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MAML 17

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Research Project

To investigate the learning theories which underlie David Kolb's exposition of experiential learning, and by a process of interview and discussion, to explore how experiential learning is conducted in an established outdoor management development centre and whether it reflects these theories.

ABSTRACT

The work is in two parts. The first is an exploration of the underlying components of David Kolb's theory of experiential learning, aimed at identifying and airing the thoughts which underpin what has become a "given" in some areas of experiential training. The second part is an endeavour to establish what a well-established provider of outdoor (and out-of-doors) management development actually does, and where this converges and departs from the underlying theories. In addition, an examination of the proposition that the family of training approaches generally known as Outdoor Management Development can be anything from a vehicle for the personal development of managers to a means of training managers in behaviours currently desired by their employers.

Methodology:

1) Establish an overview of experiential learning theories by an examination of literature (both academic and popular – management), conducted by electronic means as well as library research. In terms of the subjective-objective continuum, this originally veered towards objectivism, but, through the exercise of reflection, became more a voyage of personal discovery. There was no attempt to add to the canon of experiential learning, but the reading/writing process became an example of experiential learning (reflection –driven) in action.

2) Seek an understanding of what some practising outdoor management developers see as their work, and to interpret their understanding of what they do by face-to-face interview and discussion. This was always intended to be a more subjective approach, based on interaction with the interviewees and exploring their interaction with delegates.

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Part 1:

An overview of learning theories and their roots. In particular, this section will concentrate on those theories commonly used in the experiential training of managers.

Part 2:

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle and related comments/critique.

SECTION 2: OUTDOOR MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT

Part 1: Outdoor Management Development (OMD), and the learning theories which underpin it.

Part 2: Face-to face interviews with outdoor management trainers, seeking their perceptions of underpinning theories, and how these are applied. Conclusions will be drawn about the theories actually in use.

CONCLUSIONS:

Using material from Sections and 2, to draw conclusions as to:

- The level of awareness of OMD practitioners of the learning theories which underpin their work, and the degree to which they take these into account in conducting their business.
- The relevance or otherwise of experiential learning theory to OMD practice
- Any light that OMD practice may shed upon theory.

INTRODUCTION

1) Why Choose Experiential Learning and OMD?

Twenty two years ago, I attended a training event which changed my life. Someone in the deeply conservative tobacco company for which I then worked had contrived to import a team from the Tavistock Institute into the Company's (deeply conservative) training centre and given them a one-week slot at the start of a four week development programme.

The Company and the Tavistock Institute were as culturally different as can be, and thus twelve unprepared delegates (including myself) were surprised to find ourselves engaged in a "T" group. The result was stunning. We wrestled with the openness, the stress, the long silences, the pressure to be honest, the pressure to be open, the pressure to *listen* to each other. As well as learning to cope, we bonded in a way which I have never – before or since – experienced. We were a band of brothers.

We became *involved* in the *whole* experience, and learning, we discovered, was something that was a *part* of that experience, not something externally imposed by "experts". This discovery, combined with the bonding, had a profound effect on the rest of the course. We refused to countenance traditional lecture-based training. When it was imposed on us we mutinied, deeming it a better use of time to carry on the "T" group without benefit of Tavistock.

We became a problem to the company, and it to us. In the following years, most of us left it. The head chef of a paper mill is now a successful broadcaster. The sales executive is now a smallholder. I now make a self-employed living through OMD.

The "T" group was my first exposure to "formal" experiential learning. For me, powerful, uncomfortable and ultimately life-changing. That's why I chose the topic - and it's relationship to my trade - as a suitable vehicle for research.

My research led me to perceive something else. The Lewinian experience described above forms one end of a spectrum. It's benefits are often unmeasurable, sometimes immeasurable. The other end of the spectrum is that package of training methods – lectures, competencies, – which provide the "measurables" by which buyers judge much training. OMD is capable of accommodating both ends of the spectrum; one of it's roots is the personal development of young people, wherein the objectives are for delegates to learn whatever is appropriate to their development at the time. Another root – an example is the Leadership Trust – is the attainment of demonstrable competency in a particular managerial skill.

This dichotomy forms the basis for the proposition examined by interviews with the training staff of an OMD centre. The process of digging into Kolb gave me the opportunity to reflect on a whole world of learning theories, and thus to arrive at a

proposition which is meaningful and important to me. The value of the digging process is summed up below:

**“Reading is important, because
reading makes me *think*”**

Germaine Greer
Television interview, 1999

2) Learning Theories and their Experiential Application – the Kolb factor

“Experiential Learning” is something of a catch-all term, covering an assortment of training methods, techniques, and philosophical approaches. The diversity of the experiential community has been characterised as a series of “villages”¹, which are summarised in Table 1 below:

“VILLAGE”	EXPERIENTIAL FOCUS	PURPOSE	EXAMPLE
1	Valuing learning from the experiences of life and work, as opposed to learning from the formal education system	To create new routes into higher education, employment, professional bodies etc.	The original thinking behind NVQ’s
2	Changing the structures, purpose and curricula of post-school education	To supplement or supplant traditional post-school education with experiential approaches	Lancaster MA(ML) and it’s Learning Community approach
3	Personal and collective empowerment through reflection on prior learning: re-vision	Raising group consciousness, community action, social change	Minority - e.g. race, gender, sexual orientation workshops
4	Personal growth and development, increased self-awareness and group effectiveness	To explore new ways of being, change old ways of responding, affirm undervalued aspects of oneself etc.	“T” groups, counselling, group therapy

Table 1: The four “villages” of the experiential community

The four villages represent a very wide range of philosophies, traditions, methods and techniques. All have some relevance to management learning and all are cited by David Kolb (Experiential Learning, 1984).

In this instance it is useful to “unpack” Kolb, as his work, dating back to 1975², was never intended to reflect OMD practice, although cited as an illustration of OMD from an early date³. Much of this research comprises such an unpacking, together with a reflection on the actual methodology used by an OMD provider.

3) Outdoor Management Development (OMD)

The rise, particularly in the Anglophile world, of the training genre often known as Outdoor Management Development (OMD) has been a fascinating phenomenon. In 1979, the year in which Creswick and Williams published their paper⁴, there was little indication that this training medium would become any more popular than, say, Mathematics, or Colloquy Meetings, both of which get more column-inches in a listing of management development techniques published as late as 1983⁵.

Twenty years on, it's difficult to find an experienced manager who hasn't attended some kind of outdoor programme.

It's that "some kind" that prompts this research. My experience of selling and delivering OMD has become increasingly hampered by clients' preconceptions about what it actually is. The problem used to be (1980) that they had *no* idea. The problem now (1999) is that they usually have some understanding but remain ignorant of the (many other) strands to which they have not been exposed. It's as if all courses in the outdoors were like the one or two the potential client has experienced, when in fact the outdoors offers a very wide spectrum of experiences.

The perceptions of OMD providers can be even more deep-rooted than that of their clients, and as varied as the routes by which practitioners arrived in the field.

One thing that providers do agree upon is that OMD is an "experiential" genre. Agreement rarely goes further, as cognition of what "experiential" means may differ widely. This can result in collaborations between providers being hampered due to a failure to share or agree on what is meant by experiential learning.

4) Intentions: I intend to apply the fruits of my reflection to the understanding of OMD by trainers working for an established provider, thus comparing the theoretical knowledge with what is actually practised. Such a comparison has usefulness in judging whether Lewinian "development" or a "competencies" approach predominates.

SECTION 1

LEARNING THEORIES AND THEIR EXPERIENTIAL APPLICATION

The work of David A Kolb⁶ will appear on these pages a number of times. Kolb did not invent experiential learning, but thoroughly encoded knowledge on the subject, drawing especially on the three pioneers Jean Piaget, John Dewey and Kurt Lewin, as well as developing a model of experiential learning which synthesises those of the above three pioneers and incorporates the work of many others.

Because of its synthetic nature, Kolb's book is an excellent focus for research on experiential learning. Kolb's importance is as a synthesist rather than an originator of learning theory⁷. The contents of this section may best be summed up graphically:

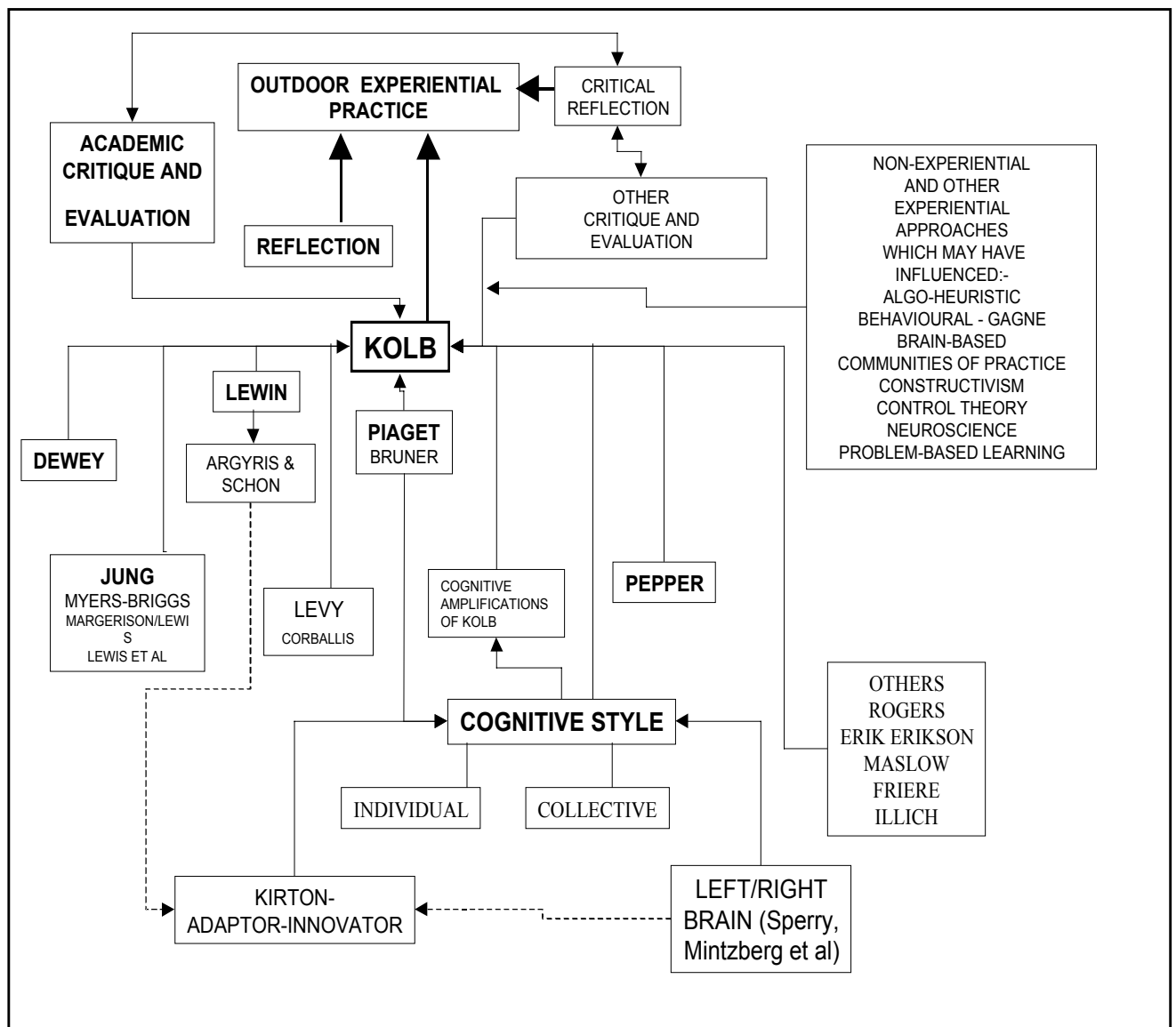


Diagram 2: Experiential Training Theories –Root and Branch

SECTION 1

Kolb clearly considers the intellectual origins of experiential learning to be the work of three people: John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget. Their contributions are set out below:

