

AN EXPLORATION OF THE PERCEIVED VALUE OF HIGHLY SOCIO-INDUCTIVE LEARNING

Daphne DePorres
University of Monterrey
daphne.deporres@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

An exploration of the perceptions of students in an Organization Development masters program in Monterrey, Mexico offers a unique window into what is valued by managers and leaders who purposefully seek to develop the skills necessary to facilitate, respond to, and manage change.

Three propositions were explored in this exploratory study:

P₁ - Although more challenging overall, learners value learning methods that are highly socio-inductive for knowledge generation.

P₂ - Learning methods that are in the upper left hand quadrant of the socio-inductive/technical-deductive grid are more challenging to implement than other learning methods that are commonly used.

P₃ - Highly socio-inductive learning (HSIL) methods require high levels of student responsibility.

Two cohorts of the program were surveyed for their assessment of eight items related to the three propositions.

Cohort 1 had just completed 3 of 7, 5-day modules. Cohort 2 had just completed 7 of 7, 5-day modules.

The two groups of students found the HSIL pedagogy in the guise of the Field Experience most influential in their learning, most intellectually challenging, contributed most to the generation of knowledge, required the most responsibility on their parts (See Appendix 1). Students also indicated that the social component of learning processes of the masters program were very important. These findings support propositions 1 and 3. Highly Socio-inductive learning is a pedagogy that appears to have value for students and one that presents challenges that other, less social or inductive pedagogies.

INTRODUCTION

Masters students of the University of Monterrey's program in Organization Development, who are also managers and leaders in their own organizations, have chosen to further educate themselves so as to be able to successfully meet the challenges posed by rapidly changing environments. An exploration of the

Figure 1. : Definitions of Organization Development

Organization development is an effort (1) planned, (2) organization-wide, and (3) managed from the top, to (4) increase organization effectiveness and health through (5) planned interventions in the organization's "processes," using behavioral-science knowledge. **Beckhard (1969).**

Organization Development is a long-range effort to improve an organization's problem-solving and renewal processes, particularly through a more effective and collaborative management or organization culture- with special emphasis on the culture of formal work teams-with the assistance of a change agent, or catalyst, and the use of the theory and technology of applied behavioral science, including action research. **French & Bell (1978).**

Organization Development is a response to change, a complex educational strategy intended to change the beliefs, attitudes, values, and structure of organizations so that they can better adapt to new technologies, markets, and challenges, and the dizzying rate of change itself. **Bennis (1969).**

Organization Development is a process whereby actions are taken to release the creative and productive efforts of human beings at the same time achieving certain legitimate organizational goals such as being profitable, competitive and sustainable. **(Dyer, 1997 cited in Egan, 2002).**

Organization Development is a system wide application of behavioral science knowledge to the planned development and reinforcement of organizational strategies, structures and processes, that lead to organization effectiveness. **(Cummings and Worley, 2001 cited in Egan, 2002).**

Developments in Business Simulation and Experiential Learning, Volume 34, 2007

perceptions of this population offers a unique window into what is valued by managers and leaders who purposefully seek to develop the skills necessary to facilitate, respond to, and manage change (see figure 1 for definitions of organization development).

As the environments surrounding organizations change, the education of organizational managers and leaders must change as well (De Jongh & Prinsloo, 2005; Dehler, Welsh & Lewis, 2001). Of pertinent interest to educators is the ongoing challenge to match pedagogy to the changing requirements of learners. This paper examines the perception of student value of some of the Dehler, Welsh & Lewis, 2001). Of pertinent interest to educators is the ongoing challenge to match pedagogy to the changing requirements of learners. This paper examines the perception of student value of some of the core educational processes experienced by students who desire to become “change agents” or change practitioners in the tradition of the field of organization development and change. The question of interest is: are the elements of the pedagogy discussed herein - highly socio-inductive learning – valued by students, who themselves lead and manage, as relevant to in today’s rapidly changing organizational contexts?

