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INTERPERSONAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT: THE EXPERIENTIAL TRAINING UNIT (ETU) AND TRANSFER OF TRAINING*

Samuel C. Certo
Indiana State University

Kenneth E. Newgren
Indiana State University

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, the use of experiential training packages has definitely gained in popularity. In fact, this popularity gain has materialized so quickly that experiential training practice seems to have extended beyond related empirical research (Kenderdine and Keys, 1974, p. 4). To narrow this practice-research gap, trainer- researchers are toiling to scientifically present and/or test hypotheses developed through training experiences and other related undertakings. In line with this practice-research gap effort, this paper presents hypothesized guidelines for increasing the effectiveness of experiential training packages which are aimed at developing interpersonal skills. Interpersonal skill is defined as the ability to help the organization move toward goal attainment by dealing efficiently and effectively with the people side of production. Although these guidelines were developed from and supported by training experiences, the importance of undertaking related empirical hypothesis testing should not be overlooked or underestimated. More precisely, investagatory empirical research should be strongly encouraged.

These hypothesized guidelines suggest that: 1)...an interpersonal skill is composed of a set of performance-related subskills which should be developed somewhat sequentially through an Experiential Training Unit (ETU) as opposed to a commonly used barrage of experiential exercises, and; 2)...to maximize learning, the design and administration of an ETU be based, at least partially, on implications of completed transfer of training studies.

Ellis (1965, p. 3) defines transfer of training as the influence of prior experience or performance on the performance of some subsequent task(s). According to Deese (1958) there is no more important topic in the psychology of learning or training than the transfer of training. This transfer can take the form of positive transfer, an influence which facilitates performance in a new situation; negative transfer, an influence which hinders performance in a new situation; or zero transfer, an influence which has no effect on performance in a new situation. The primary application implications of transfer principles on ETU design probably involve positive transfer. An ETU is defined as a sequential series of related training activities involving at least one climax experiential exercise and aimed at developing interpersonal skill through appropriate subskill development (Certo, l975a). An experiential exercise is a task designed with specific circumstances to generate trainee behavior which can be observed, discussed, and evaluated against interpersonal

* Some of these thoughts were originally presented in a Roundtable Discussion at the 35th Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management (1975).

theory (Certo, 1975b). The instructor who administers the ETU typically assumes the role of encouraging high levels of student discussion, developing an educational climate in which student-trainees learn new behaviors, acting as a resource person, and facilitating learning via theory and experience (Certo, l976b).

The ETU sequencing of activities is not rigidly outlined and may vary slightly from ETU to ETU depending upon which experiential learning model it is based. For example, the sequencing suggested by the Kolb (1974) experiential learning model presented in Figure 1 is somewhat different than the sequencing suggested by the Certo- Dougherty (l975c) model presented in Figure 2. Kolb and Fry (1975) indicate that .. change and growth are best facilitated by an integrated process that begins with (1) here and now experiences followed by (2) collection of data and observations about that experience. The data are then (3) analyzed and the conclusions of this analysis are fed back to the actors in the experience for their use in the (4) modification of their behavior and choice of new experience (p. 33-34)"

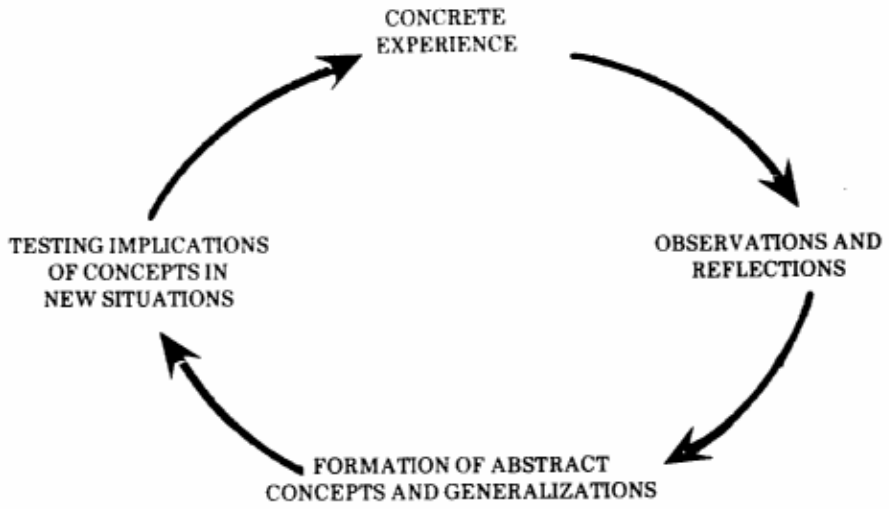
Certo and Dougherty (l975c), however, suggest the following learning sequence: "...the student-trainee studies the reading material assigned by the instructor...next, under supervision, the student attempts to apply the material studied in an experiential exercise...upon completion of the exercise there is discussion among participants and observers as to the effectiveness of the efforts to apply the theory...evaluation may show the need to repeat part or all of the skill cycle starting either at the level of increasing understanding of the theory, or at the level of performing additional experiential exercises...p. 2."