John Dewey

For Dewey, knowledge is not absolute, immutable, and eternal, but rather relative to the developmental interaction of man with his world as problems arise to present themselves for solution"

Anonymous introduction to John Dewey's "How We Think",
Prometheus, New York, 1991 reprint

John Dewey (1859-1952) was the leading American philosopher of his day, for 26 years professor of philosophy at Columbia University, and pioneer experimental educationist. It is in the latter area that he most influenced the world of experiential learning, particularly through application of his perceptions that learning is a thoroughly experiential activity:

"An infant does not even begin to reach definitely for things that the eye sees till he is several months old, and even then several weeks' practice is required before he learns the adjustments so as not to over-reach nor to under-reach.....final mastery requires observing and selecting the successful movements, and arranging them in view of an end"

("How We Think", page 158)

In paragraphs preceding and following the above, Dewey contrasts the instant and instinctive actions of a new-born chick in picking up food with the careful and repeated conscious consideration required by a human child to learn to do the same. Thus Dewey places even the most rudimentary actions of childhood into the first village of the experiential world. He goes further, suggesting that the sharp separation between "play" and "work" as represented by the change in teaching approach between Kindergarten and grade school in the American education system of his day was not conducive to learning⁸.

Dewey's legacy is very much that of the first and second "villages". Kolb remarks:

At one recent conference of the National Society for Internships and Experiential Education (NSIEE) one speaker remarked that there were three identifiable generations in the room: the older generation of Deweyite progressive educators.....

David A. Kolb, Experiential Learning, Page 5

Dewey himself, arguing from a philosophical stance, made clear that education was his area of concern:

"if one attempts to formulate the philosophy of education implicit in the practices of the new education, we may, I think, discover certain common

principles.....To imposition from above is opposed expression and cultivation of individuality; to external discipline is opposed free activity; to learning from texts and teachers is opposed learning by experience....”

John Dewey, *Experience and Education*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1938 (1997 reprint)

Reinforcing this educational emphasis in Dewey's work, the National Society for Experiential Education (Formerly NSIEE) freely acknowledges its debt to him. In a 1997 paper⁹ the society states:

“The essence of experiential education was captured by the philosopher John Dewey who argued that “events are present and operable anyway; what concerns us is their meaning”..... The problem for teachers and students is how to make meaning out of our experience”

Thus the Deweyite approach is seen (by the NSEE at least) as a means of teaching which takes “ordinary” experience and turns it into learning. This is done through a variety of methods including apprenticeship and internship programmes. These generally lead to the experiential learning of trade or professional skills – apprenticeship or internship, for example.

Despite recent revelations on quite how exotic the learning of some interns can be, the general objective is not to change the world (or even the way one sees or interacts with the world), but to learn the prosaic or exotic, simple or complicated, skills of a trade or profession by interaction with the world of that trade or profession. The NSEE, for example, sees experiential methods as superior to traditional education

Dewey's contribution to experiential learning was a key one:

- He pioneered applications of learning which make meaning out of experience.
- He argued that traditional (non-experiential) education is based on an assumed dualism of mind and body, and that experiential education should, on the other hand, be holistic and integrative, as opposed to the divorce of experience from learning of traditional pedagogy.
- He argued for the democracy of the experiential method as against the autocracy of traditional education¹⁰.

Dewey's legacy lives on in the widespread application of a variety of experiential education methods. The apprentice working to a planned programme of experience, the medical student learning by dealing with the actual problems of patients, both owe something to John Dewey.

What they learn may well be extremely useful to them, and additionally they may well learn to learn the lessons of experience. It is unlikely to change the way they actually perceive the world. On the other hand.....

Kurt Lewin (1890 –1947)

According to Kolb¹¹, Lewin was no less than “the founder of American social psychology”, described by others as having an influence comparable to “Sigmund Freud”¹² Lewin's continued influence on the fields of social psychology and organisational behaviour is based on the action-research method he pioneered.

The methodological approach adopted by Lewin was to develop actual group experiments of change, carried out in the laboratory or field, viewing group life *in its totality* rather than focusing on particular aspects.

Part of his contribution to experiential learning was, quite simply, that he presided over the discovery of a method of group reflection which, in evolved forms, is in common use today. This came about as the result of a small group of participants on a leadership and group-dynamics programme seeking to join in the end-of-day discussions in which experts analysed their behaviour during the day's training¹³. A witness has written:

“Some time during the evening an observer made some remark about the behaviour of one of the three persons who were sitting in - a woman trainee. She broke in to disagree with the observation and described it from her point of view. For a while there was quite an active dialogue between the research observer, the trainer, and the trainee about the interpretation of the event, with Kurt (Lewin) an active prober, obviously enjoying this different source of data that had to be coped with and integrated.”

Ronald Lippitt, *Training in Community Relations*, New York, Harper and Row, 1949
Quoted in Kolb, *Experiential Learning*

The delegates came to the next evening's session, bringing at least half of the 50 or 60 participants with them. From then on:

“The evening session became the significant learning experience of the day, with the focus on actual behavioural events and with active dialogue about differences of interpretation and observation of the events by those who had participated in them”

Lippitt (see above - my underlining)

Lewin's view that:

“People are more likely to accept and act on research findings if they helped to design the research and participate in the gathering and analysis of data”

Chris Argyris and Donald A Schön, *Organisational Learning II*, Addison-Wesley, Reading Mass., 1996

was born out by such occurrences and his valuable contribution to experiential learning can be summarised as:

- The involvement of his experimental subjects as *active, inquiring participants* in the conduct of those social experiments

- The view that people are more likely to adopt beliefs in whose development and testing *they have been active participants*

In achieving the above, Lewin took experiential learning into a wider realm than that of “formal” education, and paved the way for such as the Tavistock Institute to apply theories similar to his own to organisational issues. Through Lewin, experiential learning transcended mere experiential education, gaining the potential to occupy all four of the experiential “villages” :

- Village 1: By encouraging participant-reflection on experience (see above)
- Village 2: “T” Groups and similar approaches often take place within an educational framework, for example in management training programmes.
- Village 3: Lewin, for example, used experiential techniques to find a solution to disturbances of an apparently anti-Semitic nature by Italian youths in New York. The *solution* was pragmatic – better housing, leisure facilities, and so forth. The *process* was experiential – involving as many community and gang members as possible in discussions seeking the solution.
- Village 4: The “T” group and other group - based development methods owe much to Lewin’s original work in this area. So does methodology at the “developmental” end of the OMD spectrum.

My own experience on the receiving end of a methodology which can trace its roots directly back to Lewin changed the way I dealt with the world. Similar things can be said of many others, from frustrated mine operators to New York street gang members.

The third major originator of experiential methodology looks beyond how we deal with the world, looking instead at how we see the world and the influence of our reasoning processes on that perception.....

Jean Piaget

Kolb views Piaget in something of a different light to Dewey and Lewin: Whereas the latter two represent a challenge to rationalist philosophies of education, Piaget's challenge comes from *within* the rationalist perspective¹⁴

Whilst working with Binet on intelligence tests for children, Piaget found himself less interested in the results than in the processes through which the children went to arrive at them. Research led to the conclusion that intelligence is shaped by *experience*.

To quote Kolb:

“The growing child’s system of knowing changes qualitatively in successively identifiable stages, moving from an enactive stage, where knowledge is represented in concrete actions and is not separable from the experiences that spawn it, to an iconic stage where knowledge is represented in images that have an increasingly autonomous status from, the experiences they represent, to stages of concrete and formal operations, where knowledge is represented in symbolic terms, symbols being capable of¹⁵being manipulated internally with complete independence from experiential reality.

Although Kolb (above) describes only the three stages listed above, others recognise four stages, expressed as child-development:

- 1) Sensor-Motor:** The child, through physical interaction with his or her environment, builds a set of concepts about reality and how it works.
- 2) Pre-Operational:** The child is not yet able to conceptualise abstractly and needs concrete physical situations.
- 3) Concrete Operations:** As physical experience accumulates, the child starts to conceptualise, creating logical structures that explain his or her physical experiences. Abstract problem solving becomes possible at this stage.
- 4) Formal operations:** By this point, the child's cognitive structures are like those of an adult, including conceptual reasoning.

Piaget outlined principles for building cognitive structures. During all development stages, children experience their environment using whatever mental maps are currently available to them. If experiences are repeated, they fit easily into the child's cognitive structure. If the experience is different or new, the child alters his or her cognitive structure to accommodate the new conditions. This way, the child builds increasingly adequate cognitive structures.

Piaget himself was a thorough researcher and describer who, with co-workers explored child-cognition through thousands of studies over a 50-year period. It was left to others to turn theory into practice.

Of these, **Jerome Bruner** was the first in America to initiate the design of curricula which were geared to stages of cognitive development. Thus, children found themselves learning by experiences which in theory were attuned to their developmental stage and Learning to discover the process of acquiring knowledge, not just the *content*.

This emphasis of the validity of both *process* and *content* has become an abiding contribution to adult experiential learning, a fundamental of one of the approaches to Outdoor Management Development. It often emerges in group briefings as something like “The content of exercises may have little bearing on

working life, but the process is fundamentally the same, and is the area from which appropriate learning can be had". Or as one pioneering management developer put it, "Never mind the content, feel the process...."¹⁶

Piaget's legacy is seen at work across the world on a daily basis, both in the second "village" of pre-adult education and, through the separation of process and content, the fourth "village" of personal growth/group effectiveness.

The cognitive approach, too, still attracts much research.

Summary

Kolb identifies three major founders of experiential learning. They are:

John Dewey, whose legacy is seen in apprenticeships and internships.

Kurt Lewin, whose core values led to Participative Management philosophies and the allied world of organisation development.

Jean Piaget, whose work sparked an educational revolution and led to the key experiential concept of *task* and *process* learning.

SOME OTHER ROOTS

In addition to the above, Kolb ¹⁷ identifies people from areas of thought not directly linked to experiential learning, whose work has been influential on it's development. These include:

Carl Jung

As a founder of modern psychotherapy, Jung was deeply influential on the thinking about the roots of human behaviour. As far as experiential learning is concerned his theory of psychological types (Jung, 1923) is important. The theory was popularised by Isobel Myers from the early 1960's (Myers, 1962) through the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, a psychometric instrument used to clarify (in modified form) an individual's type-preferences. Jung, by originating the typology, and Myers by producing a popular type questionnaire, have enabled many to catch a glimpse of their own (and others') cognitive preferences, particularly our inherent biases towards the inner psyche or outer world¹⁸.

in summary the Jungian preferences available are:

Perceiving Functions: How we see the world and take on information from it. The dialectic oppositions are:

Sensing: The taking on of information in a very literal way, using the five senses and seeing the world as it is, in the here-and-now.

