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# **Facilitating Adult Learning in Organizations**

# Facilitating Adult Learning in Organizations

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Marcy, the personnel director of a large corporation, has just returned to her office after visiting a training class being conducted by one of her division's new trainers. The visit was made at the suggestion of Don, the training director, who was anxious to have Marcy observe Ethel, his newly found training professional, in action. Don recruited Ethel from an elementary school faculty.

Marcy made the following notes in anticipation of her later discussion with Don:

*Today I visited Ethel's classroom. Everything appeared to be in order as I entered the room. Twenty chairs were placed auditorium style, neatly lined up facing the instructor, who was on a slightly elevated platform in the front of the room. Blackboards and screens were ready for use. Ethel was in the middle of what seemed to be a detailed lecture on the history of the company and its founders.*

*The trainees at first glance appeared to be attentive, but, upon closer inspection, many were daydreaming, doodling, or in other ways distracted. The longer Ethel lectured, the lower the participants' interest in the subject became.*

*Immediately following Ethel's lecture, a PowerPoint presentation was given. The lights were lowered and a cheerful voice with music in the background talked about the company's benefits programs and what they could mean to the employee's well-being. When the show was over, Ethel asked for questions, but there were none.*

*The balance of the session consisted of a video, more lecture, and handing out information booklets. At the end of the program, when the class was dismissed, the exit was rapid and quiet, as no one seemed to know anyone else.*

*After the group departed, Ethel stopped to say "hello." She seemed proud of her knowledge of the subject and pleased with her ability to deliver it.*

“The designer’s and the facilitator’s job then is to help the participants understand their experience and convert it to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to solve work and organizational problems.”

If you were Marcy, what evaluation of Ethel would you give to Don? What recommendations, if any, would you give to improve Ethel’s results?

Many trainers, managers, or consultants, when faced with a training assignment like Ethel’s, would provide the same kind of training as Ethel did. Considering that most of us have been exposed to programs like Ethel’s, we can hardly be blamed. Our response to training and development opportunities is nearly automatic. “You want training? Give me a classroom, some chairs, and a flip chart, and I’ll tell them what they need to know.”

This article is about preparing and presenting learning experiences for adults. Working effectively with adults is quite different from most of the school, church, and organizational models to which we have become accustomed. One obvious weakness of Ethel’s approach is that it fails to engage the participants. Not only is their experience and involvement not sought, Ethel’s strategy is to deliver information and then hope that it is absorbed and acted upon.

The participants are not asked to be active in the learning process, reflect on their experiences, or put the information to some practical use. It is easy to understand the apathy and restiveness of Ethel’s group.

Defining human learning is difficult. If we accept the proposition, however, that all learning is based on experience, then Jarvis’ definition (1987, p.16), “... learning is the process of transforming experience into knowledge, skills, and attitudes,” can be a very useful starting point. The designer’s and the facilitator’s job then is to help the participants understand their experience and convert it to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to solve work and organizational problems. The approach of this article is to suggest how this might be done using an experiential model of learning.

## **Before You Decide to Train**

If you ask a typical group of managers or trainers what they would do if they suddenly found out that they had some extra budget to spend on any kind of training they wished, you would quickly get a list of ideas. Each idea would have a degree of merit. If you followed that question by asking how they knew that their program would be a good expenditure of the extra budget, few could give you a solid justification. Their responses generally would be based on their intuition. And that's fair because they were asked to respond without doing much thinking about it. But how close is this to the way programs are usually conceived? Is it accurate to say that managers and trainers have ideas for programs they would do if they just had the budget, but that most of their ideas are not grounded in individual or organizational need?

If that is the case, we might ask where training and development needs come from in the first place.

It is helpful to think of a need as a gap between someone's (or group's) current performance and what someone else (or others) think that performance should be. We train or develop or educate employees

to help close the gap between their current level of performance and the performance standard set by someone else.

To help define that gap, we need some data for analysis. That data can come from personal observation, comments by key people, interviews, focus groups, tests (or learning instruments), surveys, records and reports, job analyses, and other sources. There are literally dozens of sources of information that can help define performance improvement needs. Instead of too little information, the problem is likely to be too much information. Add to that the politics of most organizational situations, and it becomes clear that deciding whether training is an appropriate remedy can get pretty confusing. Consider the following scenario.

## **THE CHARGE ACCOUNT PROMOTION**

### ***A Training Problem***

Two weeks ago, the corporate credit director visited the store at which you are the training manager. He expressed strong disappointment to you and the other members of the store management team because of your sub-standard number of charge customers. Past efforts to promote charge accounts through your store have not met with much success. Sales people, even though they receive \$2.00 for each new charge customer they solicit, are unenthusiastic about these annual campaigns.