KEY VARIABLES DEFINING ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

There is variation across the published definitions of Organization Development. In a study published in 2002, T. Marshall Egan reported findings illuminating 10 dependent variables that emerged during an analysis of 27 definitions of Organization development published between 1969 and 2002. The variables are:

1. Advance Organizational Renewal
2. Engage Organization Culture Change
3. Enhance Profitability and Competitiveness
4. Ensure Health and Well-being of Organizations and Employees
5. Facilitate Learning and Development
6. Improve Problem Solving
7. Increase Effectiveness
8. Initiate and/or Manage Change
9. Strengthen System and Process Improvement
10. Support Adaptation to Change

In order to impact and influence change in any of the variables cited above, students must become proficient in facilitating and navigating processes that positively impact both social and technical elements of human system(s). It is not difficult to also make the connection between learning about processes that facilitate change in the current environment and organizational contexts, but also the pedagogies that support this type of learning.

In addition to traditional educational approaches to gaining knowledge and proficiency in the field, such as lectures, assigned readings, written assignments, and recall-based examinations, educators in our Organization Development program draw on learning mechanisms which

require significant interaction amongst students and faculty. In this manner, students identify and resolve or achieve opportunities and challenges that student’s face in their organizations. The next section outlines the unique features of the MDO program which enable Socio-Inductive pedagogy.

THE MDO PROGRAM

The *Maestria en Dessarrollo Organizacional* (MDO) program at the University of Monterrey celebrated its 30th anniversary this year. The program has matriculated over 900 students. Several factors support the perception that the MDO program provides value for students and the university, and by extrapolation, the community: the significant history of the program, the program’s continued presence among the high priority strategic foci of the university, and its recognition as (cite Expansion article).

If the MDO program has been longitudinally successful, remains on the university’s strategic radar and is nationally recognized, then what is it about the program that provokes such notice? Since its inception in 1976 the MDO program utilizes, among its pedagogical supports, an approach relatively rare in higher education. This pedagogy, which we will call *highly socio-inductive learning* (HSIL), borrows from several theoretical traditions, as will be explored in a later section of this paper.

UNIQUE FEATURES OF THE MDO PROGRAM

Students who enter the Organization Development program contract with the University to become educated as scholar-practitioners who seek to assist human systems to achieve specific objectives, related to one or more of the variables listed above. The human systems referred to are typically for-profit and not-for-profit organizations, subsets of those organizations and/or their stakeholders. Students of the program range in age from 25 to 50 years, are often leaders and/or managers in small, medium and large Mexican companies, and are specialists in a wide variety of functional areas.

Housed in the School of Business, the MDO program has several structural elements that are significantly different from many other business-oriented programs:

- a) Cohort
- b) Modular
- c) Emphasis on Self as Instrument
- d) Field Practice and Practical Application

Students enter the program, participate in learning activities, and complete the program with a group of students, the cohort, who also pass through these phases with them. Each cohort ranges from 10 to 20 students, bound together through common experience. The preeminent of the many experiences of the program is the five- day “module,” of which there are seven in the program. The module features an intensive social

Developments in Business Simulation and Experiential Learning, Volume 34, 2007

environment, where members of the cohort participate in learning activities with each other during 8 to 12 hour days (although during several residential modules these days are much longer). Learning and generating personal knowledge about the field of Organization Development and Change are the primary goals. However, examination, reflection, and possible change of one's own assumptions, behaviors, values, and presence are a key dimension of the program and feature prominently in the consideration of the program as a whole.

The three components mentioned so far (cohort, module, and self as instrument) support the intentions of the program to promote learning through experiences where practical application of learnings is highly desired.

HIGHLY SOCIO-INDUCTIVE LEARNING

Wilson and Beard remind us that theories developed to illuminate the phenomena of learning, education, training, and development are all too often produced in separate disciplinary silos. A consequence of the isolationistic development of theories is the lack of a commonly shared and integrated understanding of learning and its processes (2003). The educational processes utilized in the *Maestria en Desarrollo Organizacional* (MDO) program span institutional and disciplinary boundaries, to optimize the learning experiences of adult learners. The overall approach to education in the MDO program is based upon a socially-bound, highly interactive cross-disciplinary exploration of relevant which results is intended to produce actionable knowledge. To encapsulate, we will call this form of knowledge creation Highly Socio-Inductive Learning (See figure 2.).