Intuition: Taking on information in an inferential way, seeking to connect it to other pieces of information, applying imagination to it, seeing the world as it might possibly be in the future, rather than as it is in the here-and-now.

Judging Functions: How we make decisions, either by:

Thinking: Carefully weighing the options and coming to a balanced decision; like an ideal judge weighing evidence, or:

Feeling: Reaching decisions through personal warmth, often by judging what answer will produce the greatest happiness for ourselves and those around us.

Introverted and Extraverted types: Jung makes the further point that all four functions can be applied in either an *introverted* or *extraverted* way. It should be understood that Jung and those who followed applied these terms in an unconventional way: *Introverted* means gaining energy from within and *extraverted* means taking energy from interaction with the external world.

Myers¹⁹ added a fourth preference (not made explicit by Jung) to the questionnaire which she initiated: The preference for exercising either the Judging or Perceiving functions. The validity of this dimension is not altogether accepted, with for example Lewis (Lewis and Lowe, 1992) dispensing with it in designing his Jungian questionnaire²⁰.

Jungian type, based as it is on a classification of cognitive styles, has many applications of which a principal one as far as experiential learning is concerned is that of discovering preferred learning styles and abilities. Ralph Lewis (Margerison and Lewis, 1979, Lewis and Lowe, 1992,) has written extensively on this, producing a questionnaire which, among other things, addresses this area of Jungian typology. Lewis's distinction between preference and ability is important, highlighting that we are sometimes forced (and able) to learn in areas for which our cognitive preferences ill-prepare us.

The importance of Jungian type for an experiential trainer is that it provides a tool for matching the training to the preferred Jungian type/learning style of the individual. Jung's typology and the associated questionnaires also give a framework for interpreting the behaviour of individuals in task-based learning.

The importance of Jungian type to Kolb is that it is akin to experiential learning in that both are holistic concepts seeking to describe the emergence of basic life orientations as a function of dialectic tension between basic modes of relating to the world. Learning, as Kolb sees it, involves the integrated functioning of the total organism – thinking, feeling, perceiving and behaving²¹ - terms which closely coincide with Jung's own.

Kolb asserts that Jung's typology is out-of-step with the current trends in behavioural sciences away from theories that propose to explain the totality of

human functioning, and *towards* concentrating instead on exploring and describing particular processes and sub-processes of human adaptation.²²

Although ultimately arriving at an integrated theory of experiential learning, Kolb acknowledges²³ that the search through particular sub - processes of human adaptation is fruitful in exploring experiential learning, and we now turn to some of these:

COGNITIVE STYLE (1) INDIVIDUAL

“Individual cognitive style may be thought of as qualitatively different ways of organising and processing information, with the 'best' style being determined by the demands of each particular task, problem or situation”

Sadler-Smith, E & Badger, B (1998) *Cognitive style, learning and innovation in Technology Analysis & Strategic Management*, Vol 10, Issue 2, Abingdon, Jun 1998

“Cognitive style is a person’s preferred way of gathering, processing, and evaluating information. It influences how people scan their environment for information, how they organise and interpret this information, and how they integrate their interpretations into the mental models and subjective theories that guide their actions”

Hayes, J and Allinson, C.W. (1998) *Cognitive style and the theory and practice of individual and collective learning in organisations*, New York, Human Relations vol 51, issue 7,

Taking the above two statements as a guide, individual cognitive style is a key influence on the learning people take from experience because an individual's cognitive style governs and interprets the evidence of eye, ear and hand to define the lessons absorbed by the experiential learner.

Kolb asserts (P.62), and Jungian type questionnaires illustrate that individuals' cognitive preferences vary widely across a number of criteria. This variety has prompted much enquiry into cognition, some of which is summarised below:

Messick²⁴ described cognitive style as characteristic modes of:

- perceiving
- remembering
- problem-solving

which reflect information-processing regularities that develop around the underlying personality.

Witkin²⁵: With associates, perceived cognitive style as individual differences in the way that people:

- perceive
- think
- solve problems

- learn
- relate to others

From these and other descriptions by Allinson and Hayes, Kirton and Riding, we may discern a number of characteristics of cognitive style:²⁶

- is concerned with *form* rather than *content* of information processing
- is a *pervasive* dimension that can be assessed using psychometric techniques
- *stable* over time
- may consist of a number of bipolarities
- may be *value differentiated* (i.e. 'different' rather than 'better' thinking processes)

An example of value-differentiation is Kirton's model of cognitive style, built on the assumption that style is conceptually independent (as inferred by Allinson and Hayes above) of cognitive capacity, cognitive techniques and coping behaviour. To illustrate, my style (on the Kirton Adaptor-Innovator bipolarity) is very much towards innovator – but that doesn't mean that I've necessarily got masses of cognitive capacity, skill, or even the ability to use these if I *did* have them.....just that my style is that of innovator. This parallels Jungian type which, according to Myers²⁷, assumes that children are born with a predisposition to prefer some (Jungian) functions over others, and that an indication of *preference* for, one style is no guarantee of *ability*.

Models of Style

Sadler-Smith²⁸ argues that there are three models of cognitive style which satisfy Messick and Witkin's dimensions, and that have been widely used in organisational and educational contexts:

- Intuition-analysis dimension (Allinson & Hayes)
- Adaptor-innovator dimension (Kirton)
- Wholist-analytical dimension (Riding).

Intuition-Analysis: Allinson and Hayes speculate that hemispherical differences in the brain are a possible basis for a variety of cognitive styles²⁹, using the term 'intuition' to describe *right brain* thinking (i.e. immediate judgement based on feeling and the adoption of a global perspective) and 'analysis' for *left brain* thinking (judgement based on reason and focussing on the detail). The idea of the dominance of one or other of the two hemispheres of the brain comes from 1960's work on 'split-brain' patients. Management theorists recognized the potential of this work and in 1976 **Mintzberg**³⁰ wrote about "planning on the left, managing on the right". Levy (1980) and Corballis (1980) summarised this work³¹, but there is as yet no "hard" neurological evidence for actual left-brain/right brain functions. The idea remains an interesting hypothesis, and a framework for describing types of cognition.

Adaptor – Innovator: Kirton's adaption-innovation theory³² states that individuals differ in their preferred ways of dealing with change, creativity, problem-solving

and decision making. This dimension of cognitive style is bipolar, with no particular position on the scale being 'better' than any other, although one style may be more effective than another in particular situations.

Adaptors are characterised by precision, reliability, efficiency, discipline and conformity, seeking solutions to problems in previously understood and tested ways, appearing impervious to boredom, maintaining high accuracy over long spells of detailed work.

Innovators are typified by undisciplined thinking, and tangential approaches to tasks and problem-solving, cutting across accepted paradigms. In groups they are catalysts, often being perceived (by adaptors) as unsound, impractical and unable to maintain detailed meticulous work for long periods.

Wholist-Analytical: Riding's³³ wholist-analytical dimension aims to describe the habitual way in which individuals process information in another bipolarity than that presented by Jung. *Analytics* will process information into its component parts; *wholists* retain a global view. There are risks in either position: For analytics, breaking-down of wholes into parts may lead to concentration on one aspect of an issue at the expense of others, exaggerating it's overall importance. Wholists may run the risk of blurring the distinctions between the parts of a problem.

Experiential Applications

The foregoing stresses the immense relevance of individual cognitive variety to experiential learning and OMD: Individual learners may perceive the same experiences in a multitude of ways, getting different learning from it. To take an old OMD standby, an exercise wherein delegates are invited to cross a given piece of ground using three barrels and two planks, with only the barrels allowed to touch the ground, one can observe a wide variety of learning outcomes, each dependent on, as well as the actual behaviour displayed by the delegates, their cognitive styles. Two examples from the extremes illustrate this:- In one, individuals learned through using well-developed intuition to derive complex metaphors from their behaviour; in the other, learning came from well-developed analysis leading to improved understanding of systematic problem-solving techniques (See appendix 1)

Cognitive style can have a massive effect on learning. Driver³⁴, for example, avers that it may be a better predictor of job behaviour than intelligence. If cognitive style is *that* important, the extent to which it is taken into account by designers and deliverers of experiential training will have a strong bearing on the effectiveness of that training.

COGNITIVE STYLE (2) COLLECTIVE

There is a wide debate around whether organisations or other collectives can actually have cognitive systems. Much of which is encapsulated in very active

debate around organisational learning and the learning organisation. In summary, the issues are:

Organisational Learning/ the Learning Organisation:

Organisational Learning is a relatively new field of study which Argyris and Schön³⁵ assert is “an idea in good currency”. Nevertheless, Cohen and Sproull were able to note as late as 1991³⁶ that:

“Research in organizational learning suffered from concepts that were excessively broad, encompassing nearly all organizational change and from various other maladies that arise from insufficient agreement among those working in the areas of key concepts and problems”

Cohen and Sproull (1991)
quoted in Lipshitz, R & Popper, M (1998)

A summary of the confusion surrounding the topic is provided by Argyris and Schön³⁷, who identify two communities:

- 1) Practice-orientated: prescriptive, value-committed, certainly evangelical, sometimes messianic, proponents of the “Learning Organisation”, most of whom do not puzzle over the meanings and implications of their vocabulary – flat organisation, local autonomy, trust, empowerment and the rest – because these “answers” are their starting point.
- 2) Scholarly inquirers: Seeking answers to the questions “what does organisational learning mean?”, “is it feasible?”, and so on. This group tends to adopt a sceptical stance towards these questions.

Popper and Lipshitz³⁸ suggest that a root of the confusion is the attribution of human qualities to organisations (which are, in fact, non-human entities). This perception tends to gloss over of the fact that how organisations can learn is not as self-evident as such anthropomorphism can make it seem. Organisations may be *composed* (partly) of people, but this does not make them *the same* as people. Lipshitz and Popper suggest that organisational learning can be seen only partly as an extension of individual learning.

Easterby-Smith³⁹ identifies a reason for ambiguity in this area; the existence of contributions to organisational learning from six different disciplines, leading to a confusion of tongues. These are summarised, with their contributions and perceptions of problems, in table 2.

This range highlights the fact organisational learning, and thus organisational cognition, is an extremely complex issue, and one which is quickly evolving and attracting study. Given the complexities, any experiential trainer venturing into this area would need to tread very carefully.

Hardware and Software

In describing an example of organisational learning in the Israeli Airforce, Popper and Lipshitz state that⁴⁰:

“Organisational learning has two facets—a tangible “hardware” facet that consists of learning mechanisms and an intangible “software” facet that consists of shared values and beliefs that ensure that the mechanisms produce actual learning (i.e., new insights and behaviours) and not mere rituals of learning.”

