Experiential Learning Cycle (David A. Kolb)

A focus on Experiential Learning Cycle

This document talks about the experiential learning cycle that was introduced by David A. Kolb. This document shares the two concepts that were brought forward by the cycle – mainly the learning cycle and learning type.
Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>A four stage cycle</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Concrete Experience Vs Abstract Conceptualization:</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Reflective Observation Vs Active Experimentation:</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Four-type learning styles</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Accommodating</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Converging</td>
<td>4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Diverging</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Assimilating</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>5-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE
1. Introduction

Having developed the model over many years prior, David Kolb published his learning styles model in 1984. The model gave rise to related terms such as Kolb's experiential learning theory (ELT), and Kolb's learning styles inventory (LSI). In his publications 1984 book 'Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development' Kolb acknowledges the early work on experiential learning by others in the 1900's, including Rogers, Jung, and Piaget. In turn, Kolb’s learning styles model and experiential learning theory are today acknowledged by academics, teachers, managers and trainers as truly seminal works; fundamental concepts towards our understanding and explaining human learning behaviour, and towards helping others to learn.

Kolb’s learning theory sets out four distinct learning styles, which are based on a four-stage learning cycle. Kolb’s model offers both a way to understand individual people’s different learning styles, and also an explanation of a cycle of experiential learning that applies to us all.

Experiential Learning Cycle typically expresses a four-stage cycle of learning, in which 'immediate or concrete experiences' provide a basis for 'observations and reflections'. These 'observations and reflections' are incorporated into 'abstract concepts' producing new implications for action which can be 'actively tested', in turn creating new experiences.

Experiential Learning Cycle represents a spiral where the learner is enabled to touch all the bases - a cycle of experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting. Immediate or concrete experiences lead to observations and reflections. These reflections are then translated into abstract concepts with implications for action, which the person can actively test and experiment with, which in turn enable the creation of new experiences.

Kolb’s model works on two levels. First level is something quite popular, the four stage cycle. The second level talks about behavioural patterns on individuals, which merge two stages to show how a person’s behavior is. The four stages will be divided into two parts - The Doers (Active Experimentation - AE) & Watchers (Reflective Observation) and Feelers (Concrete Experience - CE) & Thinkers (Abstract Conceptualization – AC).

2. A four-stage cycle (S, 2013), (McLeod, 2010):

1. Concrete Experience - (CE)
2. Reflective Observation - (RO)
3. Abstract Conceptualization - (AC)
4. Active Experimentation - (AE)
The experiential learning cycle can be divided into two parts – the red arrows and blue arrows. The arrow represents a co-relation between the two stages as illustrated above. The Red arrow represents the two ways of knowing something. The Blue arrow represents the two ways of understanding something.

2.1. Concrete Experience Vs Abstract Conceptualization:
Concrete experience is basically the direct practical experience that people go through when involved in an activity. This experience can be faced in different modes, methods and variations. In another words, this stage is knowledge by experience. Abstract Conceptualization, on the other hand, is more into theory, where people tend to use theory that they already know to relate to certain emotions, actions, situations. In another words, knowledge about something which is theoretical.

2.2. Reflective Observation Vs Active Experimentation:
Reflective Observation talks about what the experiment means to the person who experienced it. This stage allows the person to think through the experience and be able to understand what has happened. One the other hand Active Experimentation is transforming the theory in Abstract Conceptualization and testing it or practicing it on another situation or environment.

