Thank You for Being a Peer (Coach) – Peer Coaching in the Classroom

Abstract:

Peer coaching is necessary for continuous development in rapidly changing work contexts. In this session, we describe two courses where we integrated peer coaching throughout the semester. We begin with introductions and a background on peer coaching, followed by a peer coaching preparation activity. We then outline peer coaching in the two courses. We conclude with further discussion and a final peer coaching activity. By the conclusion of this session, participants will understand the importance of peer coaching and be able to implement peer coaching into their classrooms.

Keywords: Peer coaching, feedback, developmental work relationships

Introduction

Peer coaching is necessary for ongoing learning and development in ever-changing work environments (Parker et al., 2008). In their comprehensive book on peer coaching, Parker, Hall, Kram, and Wasserman defined peer coaching as "A focused relationship between individuals of equal status who support each other's personal and professional development goals" (2018, p. 2). Peer coaching fosters student engagement (Trinh, 2017) and the development of various soft skills such as communication and empathy (Trinh, 2020).

The purpose of this session is to outline ways in which peer coaching can be incorporated into Organizational Behavior and Leadership courses. In an Organizational Behavior course, we incorporated peer coaching into a team project by integrating principles from Parker et al.'s book and best practices from performance management and feedback. In an online Leadership course, we incorporated peer coaching into an online asynchronous leadership class assignment by using principles from Trinh and Kolb's (2012) Eastern experiential learning model. After attending this workshop, attendees will be able to:

1. Describe why peer coaching is valuable.

2. Implement peer coaching within their own courses in both an in-person and online format.

3. Develop peer coaching relationships.

Theoretical Foundations and Teaching Implications

Developmental relationships and more recently, developmental networks, have long been recognized as essential for learning (Chandler et al., 2011; Dobrow et al., 2012; Kram, 1985). Developmental networks are comprised of multiple supportive individuals from various domains of a person's life such as friends, family, and other work and nonwork groups (Higgins & Kram,

2001). These individuals do not have to be within the person's organization and provide diverse forms of support (Dobrow et al., 2012). More recent research expands beyond these relationships to incorporate networks comprised of multiple developers and developers of equal status, such as peers (Chandler et al., 2011). Peer coaching removes some of the hierarchical barriers associated with mentoring, increasing psychological safety so individuals feel comfortable taking risks or asking questions (Parker et al., 2018). Peer coaching provides the ability to adapt and innovate quickly when organizational development initiatives may not be able to keep pace with technological changes (Parker et al., 2008).

Incorporating peer coaching into the classroom has multiple pedagogical advantages. As described, peer coaching develops skills such as communication and empathy (Trinh, 2020). Through peer coaching, students practice establishing developmental relationships and giving and receiving constructive feedback from their peers. Further, students discuss tricky areas with their peers, allowing them to think about course topics from multiple viewpoints. Finally, they will see their own development journey through others' perspectives (Parker et al., 2018).

Learning Objectives

Peer coaching can be incorporated into both undergraduate and graduate courses and, as evidenced by the activities presented, is conducive to both online and in-person formats. Our primary objective when incorporating peer coaching into the classroom is:

Demonstrate skills related to effective peer coaching, including giving and receiving feedback, listening, and goal setting.

Overview of Peer Coaching Course Integration

In the in-person Organizational Behavior course, students participate in multiple guided peer coaching sessions throughout the semester to enhance their team service project. As part of

this project, they write a final paper reflecting upon their experience, incorporating organizational behavior topics into their reflection. Immediately after forming teams, students create a team charter where they develop goals for the team and for themselves. Students are encouraged to provide ongoing feedback throughout the semester based on these team charters but have three formal check-ins throughout the course of the project. Prior to the check-ins, they prepare written feedback for each team member and reflect upon their own performance as well as the performance of the team in general. During the in-class peer coaching sessions, students provide an update on their current mood, work issues, and provide a brief report to help set the stage for the session. Students then discuss their prepared feedback with the team, identifying strengths, strategies for improvement, and tactics to meet their team and individual goals. Finally, they update their team charters to incorporate the feedback and strategies discussed through peer coaching.

In the online Leadership course, students participate in peer coaching activities on a weekly basis for the semester with two other students, using technology ranging from texting to video conferencing (e.g., Zoom) to communicate (Trinh, 2020). Students complete various activities and assignments for the class, then send materials to their peer coach. Peer coaches then read their partner's materials, write brief feedback to the materials, then email that feedback before their meeting allowing for time to reflect prior to meeting. Peer coaches comment on one piece that went well in the assignment, one piece that could be better, and something they would like to talk about more deeply. During the conversation, which is intended to last 60 minutes, the two peers take turns providing feedback about the materials provided, the course content, and/or the weekly course topic. Finally, students individually reflect on their learning for the entire week.

Both courses focus on continuous, reciprocal feedback that allows for more individualized development over the course of the semester. Additionally, our courses provide the opportunity to reflect upon peer coaching and think about how it affects their learning.

Session Description

We will begin the session with facilitator and audience introductions, a background on peer coaching, and a discussion of audience peer coaching experience. We will include a peer coaching preparation activity that we have used in the classroom. After our first short activity, we will discuss our methods for integrating peer coaching in the classroom and engage in a peer coaching session. Finally, we will conclude the session.

Our proposed schedule is as follows:

I.   Introduction (20 minutes)

    a. Facilitator and audience introductions

    b. Importance of peer coaching, session background, and why we became interested in this topic

    c. Audience experience with peer coaching

    d. Peer coaching preparation activity

II.   Descriptions peer coaching used in the classroom along with examples (25 minutes)

    a. In-person Organizational Behavior course

    b. Online Leadership course

III.   Peer Coaching Activity (10 minutes)

IV.   Wrap-up (5 minutes)

Time Requested

60 Minutes

Resources Needed

Laptop, projector

Application to Conference Theme:

We fully embraced the "Bridges" theme as peer coaching requires students to draw on their strengths and previous successes and failures to build bridges towards their current and future development. Further, students build bridges among each other when developing peer coaching relationships.

References

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