Socio-inductive Learning refers to teaching methods which pursue knowledge through attempts to resolve real or realistic dilemmas using methods which depend upon significant interaction among learners, and are inductive in nature; where the identification of, and integration of, theory proceeds during and after the learning experience, as opposed to a pre-experience emphasis on theory. This pedagogical stance disavows the "decontextualized transmission of abstract and universal knowledge and expertise" (Mingers, 2000) in which students are often passive sponges, soaking up knowledge bestowed by professors and then regurgitating it to please the professor or obtain a grade (Freire cited in Snowden, 2004).

Socio-inductive pedagogical stance is supported by the premise that "learning is a shared social activity" (Sawyer, 2004) and "learning is enhanced by social interaction" (Cooperstein & Kocevar-Weidinger, 2004). To this end, it is supported by the unique structural components of the MDO program that form the musculature of the constructive process. The use of a cohort, modular learning sessions, emphasis on self as instrument, and field practice/practical application conform with what Mingers advocates when he writes that learning should be a process of self development,

in which knowledge is acquire through its relevance to the real-life engagements and struggles of the learner" (2000).

In a socio-dependent setting (must work with others) with an inductive orientation (theory emerges), students find themselves trying to make sense of things during learning situations by asking "What is this? What's going on? What should I do?" Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld assert that making sense of situations that provoke these questions occurs through communication (2005).

This viewpoint is congruent with critical theory, which assumes that knowledge is closely bound to those who produce the knowledge, their concerns, and their own ways of legitimizing eventuations (Ryan and Grieshaber, 2004).

Johnson (2006) suggests that the generation of new knowledge is the most challenging and oft-neglected when discussing the learning process. Johnson (2006) suggests that this inductive approach leads to deeper wisdom on the part of the participant and during the process provides an environment that is alive with relevant discussion and also produces the benefit of personal growth.

The socio-inductive approach used in the MDO program is called "problem-based learning" by Prince and Felder (2006). Problem-based learning calls for a real, multi-faceted problem, whose solution is desired by either the learner or a client who has a vested interest in the solution of the problem. Prince and Felder cite that "problem-based learning" is the most challenging of the inductive knowledge creation methods discussed in their paper for several reasons; problem-based learning is often undertaken in a team setting and there are many interpersonal dynamics, some of them troublesome to students when they are required to work in teams; problem-based learning requires that facilitators or teachers have a highly developed skill set that enables them to assist students with widely varied and often unpredictable technical challenges that occur in the course of the experience ; problem-based experiences take time to create and certainly take time to implement which sometimes leads to; resistance to undertaking problem-based learning itself, as it differs quite dramatically from what many students consider "education" or "learning"(2006).

This approach is far from new and has been visited by scholars, among them John Dewey. Glassman reminds us that Dewey recognized the value of making empirical discoveries through action and inquiry and then using the information to solve problems. Dewey also noted that the inquiry-application model may be inadequate as great may be the number and importance of information that is missed during the observation and assimilation processes, and when failing to determine how recognized pieces fit within the learner's experience (2004).

THE STUDY

Correspondent with Dewey's notation that much can be missed during educational processes if the learning is not adequately connected with the learner's own experience, the

Developments in Business Simulation and Experiential Learning, Volume 34, 2007

MDO seeks to optimize the possibilities that this connection will occur. Anecdotal evidence indicates that we do. However, we had never tested this assumption directly. In our attempt to address the overarching research question, this study considered three propositions related to the HSIL methods employed in the program. The propositions were: P₁ Although more challenging overall, learners value learning methods that are highly socio-inductive for knowledge generation.

P₂ Learning methods that are in the upper left hand quadrant of the socio-inductive/technical-deductive grid are more challenging to implement than other learning methods that are commonly used.

P₃ Highly socio-inductive learning methods require high levels of student responsibility.

Two cohorts of the MDO program were surveyed for their assessment of eight items related to the three propositions. Cohort 1 had just completed 3 of 7, 5-day modules. Cohort 2 had just completed 7 of 7, 5-day modules.

The commonly used pedagogies utilized as choices for most of the items included: Lecture, Simulation, Case Study, and Field Experience. Readers are likely to be familiar with the first three choices, possibly less familiar with Field Experience as it is experienced in our program. An example of the Field Experience is a several month-long assignment in which teams of students identify a client who has a real opportunity or problem and has a felt need for change. The student team works with the client to address the issue or opportunity using processes originating in the field of Organization Development. While many types of in-class pedagogies are also socio-inductive, including simulations and case study, it is the Field experience which is most highly socio inductive. Students also engage in other, shorter duration Field experiences during the program.