The critical ingredient of the ETU is the existence of subskill development emphasis within the training process. The subskills focused upon within the ETU concept are Cognitive Skill, i.e., the ability to mentally grasp and understand a particular theory; Transformation Skill, i.e., the ability to designate specific behaviors which would reflect a particular theory; Activation Skill, i.e., the ability to perform transformed behavior in such a way that it is perceived by others as intended; Preliminary Diagnostic Skill, i.e., the ability to mentally determine what behavioral cues displayed by another would indicate when a particular theory should be applied; and Advanced Diagnostic Skill, i.e., the abilities to identify these behavioral cues in an interaction situation and to assess the quality of the application attempt making modifications when necessary.

Overall, ETU design involves not only sharpening cognitive abilities to lay strategies and analyze and solve problems, but to translate cognitive output into appropriate human behavior. Also, ETU design is based upon transfer of training principles to facilitate trainee learning, i.e., preliminary ETU subskill training activities are structured to facilitate trainee performance or learning in subsequent subskill training activities.

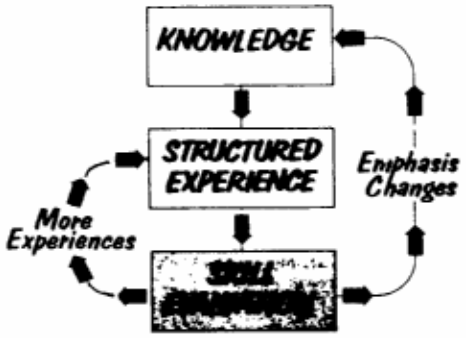
Subsequent paragraphs are an account of an experience in which an ETU was designed and administered to meet the training needs of the U.S. Civil Service Commission. Although this particular ETU focused on developing the interpersonal skill of successfully helping other organization members (Gibb, 1964), the same system of training

FIGURE 1



The sequencing of learning activities within the Kolb experiential learning model.

FIGURE 2



The sequencing of learning activities within the Certo-Dougherty experiential learning model.

activities can be designed for other interpersonal skill areas. Depending upon such factors as the situation and the organization involved, some modification of the sample ETU could be advisable.

According to the ETU concept, Expertise (E) in the target helping skill is a function of expertise in the following subskills: Cognitive Skill (CS), Transformation Skill (TS), Activation Skill (AS), Preliminary Diagnostic Skill (PDS), and Advanced Diagnostic Skill (ADS). In equation form, E = f(CS, TS, AS, PDS, ADS). Cognitive skill is defined as the ability to mentally grasp and understand related help theory. Transformation Skill is the ability to list specific behavior which might exist in a desired help relationship as reflected by help theory, i.e., trainees mentally transform help theory into specific behavior. Once this transformation is completed, Activation Skill takes precedence. This skill is the ability to perform transformed helping behavior in such a way that it is perceived by others as intended. Next is the Preliminary Diagnostic Skill, the ability to mentally determine what behaviors performed by another would probably indicate that help should be given to him. Advanced Diagnostic Skill is not only the ability to identify these behavioral cues in a personal interaction situation, but also to: 1) give help, and; 2) assess the quality of help while it is being given.

