8 Minutes to Performance Improvement
Effectively Using Positive Deviant Wisdom to Change Behavior

William Seidman, Ph.D.
Michael McCauley

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Non-experts can be enticed to review Positive Deviant wisdom in just a few minutes through a series of questions that tap into personal motivation

- There is only a 90 second window to convince non-experts to take ownership for applying the Positive Deviant wisdom to their environment and changing their behavior.

- The non-expert must have *instant engagement* which is created by *instant credibility*.

- Digital Coach Technology (DCT™) creates instant engagement for the non-expert. It engages the non-experts' "passion" for their work, stimulating both a cognitive and an emotional response that promotes instant application.

- The non-experts change their behavior almost immediately – in most cases within the first 8 minutes of engagement. They enter a state of accelerated learning from which they behave in accord with the Positive Deviants' wisdom.

- Instant engagement creates an opportunity for sustained performance improvement producing significant results

This is part 2 in a series of articles on the discovery and reuse of Positive Deviant wisdom. This article focuses on the practical application of Positive Deviant wisdom by non-experts to resolve real challenges. Other articles focus on the discovery process itself and on using DCT™ to significantly expand performance improvements.

CEREBYTE

8 Minutes to Performance Improvement
Effectively Using Positive Deviant Wisdom to Effect Behavior Change

William Seidman, Ph.D.
Michael McCauley

▌ FIRST, A STORY…

At a recent wisdom discovery session, someone asked a "stupid" question:

> *"So, now that we've gathered all this wonderful Positive Deviant wisdom, what are we going to do with it?"*

A stunned silence ensued.

Rewind to the beginning.

The Mergers and Acquisitions (M&A) expert had consistently and systematically outperformed all the other M&A professionals in the company. Learning his "secret sauce" and aligning the processes of the 200 other M&A specialists with his "secret sauce" could produce millions of dollars in additional profits.

> *Too much attention is often paid to gathering expertise while too little is focused on leveraging it to improve performance.*

The company had previously tried interviewing him, following him around, and videotaping him in an effort to identify and gather his tacit wisdom, but they were never satisfied that they truly understood the subtle factors that made him so successful. Now, with a new approach to discovery based on "digital coaching technology (DCT™)," they knew they had it.

His secret sauce was tremendous. It included such subtle wisdom as:

- The identification and interpretation of a particular type of phrase uttered by the CEO or CFO of the acquiring company that communicated the "real" reasons for the acquisition

- How he aligned the decision-making process with these real reasons

- His ability to focus in on a single clause in a specific type of contract that typically determined the likelihood of a successful merger or acquisition

They were very excited. And then that pesky question was asked.

> *"So, now that we've gathered all this wonderful Positive Deviant wisdom, what are we going to do with it?"*

They had been so focused on gathering the Positive Deviants' secret sauce that they had failed to think about what they were going to do with it once they had it. Furthermore, they intuitively knew that the conventional wisdoms of creating a binder or a training course from the material could not possibly communicate the intensity, sophistication and depth of the wisdom. They wondered: *"Why bother to collect wisdom if there is no plan or means to make it useful to the organization?"*

Unfortunately, the story recalled above is both an actual situation and a standard set of responses that are typical of how many organizations have tried to use Positive Deviant wisdom to improve

performance. Too much attention is spent on trying to *gather expertise and create best practices* while too little attention is focused on enabling less experienced or successful people to *reuse Positive Deviant wisdom* to improve their own performance.

This article presents an approach for facilitating the application of Positive Deviant wisdom by non-experts. Specifically, it discusses the factors (including DCT™) that promote the use of Positive Deviant wisdom by creating the experience of personal mentoring for many non-experts simultaneously and at low cost. Where this approach has been used, it has caused significant behavioral change and improvement of non-experts in as little as eight minutes. For one quick service restaurant chain, the improvements increased sales by $2,000 per week per restaurant!

A SURPRISING OMISSION

Why do organizations place so much emphasis on collecting Positive Deviant wisdom, and almost none on using that wisdom? Simply put, collection is the easy part – it's the sustainable reuse that is hard!

Getting non-experts to use Positive Deviant wisdom requires a solid understanding of four separate disciplines, as well as the ability to integrate those disciplines (Figure 1).

