# The Handbook of Experiential Learning & Management Education

*edited by Michael Reynolds & Russ Vince*
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Whether you teach management at the undergraduate or graduate level, *The Handbook of Experiential Learning & Management Education* deserves your attention. It presents an international perspective on the state of experiential management education, with contributions by scholars mostly from the United States and the United Kingdom; in addition, the wide range of disciplinary perspectives it offers is valuable for exploring the potential of experiential learning in the areas of Management, Human Resource Management, Management Education, Management Development, Leadership Development, Human Resource Development, Organization Development, Action Research, and Psychoanalysis. Many of the contributors to this handbook base their work on Kolb (1984), who defined experiential learning as "… the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (p. 41). In other words, experiential learning creates the setting for people to examine their experience and learn from it.

The handbook is divided into six parts. In Part I, "Fundamental Ideas and Theoretical Developments in Experiential Learning," the first of four chapters describes an experience-based intervention designed to help managers challenge and revise their assumptions using Argyris's concept of double-loop learning. The three chapters that follow present accounts of experienced-based learning for MBA students and multidisciplinary action-research project teams.

Part II is titled "The Diversity of Classroom Experience." Within it, Chapter 5 describes a framework that integrates tactical, strategic, and moral perspectives, which can be used to introduce experiential learning to management students who have no work experience. Chapter 7 provides

online activities for increasing students' involvement with course content, their peers, and the instructor, thus enhancing subject learning and self-awareness, and Chapter 8 presents a team project in which students learn to identify and solve problems on their own while developing communication and teamwork skills.

The five chapters in Part III, "Politically Grounded Experiential Learning," address the politics and power relations mobilized by experiential learning. Chapter 9 explores the relational and emotional dynamics involved in leadership practice, and Chapter 11 describes a "wilderness experience" used in an MSc program. Chapter 12, a critique of experiential learning, reminds us that "experience" in experiential learning should not be taken for granted and stresses the need to question the microcosms created through experiential methods. Chapter 13 concludes that attempts to change from traditional teaching methods often face institutional resistance, despite the espoused mission to develop more dynamic teaching programs, and recommends that we compare different experiential methods to develop the best fit within the university context.

Part IV, "Experiential Learning and Systems Psychodynamics," addresses the long tradition of experiential learning from a psychoanalytic perspective. Experiential learning is a way of introducing concepts or representing complex work environments and allowing reflection. Concrete examples are presented, for example, an undergraduate lecture on management and organizational behaviour and an action-research project designed to examine the feelings and emotions experienced by students and faculty within university settings. Chapter 17 discusses the use of "live projects" in an MBA program and explores the challenges involved in integrating experiential approaches in university settings and in evaluating what is learned during an experiential event. MBA programs use the lecture (teacher-centred) approach extensively, which minimizes uncertainty for students; in contrast, the project-added approach increases both uncertainty and the possibility for creativity by students. The author concludes that without opportunities for experiential learning, management education will continue to produce students unprepared for the realities of organizational life.

Part V, "Doctoral Students' Experience of Learning," emphasizes collective reflection as a key element in the development of scholarly knowledge and practice. Chapter 18 presents an approach used to help doctoral students become more immersed in the literature through a collaborative writing project. Chapter 19 describes an experiential research community of practice designed to provide peer-supported knowledge sharing and discovery and discusses the student-supervisor relationship, while Chapter 20 analyzes an exercise designed to help doctoral students understand how

(and why) to use visual data-collection methods when researching emotions in organizations.

Part VI, "Critically Focused Experiential Learning," begins with a discussion of the use of guided learning narratives to help groups of management students understand the dynamics of power in organizations. Chapter 22 illustrates how undergraduate students work with research literature and lecture material to reflect on their own experiences and, thus, make connections between personal experience and case studies. Finally, Chapter 23 illustrates how student-led human resource management projects, action learning, and participative assessment enable students to learn about organizational processes.

Is experiential learning undergoing a revival, as the editors of this handbook claim? Experiential learning is not likely to replace the use of case studies, lectures, and textbooks, but its potential to develop the practice of critical management education warrants your reading time. The experiential approaches described in this book focus more on learning processes than on course content or the measurement of learning outcomes and, in doing so, demonstrate the richness of thought that experiential learning can bring to management education. Clearly, however, we should keep in mind that experiential learning is more effective when it matches learners' preferred learning style (Armstrong & Mahmud, 2008).

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## References

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Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.