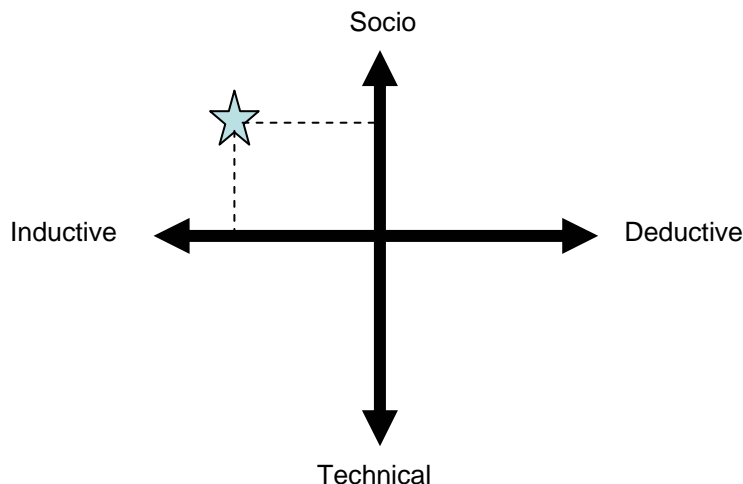
What makes the Field Experience highly socio inductive? Especially since the most extensive field experience occurs late in the MDO program? Students have

been presented with theory in class, students are charged with reading texts that present and explain theory, students have participated in interactive learning process. However, without experience or practice, relevant to real life concerns, it is apparent that most students have not either integrated the theory that they have been exposed to, nor have they created their own unique understandings and knowledge.

During the most extensive Field Experience students are required to work with the client to address problems and opportunities presented to them by the client. This prompts a review of the literature to begin to get a grasp on the nomenclature, definitions, and previously developed theory about the problem or opportunity, as well as indirectly related information. This beginning process does not indicate knowledge of the theory, but represents an orienting activity prior to moving forward on one or two of the many possible paths related to addressing the problem opportunity.

Students, as a team, must then proceed to work with client toward positive results. In the case of OD, the positive results are often intended to ultimate impact the bottom line. However, the tenure of many practitioners is quite short term, relative to the economic cycles which factor in (and also miss) thousands of variables both human and technical to arrive at financial results. What does occur is the student team and client embark on a process called the Change Cycle (see Figure 3). The Change Cycle methodically moves both students and client through processes designed to produce results, most often in the form of new knowledge for the system. This new knowledge is then immediately utilized by the system to achieve short term business objectives, but also to continue with iterations of the Change Cycle and generate more knowledge for the system. It is proposed that iterations of the change cycle, and the generation of packets of knowledge with each cycle ultimately reaches the satisfaction of what the client would consider a Grand Objective. The success of this knowledge generation process is dependent on the students and client working very closely together. Actually, the process cannot

Figure 2. Graphic representation of Highly Socio-Inductive Learning



Developments in Business Simulation and Experiential Learning, Volume 34, 2007

be implemented in a human system without interdependency among system members (and change practitioners).

In actual practice most change practitioners (the students) and clients are working without conscious knowledge of relevant theory. The Change Cycle is one method of enabling both parties to develop actionable knowledge. This knowledge often, but not always, corresponds to theory found in the literature (and expected to be known by the student). A significantly beneficial aspect of this process is that the theory or knowledge that is generated finds immediate application in the client system, which contributes to the perceptions of value by both the student and the client.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The two groups of MDO students found the HSIL pedagogy in the guise of the Field Experience most influential in their learning, most intellectually challenging, contributed most to the generation of knowledge, required the most responsibility on their parts (See Appendix 1). Students also indicated that the social component of learning processes of the MDO program were very important. These findings support propositions 1 and 3.

Two items in the survey related to perceptions of the students about the comparative level of challenge presented for the instructor during a highly socio-inductive process. Students indicated that they thought the Field Experience would be the most difficult to facilitate as a teacher, while the lecture would be the least difficult. If nothing else, these responses indicate that there are aspects of the Field Experience which present teaching challenges that other methods of instruction do not.