The other day, you happened to be passing your store's cash office and you overheard a credit interviewer talking to a customer about her charge application. The tone of the interview sounded prying and unfriendly. The customer didn't look too happy either. As you walked away, you wondered if the customer would get a charge card. Someone said to you once that the credit standards at your store were very stringent. You also made a quick mental note that the housekeeping of the interview area left something to be desired.

Later that day, as you made a personal purchase at the store, you silently noted that your store's credit card was the least attractive one in your wallet. While you waited for an authorization of what seemed like a small amount of money, you looked over a store credit application standing in a rack near the register. The application looked complicated and uninviting. After a lengthy delay, the transaction was completed.

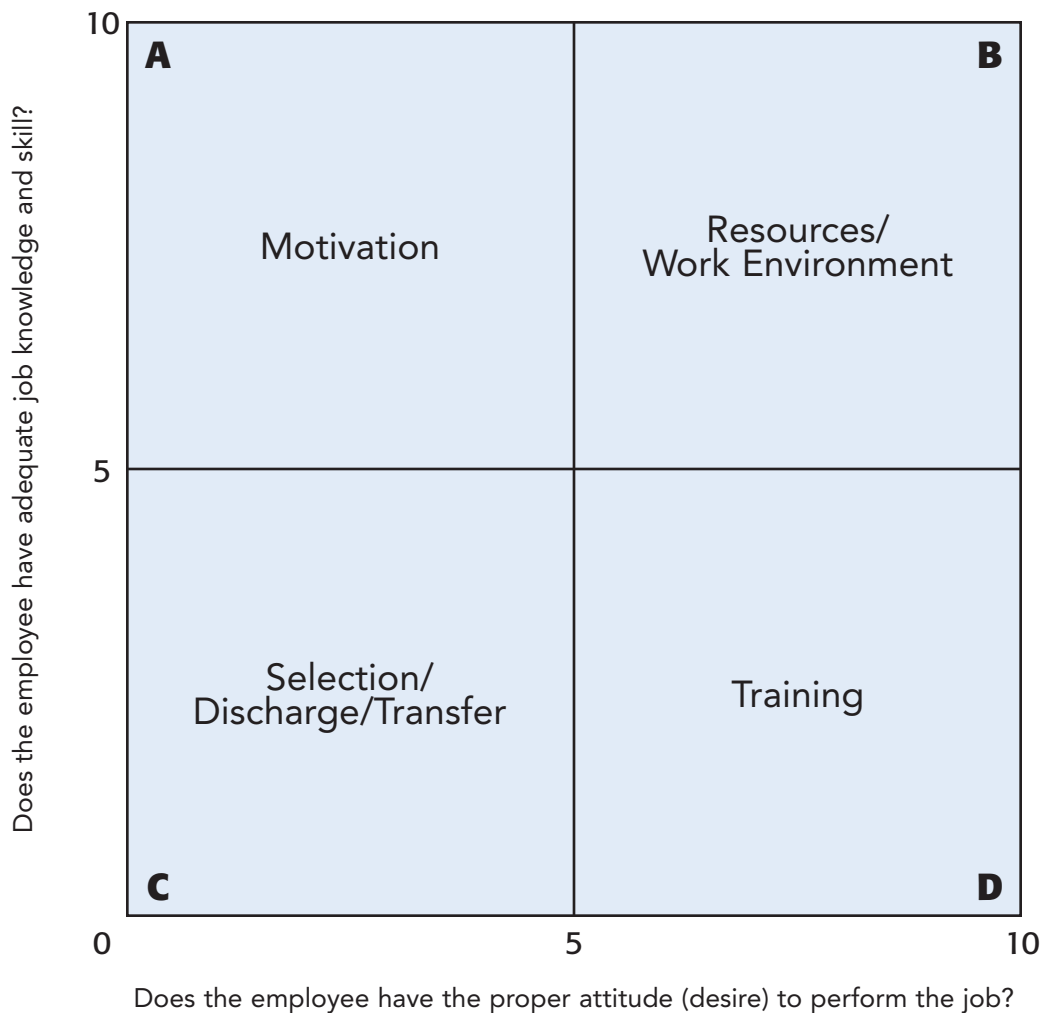
Back again in your office, you found a memo from the general manager resting squarely in the middle of your desk. It read:

*"In view of our low number of charge accounts and weak solicitation efforts, please prepare a training program to address this problem. I would like to review your plans with you next week."*

It would seem logical to question whether the performance problem described above is one that training will be able to solve. Many factors seem to be promoting the problem. How can you separate out the performance needs that training and development are equipped to handle?

