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Chudesno, Inc.: An Evaluation of an Experiential Training and Development Simulation

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the evaluation and qualitative analysis of a training simulation entitled, "Chudesno, Inc.". The purpose of the simulation is to promote the transfer of knowledge and insight from experienced participants to less experienced or novice participants. The anticipated effect of this instructional design is that less experienced practitioners would learn effectively and efficiently by working with more experienced peers alone. Assessment surveys completed by participants before and after the simulation and interviews with selected participants were used as the basis of analysis. Results and implications for simulation design are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The field of experience based training and development (EBTD) is becoming more sophisticated and specialized. Recent advances in the field include specific processing techniques (Nadler & Luckner, 1992), integration of therapeutic interventions (Gass, 1991), and comprehensive research evaluation of training outcomes (Priest, Attarian, & Schubert, 1993). Despite these advances the future of experience based training has been questioned as faddish or inconsequential (Wagner, Roland, & Baldwin, 1991). Continued advancement of the field is essential if experiential training is to be viewed as meaningful by organizational clients.

CHUDESNO, INC.

In response to the rapid changes in the field of EBTD, this simulation was designed to facilitate the sharing of skills, strategies and creative ideas between experienced EBTD practitioners and others interested in EBTD. The immense amount of knowledge required to conduct corporate experiential training effectively might intimidate a new practitioner. It was hypothesized that by working with an experienced participant on a shared learning task that a less experienced participant would learn information in context.

Learning objectives for the simulation stated that learners should:

1. Discover new ideas, techniques, and resources in

the design of EBTD programs.

2. Dialogue with peers concerning the unique issues associated with EBTD programs.

3. Develop concrete plans and ideas for incorporation at their own training setting.

Introduction and Orientation

Participants were briefed on the purpose and process of the workshop. Participants were then asked to define themselves in terms of three levels of experience with EBTD:

Level 1: I am new to EBTD or have little experience with EBTD.

Level 2: I have some knowledge or experience with EBTD but do not consider myself a practitioner.

Level 3: I consider myself to be an EBTD practitioner. Teams of four were then formed, each team consisting of members with varying experience levels.

Each team of participants was provided with a profile of Chudesno, Inc., a description of the program participants, and the results of a comprehensive needs assessment. Teams had the opportunity to ask questions of the client in a large group format using a fishbowl technique.

Simulation Design

Each team was then asked design a one to three-day experiential training experience for this client. A format and some design suggestions were provided. Recommended issues to be addressed included desired outcomes, selection and design of activities, processing techniques, and transfer of learning to the workplace. During the program design phase of the workshop, the presenters played the role of the client, providing additional information as requested by the design teams.

ANALYSIS

Qualitative analysis of Chudesno, Inc. was directed at three primary questions:

1. Was the simulation perceived by participants as successful at attaining learning objectives?

2. Was the matching of participants from various

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experience levels perceived as effective in learning?

3. What were the dynamics between group members and how might these dynamics impact learning during the simulation?

These questions were addressed primarily from participant surveys presented at the beginning and at the end of the simulation. A focus group discussion of was also conducted following the simulation.

RESULTS

Written evaluations were collected from 46 of the 55 participants in the simulation. Of these respondents 19 reported themselves as being at Level 3 (practitioner), 21 at Level 2 (awareness), and 6 at Level 1 (novice) experience levels. Qualitative analysis of written these evaluation identified three themes associated with participants' perception of the Chudesno, Inc. experience:

Stratification of Experience Levels

Participants universally endorsed the concept of stratification by experience level. Levels 1 and 2 participants recognized specific gains from working with participants of greater experience. One suggestion was made that participants have time to share their previous experiences in EBTD at the beginning of group formation.

Several Level 1 and Level 2 participants could describe specific information or insights gained from level 3 participants. Some Level 3 participants indicated a need for a more advanced simulation. However, there was no indication that Level 3 participants felt the presence of less experienced group members inhibited their learning.

Level of Structure

One of the more dynamic aspects of the participants' evaluation was the assessment of the degree of structure needed in the simulation. Participants at all three experience levels indicated the need for more structure in both the fishbowl experience and the program planning sections of the simulation. At the same time, a number of participants at Levels 2 and 3 indicated that the lack of structure was a positive attribute of the experience.

Two novice participants indicated that they wanted more specific "answers" from the simulation facilitators regarding how the facilitators would respond to the simulation. One Level 3 participant felt the lack of structure made the experience less relevant for a Level 1 participant in his or her group.

Definition of Experience Level

One issue raised in both the evaluation and the focus discussion centered on the lack of consistency in participant's self-evaluation of experience level. A few Level 3 participants indicated their perception that other participants had over-represented their experience level. This was most evident in the fishbowl demonstration when a Level 3 volunteer was seen as less experienced and insightful than anticipated.

CONCLUSIONS

Consistent with the goals of qualitative inquiry, the purpose of this evaluation is to develop insights into potentialities of a simulation situation rather than to produce concrete recommendations for future practice. The analysis suggests that stratification of experience levels in simulation groups can be an effective technique. Clearly the success in this case was due in part to the fortuitous distribution of participants at all levels. This design would be limited by lack of experienced participants.

Given a diversity in experience levels, it may be difficult to adequately determine the most effective degree of structure to adopt. However, in this case, need for structure may have been as much a matter of differences in learning style as differences in experience level. Finally, the ambiguity of self-evaluation of experience level may be highly subjective. A more precise definition of each level (i.e., years experience, certification, etc.) may be helpful in clarifying the evaluation.

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