procedural rules imply orderly play at least at first.

RESEARCH ON INITIATIVE AND HOW INDIVIDUALS DEVELOP IT

While there is a great deal of literature on how people learn, how to develop leaders, how to improve work in teams, and how to motivate students in teams and in classes, it was difficult to find many articles solely on initiative (self-motivation) and how to develop it in students.

Borkowski, Carr, and Presley wrote about helping students learn strategies that will help them succeed at assigned tasks in 1987. *Metacognition* represents self-knowledge about cognitive states and processes. *General Strategy Knowledge* "produces an understanding that learning will usually improve if sufficient effort is put forth in strategy selection and deployment." (Borkowski, et al, 63) Strategy use is never actually spontaneous, but the result of a continuous, long-term developmental process. Students learn the range of applicable tasks that are, and are not, solvable with a newly acquired strategy. (64)

Teachers need to provide detailed instruction about how and why a strategy is effective. (65) Self-testing and verbal feedback give learners more knowledge about a strategy. "Good performance following strategy use strengthens general strategic knowledge, which, in turn, promotes positive self-esteem and attributions of success to effort rather than to uncontrollable factors such as ability or luck. Motivational factors play a key role in subsequent 'spontaneous' strategy use by providing incentives necessary for deploying strategies, especially on challenging, difficult tasks." (67)

In other words, metacognitive theory seems to indicate that our exercise should include initial discussion of possible strategies for solving a problem and later feedback from both teachers and students on to what extent and why some strategies were more successful than others.

Cognition and Instruction is a collection or articles on how people learn. According to Nolen, three types of motivational orientations exist toward school learning: Task orientation (commitment to learning for its own sake, person strives to learn or understand and feels more competent they more learned); Ego orientation (perform better than others or to establish that one's ability is superior); learning as a means to an end); Work avoidance (put forth as little effort as possible and get away with it). (270-271)

Brown explains further that "Mastery-oriented children, rather than attributing temporary setbacks to personal shortcomings, treat obstacles as a challenge to be overcome by perfecting their learning strategies." (313) "Seeking adequate explanations for events seems to characterize good problem solving in adults and in children. The reciprocal teaching procedure encourages explanation and the search for deeper levels of understanding... promotes motivation for comprehension." (319)

The conclusion we might draw from these articles is that our exercise needs to include problem-solving in some open-ended way to allow for multiple strategies to be used. Perhaps conditions could change during the game (for the out-of-class segment?) so that students need to apply critical thinking and move in a different direction to continue to solve the problem.

In 1995, **Winne** wrote about self-regulated learners, finding that they possess positive expectations, motivation, and diverse strategies for problem solving. (173) *Learned industriousness* is the transfer of effort to a new task. It is based on effort spent on prior task plus opportunities to learn that a variety of tasks call for effort. (176) A complex strategy for learning informa-

tion in a text, for example, develops out of learning about study tactics. Students can learn to give self-feedback and monitor performance to improve skills in this area. (184-185)

VanZile-Tamsen and Livingston also wrote about motivation in 1999. They find that "Identifiable cognitive strategies, previously believed to be used by only the best and the brightest students, can be taught to most students." (54) Self-regulated learning "involves the ability to monitor and regulate one's own learning and strategy use; one's propensity for using elaboration, organization, and critical thinking strategies to facilitate the learning process; and one's propensity to manage effort expenditure and external resources, such as peers, teachers, and the environment, to facilitate the learning process." (55) Lower-achieving students use fewer of these strategies but can be taught to use them. (60)

While high-scoring students may succeed more quickly at an exercise, this research seems to indicate that all students can succeed eventually if we teach them the appropriate strategies.

DEVELOPING AN INDIVIDUAL EXERCISE

Consider the individual as a team of "one." What drives this team of "one"? How does he/she develop and sustain self-motivation or initiative? *Initiative* is defined by Webster as: "the first step or action; opening move; active role: to take the initiative." He also defines it in the context of "on one's own initiative" to be spontaneously or on one's own; self-motivating; without instruction or coercion. Initiative itself is developed by virtue of an unmet (many times intrinsic or higher order need) leading to some degree of need (goal) attainment. Taken in this context means that it comes from within the person, something that we give to ourselves. From this we can draw the following simple relationship:

Unmet Need ----------> Initiative ------------> Need fulfillment (Goal Attainment)

Initiative as Fuel for Attaining Goals

Initiative can be thought of as fuel for the fire in the area of goal attainment and the rate at which initiative is developed is dependent on the strength of that unmet need. The strength of that unmet need is dependent in some way on the strength of the values used as drivers that push us toward that need fulfillment. Goals are set and developed to help us achieve that desired end by contributing to this fire. We can therefore consider the following analogy: Initiative can be considered analogous to the rate at which we apply heat to a particular substance on its way to reaching its ignition point. We can also construct the following relationship:

Initiative = f (strength of the unmet need, rate at which we pursue the need, the unmet need, and

Ignition point = f (temperature of the heat source, rate at which heat is applied to a flammable substance, the composition of that substance).

The intensity (rate of development) of that initiative is directly related to realization of need.