One quick way is through the performance analysis grid. Here's how it works:

First, form a mental image of an employee or group of employees who are not performing satisfactorily. Then, use the grid in Figure 1 to get a general idea of the strategy you should consider to help this person or group perform at a more satisfactory level. Begin by marking the point on the horizontal scale to indicate what you believe represents the employee's attitude toward his or her job. Then mark the point on the vertical scale to indicate what you believe represents this employee's knowledge/skill to do the work. Construct a perpendicular line from each point. The lines will intersect in the quadrant in which the most effective change strategy lies.



**FIGURE 1:** The Performance Analysis Grid

**Quadrant A:** If the employee has sufficient job knowledge but has an improper attitude toward the work, this may be classified as a motivational problem. The consequences (rewards) of the person's behavior will need to be adjusted.

**Quadrant B:** If the employee has both job knowledge and a favorable attitude but performance is unsatisfactory, then the problem may be out of the control of the employee. It may be that critical resources are in short supply, or time pressures are too severe, or other factors are constraining this employee's performance.

**Quadrant C:** If the employee lacks both job knowledge and the proper attitude, he or she may be improperly placed in that position. This may imply a problem with employee selection and suggests that transfer or discharge should be considered.

**Quadrant D:** If the employee has the desire to perform but lacks the requisite job knowledge or skills, then additional training may be the answer.

In general, training or development works when someone needs information or skill(s) to do something. If someone already knows how to do something, then no amount of training will make any difference in his or her performance.

## **Developing Program Goals**

Once you have identified the performance needs that training and development remedies can alleviate, the next step is to determine the specific goals for the training activity. The proponents of Behaviorism and Robert Mager (1984) have convinced most trainers and managers that before designing or facilitating a learning experience, specific behavioral objectives must be developed. Behavioral objectives answer the question, "What will the learner be able to do at the completion of the instruction or learning segment?" A whole science has formed around the development and specification of behavioral learning objectives.

*“...discussion, involvement of the learner, and mutual understanding are more important in the long run than a single, well-constructed one- or two-sentence objective.”*

A “good” objective in behavioral terms specifies what the learner will be able to do, how well he or she will do it, and how the trainer/learner will know that it is being done competently. The more precise the objective, the better.

Certainly, knowing what your training is supposed to achieve and having some idea as to how you can prove that it has been achieved is better than having no clear purpose and merely hoping that your participants will change their behavior after the training is over. It can also be argued that too close a specification of predetermined educational objectives can be seriously restrictive to the adult learning process. By identifying objectives in advance of the learning experience, a program designer may miss the opportunity to involve learners in the process of deciding what they will learn. The program may remain too impersonal because it ignores individual learner needs. Tightly drawn objectives may not foster self-directed learning competencies in adults who become dependent on the designer or trainer for “what is to be learned and how it is to be learned.”

Rather than follow a rigid formula for charting learning objectives, the trainer/manager should consider aiming for *clarity* of purpose and method instead. This means that discussion, involvement of the learner, and mutual understanding are more important in the long run than a single, well-constructed one- or two-sentence objective. As Brookfield puts it, behavioristic strategies foster a “... tendency to equate one form of adult learning — instrumental learning (how to perform technical or psychomotor operations more effectively) — with the sum total of adult learning. It neglects completely the domain of the most significant personal learning — the kind that results from reflection on experiences and from trying to make sense of one’s life by exploring the meanings others have assigned to similar experiences” (Brookfield, 1986, p. 213).

## **Adult Development**

Having determined the performance needs you want to address and decided on some general program goals, you will want to do some reflecting on the characteristics of the individuals in your learning group. We all know that adulthood is a time of change, but how do we take that into consideration in the creation of a learning experience? It helps to view your participants in a dynamic context. You might ask yourself, for example, “What kinds of development crises and changes are my participants going through at this moment in their history? How can I understand those changes? How can I as a trainer/manager help people evolve and grow?” Not an easy set of questions. Each human being presents a unique set of circumstances to be understood. How do you accomplish that with a group of 10, 15, or 20 people?

Fortunately, a few writers during the last decade or two have given us some theories to consider. Roger Gould, for example, argues that people grow through a series of confrontations with their past. These confrontations occur between the ages of 16 and 50. To develop an adult consciousness, one must confront and defeat four basic assumptions of childhood: “We’ll always live with our parents and be their child;” “They’ll always be there to help when we can’t do something on our own;” “Their simplified version of our complicated inner reality is correct;” and, “There is no real death or evil in the world.” How does a trainer/manager/consultant create opportunities for those confrontations to occur in the context of his or her training?