ETU training activities focused on the development of these subskills both individually and collectively. The specific activities used and the sequence in which these activities were administered are presented below:

1. Cognitive Skill Activity - prior to any training sessions, trainees individually read and contemplated the aforementioned article by Gibb. During the subsequent training session the trainees were broken into groups and asked to reach a consensus on the three most important and three least important points in Gibb's article. After each group completed the assignment all groups were collectively led in discussion by the trainer to discuss the quality and implications of the lists.
2. Transformation Skill Activity - individual groups again convened and worked on the task of developing actual communication dialogue which might take place on Orientations that Help vs. Orientations that Hinder. Each group defined whatever helping situation it desired. Again, the trainer then led the group in a discussion of related opinions after all groups had completed the assignment.
3. Activation Skill Activity - various trainees were asked to actually demonstrate the dialogue developed and situations defined by their groups while being video-taped. The video-tape was then replayed to weigh dialogue quality and appropriateness as well as the role of such variables as non-verbal communication in the Helping Skill.
4. Preliminary Diagnostic Skill Activity - small groups were assigned the task of listing as many significant cues as possible which might indicate with a relatively high probability of accuracy that an individual needs help. Prior situational parameters developed by each group were also used in this activity. A general discussion followed.
5. Advanced Diagnostic Skill Activity - the following experiential exercise (Certo, l976a) was administered, video-taped, replayed, and discussed to identify behavioral cues indicative of a situation wherein giving help is advisable and assessing the quality of help given:

MANAGER AS HELPER

Behavioral and/or Cognitive Objectives

1. To emphasize the existence of organizational situations in which people help one another.
2. To see how one can build a productive helping relationship.
3. To gain experience in helping others and evaluating how successfully one person is helping another.

Size of Training Group

1. From 10 to 20 members.

Training Time Required

1. Approximately 60 minutes.

Training Materials Needed

1. One large envelope containing materials such as:
   a. manila folders
   b. index cards of various sizes
   c. paper clips of various sizes
   d. a piece of chalk
   e. a roll of tape
   f. a ruler
   g. an old newspaper

2. One Trainer Instruction Sheet:

Trainer Instruction Sheet

Situation

You are a senior trainer in your organization. You have been asked by the president of your company to help various organization members acquire the skill of building a TOTUS. A TOTUS is whatever you want to define it as and looks like whatever you want it to be. In a few minutes you will be given a TOTUS BUILDING KIT and asked to help a trainee learn how to build a
TOTUS.

Role

You are a trainer who is extremely critical during your training session. You use fear to motivate trainees and will settle for nothing less than a perfect TOTUS. You think trainees are inferior. The tone and content of your messages clearly display this attitude.

3. One Trainee Instruction Sheet:

Trainee Instruction Sheet

Situation

You are a line worker. Your company is dynamic, responsive, and progressive. As such, you are often asked to learn how to assemble new products. In a few minutes the Senior Trainer in your company will help you learn how to assemble one of these new products.

Role

You are eager to learn and looking forward to your upcoming training session. You are so interested that you even ask questions concerning how the product was developed, who developed it, its uses, etc.

4. Moveable desks.

5. A flat surface on which to build the TOTUS.

Steps for Administration

1. The instructor chooses two participants and takes them outside the training room.
2. Once outside the room, the trainer gives one participant a Trainer Instruction Sheet and the other participant a Trainee Instruction Sheet. The instructor asks the participants to study the sheets for a couple of minutes but not to communicate about them.
3. The instructor goes back into the training room and says the following to the rest of the group:
   a. You are about to witness a training event.
   b. In this event a Trainer will be helping a Trainee learn how to build a new product the company wants to manufacture and sell in the near future.
   c. Take detailed notes on the quality of help one Rerson is giving the other.
4. The instructor asks the group to sit in a circle around a table and two chairs.
5. The instructor asks the Trainer and Trainee to enter the room and sit at the table.
6. The instructor gives the Trainer the packet of materials and asks him to begin the exercise.
7. If possible, this Trainer-Trainee interaction should be video-taped.
8. Below are some questions to start the discussion after the TOTUS is built:
   a. What role was the Trainer playing?
   b. What role was the Trainee playing?
   c. Would you want help from an individual with the same basic attitudes as the Trainer in this exercise?
   d. What advice would you give the Trainer to make him more able to help others?

e. Is there a difference between knowing how to build a TOTUS and knowing how to help someone learn TOTUS-building? Discuss.
f. Replaying the video-tape of the exercise with periodic stops usually generates an abundance of data for discussion.

