

Developments In Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 17, 1990

THE INFLUENCE OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING TECHNIQUES ON STUDENT RECOGNITION OF NON-PRIMARY LEARNING STYLES

Ronald L. Coulter, Southwest Missouri State University
Mary K. Coulter, Southwest Missouri State University
Robert E. Widing, Case Western Reserve University
Jeff Rowe, Pennzoil Products Company

ABSTRACT

A study was designed to determine if an experiential learning exercise would influence students to recognize the use of learning skills not customarily associated with their primary learning styles. Kolb's (1976) learning style inventory and a post-treatment instrument were used to detect recognition of new learning skills across the four primary learning style groups. Three of the four groups indicated significant differences on selected learning skills not known to be strengths in their self-reported primary learning styles.

INTRODUCTION

The need for a global approach to business education clearly suggests a need for a variety of teaching styles to help students learn how to learn. The ability to recognize and to approach new business situations creatively may well require the ability of students to utilize non-primary styles of learning. In the terms of Brenenstuhl and Catalanello (1979), a contingency approach to learning may be the way of the future. Concentrating upon enlightening ourselves about how and why learning occurs, and the result's we expect from the learning process demands that we be challenged to assimilate different teaching and learning approaches into the classroom. Effective learners rely on different learning modes. An individual's choice of and emphasis on learning mode characterizes their learning style.

METHODOLOGY

Thirty-seven students in a principles of marketing class at a large Midwestern university were classified into Kolb's Learning style groups based upon their self-reported LSI scores. The students were then randomly assigned to classroom groups and exposed to an experiential group planning exercise designed to provide them with a variety of organizational planning issues. After the exercise they were asked to express their perceptions on the intent of the exercise on 11 group planning characteristics. A 9-point semantic differential scale was used. The subjects were then asked to indicate the actual effects of the exercise across the same eleven characteristics. Recognition of new learning style skills by group members operationalized to exist if significant differences between the perceived intent of the experiential exercise and the actual exercise effect occurred. Differences were examined across primary learning style groups.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

T-tests between the pairs of scores for the 11 attitude beliefs were examined across the 4 primary learning styles. The findings indicate significant differences for three of the four learning style groups with regard to perceived intent of the exercise and the actuality of the experiential learning experience. Only the accomodator learning style group indicated no significant differences between their perception of the perceived intent of the exercise and what was actually experienced. As Cohen (1988) has stated experiential exercises are designed for marketing students who typify this group. The other three learning style groups, convergers, divergers and assimilators, all reported significant differences on planning skills not normally associated as being strong characteristics for their primary learning style. Only the accomodator learning style subjects indicated no significant differences between their perceived intentions of the experiential exercise and their experience of the exercise. This finding appears to support Cohen's (1988) contention that marketing students, whose primary learning style is that of an accomodator, would feel very comfortable with experiential teaming techniques. Coincidentally, each of the significant differences reported by subjects from the three other learning styles were all unique. Each found a different aspect of the learning experience that differed from what they expected.

REFERENCES

- Brenenstuhl, Daniel C., and Ralph F. Catalanello (1979) "The Impact of Three Pedagogue Techniques on Learning" Journal of Experiential Learning and Simulation Vol. 1, pp 211-225.
- Cohen, William A. (1988) "Enhance teaching with experiential learning" Marketing Educator Vol. 7, No 1, (winter) p 1, 5.
- Kolb, David A. (1976) Learning Style Inventor, Boston Massachusetts: McBer and Company).