*“...you will want to think as deeply as possible about the needs of each of your participants as you fashion their learning experience with you.”*

Daniel Levinson and his colleagues have identified from their research four overlapping eras in the human life cycle. Each era lasts about 25 years. The eras include Childhood and Adolescence, Early Adulthood, Middle Adulthood, and Late Adulthood. A person's life structure evolves through a sequence of alternating periods. A relatively stable structure-building period is followed by a structure-changing period. The work of the structure-building period is to deal with those adult tasks of determining an occupation, marriage/family, friendships, religion, and others. The tasks of the structure-changing period are to question what has been built and to search for new possibilities. Like Gould, the ages at which these changes occur are fairly predictable.

A third adult development theorist, Robert Kegan, suggests that growth is a process of differentiation and emergence from embeddedness. The child at the age of 6 months to 2 years, for example, is embedded in a mothering culture. The emergence from this “mothering culture” is fostered by the mother when she stops nursing, reduces carrying and holding, and acknowledges the child's independence in various ways. The mother, by letting go, can help the child move to the next culture of embeddedness. Each new stage (culture) represents an evolutionary balance or truce. “Over-holding” impedes an individual's growth. The trainer must always ask, “Am I over-holding individuals or the entire group and preventing their growth? Is what I am doing empowering the participants to grow and develop on their own?”

Other researchers and writers have already given us a rich array of viewpoints through which to consider the needs of our adult learners. It is appropriate that we consider these “maps” as we prepare a learning experience. As trainers, we need to be conscious of the kinds of changes we are likely to induce through the learning process. There is, of course, no precise way to describe the characteristics of your adult learners. But you will want to think as deeply as possible about the needs of each of your participants as you fashion their learning experience with you. The issue always is, “What can I do to promote the growth of individuals and the group as a whole through my design and later facilitation?”

## Assumptions About Adult Learning

Exactly *how* adults learn is subject to much speculation. It is helpful to trainers and managers to consider their assumptions about the adult learner in contrast to the youthful or child learner. Malcolm Knowles (1987) asks us to think about two sets of assumptions, one he labels *pedagogy* and the other, *andragogy*. The body of theory and practice on which teacher-directed learning is based is often given the label “pedagogy,” from the Greek words *paid* (meaning child) and *agogos* (meaning guide or leader) — thus being defined as the art and science of teaching children. The body of theory and practice on which self-directed learning is based is coming to be labeled “andragogy,” from the Greek word *aner* (meaning adult) — thus being defined as the art and science of helping adults (or, even better, maturing human beings) learn.

The pedagogical model is the one with which all of us have had the most experience. Teaching in our elementary schools, high schools, colleges, the military service, churches, and a variety of other institutions is largely pedagogically oriented. When we are asked to serve as instructors or to prepare instruction for others, the pedagogical model comes quickly to mind and often takes control of our design activities. That is easy to understand because pedagogy has dominated education and training practices since the seventh century.

Five assumptions about learners are inherent in the pedagogical model:

- The learner is a dependent personality. The teacher/trainer is expected to take full responsibility for making the decisions about what is to be learned, how and when it should be learned, and whether it has been learned. The role of the learner is to carry out the teacher’s directions passively.
- The learner enters into an educational activity with little experience that can be used in the learning process. The experience of the teacher/trainer is what is important. For that reason a variety of one-way communication strategies are employed, including lectures, textbooks and manuals, and a variety of A-V techniques that can transmit information efficiently to the learner.
- People are ready to learn when they are told what they have to learn in order to advance to the next grade level or achieve the next salary grade or job level.
- People enter into an educational activity with a subject-centered orientation. Learning is a process of acquiring prescribed subject matter content in a more or less logical sequence.
- People are motivated to learn primarily by external pressures from parents, teachers/trainers, employers, the consequences of failure, grades, certificates, etc.

During the 1960s, European adult educators coined the term “andragogy” to provide a label for a growing body of knowledge and technology in regard to adult learning.

**The following five assumptions underlie the andragogical model of learning:**

- The learner is self-directing. Adult learners want to take responsibility for their own lives, including the planning, implementing, and evaluating of their learning activities.
- The learner enters an educational situation with a great deal of experience. This experience can be a valuable resource to the learner as well as to others. It needs to be valued and used in the learning process.
- Adults are ready to learn when they perceive a need to know or do something in order to perform more effectively in some aspect of their lives. Their readiness to learn may be stimulated by helping them to assess the gaps between where they are now and where they want and need to be.
- Adults are motivated to learn after they experience a need in their life situation. For that reason learning needs to be problem-focused or task-centered. Adults want to apply what they have learned as quickly as possible. Learning activities need to be clearly relevant to the needs of the adult.
- Adults are motivated to learn because of internal factors such as self-esteem, recognition, better quality of life, greater self-confidence or the opportunity to self-actualize. External factors such as pressure from authority figures, salary increases, etc. are less important.