Popper and Lipshitz (1998)

This gives us a clue to where experiential learning and training - fits in to the jigsaw: Systems can be taught by either experiential or traditional methods. It is difficult to use traditional methods to promote sharing in an organisation or group's values and beliefs. It is insufficient to *tell* a trainee jet pilot that a set of shared values and beliefs (in this case based around post-flight reviewing practices) exists. The pilot must experience them for herself or himself. S/he must see the senior officer taking criticism without pulling rank, S/he must *feel* the atmosphere in the review. S/he must *encounter* the urgency with which experienced pilots rush to the review. This can only be learned by experience. Those who have “learned how to learn” are at an advantage.

DISCIPLINE	CONTRIBUTION	PROBLEMS SEEN AS
MANAGEMENT SCIENCE	The creation and dissemination of information. The notion of organisational knowledge. Levels of learning. Informating. A holistic view	The distorting effect of organisational politics. The tendency for managers to behave in “non-rational” ways. Conflicts between short- and long-term agendas. Unlearning
SOCIOLOGY AND ORGANISATION THEORY	Fundamental questioning of the nature of learning in organisations and the underpinning process of construction. Drawing attention to the reality of power, conflict and politics in organisations	
PSYCHOLOGY AND ORGANISATION DEVELOPMENT	The importance of context, adjusted ideas about how individual learning can relate to organisational learning, cognitive maps and frames of thinking, the interrelationship between thinking and action.	Moving the content of learning from individuals to the collectivity. Defensive reactions among individuals and groups. Poor communications between organisational members.
THE STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE	Belief in the competitive advantages of organisational learning. The debate about how far organisations <i>can</i> adapt to change. The importance of knowledge which arises from direct experience. Importance of exchange of technical information and general management practices	Self-inflicted pressures of competitive forces and change resulting from growth. Self-inflicted cultural limitations, especially with regard to joint ventures
THE PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE	Productivity as a criterion to assess learning. The learning curve. Endogenous and exogenous sources of learning. Organisational design as a factor affecting the transfer of learning from the individual to the organisation	Limitations in using single criteria to compare organisational configurations. Methodological weaknesses of comparative research. Minimal consideration of transnational cultural differences.

CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES	The importance of values and beliefs. To highlight the role of culture in affecting both process and nature of organisational learning	Relativity of cultural beliefs. Difficulty of transferring ideas from one culture to another.
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Table 2: Perspectives on organisational learning (from Easterby-Smith)

One of the skills of the pilots is the ability to learn through their own guided reflection and the critical reflections of their brothers and sisters in arms. This leads us on to another area of experiential learning:

REFLECTION

“All human beings need to become competent in taking action and simultaneously reflecting on this action to learn from it.”¹

Argyris and Schön (1974)

“Experience plus reflection equals learning”

John Dewey (1938)

Why Reflection?

Kolb sees reflection as the opposite and natural foil to action⁴¹. There can be no experiential learning without action, but experiential learning is stunted without the opportunity to reflect and resolve.

This simple concept has led to a convolution of interlocking and overlapping theories and practices. Set out below is a selection:

1) John Dewey emphasised the importance of reflective thought in experiential learning from experience: ⁴²

Active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and further conclusions to which it leads ... includes a conscious and voluntary effort to establish belief upon a firm basis of evidence and rationality.

DEWEY, J. (1933, reprinted 1991), *How We Think*, p6, New York, Prometheus

Dewey's concepts of reflective thought influenced adult learning theorists, including Kolb. A common feature of most theories of adult experiential learning is the importance of integrating new with past experience through the process of reflection.

Schön encapsulates reflection as a process in which the participant:

- Draws on experience to understand the situation

- Attempts to frame the problem
- Suggests action
- Re-interprets the situation in light of the consequences of action

Schön's work with Argyris in the field of improving professional practice developed the double loop learning (see appendix 2). One of the keys to unlocking this is to use critical reflection to dig below the surface, questioning the underlying values, beliefs and assumptions currently governing behaviour.

Reg Revans' (1978,1982) action learning, designed to help generate solutions to real problems, emphasised the concrete experience of the individuals taking part in the learning activity. This was influential on the methodology adopted by Roy Williams in his use of review in early OMD programmes.

It's place in Kolb's cycle serves to illustrate the importance of reflection to the experiential learning process. Without reflection, the process does not meaningfully exist; experience remaining mere experience.

SUNDRY APPROACHES TO EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Algo-Heuristic Learning:

L. Landa proposes that learning is more effective when the student is aware of, and able to use an underlying mechanism. Algo-heuristic learning is concerned with identifying mental processes -- conscious and especially unconscious -- that underlie expert learning, thinking and performance in any area. Problems are identified as falling on a continuum between:

- Those for which the solution lends itself to the production of reliable *algorithms* and:
- Problems (*creative/ heuristic*) for which precise and unambiguous sets of instructions cannot be formulated.

For the latter, it is possible to formulate instructions containing a degree of uncertainty (*heuristics*).

Constructivism:

A philosophy of learning which incompletely echoes Piaget, placing emphasis on the view that we construct our own understanding of the world by reflecting on our experiences. Each of us generates our own "rules" and "mental models," which we use to make sense of them. Learning is simply the process of adjusting our mental models to accommodate new experiences.

The guiding principles of Constructivism, which sound as if they make the assumption that we are all Jungian intuitives, are:

- Learning is a search for meaning.

- Meaning requires understanding of wholes as well as parts. The learning process should therefore focus on primary concepts, not isolated facts.
- In order to teach well, we must understand students' mental models and the assumptions they make to support those models.
- The purpose of learning is for an individual to construct his or her own meaning, not to memorise and regurgitate someone else's meaning.

Rogers and Maslow: Constructivism perhaps also owes something to **Carl Rogers**, via his person-centred approach to psychotherapy and counselling, and the attendant promotion of a facilitating rather than traditional approach to teaching.

Rogers and **Abraham Maslow** who, after experiencing a "peak" on the birth of his first child, moved away from behaviourism and developed theories of self-actualisation, are cited by Kolb as underlying influences on his summary of experiential learning,. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is used in OMD programmes, more to illustrate the concept of self-actualisation than to demonstrate ways of achieving it.

Neuroscience: Like left-brain/right-brain theories in being a fast-developing and as yet imperfectly understood field, this branch of learning theory emphasises the necessity for a richness of experience in learning in order to build-up physical connections within the "web" of the brain's functions.

Problem-based learning:

"Problem-based learning.... results from the process of working toward the understanding and resolution of a problem.... the problems students encounter are those of actual patient cases.... serving as the stimulus for acquiring the basic science knowledge needed to understand underlying mechanisms of health and disease, and also.... as the focus for the development of clinical reasoning skills..... learning is motivated by a need to resolve patient problems. "

From the website of the University of Southern Illinois

It can be seen that this owes much to Dewey - another outworking of his theories of experiential education .

Robert Gagne: Influential in some forms of industrial and commercial experience-based training (for example Training Within Industry), Gagne's theory is based on the behaviourist view that learning should cause an observable change in the learner. Systematically:

- Skills should be learned one-at-a-time.
- Each new skill should be based on previously acquired skills
- Learning and knowledge are hierarchical in nature

This writer can report from experience that this approach is systematic, foolproof, and laborious for trainer and trainee. Nevertheless, it is an experiential method of training, and is frequently used. It provokes the closing thought for this section that it perhaps represents one extreme on an experiential training continuum (See figure 3):

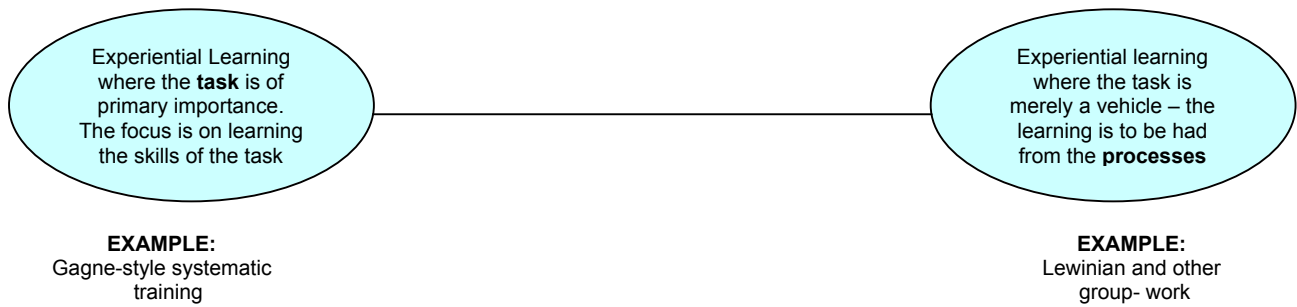


Figure 3: Task and Process in Experiential Learning

SECTION 2: – KOLB'S EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE

“...there may be a great payoff in the integration of findings from these specialised areas into a single general adaptive model such as that proposed by experiential learning theory.....When learning is conceived as holistic adaptive process, it provides conceptual bridges across life situations such as school and work, portraying learning as a rich new perspective for the conduct of education”

David Kolb, 1983

Weaving from a rich diversity of threads, the principal of which are outlined in the preceding pages, David Kolb provides us with that general adaptive model. An annotated version (Figure 4) of which is set out below:

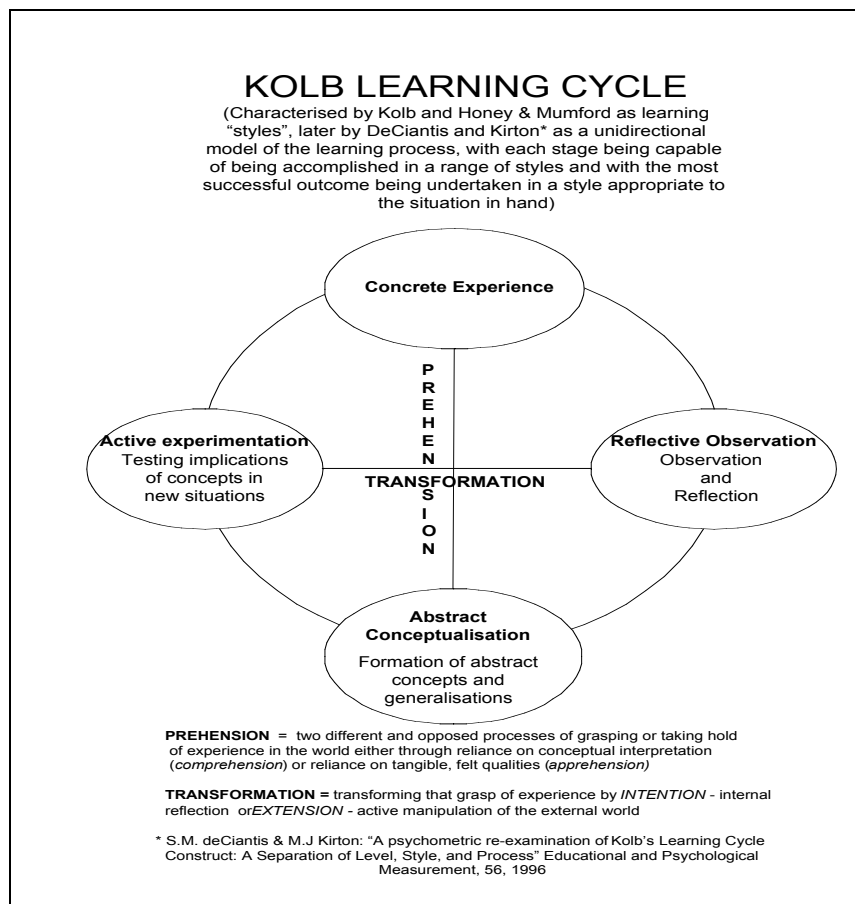


Figure 4 – Kolb's experiential learning cycle, with my annotations

THE FOUR LEARNING STYLES

As well as the learning cycle, Kolb developed a questionnaire, the Learning Style Indicator (LSI) which measured individual preferences for learning styles. The descriptions of each of the LSI “types” works well as a description of the attributes of the four styles:

These summaries have been paraphrased from *Experiential Learning* (KOLB (1983) New Jersey, Prentice Hall), particularly pp 69 and 70. These pages deal with preferences towards each of the four styles, and are written here as such:

Concrete Experience:

Someone with an orientation towards Concrete Experience focuses on being involved in experiences and dealing with immediate human situations in a personal way. This is characterised by:

- An emphasis of feeling over thinking
- A concern with the uniqueness and complexity of present reality, as opposed to theories and generalisations
- An intuitive “artistic” approach as opposed “scientific” approach to problems –
- Quality in intuitive decision-making
- An enjoyment of, and skill in, getting on with others, valuing relating to people
- Functioning well in unstructured situations
- An open-minded approach to life.

