Exploring Experiential Learning: Simulations and Experiential Exercises, Volume 5, 1978

AN EXPERIENTIAL EVALUATION OF A DIDACTIC - EXPERIENTIAL APPROACH FOR TEACHING PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

Lane Kelley
University of Hawaii

First, this paper presents a brief review of the studies of the effectiveness of different teaching methods in colleges of business administration. The effectiveness of different teaching methods are assessed in terms of attitude change, skill development, and cognitive development. Second, the lecture method and a didactic-experiential approach are discussed in terms of the learning process: (1) development of theory (generalization), (2) relating theory to psychological set, and (3) modification, acceptance or rejection of theory. The results of an empirical comparison between the effectiveness of the lecture and didactic- experiential approaches is presented in terms of (1) cognitive learning of personnel management principles and (2) attitude toward the course. Attitudinal questions were framed by items such as content of course interesting, assignments stimulating and helpful in understanding course, and whether the students' planned to take another course in the same field. The cognitive test and the attitude survey both supported the didactic-experiential approach. An example of a didactic-experiential exercise is illustrated (experienced) which is then evaluated by the trainers themselves.

The basic teaching method used in the university classroom-- lecture/discussion--has many advantages; it is economical--we can cover a large amount of material in a very short period of time for a large number of students. It is also ego building for the professor. He "feels" that he has control of the students' learning environment. His position in the classroom, standing to the front and above the sitting students, reinforces the feeling of control. It is also common for the professor to reason that while he is lecturing he is really doing his work and not so when he is an observer of a group dynamics exercises. It is also orthodox, traditional, and acceptable. Very seldom is its use questioned. As students and teachers we know that the lecture method has strengths but also serious drawbacks. Probably the most serious is that it requires the student to be relatively passive, which might be a positive behavioral objective for the workers in Brave New World but questionable for developing managers. Secondly, if we depict the learning loop as an interaction process between (1) development of theory, (2) relating to experiential field (i.e., cognitive map, values, attitudes, psychological set, etc.), (3) modifying, accepting or rejecting theory, the lecture approach emphasizes the first of the above situations, development of theory, but does not create the environment conducive to the other two.

Conversely, the experiential approach emphasizes the second part of the learning cycle, relating the student's experiential field and the third which is the modification, accepting, and rejection of the theory. But what if the stage one, theory

(models that allows us to create abstractions for easier understanding of complexities) are de-emphasized. Then cognitive learning, based on understanding is de-emphasized and the experiential learning is limited to conditioned learning from the reward-punishment of the experience. Taking the familiar Confucius quote: "I hear and I forget;
I see and I remember;
I do and I understand."

"I do and I understand" has to be questioned. The compulsive "does" but does not necessarily understand. I walk but this does not mean that I understand "walking," the conversion of energy for muscle movement of my walking. We might develop our own generalizations and understanding from our experience but not necessarily. The student might develop theory/generalizations from experiential exercises and he might simply experience the experience. The experiential approach emphasizes doing, not thinking. Conversely, the lecture approach, it might be argued, doesn't encourage either thinking or doing. Simply, transmission of data.

What does the research say on the effectiveness of the experiential approach in Management education?

Ten years ago, the Carnegie Commission stated that professors of Business Administration needed to adopt new teaching methods. A survey of training directors from the largest corporations in the U.S. consistently ranked the traditional teaching method--lecture--ineffective in terms of changing interpersonal skills, acquisition of knowledge, problem solving, and retention of knowledge. In another survey of leading AACSB scholar and administrators they reported that by 1985 there would be an increase in the use of "out of classroom experiences (field work, live cases, and work experiences); simulations such as games, and role playing--are as of experiential learning. They also felt that these changes should take place.

Are experiential methods effective? One research article in the Academy of Management Journal reported that a business policy simulation computer game team which had gone through Kolb's, et. al.'s Organizational Psychology: An Experiential Approach did not do better than a team which had not gone through the exercises. The poor design, hypothesis formulation, and sample of this "study" does not justify conclusions. Another study of the experiential approach in a business policy course reported that the use of "the" experiential approach to teaching business policy appears to be a very effective teaching device and that secret ballots of students the next semester chose the experiential approach. A third study of the effectiveness of "the" experiential approach in teaching a business policy course concluded that the experiential method produced relevant learning about the human factors involved in the process of policy formulation (but) for the bulk of the class, however, this experience was almost "too real." The experiential approach in this study was actually a required field study without reading lists, lectures, an ambiguous reward system and standards, and a highly uncertain environment. The lack of hypothesis formation, research design, etc. of this study, like the previous,

does not allow for any type of conclusion.

In summary, of the few reported attempts to measure the effectiveness of the experiential approach the research has not been of the quality to be able to draw any conclusions.

During the last two years Arthur Whatley, Assoc. Professor at New Mexico State University, and I have been designing an integrative didactic and experiential approach to teaching personnel management. Theory and cognitive learning plays an important role and student experiencing the subject matter is also emphasized. The difference in our approach and that of other experiential handbooks such as Kolb, et. al.'s is the emphasis on content, theory development by a process that involves:

(1) development of theory, lecture is used to develop the major concepts covered in personnel management.

(2) implementation of concepts into experiential exercises that are designed to test the concepts in terms of the student's psychological set, his experiential field. In line with that concept, I have brought an exercise that we are developing to illustrate our approach. (See Appendix A. At this point the participants are formed into groups and complete the exercise.)