A subscription to either of the models of learning carries with it certain implications for the trainer/manager. The basic concern of people with a pedagogical orientation is *content*. Trainers and managers with a strong pedagogical orientation will be heavily concerned about what needs to be covered in the learning situation; how that content can be organized into manageable units; the most logical sequence for presenting these units; and the most efficient means of transmitting this content.

**In contrast, the basic concern of those people with an andragogical orientation is *process*. The andragogical process consists of seven elements:**

- Physical and psychological climate setting
- Involving learners in planning for their learning; involving learners in diagnosing their own needs for learning
- Involving learners in formulating their own learning objectives
- Involving learners in designing learning plans
- Helping learners carry out their learning plans
- Involving learners in evaluating their own learning outcomes.

## A Situational Focus

Having incorporated andragogical principles into your design and facilitation plans, you will want to consider the task maturity or developmental level of the person or group. In this case, what is meant by maturity or development is the general competence and motivation to perform a given task or set of tasks. Glaser and Sashkin (unpublished) have hypothesized that trainers and managers will be most effective in helping others to acquire knowledge, attitudes, and skills, if they adjust their style to the learners present developmental level.

In Situational Leadership theory, Hersey and Blanchard (1982) suggest matching leadership style to the competence and commitment of the follower. The same relationship may be said to exist between trainer and participant-learners. Learners may be roughly categorized into four levels of varying mixtures of competence and commitment. A low level of competence and a high level of commitment, for example, characterizes new learners or beginners in any area of skill or knowledge. A high level of competence and commitment characterizes experienced, capable learners who have demonstrated their understanding and motivation to learn. Other levels of development may be identified. The problem for the trainer/manager is to match his or her learning strategy to the general developmental needs of the group or the majority of individuals in the group.

If a group is relatively low in competence, for example, the program designer will specify a didactic approach. This means that the trainer will control most of training through a lecture format. Participants will be expected to acquire the content through memorization. If the group is more competent, but still dependent on the trainer, a socratic approach may be used. Under this system, the participants are expected to respond to questions and enter into a dialogue with the trainer. When participants become more competent and motivated, a facilitative approach may be used. Participants are expected to take on more responsibility for designing, implementing, and evaluating their own learning. When participant competence has been demonstrated and the motivation to learn is high, learners can be empowered and encouraged to be more self-directing in their pursuit of knowledge and skill.

*“Trainers and managers can increase the probability that learning will occur in individuals or groups if they are sensitive to the developmental needs of the learners.”*

Trainers and managers can increase the probability that learning will occur in individuals or groups if they are sensitive to the developmental needs of the learners. "Situationally focused" means that the trainers, to the best of their ability, will adjust their personal styles and learning strategies to match the task development levels of their participants.

## **Team Learning**

The Experiential Learning/Training Model in Figure 2 is set in a "team learning environment." The traditional way of organizing a classroom is to place the trainer in the front of the room with audio-visual paraphernalia of varying degrees of sophistication. The participants are then lined up in rows facing the trainer. Although people can interact with others on their right or left, it is very difficult to get involved with those in front or behind. The exchange of ideas is limited to a dialogue with the trainer or a side conversation with those immediately adjacent.

This model recommends taking advantage of the increased learning afforded by arranging people in small groups of four to eight learners to form a "learning team." All teams, of course, can interact with each other or the trainer, but the advantage is that people in small groups can build open and trusting relationships, share their experiences, and solve problems and make decisions more easily. The results of studies of individual versus group learning are remarkably consistent in showing that groups learn faster than individuals, both in natural situations and in contrived laboratory situations (Shaw, 1981, p. 66).

