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Childcare Center Communication

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Abstract

For my capstone project, I worked with the College of Southern Idaho Early Learning Center to identify their teacher and parent communication needs and then researched and reviewed communication platforms to implement a new application that allows parents and the daycare to chart the progress of their children. And it allows parents to stay in contact with their children's caregivers/teachers throughout the day. This helps parents be able to know what their children are doing while they are at work or school. I was also able to volunteer and help at the daycare in order to identify their needs regarding a total communication program. This was a wonderful experience because I was able to help improve the communication between parents and the childcare teachers and also spend time with the children.

Section 1: Introduction to Capstone Project

My capstone project was working with the College of Southern Idaho's Early Learning Center to help implement an application that would improve communication between caregivers and parents regarding their children's progress and daily activities. I have worked at the College of Southern Idaho Early Learning Center for years as my college schedule allows and so I really wanted to do something that would benefit the childcare professionals, parents, and children associated with the center.

In researching my project, I used a multi-faceted approach. I spent time in the childcare setting, spoke to the early childcare professionals, and interviewed parents of the children. After I gathered all of this information I could, I realized that one of the greatest needs identified by all of the people I spoke to and observed was in regards to communication.

Though I found that all of the individuals identified communication as a need. I did not really know if it was really a need or just a preference, so I began to research the importance of communication between the childcare teachers and the parents of the children in the childcare center.

Section 2: Elements Coming Together

Innovative Approach

Though all of the individuals I met with for this project identified communication as a need. I did not really know if it was really a need or just a preference, so I began to research the importance of communication between the childcare teachers and the parents of the children in the childcare center. In addition, I volunteered at the center to see how communication typically works between the childcare professionals and the parents.

What I found reinforced my choice of this capstone project. I had only thought of the social emotional reasons for frequent communication between the childcare teachers and the parents, but I found that frequent communication affects much more than that. Mena et al. (2020) found that it can even affect the health and nutrition of the children.

When applied to the context of parent and child care provider relationships, effective partnerships can promote collaboration between parents and child care providers to address child nutrition-related concerns. Frequent and open communication, mutual trust or confidence, and respecting each individual's share of competency or knowledge are key relationship characteristics needed for effective partnerships. In addition, parent involvement can also promote parent and child care provider partnerships. Studies have found that when child care providers share nutrition information with parents, parents provide healthier meals for their children. (p. 3)

Young children spend considerable time in childcare centers and so it is really important for the parents and the caregivers to communicate often in order to find effective ways for sharing the responsibilities that go into the caring of the children (Drugli & Undheim, 2012).

Drugli and Undheim (2012) also found that frequent communication between the childcare providers and the parents help the children with adapting to the childcare environment. This frequent communication about the children's day establishes a relationship that can allow for other important conversations regarding problems to occur. And finally, in their study, they also stated the preference of the parents to have as much information and communication about their children's day as possible.

I think there are two reasons my approach was innovative. First, my approach was innovative because I am mostly concerned with the connections I make with others and helping

them in any way I can. I believe this personal characteristic I have that really helps me be innovative because I think this is a somewhat unique approach to work in general.

Second, I believe my approach was innovative because I also conducted research in order to find less obvious reasons for this project besides just the desires of the parents and caregivers. For example, the fact that communication can actually affect the nutritional health of children is an impact that I don't think many people have considered as a result of effective communication.

Emotional Intelligence

I think that emotional intelligence in general is something that I have been working on for a long time. I think people with high emotional intelligence have a way of making connections with others that go beyond the workplace.

In fact, during my research of this topic for my capstone project, I found a study that cited the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership whether it is leading a project such as this or in my own business someday, emotional intelligence is critical because they are the emotional and social skills that affect the way we see ourselves, express ourselves, develop and continue relationships, overcome obstacles, and use emotional information in an effective way. In fact, technical skills are often less important than the different perspectives of emotional intelligence such as self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills in determining success (Issah, 2018).

In completing this project, I found that self-regulation and self-motivation were so very valuable to me as it kept me on track, assisted me during the hard aspects of this project, and helped me push through to the end. As important as self-regulation and self-motivation were to me during this project, I believe empathy and social skills were important as I worked with individuals. For instance, empathy and social skills assisted me in making connections with the

people I was meeting with. It took social skills to develop strong connections with the individuals and empathy was what allowed me to really listen to what they were saying in order to determine their needs.