Reflective Observation:

Focuses on understanding the meaning of ideas and situations by careful observation and impartial description. Emphasises:

- Understanding as opposed to practical application
- A concern with truth and function over pragmatism
- An emphasis on reflection rather than action
- An intuitive grasping of the meanings and implications of situations and ideas
- Looking at things from different perspectives
- Appreciating different points of view
- Forming opinions through a reliance on one’s own thoughts and feelings
- Valuing patience, impartiality, considered, thoughtful judgement

Abstract Conceptualisation:

Focuses on using logic, ideas and concepts. An orientation towards this emphasises:

- Thinking, as opposed to feeling
- A concern to build generalised theories, rather than seeking to intuitively understand unique, specific area
- A “scientific” rather than “artistic” approach to problems
- Enjoys (and is good at) systematic planning
- Enjoys (and is good at) manipulation of abstract symbols
- Enjoys (and is good at) quantitative analysis
- Valuing precision, the rigour and discipline of analysing ideas and the aesthetics of neat conceptual systems

Active experimentation

Focuses on actively influencing people and changing situations. An orientation towards this emphasises:

- Practical applications as opposed to reflective understanding
- Pragmatic concern with what works, rather than what is truth
- Doing as opposed to observing
- Accomplishing things
- Willingness to take some risk in order to achieve objectives
- An influence on their environment, whatever that may be
- Results

Kolb's learning cycle first appeared as long ago as 1975⁴³, achieving wider currency since the 1984 publication of *Experiential Learning*.

Significance to OMD

For OMD, the cycle seems to be significant. OMD is a highly experiential process, relying for its effectiveness on lessons learned in (or through) the outdoors which (it is hoped) will positively effect some desirable (or *desired*) change in delegates' behaviour at places other than those in which the lessons were learned. An understanding of *how* people actually learn through experience would seem a useful tool.

The connection between Kolb and OMD was made long ago: In a 1983 article⁴⁴, Chapman and Lumsdon claimed that:

“Very few management development activities comprise all four of the elements described by Kolb in his model of “Circular Learning”.....Most programmes rely on the prior existence of Element 1, Concrete Experience, in participants. [outdoor] Development training creates it by providing experience in an environment which can be uncomfortable, uncertain, unfamiliar and sometimes hostile”*

CHAPMAN, A & LUMSDON, C.A., (1983) *Outdoor Development Training, a New Tool for Management*, Leadership and Organisation Development Journal, 4, 4.

* My insertion, for purposes of clarity.

This quote serves as a useful bridge into the next section, an overview of OMD which in itself acts as a lead into an exploration of how experiential learning is perceived at a representative OMD centre.

SECTION 4: OUTDOOR MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT – AN OVERVIEW

A Personal Story: Two learning experiences have changed my life. I have already described one. The other was an outdoor programme I attended in 1978. I had mixed feelings, looking forward to a week of exciting activity, but having no idea what the real benefits of were meant to be. My less optimistic colleagues muttered about “brainwashing” and expressed fears that the programme’s objective was to exhaust us, thus making us open to company indoctrination.

The reality was different to all our expectations. We carried out a series of absorbing tasks which required (at the very least) some creativity in their solving. Physicality was reduced to the level of a welcome incidental - adding an element of fun, rather than exhaustion. The emphasis on process review was high. As time passed, the exercises became more complex, culminating in one lasting 24 hours in which we were able to explore layer after layer of task-complexity, circumstances pushing us towards adopting a managerial approach which emphasised flexibility, communication, and the need to make decisions on incomplete information. By this time we had become accustomed to review, and incorporated it into our performance.

I found the experience deeply seductive, and as the week progressed I became more and more excited. Even now, I can recall specific moments from the programme in graphic detail, yet find it hard to record what I *actually* learned. My learning could not (cannot) be summed up in a list of competencies. Whilst researching for this paper I found a summary of what happened to me:⁴⁵

“A profound kind of learning which is readily sensed, but can be difficult to articulate: It is a kind of learning which is fundamental, which is holistic, which is closely linked to personality, and which affects how people learn. ‘Development’ is typically less specific but more substantial and more central to a person’s make-up than ‘learning’. (Development is) a change in a person’s core construct system”

Greenaway (1995)

Such changes have consequences: On return to the office I found the routine of my job less congenial than before. My eyes had been opened to a new world, and the day-to-day now palled. Acting as a staff member on further outdoor programmes only served to heighten this feeling. Going back to the office felt like going back to unreality. In due course I accepted an invitation to join a development training organisation. From there I built a niche for myself.

The Wider world of OMD

Although OMD is often seen as a unified and identifiable form of management education, it is, in fact, a wide field of endeavour. Many providers have adapted to a variety of purposes, exercises initially aimed at personal development. Others formed their approach to OMD in backgrounds ranging from military training (for example, John Ridgeway) to occupational psychology (for example, Roy

Williams). The field grew rapidly in the 1980's, so influxes of new trainers brought their own ideologies. Some of the typologies which can be found in OMD are:

Typology 1:



As an example of the above bipolarity, Greenaway⁴⁶ cites two examples of advertising for OMD:

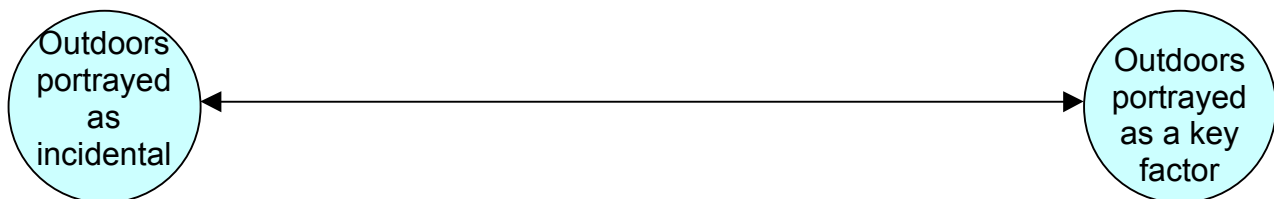
- 1) *"In the 1990's the swamps will get deeper, the alligators sharper. This is where Bearsports can help. Its Management Survival Programme is based outdoors applying theory to situations that will test morale and motivation to the limit..."*

Bearsports, advertising in "Transition", 1990

- 2) *"Elan Valley Lodge believe that people learn better if they find the experience enjoyable"*

Elan Valley Lodge, advertising in "Training Officer", 1992

Typology 2:



Again, Greenaway⁴⁷ cites examples of both extremes from OMD promotional literature:

- 1) *"Arete starts with the outcome, not the outdoors"*

Arete , Advertising in "Training Officer", 1992

- 2) *"Harness the power of the outdoors"*

Impact Training and Development, advertising in "Transition", 1990

Typology 3:



This bipolarity cannot be illustrated from advertisements, but is powerful. Training is “education with a practical purpose” (Greenaway, 1995), whereas development emphasises growth and person-centred learning. One is *trained* to learn the skills of cooking; one might experience *development* through having learned cookery – perhaps an enhanced feeling of self-sufficiency or discovering new and life-changing self-expression through cookery.

As applied to OMD, this particular dichotomy can best be expressed through examples:

- OMD as **training** might result from a course aimed at delegates better understanding some managerial skill such as action-centred leadership (ACL). An OMD supplier might design a programme in which the exercises reflect some aspect of ACL, and in which review questions are phrased to highlight ACL. Discussion in other areas might be curtailed by the facilitator, and inputs would be based on ACL concepts. Training is concerned with outcomes, and the success or failure of the course could be judged by whether or not the delegates have learned ACL

This approach can lead to a “front-loaded” learning model: The subject-matter is delivered as an input, with exercises designed to confirm the truth of that input and review being based around how well the participants were able to behave in the ways prescribed by the input.

- OMD as **development** might result from a course designed to help delegates become more aware of the potential latent within them. An OMD supplier might then run a programme in which there are no specific learning outcomes for any exercise; they act as vehicles in which people interact, and provoke generalised reflection.

The programme might include elements aimed at highlighting individual potential. Review would be open, based on whatever processes happened during the exercises. It is likely that review would also be probing, seeking to explore *why* people did what they did. Exercises might include a surreal element, aimed at expanding delegates’ consciousness. Learning in these situations is focussed on the individual, and not on particular skills.

Development is concerned with growth and person-centred learning rather than specific outcomes, and thus the success or failure of such a programme should be judged in those terms.

For me, the **training versus development** issue is vital: I became aware whilst working on this research that the drift of OMD may have been away from development and towards training. Further, perhaps the medium is being used to teach a range of difficult and awkward things which, because of the enjoyable and exciting nature of the medium, makes it a sugar coating for an otherwise bitter pill.

In another metaphor, OMD might be just “free-range” learning, better than the educational factory farm but, as millions of pigs (if they could speak) could testify, the end-result of all pig-farming is bacon.....and my experience is that OMD can be something else, perhaps helping us to acquire the skills of the Tamworth Two, taking our chances with freedom. These thoughts come about as a result of the reflection prompted by this research. I found it difficult to maintain a neutral, objective view, sympathising strongly with the sentiments captured by Reynolds⁴⁸:

“Reed and Anthony (1992) regard management teachers and trainers who intentionally perpetuate morally impoverished programmes of education for managers as deserving of contempt and working against their own interests. They contend that management educators should work to help managers: . . . to an awareness of their own significance and responsibility by encouraging in them a consciousness of the difficulties with which they are engaged. They must be encouraged to think about the unprogrammable complexities which face them without the distracting and specious assistance of codes, competencies, catch phrases and mission statements”

My initial response to the training/development dichotomy (from the early 1990's onwards) was to attempt to synthesise the two, relying on cunning design to devise programmes wherein the exercises pointed inevitably to the clients' desired outcomes, whatever the actual behaviour of the delegates without making this obvious to them. Review, I felt, could then take it's natural course, uncontaminated by any tutorial prompting, but serving the needs of the ultimate client. My current reflections lead me to perceive this as very smart instrumentalism.