The disciplines are:

- Human cognitive processing (how we think about and process information) – this is essential for understanding both how the Positive Deviants structure their wisdom and how non-experts absorb that wisdom

- Human motivation (what makes us act in certain ways) – getting the non-expert motivated enough to take ownership for absorbing the Positive Deviant wisdom is the single most critical, and most difficult, component of success

- Organizational dynamics (how organizations behave) – both cognition and motivation must be wrapped in an organizational context. If these do not align, no behavioral change takes place
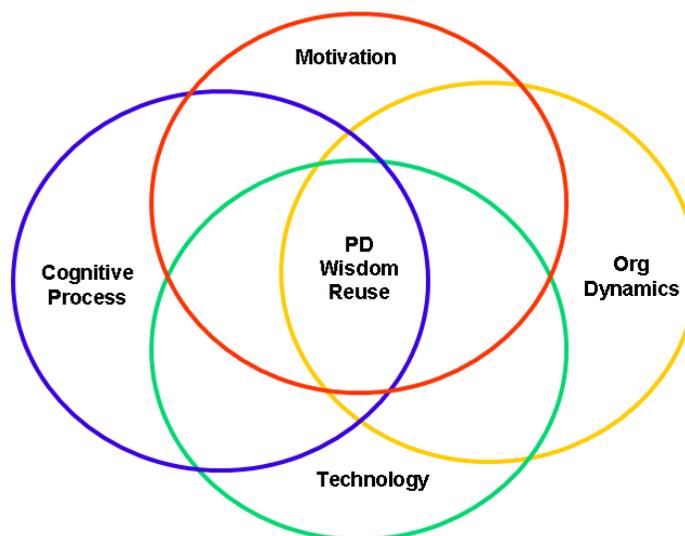

Figure 1: The Zone of Wisdom-based Performance Improvement

- Technology – this includes both the design of the interface, which is the single most critical technical area, and the underlying architecture of the system that enables the integration of the above processes

As a non-expert attempts to use Positive Deviant wisdom, these factors interact with each other. For example, guiding the non-expert to take ownership (motivation) for the Positive Deviant wisdom (cognitive), the architecture of any support system must have a capability for local adaptation and connectivity (technical), as well as a means of centrally storing and maintaining the approved best practices (organizational). All four aspects of using Positive Deviant wisdom are constantly interacting and must be treated as completely integrated to create quick, effective behavior change.

All four aspects of using Positive Deviant wisdom are constantly interacting and must be treated as completely integrated.

Not surprisingly, this is not a comfort zone for many people or organizations. Historically, training courses and binders have focused more on the cognitive while e-learning and knowledge management have focused more on the technology. Few, if any, systems are focused on either motivation or organizational factors. To make matters worse, until now, nobody has recognized the importance of an integrated approach.

A CRITICAL DEFINITION

Non-expert use of Positive Deviant wisdom has received so little attention that there isn't even a commonly accepted definition of the process. Here is our definition:

Reuse of wisdom is the application of another person's wisdom to a new situation, without them present, in a way that produces a significant productivity gain.

There are several key elements to this definition. First, non-experts must actually use the wisdom in a new situation. This is not a frivolous idea. It is impossible to establish any meaningful value if the non-experts don't use the Positive Deviant wisdom in a new situation. Yet, the majority of knowledge management training and process engineering is about creating databases, binders and passive learning systems that produce little or no actual reuse of the knowledge.

Next, they must use the wisdom without the Positive Deviant present. Again, this is an important idea. Communities of practice and personnel profilers all require the Positive Deviant to be present, undermining Positive Deviant productivity and disenfranchising the Positive Deviants over time. Reusing wisdom is only meaningful when it is successfully done without the Positive Deviants present.

Finally, use of the wisdom must create a "significant productivity gain," otherwise it is a waste of resources. This is the real payoff. Wisdom doesn't have value to the organization in itself. It only has value if it produces value. A remarkable amount of "information" has remarkably little sustained value. If you can't foresee a well-defined gain, you should not be collecting the content!

This definition creates a very high standard of performance, but anything less is meaningless. Even though each element of it is essential to wisdom reuse, it will no doubt frighten many people.

REUSE MODELS

There have, of course, been many previous efforts to use Positive expert

wisdom. Generally, these efforts fall into three categories (Fig 2), each of which has some significant weakness. The three categories are: print media, classroom training and personal mentoring.

Print media, such as a book and the ever-present corporate binder, has the advantage of being relatively inexpensive to expand for additional usage. Once you have written a book or created a binder, it is easy and inexpensive to duplicate it for another person. But these media are expensive to initially develop, tend to be difficult to adapt to unique circumstances, and perhaps most importantly, the application of the knowledge is solely the responsibility of the end user. Actual application and utilization of the knowledge is problematic. Also, print media tends to reflect the company perspective, or the "official story" (e.g., they way things should be done *in theory*), leaving little room for people's reality. Costs are low, but so is the impact.