Four-type definition of learning styles which incorporates two types of the stages mentioned.
1. Accommodating (CE/AE)
2. Converging (AC/AE)
3. Diverging (CE/RO)
4. Assimilating (AC/RO)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Doing (Active Experienetration)</th>
<th>Feeling (Concrete Experience)</th>
<th>Thinking (Abstract Conceptualization)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accommodating</td>
<td>Converging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching (Reflective Observation)</td>
<td>Diverging</td>
<td>Assimilating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.1. Accommodating:
These groups of people are the doers and feelers. The Accommodating learning style is 'hands-on', and relies on intuition rather than logic. These people use other people's analysis, and prefer to take a practical, experiential approach. They are attracted to new challenges and experiences, and to carrying out plans. They commonly act on 'gut' instinct rather than logical analysis. People with an Accommodating learning style will tend to rely on others for information than carry out their own analysis. This learning style is prevalent and useful in roles requiring action and initiative. People with an Accommodating learning style prefer to work in teams to complete tasks. They set targets and actively work in the field trying different ways to achieve an objective.

3.2. Converging:
These groups of people are the doers and thinkers. People with a Converging learning style can solve problems and will use their learning to find solutions to practical issues. They prefer technical tasks, and are less concerned with people and interpersonal aspects. People with a Converging learning style are best at finding practical uses for ideas and theories. They can solve problems and make decisions by finding solutions to questions and problems. People with a Converging learning style are more attracted to technical tasks and problems than social or interpersonal issues. A Converging learning style enables specialist and technology abilities. People with a Converging style like to experiment with new ideas, to simulate, and to work with practical applications.

3.3. Diverging:
These groups of people are the feelers and watchers. These people are able to look at things from different perspectives. They are sensitive. They prefer to watch rather than do, tending to gather information and use imagination to solve problems. They are best at viewing concrete situations several different viewpoints. Kolb called this style 'Diverging' because these people perform better in situations that require ideas-generation, for example, brainstorming. People with a Diverging learning style have broad cultural interests and like to gather information. They are interested in people, tend to be imaginative and emotional, and tend to be strong in the arts. People with the Diverging style prefer to work in groups, to listen with an open mind and to receive personal feedback.

3.4. Assimilating:
These groups of people are the watchers and thinkers. The Assimilating learning
preference is for a concise, logical approach. Ideas and concepts are more important than people. These people require good clear explanation rather than practical opportunity. They excel at understanding wide-ranging information and organising it a clear logical format. People with an Assimilating learning style are less focused on people and more interested in ideas and abstract concepts. People with this style are more attracted to logically sound theories than approaches based on practical value. These learning style people are important for effectiveness in information and science careers. In formal learning situations, people with this style prefer readings, lectures, exploring analytical models, and having time to think things through.

4. Conclusion

In the experiential model, Kolb described two different ways of grasping experience: Concrete Experience and Abstract Conceptualization. He also identified two ways of transforming experience: Reflective Observation and Active Experimentation. These four modes of learning are often portrayed as a cycle.

According to Kolb (2013), concrete experience provides the information that serves as a basis for reflection. From these reflections, we assimilate the information and form abstract concepts. We then use these concepts to develop new theories about the world, which we then actively test. Through the testing of our ideas, we once again gather information through experience, cycling back to the beginning of the process. The process does not necessarily begin with experience, however. Instead, each person must choose which learning mode will work best based upon the specific situation.

For example, let's imagine that you are going to learn how to drive a car. Some people might choose to begin learning via reflection by observing other people as they drive. Another person might prefer to start more abstractly, by reading and analyzing a driving instruction book. Yet another person might decide to just jump right in and get behind the seat of a car to practice driving on a test course.

How do we decide which mode of experiential learning will work best? While situational variables are important, our own preferences play a large role. Kolb notes that people who are considered "watchers" prefer reflective observation, while those who are "doers" are more likely to engage in active experimentation. "Because of our hereditary equipment, our particular past life experiences, and the demands of our environment, we develop a preferred way of choosing," Kolb explains. These preferences also serve as the basis for Kolb's learning styles. In this learning style model, each of the four types has dominant learning abilities in two areas. For example, people with the Diverging learning style are dominant in the areas of concrete experience and reflective observation.

Kolb suggests that a number of different factors can influence preferred learning styles. Some of the factors that he has identified include (Colin M. Beard, 2006):

- Personality type
5. Bibliography