The face-to-face research will include examination of this issue.

Typology 4



This typology is expounded more fully by Krouwel and Goodwill (1994)⁴⁹, and is based on the relative emphasis placed by providers on activity and review. At one extreme is endurance training, which places little or no emphasis on review, but

which involves challenging tasks offering high excitement. At the other are lighter options offering little by way of physical challenge but with a very high focus on review.

Steps between are characterised as outdoor education (High task; some review) and development training (high task; high review).

Conclusions

OMD is not a unified process. It encompasses everything from brutal tasks with little or no review to lightweight exercises with lots of review; from training aimed at imparting particular management skills to very developmental of approaches; from a downplaying of the outdoors to an emphasis on it; from high fun to high challenge.

Provision of OMD has grown rapidly. How rapidly can be roughly gauged by the number of providers: In 1983, according to Beeby and Rathborn⁵⁰, there were fifteen in Britain. By 1993, this had risen to over 177⁵¹.

It or may be that “development” has been subsumed by “training”. This lead to a proposition:

Proposition: That the family of training approaches generally known as Outdoor Management Development can be anything from a vehicle for the personal development of managers to a means of training managers in behaviours currently desired by their employers, and that the latter is in the ascendant.

An appreciation of OMD practitioners' understanding of the nature of experiential learning may illuminate this proposition, as may enquiry into course content and perceptions of key areas explored in programmes.

The proposition is one that goes back to the very roots of experiential learning. At one end of a continuum there is Kurt Lewin (and the multitude that followed), saying look at it *all*, and at the other end those who say that OMD is just a way to teach professional skills. At one end, OMD has the potential to provoke radical change, at the other, to promote the practice of particular job or process skills.

Whatever it is or might be, OMD is a big business. In the next section, a corner of that business is used to explore the above proposition.

SECTION 5: INTERVIEWS WITH OMD PRACTITIONERS AT AN ESTABLISHED CENTRE

Finding Willing Subjects: My 20-year involvement with OMD should have made it easy to find practitioners to interview. Three potential sources presented themselves:

1) The group of **freelance OMD trainers** with whom I frequently work. The easy option.

2) The training team of **Outward Bound Professional**, based at the Outward Bound centre at Eskdale Green, Cumbria. I have worked with this group in the recent past. An attraction is that Outward Bound has the longest history of any outdoor development provider. Outward Bound has been the scene of often passionate ideological debate between pragmatism and outdoor/developmental purism⁵².

3) The training team of the **Lindley Educational Trust**, based near Masham, North Yorkshire. Lindley is my former employer and thus I knew something of their history. A further advantage was that I had kept in fitful touch with the Trust's Managing Director since leaving, and so had an influential contact. Lindley has had it's fair share of purist/pragmatist debate.

I rejected the first group as it is possible that the interviews might be tainted by the commercial relationship between us. Further, I have a tendency to work with like-minded people and there would thus be a bias in using this group.

Repeated telephone calls to the Director at Outward Bound Eskdale failed to elicit any response, and rather than keep knocking on a closed door, I moved on.

Lindley Educational Trust

Lindley Educational Trust was my next option and it proved a willing and co-operative one. The Managing Director gave me an instant go-ahead for the interviews. Within days I had arranged two consecutive dates during which six people would be available. A detailed timetable was agreed, and all was set. A condition for the interviews was that respondents should remain anonymous. I was happy to comply with this.

Although it would be difficult to find a truly "representative" provider from the hundreds available, Lindley has attributes which make it a good choice:

History: Lindley is well-established, having been founded in the early 1970's as a Church-based centre for the development of young people, with an emphasis on indoor experiential methodology. Over the years operations have evolved and expanded, and it was a specialist OMD team that I interviewed.

Trade Reputation: Lindley has a reputation, established over the last fifteen years, for providing sound OMD programmes.

The Questions

I arrived at these by :

- 1) Reflection and recording whilst reading.
- 2) Testing the “raw” list against the objectives of the research.
- 3) Reflecting further on the questions whilst writing.

A list of the questions is attached as Appendix 3

The questions were designed to focus on a number of areas:

- The experiential process (Questions 1, 3, 5)
- Perceptions of what OMD is (Questions 2, 4)
- Course content (Questions 10, 11,13)
- Key areas explored in programmes and the learning (Questions 6, 7, 8, 9,10)
- Resistance to learning (Question 12)
- Boundaries/limitations to the learning (Questions 9 and 14)

The Interview Process

Interviews, were able to proceed in privacy. With the permission of each interviewee, I used a cassette machine to record answers. This enabled me to fully concentrate on the interviews.

The cassette player did not seem to be an intrusive presence.

I tried to spend between-interview time with the training team, aiming to build a relaxed and friendly presence.

The interviews lasted between 55 and 65 minutes with a 30-minute gap between them. I found this rate to be extremely useful, allowing time for reflection. Of the six interviewees, five were trainers and the sixth was the training director of the Trust. My analysis of responses is confined to the five trainers. The Training Director was something of a bonus, but her commercial focus and actual lack of upfront training experience led to answers so different as to confuse rather than clarify matters. This is in no way to decry the Training Director's responses which were articulate and considered.

The five trainers interviewed come from a variety of backgrounds and have a variety of experience with the organisation.

Summed- up, training experience was from a few months to fifteen years. Commercial experience outside the outdoor world was from nought to fifteen years, and included everything from trainer in industry to very senior manager in a large company.

The interviews: Although the original questions were covered by all, the interviews often departed from the basic questions to explore areas of interest to myself and the respondents. These discussions were a bonus to the research, clarifying and moving my thinking in a number of areas.

Responses: A verbatim transcript of the discussions is available on request, but amounts to too many words (17,000) to form a part of the body of this work.

For me, the answers provide a window into two positions taken by OMD trainers:

- Some may be aiming to provide “quasi-experiential learning” wherein the learning is pre-determined, but the delivery is packaged so that the learners think they’ve discovered things for themselves.
- Others see the experience as just a vehicle, with the learning (whatever it is) that’s taken away as being the important thing.

A number of respondents expressed views on the “**development versus training**” issue which, while not always advocating the “training” approach, describe it as the customary one:

“There is a fair level of guidance which goes on to make sure that the things they find out are the things I want them to find out, ha, ha, but they feel they are making the decisions for themselves....”

“I think the days when... management development was “generally develop managers”....now it’s much more specific: “we need our managers doing this, this and this, in these sort of situations” and so you’ve got to target your exercises much more closely.”

“ In the early eighties they were just chucking huge amounts of money – “develop them!” - and you could do what you liked! and that’s long gone.....Training’s much more high profile than it was then AND they’ll spend money on it BUT only if you really deliver. The first person who can REALLY clearly demonstrate bottom-line financial improvement from OMD will make a lot of money. “

“I guess for me to really concentrate it down, for an exercise to be used.....it really must reflect the work processes and the work systems for it to be genuinely outdoor management development as opposed to outdoor experience from which some development comes. So if we were designing an exercise we’d want to look at the company systems and culture and style, and then the exercise, which may be generic, we’ll then adapt, or at least frontload and debrief against that particular style and those cultures and the information that we found out.”

“....with the client being much more specific about what they get out of it, there is more of a covert agenda: I really want this review to come round such that I can do such and such because that’s what the client wants me to do.....

...” OK, yeah, you want to develop people as well but you’ve gotta remember what we’re trying to achieve with the programme so....there is a little bit of guidance.....”

“Certainly, what we do here is organisationally based. People come to us because they’re trying to effect some organisational change. Changing organisations means changing people, but we have to drive the change.”

"We provide a choice between the old way and the new way, demonstrating the advantages of the new way"

"Certainly at the moment most of the money is because the organisation wants to change the culture TO something"

"We're actually training them to do their jobs better. That's what we're doing"

Reflection leads to a conclusion that the sociological assumptions of the "Training" approach are at the positivist end of the subjectivist-objectivist continuum. Positivist assumptions about human nature regard man as a responder. This is accepted by the "training" end of the OMD continuum in two ways:

- The provider *responds* to the tight specification imposed by the client by accepting it and doing it's best to comply.
- Training is provided which aims to instill compliance in the delegates, by "selling-in" the imposed change; thus seeking an accepting, compliant response from the delegates.

There is, too, an element of positivism in the assumptions underlying the training; that by giving groups exercises designed to highlight particular issues, then those issues *will* be highlighted. This makes an assumption that exercises can be precisely engineered to have predictable learning outcomes, which itself rests on an assumption that the behaviour and interaction of humans is reliably predictable.

In going through this process, positivist training can be likened to a school chemistry class wherein "experiments" are conducted by experts to demonstrate an already-known outcome for the benefit of the learner. In this case, though, the "learners" form one of the elements in the demonstration.

As a positivist transaction between the providers and their clients, this doesn't matter. What is being sought is for delegates to exhibit the desired behaviours when they return to work. They don't have to *mean* it. Just to *do* it.

Interviewees felt that that the organisation has adopted a positivist approach to training for commercial reasons. Attitudes to this varied from apparently enthusiastic acceptance:

" I remember..... we used to really argue about "who is the client – is it the people on the course, or is it the people who paid for the course?" and there were a lot of people in those days who – very, very nice people – (said) 'it's all about developing the people who came on the course'. **Stuff that!** You work for the organisations who pay the money, and they want specific results....."

To outright regret:

"OK, the reason that I'm doing this job is to affect individuals and sometimes that's in conflict with the objectives of the Companies.....in fact I would say that my objectives – which I often keep to myself – are on a different level to the Companies' ones...."

In summary, reasons given for a “positivist training” approach in the Trust were:

Commercial Success:

“...they'll spend money on it BUT only if you really deliver. “

Job success:

“I would have said that the people who earn the money in this organisation are left-brained.... because they seem to go out and give clients what they want, so clients keep buying whereas the right-brain people have a much more purist approach to it.... do they have much bigger...ethical dilemmas?”

Possible rejection:

“if you go to the other extreme of personal development, the real open, broad brush developing people, they would think ‘this is very silly’ ”

Getting delegate buy-in:

“.....giving them an experience that they can handle...that's gonna make them psychologically safe. We could do these messy learning events and just bring them here and say okay.....I'd be happy to do that but I'm SURE that most people would be unhappy to do that, so a key factor for me is to give it face validity and a kind of certain professionalism for their sake, so that they've kind of bought-in to the concept of coming and they're not going to be wasting their time. That's a key factor.

Fear:

“I think that there's a fear on our side that we don't want to frighten, disturb, clients, or even in our own confidence that we can leave them with something better than they had before, or might leave them with a lot of uncertainty and upset”

The “Development” Approach

Most interviewees identified another set of objectives, different from positivist ones:

“....perhaps it's a group who are quite established and you'd want to shake them up – putting them in a Greenfield site.....so it would be to completely change the dynamics of something.....you just spark that off. I think there's an element too...the unknown, putting people in an uncertain environment to perhaps make them a little bit more on edge and to react differently in that environment..... to see how the boundaries change “

(do you “front load” the input or let the activity dictate the learning?)

Very definitely the latter. Very strongly driven by the experience.