Training covers a wide range of activities from lectures to workshops. Lectures have many of the same characteristics as print media. Adding another person to a lecture is not expensive, but the initial cost of the lecturer can be substantial. Like print media, the attendee must apply the knowledge to their situation without direct support. Again, overall costs as well as impact are low.

In workshops, these ratios change somewhat. While there is a greater impact of the knowledge due to the direct work of applying it to specific situations, it is difficult and expensive to add additional people to the workshop. For workshops, both costs and impacts are moderate.

Mentoring is at the other end of the continuum from print materials. The impact of mentoring is quite high. In fact, when people are asked to identify their main mechanism for reusing

Category	Pro	Con
Print Materials	• Low cost of distribution • Can be centrally managed and maintained	• High cost of development • Difficult to adapt • Focuses on "official story" rather than reality • Application of knowledge is responsibility of end user • Limited impact
Training	• Moderate cost of distribution • Classroom application of knowledge facilitated by session leader	• Moderate cost of development • Ultimate application of knowledge is responsibility of end user • Moderate impact
Mentoring	• High, immediate impact • Application of knowledge "coached" by mentor • Low cost of development	• High cost of distribution • Limitations on speed of distribution

Figure 2: Categories of Knowledge Reuse

knowledge, after tepidly mentioning the above approaches, they invariably state that they call a mentor when something really matters. Mentoring has immediate impact and applicability, but it is very expensive. A mentor can transfer not only knowledge, but actual wisdom. Unfortunately, they can transfer it to only a few people at a time. While the impact is high, so are the costs.

Clearly, the goal in transferring true wisdom should be to achieve high impact at low cost. Using the above categories as a model, the optimum solution would be achieving the impact of mentoring at the cost of printing. While this is a laudable goal, it is not easy to do because successful mentors do many subtle things to enhance their mentoring impact. In particular, they must immediately motivate naïve people to initially participate and then create almost instant, but sustainable engagement by the non-expert.

It is really the immediate, sustainable engagement that produces the initial performance improvement and, as the above discussion demonstrates, there hasn't been a fully satisfying model for reusing someone else's knowledge, let alone their wisdom…at least until now!

Effectively applied, DCT™ can produce that initial performance improvement in at little as 8 minutes!

MOTIVATING "NAÏVE" PARTICIPATION

One challenge of the previous solutions is getting the non-experts to look at the content in the first place. Such resistance takes many forms including: "We're too busy" or "Our culture would never be this organized."

However, on closer examination, it is clear that systematically using Positive Deviant wisdom is not, in fact, a wholly

> *It is really the immediate, sustainable engagement that produces the initial performance improvement.*

new activity. People spend considerable time and effort getting organized for any given function they are expected to perform, particularly if they are new to the function. As part of this, they spend time and effort trying to learn from others. Thus, a systematic approach to using Positive Deviant wisdom to get better organized is just taking a process that is occurring frequently but inefficiently and making it more efficient. Recognition of the opportunity for increased efficiency motivates initial participation by non-experts.

More specifically, initial participation is accomplished through a simple process that leads to a strong desire to use the Positive Deviant wisdom. Here are some of the questions that motivate participation:

Do you expect to spend at least a little time getting organized before you perform this function? (Almost always, the answer is "Yes")

What is the minimum time you expect to spend getting organized for this function? (Typically "several days," if the function is substantive)

If you could become significantly better organized in just 30 minutes, would you be willing to use a different approach to achieve that result? (Always, "You bet!")

These three questions lead to a simple, final question that almost always results in participation:

Do you want to continue to do what you are already or do you want to do it more efficiently? (Again, the answer is always, "If I had the option, I'd rather do it quickly and move on!")

Most people opt for improved efficiency and become engaged!

Instant Engagement

Ninety seconds!!! Our experience indicates that, once you get a non-expert to participate, you only have an additional ninety seconds to convince them to continue their engagement. Non-experts are so inundated with information that they have become extremely skilled at screening out anything they don't think is valuable and relevant – immediately!