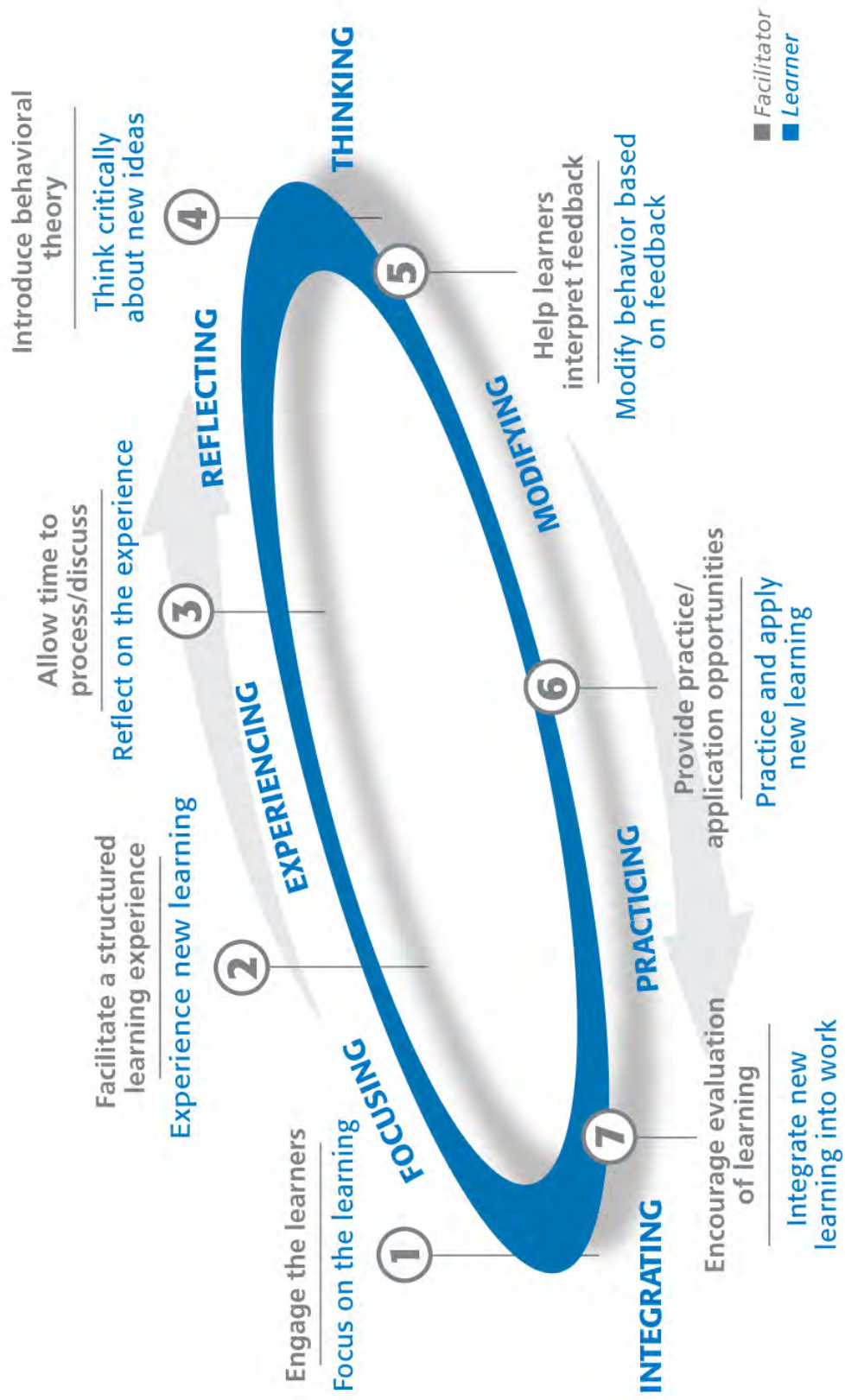
All of the processes in the experiential learning cycle can be comfortably performed in a small group setting: focusing, experiencing, reflecting, thinking, modifying, applying, and integrating.

## **The Experiential Learning Cycle**

Having completed your pre-design activities and considered the other prescriptions of the model, you are now ready to proceed with the actual development of the experiential module. Kolb, Jones, Honey, Mumford and others conceive of the learning process as a cycle, meaning that if the steps are followed in sequence, a desired learning effect will be produced. The model in Figure 2 accepts the cycle notion, but increases the number of distinct steps from four to seven. This model further describes what trainers *and* learners are doing during each step in the cycle. By indicating both trainer and learner activities, program designers can obtain a clearer picture of what needs to happen in each learning module. A *learning module* contains those training and learning activities that are conducted to reach a *single* learning objective or goal.

To illustrate what might happen at each of the seven steps, here is an example of a group of learners acquiring a collaborative conflict resolution model. The purpose is to show how a program designer (and later a program facilitator) might use this cycle in preparing a learning module to help program participants learn how to think about and resolve conflict more effectively.