(are there some connotations then for the way the experience is designed?)

I suppose so, I mean I haven't really thought about it but there is no theoretical input obviously as to what should be done and the brief which is conceived in part in the design exercise is written as a kind of bald statement, you know..” we require you to do a task” and the emphasis is on getting to experiencing without reference to a model without trying to squееееееze what they do into a model. It's definitely the other way around which is “go out there, experience it, make the mistakes, come back identify what they are and you decide the bits that were missing”

(If a client asks, for example, for co-operation, would you then design an exercise where co-operation is key to task success?)

"Yes, but only in very general terms because it's my experience that the task doesn't have to be that complicated or over-engineered in order for it to bring out what the issues are...I mean to say, if there's an issue of communication, that will be proven by getting out there. If it isn't an issue, then, you're wrong..... I think, to give confidence to the purse holder, we say that we'll design this so that this and this will come up. My personal opinion is that you.....can design it beautifully, but the group do it and something different comes out..... I think it's just like....it's a piece of life, an exercise, and if there aren't any issues that come out, you shouldn't be working with it..... The way we'll definitely come at it we'll put an exercise together that hangs together – achievable, worthwhile, to do because people's behaviour will come out"

Q: are we slightly conning the purseholders there, and is there a way out of conning the purseholders?

"Um, well, yes we are slightly conning the purseholder My experience is that by the time the purseholder's got round to paying, they've forgotten everything they ever said. You know, the vehicle is such a powerful dynamic that concrete experience tends to take over"

"the reason that I'm doing this job is to affect individuals and sometimes that's in conflict with the objectives of the companies... my objectives – which I often keep to myself –are on a different level to the companies' one....a sort of cliched example would be "the objectives are we would like to go away for two days and have fun and have a real good time...." I'm making it look ridiculous but....we'd like to get to know each other well...so my objectives are probably different from that depending on the people we're dealing with and trying to see what we could unlock in that group. I believe here we *are* good at that we've had some classic examples where we've perhaps unlocked things that the companies didn't expect. It might be that we found that everybody was in the wrong job. Everybody was very good but they were all in completely the wrong jobs in that team and there's an absolute benefit to saying that, you know, "why am I on the reception desk, because I HATE people and I like numbers..... I'd probably have a couple of, probably reasonably secret, objectives that I would hope to get across as well....of a deeper fundamental level than that with the individuals there...um...they're not exclusive but that's the challenging part..... companies want teambuilding exercises and that's not a difficult thing to do and we can do so much more than that and it's a challenge for this group to motivate each other to do that all the time and expect more of each other to pull that through, to say, "what we're really doing here..."

A key factor for me is....designing it in such a way that there's space to do what I really wanna do as a facilitator on a course

(Which is?.....)

Abstract conceptualisation. Getting them to focus on the question "so what's going on here?"

"It means getting people to identify what it is they're telling themselves that are causing them to not just *work* probably but live that way and it's to unlearn dysfunctional thinking which leads to dysfunctional attitudes and behaviour. And I *strongly* believe that is what to do...and I suppose if you think about the Kolb circle, I suppose that's why it's at that point of abstract conceptualisation that you can put strokes in and get....people to think about what happens if it was different, what happens if we allowed ourselves to say "we can do it" ...what would happen then..."

"I am a definitely a PERSONAL development consultant, I am much more concerned about the participant. And perhaps naughtily so....than I am about the business as such. Now I HOPE that by developing the participants, the business therefore will develop....."

One respondent clearly identified the “Development v. Training” continuum (although using different terms – OMD to characterise “Training” and “Personal Development” to characterise “Development”):

“Right now I think I would split OMD and personal development. For OMD I think you're absolutely right. Still up for baconing (**in response to the “pig farming” analogy**) but fitting into the organisation better. I think personal development is very much about helping people to decide for themselves. Those two things..... are different”

Two long-serving respondents identified a long-term shift as having taken place:

“ I've seen a big change from what used to be personal development where the individual used to get sent for their sakes and the company had spin-off through more “management development” where the training is less about the individuals and more about the systems and the styles.... and....to me that's sad! There is more in experiential training now that is about helping an individual understand where they fit in the company and less about developing them as a person and their potential.”

“ ...we used to really argue about “who is the client – is it the people on the course, or is it the people who paid for the course?” and there were a lot of people in those days who – very, very nice people – (said) ‘it's all about developing the people who came on the course’. **Stuff that!** You work for the organisations who pay the money, and they want specific results.....”

Time as a factor in whether programmes are “training” or “development” was raised :

(discussing a two-week programme offered by another supplier): “The longer programmes very much focussed on personal development...how do you cope with challenge, what happens inside your head when you're in a challenging situation; you're threatened by it...much, much more intensive experience, much higher degrees of exposure....of self-disclosure as well, partly because it's a longer programme and you get to know each other better, a higher level of trust and you can feel more emotionally inclined to disclose.... And on the longer programmes, although they may, to some extent have the function of team development programmes, they are really personal development programmes taking place in a group development context.”

(On discussing one- and two-day programmes):

“because there's never enough time.....I think two day programmes and one day programmes are robotic. Team development programmes that only consist of one day! Quite how you develop a team in one day is, you know.....”

In summary, the respondents saw the “development” approach in terms of the individual, and requiring a more open approach than the predetermined “selling” of particular learning objectives. The characteristics of the “development” approach were seen as:

- Focussed on the individuals' needs
- Helping them
- Requiring high levels of self-disclosure
- Involving higher levels of “exposure”
- About open process
- About unlearning dysfunctional thinking
- Envisioning what could be different

- “Unlocking”
- Needing more time than “training”

Reflection leads to the conclusion that the sociological assumptions of the “Development” approach are more towards the centre-left of the subjectivist-objectivist continuum:

The focus is very much on the individual, and through experience and reflection, going wherever that may take the trainee, with the facilitator helping that process – helping people to interpret their milieu, and orient their actions in ways more meaningful to them, to paraphrase Morgan and Smircich⁵³

Social activist assumptions about human nature regard people not as merely responding to, but interacting with, each other and their environment. This is implied in the development approach to OMD in that it’s objectives are about discovery and release of potential, wherever that may take the individual, and less about the predetermined needs of the sponsor. Indeed, some respondents averred that any benefit to the sponsor is an incidental (but beneficial) side-effect of individual development. Others allege that their own agenda is in the direction of development, whatever the sponsor’s wishes.

In the chemistry class analogy, at this end of the continuum, the pupils are allowed to experiment freely, with the teacher encouraging the experiments and maybe standing by to head-off anything that might blow the class up.....

A CONCLUSION

The interviews:

- Tend to confirm the existence of the “Development” – “Training” continuum
- Establish that trainers’ preferred positions are a range along that continuum
- Show that the organisation is seen to occupy a “Training” position
- Demonstrate a wish among some trainers to move towards “Development”

I therefore find the face-to-face interviews tending to confirm the hypothesis. The interviews themselves also produced a great deal of other information which has informed my practice, and which may well form the basis for further study.

The general tenor of interviewees’ comments also point to the “development” end of the continuum as being more likely to produce second-loop learning, with the “training” end produces interesting and absorbing first – loop learning.

I also found the following in relation to Kolb’s cycle and experiential theory:

Interviewees' Understandings of the Kolb Cycle

1) The direct question regarding Kolb was as follows:

David Kolb (1984) asserted with much evidence that people adopt and variously use four learning styles (Honey and Mumford use different words for substantially the same thing....) In what ways does OMD as practised here take these four styles into account?

Of the five trainers interviewed, four claimed some (ranging from not much to comfortable acquaintance) knowledge of Kolb, the fifth – very new to training – did not know it. The subsequent discussions therefore tended to be governed by the various espoused levels of knowledge of Kolb, but all, including the new recruit, were able to comment on it's application in their work.

The variety of knowledge may be gauged from four interviewees' first reactions, which illustrate a whole range of knowledge from zero through to a very comfortable acquaintance:

"It's a very simple idea isn't it?...it's not newit's just that the formulation of it as Kolb's Learning Cycle is relatively new, it's actually been around for Centuries"

"..not Kolb *per se*I'd be struggling to name all the bits of the Kolb learning cycle, but I'm actually thinking in those terms.....well.....no, I'm not.....I'd be very disappointed though if you found that the bulk of my programmes didn't actually fit very well into that cycle....."

"I know the cycle quite well...I'm an RO by nature"

"No, I don't know that one..."

Although the knowledge range was wide, on being shown the cycle, four of the interviewees were able to comfortably articulate their views on how the cycle applied in their training:

On Concrete Experience:

Yes, that's what we do!

OK, caveat; there's two groups, one is more than apprentices, but they tend to be shopfloor-type, er, groups- hands-on groups, practical groups – and then my personal view is we don't get much beyond concrete experience there....they certainly review, but I don't see it moving forward greatly as a result of that review.....

I think we do that pretty well by simply....um....simply making sure that the event has tasks to do , be it outdoors or indoors. I'm very keen on it....we try to design an event so that, as I say, they're actually doing a team activity.....

"We provide a real experience which is normally based around a particular subject....."

On Reflective Observation:

"I think we're generally quite good at that....it comes out a lot in review...."

"My understanding is their imaginations are quite sufficient to discuss and debate and consider and argue quite a number of subjects.... "

"For the reflectors, we will give them time! 'take a period of time now, I want you to think back over it'. We'll give them some time to take notes, providing notebooks.

"Things like getting teams to learn from watching their colleagues do things. We don't cater for the reflective observer. I think what we say is 'while you're here you're gonna get some reflective observation'. I don't think we do it.

On Abstract Conceptualisation:

"No. I think what tends to be much more is the trainer saying 'you're saying such-and-such happened. Look, this is someone's ideas. Does this help you understand what happened?' The trainer offers up ideas. It tends to be you offering theory to them....."

"Yeah. I think we lead that as facilitators.....we cater by telling them, kind of talking through drawing up principles and, um, pretty prescriptive or....close. My experience is that it emanates from us rather than the course. Unless you say 'start to conceptualise now!' they won't do it"

"That's part of the input. Workshop (meaning input) can come before or after the exercise. It depends on what you perceive to be the best approach. It depends on whether they need to be told something and then practice it, or practice it and then unpack it....but we'll put in a lot of models for them to mull over...."

"They (the non hands-on people) are good at the abstract conceptualisation..... It all just runs round in their heads.....Somebody will say 'that's exactly what happens at work when you do that!' Somebody else understands what they're saying, who carries it on and you can run it quite fast as a group...."

Active Experimentation:

"Yeah, we do that again. I mean, 'you've conceptualised, now get out there and do it...."

"Often they need to be handled during an activity because they will want to be moving on, based on trying new things...."

"...in terms of the course we do ask 'what are you going to do differently next time?' The real active experimentation is the action plan and how that's followed-up.....increasingly we're trying to sell the course plus follow-up."

