

Time travel: a discovery tool for identifying individual professional development needs

Thomas V Chacko

Background

After formal qualification, most practicing doctors try to update themselves to keep abreast with new knowledge and practice through periodic Continuing Medical Education (CME) programs. However, as opposed to CME which is teacher driven and only updates clinical knowledge, there is need for promoting Continuous Professional Development (CPD) which is individual learner driven based on individual learning needs and embraces developing and improving a broad range of skills and competencies necessary for improved medical practice. There is evidence from literature which shows that doctors become more motivated to learn and achieve required CPD goals when they discover their own CPD learning needs, plan their own CPD activities, do deliberate practice and receive feedback for improvement in practice at their own pace. This increased motivation is explained by the Need reduction theory. The Need reduction theory can be put to practice by doing a needs assessment (discrepancy analysis) which identifies the gap between “what is” and “what ought to be” (Fox & Miner, 1999).

The need for Innovation

Whereas identification of current level of competency can be done by either self-assessment against expected performance standards using a validated tool or by peer assessment of an individual’s performance in practice, or by chart audit, 360 degree evaluation by all stakeholders etc, the challenge is how and who will identify the “what ought to be” level of competency that will make the doctor an efficient and quality practitioner of the future.

Another challenge for organizers of CPD Programs is to be able to identify this competency gap within the workshop setting where performance assessment for determining the current competency level in practice is not a pragmatic option. Hence, to solve these practical difficulties, a workshop was designed to identify participants’ individual CPD training needs using the “Time Travel” method to identify

their “ought to be” level of professional and personal competencies so that they can compare that with their current “what is” level of competencies which enables them to perceive the gap between the two and thus get motivated to take steps in planning their own CPD program. Here, since the purpose was to make them motivated for sustained CPD efforts to improve competencies, self assessment of level of competencies through self-perception exercise was considered sufficient compared to the ideal of peer or expert assessment of competencies.

The Innovation

The participants are taken through a Time Travel exercise in which they are asked to visualize themselves 5 years from now and being appreciated by their patients/specialty fraternity/team members/relatives of patients and their own family members for their good qualities/behaviors/skills that is enabling them to excel professionally. This exercise helps them identify their expected “target” CPD competencies which are making them successful and appreciated by people who matter. Once they list these target competencies in their own words, they are then asked to go through the list of sub-competencies under each of the six ACGME Core competencies listed on a worksheet and

Dr Thomas V Chacko
Professor & Head,
Department of Community Medicine & Medical Education,
PSG Institute of Medical Sciences & Research,
Coimbatore 641004, India
Email: drthomasvchacko@gmail.com

identify which ones from among those identified by them closely match with the listed ACGME competencies.

They then go through the process of discrepancy analysis on the worksheet through self-assessment of the level of competency using the criteria on the Dreyfus competency scale (from "novice" to "expert" level) to identify their current as well as the visualized expected competencies thereby revealing those target competencies where the gap is the most.

This identification of their own gap in competency for individual competencies identified as essential for professional excellence helps prioritize them for planning a CPD program for themselves in their own practice setting.

This process was successfully used on a group of Health Care Practitioners who found the exercise relevant and effective in identifying their individual continuing professional development needs. This innovation is being shared so that CPD program planners and organizers can consider

it as an option for using time-travel as a method to help individuals discover their own target CPD competencies. This self-discovery of their own competency gap will help the practitioners get motivated enough to take up and sustain their CPD efforts to ensure that they become successful and sought after practitioners.

References:

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