(3) acceptance, modification or rejection of theory and closure. The exercise that we have just completed has three objectives (1) to illustrate the relationship between prejudice and employment practices, (2) experience in developing an application blank and (3) illustrating the legality of our prejudice in terms of federal and state laws. Closure is created by either (1) end of exercise discussion, questions or (2) reaction papers consisting of 1) discussion of concept 2) results of exercises and 3) the acceptance, rejection or modification of concept in terms of the experience.

EFFECTIVENESS

The experimental course has been evaluated by comparing it to another section using strictly the lecture discussion method. Two aspects were compared, (1) attitude toward the course and (2) cognitive learning. The experimental method was used in two classes--one with forty-four students, another with twenty-six. The lecture session had twenty-five students. The experimental courses met on Tuesday for lecture and Thursday for lab experiences. The professor was responsible for the Tuesday lecture and the labs were conducted by graduate assistants.

In the past, the professor with the larger enrollment and using the experimental approach had received evaluations in his other classes above the average of his peers, the other two professors had received average student evaluations.

COGNITIVE LEARNING

A thirty item test was administered to the classes. Standard subject areas in personnel management such as job description, job specification, compensation, training, job evaluation, and labor law were covered in the objective test which was designed to test for mastery of personnel management rather than

mastery of a particular test. Timing of the test was different in the classes, which seemingly was to the detriment of the experimental class. The test was given to the experimental groups unannounced but was used as part of the final exam in the lecture/discussion class. Surprisingly, the performance of the experimental groups was higher than that of the lecture/discussion group. (Statistical test of means was different at the .01 level of confidence.)

The "above the average of his peers" professor's students had the more positive attitudes

QUESTION 1
CONTENT OF COURSE INTERESTING

	N	1	2	3	4	5
Lecture	25	0%	16%	4%	60%	20%
Integrated	44	0%	2%	7%	50%	41%
Integrated	26	15%	8%	8%	54%	15%

toward the statement that the "content of the course was interesting." The "average" professor using the integrated approach students responses trailed the lecture professor.

The above average professor responses held the same position as the first with his students

QUESTION 2
COURSE INTELLECTUALLY STIMULATING & CHALLENGING

	N	1	2	3	4	5
Lecture	25	4%	24%	32%	36%	4%
Integrated	44	0%	11%	18%	52%	18%
Integrated	26	23%	8%	15%	46%	4%

feeling that the course was more "intellectually stimulating and challenging."

QUESTION 3
ASSIGNMENTS STIMULATING & HELPFUL IN UNDERSTANDING COURSE

	N	1	2	3	4	5
Lecture	25	8%	20%	28%	32%	8%
Integrated	44	2%	7%	16%	50%	25%
Integrated	26	23%	8%	8%	45%	15%

The responses of the students indicate that the assignments were more stimulating and challenging but notice that it wasn't unanimous. Approximately 30 percent of the students in both the lecture section and the average professor's integrated course

felt that the assignments weren't stimulating, but at the same time 60 percent of the students in the average professor's integrated course felt that assignments were stimulating compared to 40 percent in the lecture approach.

QUESTION 4
LEARNED THINGS HELPFUL TO FUTURE CAREER

	N	1	2	3	4	5
Lecture	25	0%	0%	12%	36%	52%
Integrated	44	0%	2%	14%	43%	41%
Integrated	26	16%	0%	24%	30%	30%

QUESTION 5
OBTAINED KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS
HIGHLY RELEVANT TO EDUCATIONAL GOALS

	N	1	2	3	4	5
Lecture	25	0%	12%	12%	56%	20%
Integrated	44	0%	2%	27%	57%	14%
Integrated	26	8%	8%	8%	62%	14%

No significant differences can be drawn from the items concerning "learned things helpful to future career" obtaining "knowledge and skills" but in the last item the student responses indicate that in the integrative approach courses, compare very favorably to other classes.

QUESTION 6
COMPARED TO OTHER COURSES TAKEN, COURSE OVERALL IS

		ABV AVG	AVG	BEL AVG
	N	1	2	3
Lecture	25	20%	68%	12%
Integrated	41	68%	24%	7%
Integrated	26	61%	15%	23%

SUMMARY

Was the integrated didactic-lecture approach more effective? It was more effective in the following areas:

1. Cognitive learning. This was a surprise to the researcher given the timing of the exam and the ability and greater emphasis of the lecture session to cognitive learning.
2. Student attitude toward course. It is our opinion that the students attitude is more favorable because they
    - (1) play a more active role in the learning process and
    - (2) personnel management concepts become more relevant. In our opinion the experimental design was more

effective in closing the loop between theory development and relating the theory to the students' experiential field. Formal personnel management is often difficult for the undergraduate to relate to. An application blank may be difficult for most people to relate to but when it is designed based on their prejudices and evaluated by the law of the land it becomes an extension of their values

--it becomes relevant. The concept is measured against their experiential field.

3. Taking other personnel management courses. Students in the experimental sections reported more favorably to taking other personnel management courses than the Students in the lecture session. This is probably the most important criteria. It simply states that the experimental classes made our personnel management courses more marketable.

This study can only be considered to be exploratory. It encouraged more research questions for this professor than it answered. Most important, it indicated that the lecture method is not necessarily the most effective teaching method for cognitive learning. It also raised questions about student and teacher differences and its effectiveness. Who benefits the most- high achievers, average students or under achievers? What role does student-teacher rapport play in the effectiveness of value- behavior oriented exercises? Lastly, which types of experiential learning, simulation, field exercises, role playing, case analysis, etc. tend to be effective in terms of which learning objectives-knowledge acquisition, attitude change and/or behavioral skills.