9. The instructor may want to discuss his training style or how he gives help to trainees.

TRANSFER OF TRAINING PRINCIPLES AND DESIGNING AN ETU

Below are some major transfer of training principles (Ellis, 1965, p. 72) matched with a brief statement of how each principle was applied to the design and/or administration of the preceding sample ETU. These statements are intended only as an example of how transfer principles were applied in an attempt to increase the effectiveness of the sample ETU.

Transfer Principles	ETU Application
1. Positive transfer is maximized if greater effort is spent in mastering the early of a series of related tasks,	1. More time was spent mastering the early ETU subskills. In general, the more time spent on the development of Cognitive Skill, Transformation Skill and Preliminary Diagnostic Skill, the better able the trainee to appropriately handle the experiential exercise.
2. Positive transfer of training is greatest when training conditions are highly similar to those of the ultimate training task.	2. High Personal involvement in groups, mental diagnostic activities, evaluation of helping behavior, and the use of video-taping were a few preliminary training conditions which were also primary ingredients of Manager as Helper. In general, Trainee exposure to preliminary conditions of this sort seemed to facilitate performance in an experiential exercise.
3. Positive transfer is greatest if the trainee understands the general rules or principles which are appropriate in solving new problems	3. The trainer tried to ensure that trainees fully under- stood the rationale behind each step of the ETU. How each prior activity should help him solve a following ETU problem was explained in detail. Overall performance was usually enhanced when the trainee knows where he is and where he's going.

4. In general, a variety of tasks during original learning increases the amount of positive transfer obtained,	4. In group discussion, the trainer emphasized the flexibility of help theory and how it applies to varied tasks and activities. Each group developing its own situational parameter provided stepping-stones to such discussion and generally enhanced the quality of subsequent activities.
5. The greater the amount of practice on the original task(s), the greater the likelihood of positive transfer,	5. Extreme care was taken to maximize Cognitive Skill development. The related Cognitive Skill training activity was repeated through a similar activity when trainee feedback in relation to subskill development seemed ambiguous. In the ETU, Cognitive Skill development is a basic prerequisite.
6. Insight, defined behaviorally as the rapid solution of problems, appears to develop as a result of extensive practice in solving similar or related classes of problems.	6. Group-defined situational parameters during the Transformation Activity served as a basis for discussing similar or related classes of problems throughout the ETU. At times, the trainer also opted to introduce situations of his own.
7. Cumulative practice in learning a series of related tasks or problems leads to increased facility in learning how to learn.	7. The ETU system was referred to not only as a specific strategy for developing the goal helping skill but as a general skill/ subskill strategy which should help trainees learn more quickly in future ETU's. Also, some merit was given to the ETU strategy as a general strategy for individual self- development, i.e., give trainee's some insights on how to change self-taught interpersonal theory into human behavior.

This paper proposes: 1) that interpersonal skills be developed through a skill/subskill strategy which is effected through an Experiential Training Unit (ETU) as opposed to a barrage of experiential exercises, and; 2) that transfer of training principles be applied to ETU design and administration as an attempt to increase training effectiveness. Greater trainee effort in mastering the early of a series of related tasks, making training conditions similar to those of the ultimate training task, developing trainee

understanding of how general principles are appropriate in solving new problems, offering a variety of tasks during original learning, practicing original tasks thoroughly, practicing similar problems, and emphasizing cumulative practice were suggested as transfer of training principles which seem particularly appropriate.

Although past training experience supports the validity of these suggestions, the importance of empirical research which investigates the ETU concept as well as the myriad of other issues surrounding the more general experiential learning situation cannot be overemphasized (Cohen and Rhenman, 1960). Campbell and Stanley (1963) stressed this need for empirical research in education quite well by presenting the experiment: ". . . as the only means for settling disputes regarding educational practice, as the only way of verifying educational improvements, and as the only way of establishing a cumulative tradition in which improvements can be introduced without the danger of a faddish discard of old wisdom in favor of inferior novelties. (p. 2.)"

Potential areas for empirical investigation include: 1) the comparative learning effects of training activity sequencing based on the Kolb vs. the Certo-Dougherty experiential learning models; 2) the comparative learning effectiveness of an ETU vs. a barrage of experiential exercises; 3) the relative contributions of subskill development to overall interpersonal skill development, and; 4) the contributions of Transfer of Training principles to overall learning in an ETU situation.

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