Creative Thinking

“Creative thinking is among the most sought-after life and work skills in the 21st century. The demand for creativity, however, exceeds the degree to which it is available and developed” (Ritter & Gu, 2020, p. 1). I really thought my final approach would be a service-learning approach, but as I began writing about my project, I realized the action option was a better approach for this project. I think it can be difficult to stay 100 percent to your original plan. I think the ability to change things on the fly for the better is critical for success. This is not only a good lesson for this project but I think it is a valuable lesson for life in general.

In this project, I really focused on divergent thinking instead of convergent thinking. I didn't want to find the one solution for this childcare's needs, I wanted to find a communication solution that would even solve needs they didn't even realize could be solved through communication.

Innovative Solution

I was able to accomplish my project because it went very similar to what I intended from the start, but it did take a few unintended turns. When I first identified the Bright Wheel application to propose to the CSI Early Learning Center personnel, we discussed its differences and similarities to programs they had tried. About a year ago, they had started to use ProCare as a billing option and as I was researching all I could to meet the communication needs of the Center, I started looking into ProCare and found that it had a communication platform similar to Bright Wheel. The Early Learning Center personnel, however, had not taken advantage of this

portion of the platform though due to a variety of reasons. The biggest one was not having the time to actually learn it. It was there that my project took a turn. Instead of Bright Wheel, I was able to learn how to use the communication portion of the ProCare platform and teach it to an Early Learning Center representative in order to implement the communication platform for the Early Learning Center as a whole. Due to the time constraints of the Early Learning Center personnel, we decided upon a model where I taught one person and then assisted them with the implementation portion. This will allow the Center to begin using the platform and reflecting on the outcomes of using a communication program to increase the communication between the parents and childcare personnel.

In the end, I was able to do what I intended even though I used a different platform than Bright Wheel. I felt the change was a good one though because the intent of the entire project was to increase communication between parents and the childcare providers, not just to use a specific product. And one of the unintended outcomes of my project was that I also ended building a strong relationship with the CSI Early Learning Center children and the parents.

Section 3: Results

I think everyone involved in this project really benefited. Both the College of Southern Idaho Learning Center and the parents now have a communication platform to use and they are pleased with this new development. In the end, I want to bring happiness to people's lives and this was a unique way to accomplish that goal. In all, I don't think anyone benefited more than myself because the satisfaction and joy I felt in helping meet a need at the Early Learning Center as well as spending time with the children is the best gift I could have received. From this project, I learned about preparation and learning to come into situations with an open mind. I have a tendency to be bullheaded at times, but this project helped me grow as a person.

Section 4: Conclusion

From completing this capstone project, I believe I found myself considering and learning many of the skills I believe are the purpose of a capstone project being included as part of the multi-disciplinary studies program. For instance, though I used to work for the College of Southern Idaho Early Learning Center and still do during my college breaks, I was able to actually view the organization much differently as I viewed myself as a facilitator navigating situations that were much more about soft skills than the technical skills I had learned during my employment.

I am not saying that the experience and knowledge I have learned while working there did not inform my project, but it was really like Blanford et. al (2020) noted in that this capstone project required me to focus on the development of a wide range of hard and soft skills that are required by industry and employers. For example, I truly learned the value of preparing a strong plan because it can be critical to the success of the project. I also learned that enthusiasm can be the difference maker in how much you enjoy the process and how successful it ends up being. Projects like this are a marathon, not a sprint. It can be important to enjoy the little things in a long project like this.

Though the project as a whole went well, hindsight is 20/20, so of course, I have already identified things I could have done better. For instance, I don't think I would have gone into the situation with a product in mind. I believe a better approach would have been to just totally go in and observe and listen. Though I tried to do that to a point, I believe I had a few preconceived ideas that informed both what I saw and what I heard. But that is the beauty of reflection. I get the opportunity to look back at that situation and try to implement that knowledge in future

situations. Right now, I am excited to encounter those future situations, and I am excited to continue to grow as a person.

References

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Appendix

A. Link to capstone project:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wexJb_cwuLdvEnPW4A5QA4CdvNqOMxUa/view?usp=sharing