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TEACHING STUDENTS REAL WORLD ENGAGEMENT SKILLS USING LIVE SIMULATIONS AND REFLECTIVE DISCUSSIONS

Abstract:

The objective of this ongoing interdisciplinary research is to expose the effects of group simulations (role-playing) on students' real-world engagement skills.

Project management (PM) is the implementation of knowledge, skills, tools and methods when planning and implementing activities required to meet project objectives (PMI, 2013). It includes identifying project requirements, defining clear and achievable goals, translating objectives into product attributes, working with teams and more.

To create a competitive advantage, organizations are required to improve the PM process and to implement appropriate training tools (Coral-Cordova, 2014).

Various studies show a significant need for implementing experiential learning processes to train employees in a safe environment to cope with real-world engagement and challenges in PM (e.g. Agile/Scrum). This requires an environment where participants can act as managers or different project roles without the costs and risks associated with an unsuccessful real project (Bar, 2011; Dantas, Barros & Werner, 2004; Larson & Drexler, 2010). Despite its emphasis on iterative learning, experiential project management learning is still ultimately oriented towards analytical thinking. Cognitive-science research show that simulations are an accelerated instrument for 'fabricating' a deeper understanding of situations that stay in the brain as real-world experiences. Also, simulations are a pleasurable and motivational method of learning (Bar, 2011; Davidoff, 2016; Kwanghyun & Saeon, 2016; Walter & Adam, 2014).

Another important aspect of this research is the use of video as part of the reflective process during the simulations. By watching and analysing videos together, students gain an understanding of their verbal and non-verbal messaging in critical situations. It promotes their understanding of the impact of their behaviours and decisions (Davidoff, 2016; Masats & Dooly, 2011; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2016).

This research program has run over the last four years among students from different disciplines: engineering, entrepreneurship, business management, technology and teacher education. The common ground between the diverse populations is the importance of learning to deal with communication challenges and dilemmas in every-day work. The simulation workshops expose the students to real-life situations in a safe learning environment. After filming the simulations, the team provide detailed feedback on observations from body language to strategies.

Ongoing mixed-methods analysis of the simulations and self-efficacy questionnaires completed by participants expose heightened empathy to all parties involved in different aspects of the projects; heightened awareness of the terms to create respectful/egalitarian discussions; wider variety of possible solutions to problems; better team cooperation in confronting ethical challenges and dilemmas; significant increase in students' Psychological Empowerment to handle real-world challenges.

Keywords:

Simulations, Real World Engagement Skills, Reflective Discussions, Video based reflections