- Step 1: Focusing** The facilitator's role is to help the participants relate to the concepts and skills about to be presented. Participants need to focus on the knowledge, skill, or attitude under consideration.
- Step 2: Experiencing** The facilitator introduces the participants to a hands-on activity that involves them in a situation that is relevant to the concepts and skills being studied. The purpose of this structured learning experience is to provide the learners with a concrete experience. It is this experience that will provide the learners with initial reactions and affective responses.
- Step 3: Reflecting** The participants are invited to reflect on and discuss their reactions to the structured activity. The purpose of the discussion is to get participants to reflect critically on the activity and on similar past experiences and to search for meaning in the experience.
- Step 4: Thinking** Theory is presented to clarify both the structured learning experience and the reflective observations of the participants. In other words, the conclusions that were drawn from the previous stage are now analyzed by the learner and are either added to his or her knowledge of existing theory or logical thinking skills are used to create a new theoretical construct.
- Step 5: Modifying** Learners are provided with information about their current use of the knowledge, attitudes, or skills suggested by the theory.
- Step 6: Practicing** Learners are provided with an opportunity to practice and apply their own learning. The purpose of this step is to help the learner incorporate the skills, knowledge, or attitudes into his or her own personal repertoire by trying them out in a protected setting and considering how they might be used on the job or in other life environments.
- Step 7: Integrating** This requires a review of the learning effort, principally by the learner. The key questions to be answered are, "To what extent have I learned the new information, skills, or attitudes?" and, "To what extent have I used the new knowledge, skills, or attitudes in the performance of my real life roles?"



**FIGURE 2:** The HRDQ Experiential Learning Model

When Step 7 is completed, the cycle begins again. Notice that the arrows suggest movement and recycling. In summary, the terms on the arrows represent learning processes the learner is engaged in:

- **Focusing** on what is to be learned
- **Experiencing** first hand a representative problem
- **Reflecting** critically on similar problems and the feelings engendered
- **Thinking** about a new perspective
- **Modifying** and experimenting with behaviors
- **Applying** (transferring) new behaviors to the workplace or other life environment
- **Integrating** the new knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors into the learner’s personal thinking and acting.

By following the 7-step model, the trainer and the learner are guided through a series of processes that will appeal to the individual learning styles likely to be found in a training/educational setting, thereby increasing the likelihood that learning will indeed occur. The job of the program designer becomes self-evident. Once the learning goals have been established, materials to support the learning cycle must be found. Figure 3 below is a summary of the 7-step model.

STEP	DESCRIPTION	ACTIVITY
1	Get Participants on Track	Word Association
2	Learning Experience	Simulation, etc.
3	Processing/Publishing	Group Discussion
4	Behavioral Science Input	Lecturette by Trainer
5	Feedback	Inventory
6	Skill Practice, Knowledge, Attitude Application	Role-Play
7	Evaluation	Supervisory Observation/ Feedback

**FIGURE 3:** Applying the Model to Conflict Resolution Training



## Accommodating Individual Learning Style

Group learning is difficult to individualize, but a consideration of individual learning style can be useful in both the design and the facilitation of adult learning. If the designers know in advance the preponderance of styles in their learning groups, they can arrange learning experiences that match their participants' predispositions. If facilitators are sensitive to participant learning styles, they can adjust the emphasis of various parts of the learning cycle. And if the participants are aware of their learning styles, they can recognize those parts of the experiential learning cycle they are apt to enjoy and profit from and compensate for those parts they would typically not respond to or ignore entirely. Understanding learning preferences and how they operate in the learning process can be very helpful to designers, facilitators, and participants.

Peter Honey and Alan Mumford (1989) have developed the *Learning Styles Questionnaire* to help participants understand how they prefer to learn. Their model draws on Kolb once again. It can be directly related to the experiential learning cycle shown in Figure 2.

Honey and Mumford suggest that people have one of four learning styles or combinations of these styles. They label the styles **Activist**, **Reflector**, **Theorist**, and **Pragmatist**.

**Activist** learners involve themselves fully and without bias in new experiences. They enjoy the here and now and are happy to be dominated by immediate experiences. They tend to thrive on the challenge of new experiences but are bored with implementation and longer term consolidation.

**Reflector** learners like to stand back to ponder experiences and observe them from many different perspectives. They collect data and prefer to think about it thoroughly before coming to any conclusion. They tend to adopt a low profile and have a slightly distant, tolerant, unruffled air about them.

**Theorist** learners adapt and integrate observations in complex but logically sound theories. They think problems through in a vertical, step-by-step, logical way. They tend to be detached, analytical, and dedicated to rational objectivity, rather than anything subjective or ambiguous.

**Pragmatist** learners are interested in trying out ideas, theories, and techniques to see if they work in practice. They are essentially practical, down-to-earth people who like making practical decisions and solving problems.

