

# Chapter 5

## Experience as a Catalyst to Student Classroom Learning in Management Education

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### ABSTRACT

*The chapter describes how instructors can capitalize on student prior experiences and create opportunities for new experiences in the classroom to foster student learning in management education programs. The chapter provides an overview of research around experiential learning (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2005), learning from experience or on-the-job learning by managers, and teaching techniques that have been shown to foster student learning in management undergraduate and graduate programs. The chapter focuses on experiences that could be created in-class or in the context of one course and does not discuss practices related to a program and curriculum design.*

### INTRODUCTION

*Education must be conceived as a continuing reconstruction of experience:...the process and goal of education are one and the same thing. (Dewey, 1897, p. 79)*

*Learning is like breathing; it involves a taking in and processing of experience and a putting out of expression of what is learned. (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 208)*

Critical thinking/problem solving, professionalism/work ethic, and leadership are top three applied or transferable skills reported to be insufficient among job applicants across all industries; these skills follow by written communication, teamwork/collaboration, and oral communication (Society for Human Resource Management, 2014). However, critical thinking, teamwork, or leadership needed in today's organizations cannot be acquired by students when simply listening to a lecture or reading a textbook (Madsen & Turnbull, 2006). To connect learning received in management education programs and the

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realities of today's workplace, educators have to provide experience-based learning (Edwards, Money, & Heald, 2001). Experiences derived from work, social, familial, leisure, and other contexts are fundamental to learning (Miller, 2000). In organizations, experiences derived from every day on the job practices and business environment become the primary source of learning for employees (Lidón, Rebollar, & Møller, 2011; Marsick & Watkins, 1990) and an important factor contributing to employee success on the job (Armstrong & Mahmud, 2008). Not surprisingly, a few years ago European Academy of Business in Society (2010) organized a Congress on Experiential Learning to discuss how experiential learning could be used both in management education and in business organizations to provide for sustainable business development. Similarly, to narrow the gap between employers' expectations and student preparation many corporations have been partnering with universities and funding projects, programs, and centers to provide students experiential learning opportunities. For example, Jeb Blue CEO recently provided \$5.4 million to the University of Michigan, USA, to start a leadership developing institute (Clark & White, 2010).

Experiential learning is "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). Experiential learning activities that foster student engagement "are found to be an invaluable pedagogical tool in underscoring and achieving learning objectives related to decision making in a dynamic 'real-life' environment" (Devasagayam, Johns-Masten, & McCollum, 2012, p. 1). Introduced in the 1980s, experiential learning has become increasingly used in management education across many countries (e.g., Kamath, Agrawal, & Krickx, 2008; Penger, Znidarsic, & Dimovski, 2011) and seems to be on the rise in the 2000s (Reynolds & Vince, 2007). Experiential learning is especially effective in fostering "talent management, leadership performance, competence development, change management, community involvement, volunteering, cross-cultural training and entrepreneurship" in management education students (Bevan & Kipka, 2012, p. 194). Experiential learning has been shown to help develop "more complex, multicategorical descriptions" of concepts (Bolinger & Brown, 2015, p. 452), student autonomy (Conklin, 2013), professionalism (Nunamaker, 2007), academic achievement and attitudes toward learning (Penger et al., 2011), and class interest and attendance and comprehension of reading materials (McNeely, 2000). Experiential learning fosters transfer of learning (Juergens, 2012) and helps student acquire judgment, insight, and sensitivity needed for their roles as managers in the future (MacGregor & Semler, 2012).

Management education programs have been integrating experiential learning components, including virtual, distance, or face-to-face internships, field experiences, service learning, cross-cultural and international programs, and experiential learning immersions and classroom activities, which could be paid or on-paid, part- or full-time and involve students in real-life projects and provide guidance by faculty (Clark & White, 2010; Healy, Taran, Z., & Betts, 2011; Kendall, Duley, Little, Permaul, & Rubin, 1984). Experiential learning helps create situations similar to those students might encounter in the workplace (Lidón, et al., 2011) and develop managerial identity and, hence, contribute to their successful transformation into the workplace and management positions (Plakhotnik, Rocco, & Roberts, 2011), building the education-to-workplace pipeline.

Instructors in management education programs have accumulated a wealth of activities that foster experiential learning in the classroom, including felt-experience exercises (Dugal & Eriksen, 2004), management incidents (McNeely, 2000), magnetic sentences industry game (Casile & Wheeler, 2005) or other business strategy games (e.g., Stone, 1995), classroom-as-organization (e.g., Gardner & Larson, 1988; Putzel, 1992), activities to utilize experiences of non-traditional students (Brumagim, 1999), Bafa Bafa and other intercultural simulations (Sullivan, & Duplaga, 1997), and creating videos (Schults &

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