Consonance and Dissonance Values

One's development of initiative has as its basis or beginnings in (the) intrinsic aspects of motivation. These aspects of values contribute through one's own goal development and the intensity associated with the need to be satisfied or fulfilled. The clearer we can be in defining consonance values (those that bring harmony or oneness) and the relative strength of those values unmet, the better we will be at developing the initiative (intensity required) to satisfy those needs. Dissonances, on the other hand, are those things that bring disharmony and cause us to lack or be discouraged from developing initiative. Disharmony exists as a result of needs that have gone unfulfilled. Overall intensity or

initiative is the by-product of combinations of the relative strength of individual consonances and dissonances.

Initiative must be developed at the proper rate; if developed too quickly it may lead to "Initiative Extinguishment" where expected results may not be immediate or it may result in "Initiative Burnout" where results, although being seen immediately, may take too long to be realized.

The exercise that will be presented at ABSEL has been adapted from two exercises from the book "Building Team Spirit: Activities for Inspiring and Energizing Teams" by Barry Heerman. The specific exercises are: "Sharing Individual and Team Goals" and "Fostering Consonant Values to Achieve Extraordinary Team Relationships."

The purpose of this exercise is:
    1. Clarify those sources of consonance (drivers) that lead to the formation of those unmet needs,
    2. Prioritize those values and identify the immediacy and the actions necessary to
       support those values
    3. Share those with others try to understand what leads to initiative development in others and strategies toward attainment of those goals (needs).

At the session, there will be more handouts of Exercise Instructions, Individual Spirit Harmonics, and Reflections on Individual Goal Development.

Exercise Instructions

1. Drawing from the list of consonance and dissonances from "Individual Spirit Harmonics," complete the "Reflections on Individual Goal Development." As you complete each sentence, keep in mind the following:
    a. Identify those consonant values that are most important in supporting your vision and rank order them in importance for development.
    b. What actions are necessary to support these values in myself?

2. Select the five most important and rank order them in terms of importance and consider the following:
    a. *How important are these to be fulfilled in the immediate future, near future, or distant future?*
    b. *What are your expectations of the immediacy of results from your efforts?*
    c. *What actions will you undertake in resolving a and b?*

3. Share those with others and compare the motivational strength resultant from your self-analysis.

    a. Are these things that can be accomplished by you alone or is outside assistance required?
    b. How is this assistance to be nurtured?
    c. What did you notice about yourself as a result of completing this activity as it relates to personal issues?
    d. What did you notice about how you set and accomplish personal goals? What influences explain your style?
    e. What were the personal goals that you identified in this activity?

Reflections on Individual Goal Development
Individual-Focused Items

1. Family who know me best say that my biggest accomplishment was ....
2. Friends who know me best say what my biggest accomplishment was ....
3. The talent or skill that I rely on to accomplish things in life is ......
4. The talent or skill that I would like to develop that would assist me in accomplishing things in my life is ....
5. The person who has done the most to influence my ability to accomplish goals in my life that I care about is .....
6. The influence that person had on me was ......

7. The most challenging things that I face in my life now are .....

8. The most interesting things I am working toward in my life are ....

9. The single most important goal that I have in my life at this time is ....

10. The next most important goal that I have in my life at this time is .....

11. What I would most like to have (and do not now have) is ....

12. What I most like to do with my time (away from work) is .....

Individual Spirit Harmonics
Consonances

(a combination of musical tones that have resolved--that is, they are in agreement)

Service
-- contribution: generously and freely giving to another
-- aligned execution: fulfilling, in a unified way, customer and team needs
-- mutual support: providing reciprocal assistance

Initiating
-- orientation: becoming familiarized and aware
-- belonging: feeling allied with a part of the team
-- trust: feeling reliant and secure about team members

Visioning
-- shared vision/values: agreeing on what is possible and its underlying worth and merit
-- compassion: experiencing empathy and concern for another
-- presence: deeply experiencing the purpose of the team

Claiming
-- goal/role alignment: agreeing on the outcome and the means for achieving it
-- organization support: securing the necessary resources from the organization
-- competence: developing skills and awareness needed to perform team roles

Celebrating
-- appreciation: feeling recognized and acknowledged
-- energy: experiencing vitality and aliveness
-- wonder: experiencing an unbounded sense of possibility

Letting Go
-- disclosure: revealing previously suppressed attitudes and opinions
-- constructive feedback: providing forthright responses that encourage growth
-- completion: feeling a sense of freedom when everything has been said

Dissonances
(a combination of unresolved musical tones)
Service
-- depletion: feeling used up, unable to freely give to another
-- uncoordinated action: incompletely fulfilling customer and team needs
-- unsupportiveness: acting without concern for others

Initiating
-- disorientation: experiencing disequilibrium and fear
-- alienation: feeling like a misfit, not part of the team
-- mistrust: feeling insecure and cautious about team members

Visioning
-- ambiguous vision/values: experiencing uncertainty about what is possible—let alone its underlying worth and merit
-- callousness: being insensitive and harsh
-- aridness: feeling barren and empty, without a sense of purpose

Claiming
-- nonalignment: disagreeing about the outcome and means for achieving it
-- nonsupport: being unable to secure the necessary resources from the organization
-- deficiency: not having the skills and awareness needed to perform team roles
Celebrating

-- nonappreciation: not feeling recognized and acknowledged
-- burnout: feeling used up and ineffective in the team
-- disenchantment: feeling repelled and put out

Letting Go
-- withheld communications: concealing attitudes and opinions from others
-- criticism: offering unsupportive critical feedback
-- incompletion: feeling regretful about withholding communications

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