This illustrates for me that conscious application of the Kolb cycle is largely absent from the programmes, but, perhaps unknowingly, the courses *can* cater to all four learning preferences. An exception is perhaps as part of the initial orientation briefing on arrival at the centre. Indeed, one interviewee said:

"My view is that most management development courses, or development courses using the outdoors for example...will use Kolb as the basic explanation to talk to delegates as to 'this is our method', 'this is our approach' and 'this is how we go about encouraging learning through experience' but will actually take no account of different learning styles on the part of delegates.....I don't think learning style is something to be considered"

The same interviewee gave a clue to the absence of consideration of delegates' learning styles:

"....that may be something that becomes obvious over a period of time, but *particularly on very short programmes* (my italics) it may be that those personal traits won't actually become very clear. and my guess would be that in many cases individuals' learning styles aren't that much looked at"

Time allowed for programmes was cited as typically one, two or three days. Perhaps not long enough for the learning styles of individuals to emerge...

The Contribution of the Outdoors to Experiential Learning

I asked the interviewees if OMD has something to offer the wider world of experiential learning:

"Yes, yes, certainly! the outdoors can be very powerful. An example would be taking a group through an outdoor pursuit-type activity; take them abseiling for example, take them caving. That in itself, because of the unusual nature of the environment, because of the actual activities might be quite frightening to the people, quite challenging in various ways.....is in many cases a valuable experience...."

".....an opportunity to wipe the slate clean mentally...perhaps it's a group who are quite established and you'd want to shake them up- putting them in a greenfield site, ha, ha, yeah, a green field! So it would be to completely change the dynamics of something"

"There is something in overcoming a challenge in a new environment, New environments make things memorable"

"I think what you unlearn are the things that you do without really thinking about it because if you're thinking about them you see that there are reasons for not behaving that way. And you can't think about that stuff in the office because you're too busy....comfortable or in some cases it's almost *subversive* to think that way. And that's another reason for working in the outdoors – because it's a different environment and not real in that sense"

All the above focusses in one way or another on the memorability of the outdoor environment and the challenges it poses. In talking about the stresses imposed by the outdoors, they also echo a comment from an earlier paper on the subject:

"Development training creates it (Concrete Experience) by providing experience in an environment which can be uncomfortable, uncertain, unfamiliar, and sometimes hostile"

Chapman A, & Lumsdon, C.A.(1983), *Outdoor Development Training – A New Tool for Management*,
Leadership and Organisation Development Journal, 4, 4.

The elements described above by Chapman and Lumsdon sound eerily like working conditions for many in the late 1990's. Perhaps, therefore the outdoors has two things to offer the world of experiential learning:

- 1) Memorability:** Because of the unusual nature of the activities involved, the outdoors presents a memorable experience. That memories of the experience should lead to recall of the learning has not been proven, but seems realistic.
- 2) A Self-Contained Reality:** In effect, the outdoors isn't realistic – but it *is* real! Such a reality- one that reproduces real stresses and strains - is difficult to achieve in

the classroom, and requires cunning design and slick delivery. In the outdoors, it just *is*.

For me, that's a remarkable addition to the experiential canon and one, it seems, which some practitioners may be sublimating to the urge to appear sophisticated, or to the need to satisfy customer demands for "training" – rather than providing "development".

Concluding Reflections

OMD programmes have seen a remarkable shrinkage in average length. I have seen a reduction in average programme-length from seven to two days. Others, notably Greenaway, have observed an even greater shrinkage (up to the early - 1980's, typical programmes lasted 12 or even 21 days).

Such shrinkage is likely to lead to tabloidisation of programmes. You simply can't expect significant personal or group development in the time available, so you go for a tight set of "deliverables" which fit neatly into the structuralist world of competencies and measurables. This may lead to customer satisfaction and to trainees learning some skills. It is unlikely, however, to lead to the kind of development that happened to me so many years ago.

The interviewees found themselves in a dilemma on this issue. Responses ranged from apparently fierce acceptance of the new order, through a subversive doing-good-by-stealth to outright regret. It seems clear that most of the interviewees wanted to be more at the "development" end of the spectrum, but find themselves using Theory Y methods to get Theory X outcomes. Instrumentalism indeed!

Personal Reflection

When I joined a develop training organisation eighteen years ago, my first managerial task was to divest the organisation of what we termed its "12-day Luddites". Now I am a five-day Luddite. **Writing this paper has become my third major adult learning experience, forcing me to reflect on my own practice, and to call its validity into question.** I have no clear idea where that reflection will lead, but look forward to the journey, energised by the comments of one interviewee:

"You say 'I couldn't possibly do that because of so and so', and I say 'if we *could* do it, what would it look like?'

As yet I am unclear as to what 'it' is - but look forward to finding out.....

APPENDIX 1

Two outcomes from the same OMD exercise, performed by different groups

The task is for a team to cross a given piece of ground using three barrels and two planks. Only the barrels may touch the ground,

Outcome 1: The group was composed of occupational psychologists, counsellors, and a smattering of training practitioners, united by nothing more than an interest in Jungian Type. They were given 20 minutes to complete the exercise. Although we can assume that their cognitive universes were differed in many ways from one another, pre-task sharing had highlighted a preponderance of – in Jungian terms - introverted intuitives, biased towards making decisions through the application of personal values (feeling), rather than through a judicial weighing-up of the facts (thinking)

A written brief was issued to the group, and there followed around 19 minutes of reflection, punctuated by fitful discussion. With one minute left – a fact of which they were unaware – they started, without much display of conviction, to attempt the task. Time ran out and I convened a review session, for which I'd allowed 20 minutes. It was still running forty minutes later, at which point the delegates elected to forego morning tea in order to continue the review. For them, it seemed, the exercise had revealed a panorama of metaphors about the ways they worked, communicated, interacted. It seemed as if the drawing-out of these (excellent) metaphors was *much easier* than the task itself.

It can be concluded that the shared parts of their cognitive universe had much to do with the discovery and examination of learning metaphors from comparatively simple activities, of applying imagination to observation. Success or failure at the activity itself was not important to them.

Outcome 2: The group concerned was composed of production supervisors from a large automotive components factory. They had a passing but not deep acquaintance with one another, being from a variety of departments and shifts. Although it can be assumed that their cognitive universes were different from one another in many ways, a pre-task Belbin team-types questionnaire had highlighted a preponderance of implementers in the group.

Following the issue of a written brief, the group set about completing their task in the allotted twenty minutes with impressive efficiency, but only limited effectiveness. Their timed planning session (they allotted five minutes of the available 20) led to nothing more likely to succeed than a colourful attempt to cross the gap by putting people inside the barrels, rolling them down a gentle slope, and hoping they would continue to roll across the marked gap. This tactic having failed, they gave up.

At the end of the task, review was a stunted affair until one of them asked the question “what’s the right way to do it?” There are, in fact, a number of “right ways” and I do not like to act as a *deus ex machina* by divulging them to groups. The review, however, was going nowhere, so I broke my own rule and told them. This released the review as they were able to approach it from the angle of “why didn’t we come up with that solution? This led to learning around brainstorming, mind-maps and other tools for stimulating creativity.

It seems that the shared parts of their cognitive universe had much to do with the application of technique and the valuing of timeliness, largely precluding the use of creativity and imagination. It was only when given a set of tools and mechanisms that they were able to access the creativity which had, presumably, been dormant inside them all along.

APPENDIX 2 Learning Loops

Chris Argyris and Donald Schön, writing in *Organisational Learning II* and borrowing from W. Ross Ashby characterise learning into “loops”. The first two of the three are:

Single-Loop Learning: Learning that, whilst changing strategies of action or the assumptions that underlie them, leave the values of that strategy of action fundamentally unchanged. Argyris and Schön cite the example of line managers who, noticing an increase in personnel turnover, respond by investigating sources of employee-dissatisfaction, seeking factors they can influence, such as salary levels, fringe benefits or job design. Thus, the line managers have initiated a single feedback loop, connecting detected error to organisational strategies of action and their underlying assumptions.

An example of single-loop feedback from industrial design is the way that various valves open and close in a heating system to maintain temperature within a pre-set range¹.

Double-Loop Learning: Takes a (sometimes giant) step further by changing the values of theory-in-use as well as the strategies and assumptions deriving from it. So there are two feedback loops in play. Strategies and assumptions may change concurrently with – or as a consequence of – changes in values.

Argyris and Schön make the point that in organisations, single-loop activity deals with first-order errors, such as excessive costs, and that second order activity (such as questioning existing practices) leads to double-loop learning. An abundance of first-order problems may be the result of a failure of second order enquiry.

Appendix 3 – Research Questions

- QUESTION 1:** What is your definition of experiential learning?
- QUESTION 2:** What is your definition of OMD. What does OMD contribute to experiential learning?
- QUESTION 3:** David Kolb (1984) asserted with much evidence that people adopt and variously use four learning styles (Honey and Mumford use different words for substantially the same thing....)
In what ways does OMD as practised here take these four styles into account? Styles are: CONCRETE EXPERIENCE (CE), REFLECTIVE OBSERVATION (RO), ABSTRACT CONCEPTUALISATION (AC), ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION (AE)
- QUESTION 4:** What factors come into play when you are designing a programme?
How do you choose/design exercises for particular populations?
- QUESTION 5:** In what ways is reflection encouraged on your programmes?
- QUESTION 6:** In designing and delivering programmes, what are the key areas that are explored?
How are the social, political and cultural complexities of delegates' home-organisations addressed?
- QUESTION 7:** In what ways (if any) does the development training you do address the development of the organisation (as opposed to the individual) , particularly in terms of how THAT ORGANISATION thinks and acts.
Can you give examples?
- QUESTION 8:** Hedburg (1981) said that unlearning inappropriate behaviours, attitudes, etc. is more difficult than learning new behaviours, attitudes, etc. What do people "unlearn" on OMD programmes?
- QUESTION 9:** In your view, does OMD develop (cognitive) abilities which are independent of particular situations, or just give people skills which fit their existing situation?
- QUESTION 10:** It has been said that successful businesses are the product of both:
Holistic intelligence (right brain, creative, innovator, dedicator, generator, whollist etc.)
and **Analytic intelligence** (adaptor, stabiliser, left-brain, analyst etc.) In what ways does your training bias towards one or the other. If there is no bias, how are the learning needs of both (? For adaptors to innovate, for innovators to adapt?) defined and met?
- QUESTION 11:** Do you use psychometric questionnaires?
If so, which ones? For what purpose? To what result?
- QUESTION 12:** Do delegates sometimes resist the opportunity to learn?
If so: What do you see as the causes for such resistance?
What form does the resistance take?
What strategies do you adopt to overcome that resistance?
- QUESTION 13:** How do you address issues of re-entry into work in terms of:
people integrating what they have learned into their work,
Of them letting their colleagues know what they're trying to do differently, and
Of them propagating what they have learned among their colleagues.
- QUESTION 14:** The conditions for an effective learning organisation to exist have been characterised as follows¹:
Continuous Learning Culture emanating from the apex of the organisation, **Valid Information**, i.e. full undistorted information, freely given without perceived or actual punishment despite outcomes of issues on which information is disseminated, **Transparency**, e.g. by legitimising the admission of error, lack of defensiveness **Issue -Orientation**: i.e. when opinions and assertions are judged according to their merits, divorced from the identity and status of the person pronouncing them, and **Accountability**: e.g., holding oneself responsible for one's actions.....

To what extent (1-5 for each if you like) are these factors designed into your OMD learning experiences? To what extent do these factors exist in your organisation?

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