From experience, the challenges alluded to in the responses to the survey include; facing and dealing with uncertainty in the knowledge generation process, effectively riding the ambiguity that is often present during the process until knowledge is generated, and dealing with student resistance to highly socio-inductive methods as a consequence of deeply held assumptions about what education should look like.

Responding to these challenges requires some acceptance of risk on the part of the instructor and the educational institution. The risks include the perception that customer satisfaction will be jeopardized; the students are not being "given" what they paid for. Thirty years of experience has demonstrated that these risks can be managed by; a) utilizing instructors with experience in the use of highly socio-inductive processes as well as very knowledgeable of the theoretical underpinnings of both the processes used and the problems and opportunities commonly experienced by students and clients, b) ensuring that there is time (or numerous times if the knowledge creation process is lengthy) for reflection and debriefing, development of a learning community which produces not only satisfactory social interaction in the short term, but bonds the students together in a quest that they deem

important, so that drop out rates are negligible and students do perceive benefits during highly ambiguous and uncertain periods of the experience.

Highly Socio-inductive learning is a pedagogy that appears to have value for students and one that presents challenges that other, less social or inductive pedagogies.

REFERENCES

- Beckhard, R. (1969). *Organization development: Strategies and models*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley
- Bennis, W. (1969). *Organization development: Its nature, origin and prospects*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Cooperstein, S.E. & Kocevar-Weidinger, E. (2004). Beyond active learning: A constructivist approach to learning. *Reference Services Review*. Bradford. Vol. 32, Iss 2. Pg. 141.
- Dehler, G. E., Welsh, M. A. & Lewis, M. W. (2001). Critical pedagogy in the 'new paradigm.' *Management Learning*. Thousand Oaks. December. Vol. 32, Iss 4. Pg. 493.
- De Jongh, D. & Prinsloo, P. (2005). Why teach corporate citizenship differently? *The Journal of Corporate Citizenship*. Sheffield. Summer. Iss. 18; pg. 113.
- Egan, T.M. (2002). Organization development: An examination of definitions and dependent variables. *Organization Development Journal*. Chesterland: Summer. Vol. 20. Iss 2. pg 59.
- French, W.L., Bell, C. H. (1978). *Organization development*(2nd, ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- French, W. & Bell, C., Jr. (1990). *Organization development: Behavioral science interventions for organization improvement* (3rd. ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Glassman, Michael. (2004). Running in Circles: Chasing Dewey. *Educational Theory*. Urbana Vol 54, Iss. 3, pag 315.
- Johnson, P.E. (2006). Process education: A humanistic response to fundamentalism. *The Humanist*. Washington, DC. Vol 66, Iss. 3. pg. 31.
- Mingers, J. (2000). What is it to be critical? Teaching a critical approach to management undergraduates. *Management Learning*. Thousand Oaks. June. Vol. 31, Iss. 2; pg 219.
- Prince, M.J. & Felder, R.M. (2006) Inductive teaching and learning methods: Definitions, comparisons, and research bases. *Journal of Engineering Education*. Washington. April. Vol 95. Iss 2. pg 123.
- Ryan, S. & Grieshaber, S. (2004). It's more than child development: Critical theories, research and teaching young children. *YC Young Children*. Washington. Nov. Vol. 59, Iss. 6; pg. 44.
- Sawyer, K.R. (2004). Creative teaching: Collaborative discussion as disciplined improvisation. *Educational Researcher*. Washington. March. Vol. 33, Iss 2; pg. 12.

Developments in Business Simulation and Experiential Learning, Volume 34, 2007

- Snowden, M. (2004). Learning communities as transformative pedagogy: Centering diversity in introductory sociology. *Teaching Sociology*. Beverly Hills. July. Vol. 32, Iss. 3 pg. 291.
- Weick, K.E., Sutcliffe, K.M., & Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the process of sensemaking. *Organization Science*. Linthicum. Jul/Aug. Vol. 16, Iss. 4; pg 409.
- Wilson, J.P. & Beard, C. (2003). The learning combination lock – an experiential approach to learning design. *Journal of European Industrial Training*. Bradford. Vol 27, Iss 2-4; pg. 88.