

# Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 15, 1988

## A REVIEW OF CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

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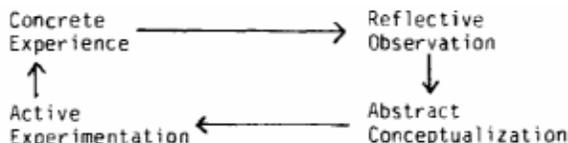
### ABSTRACT

A review of the experiential learning method is undertaken to discuss where this field has been, and where it appears to be now. Extensions of the original applications for the method are detailed, and current developments are enumerated and catalogued.

### INTRODUCTION

The field of experiential learning, or learning by involvement, has long been recognized as a desirable and effective approach to aid in the transmission and application of knowledge. According to Lau and Jelinek (1984), involvement learning places primary emphasis on the processes of interaction and thinking, rather than on rote memory of factual content of the area being studied. They believe that it is an effective technique, and it is superior to content-learning approaches.

The general learning model associated with experiential learning has been illustrated by Kolb, Rubin, and McIntyre (1971). This model, shown below, describes how an individual learns from experience.



This model describes experiential learning as starting with some concrete experience, followed by reflective observation, during which time the individual thinks about what happened during the experience. Following reflective observation the individual develops abstract concepts about what happened, and relates those concepts to his or her prior academic knowledge and/or work experience. This step is followed by the consideration of alternative behavior and the testing of these behaviors in new settings.

Prior development in the field of experiential learning has focused on the provision of sets of learning experiences for use in classroom and training settings, techniques for performance evaluation in experientially taught courses, and guidelines for the teaching of experiential courses.

A number of authors wrote textbooks devoted to compiling experiential exercises in the 1970s. These included Kolb, Rubin, and McIntyre (1971); Knudson, Woodworth, and Bell (1973); Lau (1975); Vaughn and Deep (1975); Hall, Bowen, Lewicki, and Kall (1975); Finch, Jones, and Litterer (1976); Kast and Rosenzweig (1976); Morris and Sashkin (1976); and White and Vromarl (1977). Another approach utilized during the 1970s was an extended simulation of a management situation which depended on mini-games, role-plays, or case studies. Examples of this approach include those taken by Chapman (1970), for supervisory training;

Gamson (1978) for Business and Society applications; and Miles and Randolph (1979) for organizational theory and management applications. Additionally, during this period, much emphasis was placed upon the development and refinement of computer-driven games and simulations for Business Policy and Strategy applications.

In the area of performance evaluation for experiential learning, Veiga (1973, 1975, and 1976) detailed approaches to grade students in experientially taught classes. His approach required students to keep a journal of events and to relate these events to the Kolb, Rubin, and McIntyre experiential learning model by selecting particular episodes for analysis. Lau (1975) took Veiga's approach one step further by suggesting the submission of a term paper which consisted of the analysis of journal data. This paper could focus on oneself, other individuals, interactions between individuals, or the application of small group theory and concepts to the group experience.

In the area of developing guidelines for the teaching of the experiential course, Randolph (1976) discussed the climate necessary for the experiential classroom to be successful, and Dutz (1976) provided some strategies necessary for the introduction of experiential teaching. These authors are representative of group who attempted to provide technical knowledge and hints to the prospective experiential teacher.

With this brief review in place, it is of interest to jump to the present time, and to consider what the recent developments in the field of experiential learning are. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to consider what is taking place in experiential learning during the 1980s, to illustrate these developments, and to consider future directions and challenges for the field.

### EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING METHODS

The current definition of experiential learning methods has been expanded to include techniques beyond those originally considered, which mainly consisted of small group applications and computer simulations. A complete list would now include the following options:

- Computer simulations
- Non-computer simulations
- Experiential exercises
- Small group application
- Role-playing exercises
- Skill-development
  - Negotiation skills
  - Communication skills

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- Work experience
- Internships
- Cooperative programs
- Consulting projects
  - Small business cases
- Field exercises/experience
- Cases
  - Case writing
  - Case discussion
  - Living case
- Business Ethics
- Internationalization
- Laboratory Experiments
- Analysis of performance
  - Different Audiences
- Instructor characteristics
- Student characteristics
- New exercises
- Video cases
- Satire
- Applications

This expanded list indicates a continuing emphasis on experiential learning, and an attempt to move past exercises which simulate managerial events and situations to a hands-on application. Internships and co-operative programs have received growing emphasis. Indeed, according to a recent article by Harayda (1986), part-time, full-time, for credit or not, internships that offer hands-on career experience are becoming essential to university or college undergraduates seeking to 'and jobs in a variety of professions.