To effectively use the ninety-second window an approach must have two elements:

- *Instant credibility* for the content – the non-expert must instantly perceive that the content is rich, realistic and useful
- *Instant application* of the content to their actual situation – the non-expert must immediately move from thinking that this is good information to thinking that using the information can personally help them

Instant Credibility

Credibility is largely created by the energy, passion and realism of the content. Does this sound familiar? The foundation of instant credibility is, of course, the type of wisdom discovered using the approach described by the first article in this series. Content that demonstrates the emotional reasons people commit to excellence and its realistic application to varying complex circumstances entices and engages the non-expert.

For example, the more effective managers of a pharmacy chain thought of their job as "Making the pharmacy a fundamental part of the each family's medical support system." Less-effective managers thought of their job as

"Writing 120 prescriptions a day." Similarly, top performing managers at a semi-conductor manufacturing company thought of their performance management system as "refreshing and energizing the organization by identifying and rewarding the future leaders" while less effective managers thought of it as being primarily for "equitable pay administration." Which would you rather do, help families and "energize the organization," or write prescriptions and administer pay? Not surprisingly, most new managers are more engaged by the former which leads to a significant, immediate increase in interest and participation.

Conversely, content based on "official stories," as found in most training materials and process binders, is immediately rejected. You *must* have great, realistic content to get any significant performance improvement!

Instant Application

Instant credibility alone does not improve performance, however. Within that first 90 seconds, the non-expert must also be convinced that the content is useful to them personally. They must think of it as somehow improving their lives, making their job easier, or improving their efficiency. This is accomplished by having the non-expert concisely modify the Positive Deviant wisdom to "fit their particular situation" and reflect *"their passion"* for the subject.

This approach has the effect of first engaging the non-expert in the material, then causing a subtle transition from a cognitive process to a motivational process. Having the non-expert modify the content causes them to carefully read it. The emphasis on being concise causes the non-expert to ask, "What is really important?" The prompt for passion causes the non-expert to expand
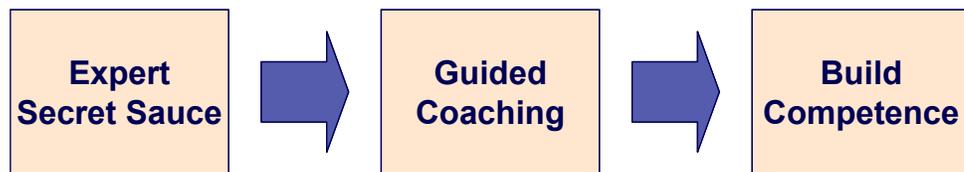
Figure 3: Digital Coaching Technology (DCT™) Structure

that question and ask, "What is really important *to me*?" As soon as the "to me" part is added, you have substantial, sustainable engagement.

For example, in the semi-conductor performance management system, non-experts tended to begin adaptation by highlighting and preparing to delete the "refresh and energize" portion of the description. After all, the program was about pay administration! But they always stopped before completing the deletion, gave the system a contemplative look and made comments like: "This is really different, but better than I was thinking" or "This is a really good way to think about the program." When there was a manager present, an intense dialogue ensued about the focus of the program that produced in-depth alignment by the non-expert with the program goals as well as a motivated non-expert.

Typically, this approach results in almost immediate, observable changes in non-expert behavior. The non-expert leans forward more, focuses more intently on the screen and breathes more rapidly. When there is someone else present, the language of the dialogue becomes more intense and specific to applying the content to the non-expert's situation. Non-expert behavior is changed, and performance improvement begins, usually in just eight minutes.

DIGITAL COACHING TECHNOLOGY (DCT™)

While these results are impressive, for most people mentoring is an intensely personal, expensive, one-one experience. How then can an organization possibly achieve these mentor-like performance improvements for hundreds of people simultaneously? Enter Digital Coaching Technology™!

DCT™ is software that emulates the human mentoring experience. It uses a highly structured process (see Fig. 3) consisting of a specialized interview that causes Positive Deviants to tell their stories (called the "naïve new person stories"), polish those stories into repeatable best practices, and store the best practices in an archive. When an inexperienced person needs to perform the same function, instead of asking the Positive Deviant to mentor them, they recall the best practice from the archive and are "coached" through performing the function as though the human Positive Deviant was there.

The actual digital "coaching" is accomplished by a series of on-screen prompts that simulate the questions, feedback and direction provided by an experienced mentor guiding a non-expert to improved performance. The prompts include explicit directions such as "Modify the Positive Deviant wisdom to fit your specific situation," as well as subtle screen and system design that guides behavioral change.