A glance at the experiential learning cycle reveals that Activists prefer the focusing, experiencing parts of the cycle. Reflectors prefer the reflecting portion. Theorists prefer the thinking part. And Pragmatists prefer the modifying, applying parts of the cycle. Effective learners are sensitive to their own learning styles. They capitalize on their strengths and compensate for their weaknesses. They are able to use all styles appropriately. Program designers and facilitators can also help their participants by recognizing learning styles in the preparation and delivery of the learning process.

## Facilitating Adult Experiential Learning

After the trainer, manager, or consultant has prepared an experiential learning module, how should he or she go about facilitating participant learning? Is the process of facilitation different from the process of training or developing?

The answer to the second question is, "Yes, facilitation is different from what we ordinarily refer to as training and development." When we think of training and development, we usually mean doing something to our participants. When we use the term "facilitation," we mean assisting, helping, or aiding the learning process. Training, development, and facilitating are often used interchangeably. As long as we know that facilitating means "creating opportunities for participants to learn," the confusion of terms seems immaterial.

The questions then are, "How do we create opportunities for our participants to learn?" "How can we use an experiential learning cycle to structure adult learning?"

Stephen Brookfield (1986) suggests five principles of effective practice. They include: respect for the learner's self-worth, a collaborative arrangement between facilitators and learners, praxis, fostering a spirit of critical reflection, and empowering adults to become more fully self-directing in their adult roles.

Looking at these five principles in a little more depth, respect for our participants is communicated through our own behavior as facilitators and the way we manage the learning process. The rule is rather simple. If we knowingly or unknowingly engage in behaviors that our participants find belittling or destructive, their learning is affected negatively. If we knowingly engage in behaviors that say to our participants, "I respect you as a person regardless of your past experience," the learning is affected positively. Our participants are freed to concentrate on what they are learning instead of protecting their self-esteem.

Collaboration refers to the joint quality of deciding what is to be learned, how it will be learned, and when it has been learned. Teaching and learning are a transaction. The involvement of the learner is half of that transaction.

Praxis is an unusual term. It means that activity is followed by reflection on that activity and that more activity and reflection follow. An experiential learning cycle guarantees praxis. Experiencing and reflecting are built into the process.

Critical reflection means helping our participants to surface and confront some of their habitual ways of looking at the world. Critical reflection involves the examination of our assumptions and developing alternative ways of looking at the world that might be more productive and healthier. As facilitators of an experiential learning cycle, we need to look for opportunities to help our participants reflect critically on their unexamined ways of managing and developing organizations.

Empowerment means giving power to our participants so that they can continue the development of their own independence. It means that we avoid playing the "expert" with all of the answers and set our participants to thinking, searching, and empowering themselves and others.

These five prescriptions for facilitating experiential learning can help trainers, managers, and consultants exploit the potential of experiential learning.

## Putting It All Together

In this article we have attempted to describe how to design and deliver training and development activities for adults. Beginning with the assumption that all learning has an experiential base, we have indicated the considerations a program designer must make in preparing learning materials for adults. We have also described an experiential learning cycle, originally devised by Jones and Kolb, and suggested how it could be used in both preparing and delivering training. The last section summarizes some of Brookfield's suggestions for facilitating adult learning. The following steps review what is involved in preparing and facilitating adult programs.

1. Conduct a performance needs analysis by using one or more of the standard methods for discovering what is hindering the performance of an individual or group.
2. Use the performance analysis grid to identify those performance needs amenable to a training solution.
3. Develop goals for the learning project, but concentrate on clarifying what is to be learned and how it is to be learned instead of constructing precise statements of behavioral objectives.
4. Consider the level of psycho-social development of your participants and how the program might deal with those needs.
5. Use andragogical assumptions in designing and delivering your program.
6. Base your program delivery system on the general task development of the participants. If task development is low, increase trainer control; if task development is high, increase learner control.
7. Use team learning instead of individual learning to accelerate the learning and change process.
8. Follow the 7-step learning cycle to plan a learning experience for a single module of learning.
9. Adjust the content and trainer interaction with the participants to help them capitalize on their individual learning style strengths.

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## About the Author

**Rollin Glaser, EdD** is chairman of HRDQ. In addition to his administrative responsibilities, he is a consultant, trainer, and writer. He has previous experience as vice president of organization planning and development for several firms. Rollin holds a BS from Northwestern University; an MEd from Northeastern University; an MA from Columbia University; and an EdD in adult education from Columbia. Rollin is the author of *Personnel Management for Retailers* (Lebhar-Friedman, 1977) and co-author of *The Management of Training* (Addison-Wesley, 1970) and *Managing by Design* (Addison-Wesley, 1981); has developed and written many instruments, simulations, and articles published by HRDQ; and is editor of *Classic Readings in Self-Managing Teamwork*.

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