This list, while not new, presumes some application of the Kolb, Rubin, and McIntyre (1971) model in a training or learning situation. Computer simulations, primarily in the Business Policy and Strategy area, have been supplemented by hand-scored simulations in a number of functional areas. More and more emphasis has been placed on the skills of management, 'a back to the basics of communication and negotiation often identified by practitioners as critical managerial weaknesses. Cooperative programs, which include a rotation between work and learning experiences, have been rediscovered as an effective technique which has real strengths associated with it. More and more consulting and field experience applications, sometimes involving small business case analysis, have found their way into management education. Finally, in addition to the traditional case discussion method, students are now often finding a requirement to write their own case based upon their personal experience (particularly at the part-time graduate level), or to be part of a Living case, where data and observations are gathered for an ongoing process, either inside or outside of the classroom.

### CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

A list of current developments in the field of experiential learning appears as follows:

- Microcomputer applications
- Integration of data-base analyses/decision support systems
- Extension to other functional areas
  - Personnel/Human Resources
  - Business Policy/Strategy
  - Entrepreneurship
  - Quantitative Management Courses

These developments are identified and explained by the implementation of new technologies, new ideas, and a shifting emphasis in management education. Microcomputer applications have resulted in simulations such as Scott and Stricklands (1985) Micromatic, which offers students the opportunity to utilize the microcomputer in a business policy situation.

Along with microcomputer applications, the field of decision support systems has arisen to aid individual decision making through supplemental analyses. Bodily (1985) describes how creating and using models, incorporating decision preferences into models, and treating aspects such as group decision-making and risk and time can improve the decision process. Furthermore, emphasis has come to be placed on the use of analyses software into experiential learning applications which have a quantitative basis. For example, Banthin, Beutell, Daugherty, Denmark, Olszewski, and Steizer (1986) state that the usefulness of spreadsheet programs such as Lotus 1-2-3 extends beyond accounting and finance courses to use in management courses which can reinforce and extend students skills.

The extension of experiential learning to fields other than management and organizational behavior is indicated by the publication of experientially-oriented text in areas such as personnel administration by Kelley and Whatley (1981) and Howard (1985); in organization development by Harvey and Brown (1982); the inclusion of experiential exercises in entrepreneurship texts, such as by Timmons (1985); and the application to managerial problem solving in business policy and strategy as shown by Smith (1986) in his application to strategic planning of an experiential case. Another application has been proposed by Gomolka (1985) to utilize the experiential methodology in quantitative management courses. Sanders (1986) also proposed the teaching of business ethics on an experiential basis.

The growing trend to address international issues in management education has also found its way into experiential learning. Exercises such as Jolly and Fairhursts (1986) International Buying integrate international dimensions into training. Likewise, Lenn (1986); Viega and Yanouzas (1986); Boukis (1986); and Yanouzas and Veiga (1986) have addressed the international issue.

Another use which experiential learning has been put to is to aid in the analysis of hypotheses about

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management and decision making applications. For example, Thruman and Ward (1984); Gosenpud, Miesing, and Milton (1984); and Miesing (1986) have all considered this aspect. In addition to viewing the international area as a different audience for experiential learning, some emphasis has been placed upon the development of exercises directed at graduate-level audiences, particularly part-time evening students. Recognizing that this audience may find many experiential exercises as too simplistic and non-applicable, several authors have worked on the design of exercises which are more applicable to the graduate level. For example, Ward, Gomolka, and Mackin (1986); Gomolka (1986a); and Gomolka (1986b) have addressed this question.

Instructor and student characteristics associated with effective performance in experientially-oriented courses have received attention in the 1980s. For example, Sanders and Gosenpud (1986) and Gosenpud (1986) address vital issues such as the impact of instructor enthusiasm and personality variables on experientially-oriented classes.

New exercises are constantly being created in the field of experiential learning. Recent examples of new applications include the use of video cases by Culpan (1986), the use of satire by Ralson (1986), and applications such as the prediction of organizational behavior from office environments by Graves and Powell, (1986).

### CONCLUSIONS

The previous survey has shown that the field of experiential learning is alive and well. Many experiential exercise books are in their second or third edition. Thus, these textbooks are being adopted for classroom basis on a repeated basis, and sell well enough that publishers desire to continue publishing them.

The field continues to expand into areas which are diverse from its original organizational behavior base, a sign of acceptance by other members of the business administration academic community. New exercises and applications continue to be developed, and the field has followed into current hot areas such as microcomputer applications, decision support systems, and international considerations. With this widespread base, it appears that experiential learning has become more than a passing fancy of the 1970s. It has become an established methodology of the 1980s, and appears to be on a growth curve through the 1990s. More and expanded applications appear to be on the horizon for the field.

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