For example, some DCT™ fields are deliberately undersized. The resulting subtle visual pressure to be concise causes the non-expert to focus in on what is important to them (one of the criteria for instant application), causing them to take ownership of the content.

Similarly, in a section on risks, if the non-expert does not respond to the Positive Deviant information about risk management, DCT™ generates a "guilt" screen that causes the non-expert to confront an area of discomfort. DCT™ combines cognitive, motivational, organizational and technological elements in a way that produces results very similar to the human mentoring experience.

In fact, non-experts typically stop distinguishing between the digital coach and a human coach by the second web page. Thus, DCT™ creates the impact of mentoring at the cost of replicating software.

Furthermore, because DCT™ is based on almost universal human capabilities, it can be applied to any specific content. It has been used for such diverse purposes as coaching performance improvement for managing fast food restaurants (think of this as high school kids in hair nets), safety management at naval shipyards and launching interplanetary vehicles.

> *Non-experts typically stop distinguishing between the digital coach and a human coach by the time they are interacting with the second web page.*

SUSTAINING PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

Eight minutes to visible performance improvement tends to motivate non-experts. They feel good about the capabilities they can see developing. But immediate improvement does not, necessarily, lead to sustained improvement.

Mentors use several other processes to sustain their initial impact, including:

- Separating the content into a high-level overview and detailed content in a way that enables the non-expert to first develop a sustainable, high-level conceptual framework (a "platform of trust") and then drill down for the application of the detailed information

- Utilizing a sequence of "Read, Feedback, and Adapt™" to engage the non-expert in specific discussions about the content and how it applies to their situation

- Driving for commitments to actions, complete with dates, which is done to ensure that the non-expert both truly understands the content and will actively use it

- Continuously monitoring the performance of the non-expert, providing support and further guidance as needed

Together, these processes, again supported by DCT™, create both sustained performance improvement and continuous development of the Positive Deviant wisdom. The process for creating these is beyond the scope of this article, and will be the focus of the third article in this series.

ALTERNATIVES TO DCT™

Are there viable alternatives to the use of DCT™ for the application of Positive Deviant wisdom? We don't think so – at least not today!

Many things have been tried in the recent past, but few have succeeded. The most common past approaches have been process binders, training courses, e-learning, centralized knowledge, and document databases. These have failed for many reasons, including:

- They provide little that motivates the initial non-expert participation

- Their content is consistently rejected by users because it is too "official"

- Their content is often lacks context, becoming data and document trivia
- Their content is usually too generic to be meaningful
- They provide little (or no) emphasis on applying the knowledge (much less a complete tracking capability)
    - They are considerably more labor intensive and expensive to create and use than DCT™

More generally, these approaches have little understanding of the importance of integrating cognitive, motivational, organizational and technological processes. At best, they may account for two of these elements, but never all four. Yet all four are essential to create effective application of Positive Deviant wisdom by non-experts.

> *The impact of gathering and reusing Positive Deviant wisdom is staggering!*

BENEFITS OF APPLYING POSITIVE DEVIANT WISDOM

Does this matter? Only if you are interested in these types of results:

- 80% reduction in the time it takes a non-expert to get organized to perform an Positive Deviant function
- 50% reduction in the time it takes to train the non-expert to perform the Positive Deviant function
- 30-50% reduction in the time it takes the non-expert to perform the Positive Deviant function

Translating this into something more specific, here are some of the impacts reported by businesses that have used DCT™:

- A global test and measurement company reduced the time

required to get organized for the launch of a new product from six weeks to just four days
- A semi-conductor manufacturer eliminated eighteen days per manager per year of repetitive activity
- A shop floor automation software company was able to support nine implementations simultaneously, with the staffing level that previously only supported three

In addition, organizations that already sell wisdom in the form of consulting services have created supplemental product lines by selling wisdom in DCT™ formats. One safety consulting company expects to double its revenues (from $2M to $4M) by adding a digital safety coach to their offerings.

SUMMARY

The impact of gathering and reusing Positive Deviant wisdom is staggering. Upon reflection, such impacts are not really surprising. Much of what we actually do is based on a foundation of repeatable behaviors. By reusing wisdom, we actually get to rationalize the repeated portions of our behavior to the point where they are very efficient, thereby creating a net productivity gain. DCT™ can produce the impact of mentoring at the cost of print. It reduces systems costs while increasing productivity –isn't that what we want?

Cerebyte, Inc.
Lake Oswego, OR
t: 888.355.0213
f: 503.624.1642