

SEDUCE: AN EFFECTIVE APPROACH TO EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

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Abstract: We all know the value of experiential learning. It is the basis for the *Annual*. Participants typically walk away with increased knowledge and skill retention after an enjoyable classroom learning experience. Yet many workshop designers and instructors do not employ experiential learning to ensure these outcomes.

The SEDUCE approach to discovery learning creates an environment in which learners realize on their own what they need to know and/or do differently. The approach is seductive in that it can transform initial resistance into willing, even avid, interest. Participants are induced to enjoy things they may not have intended to enjoy. They are enticed into heightened levels of personal discovery which, in turn, creates the dissonance necessary to facilitate individual change. The SEDUCE acronym will help you more easily remember the steps to ensure successful experiential learning.

THE SEDUCE APPROACH TO EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Figure 1 depicts the SEDUCE approach to discovery learning. The five steps—start-up, experience, debrief, unveil concepts, and execute—are undertaken in the order shown. If a step is skipped or is taken out of order, participants may not fully achieve the desired learning objectives.

Before starting, determine the learning objective(s) and select an appropriate learning experience. This may be as formal as a workshop or class or may be a few minutes of on-the-job coaching. It may be an activity, a teaching module, or a participant game. Following is a detailed explanation of each step in the model.

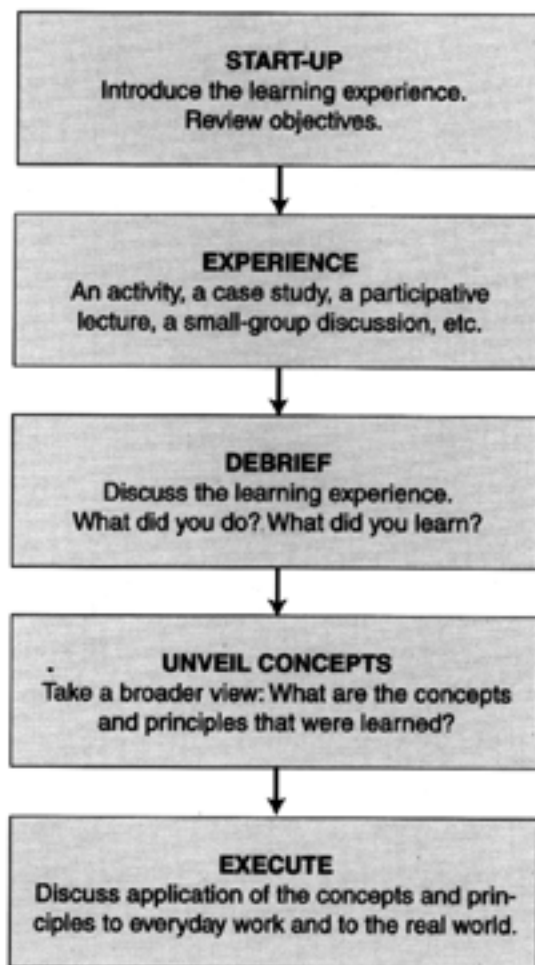


Figure 1. The SEDUCE Approach to Experiential Learning

Start-Up

The first step in the experiential learning process is the start-up. The purpose is to set up the learning experience. There are four ways to set up the experience. Use one or a combination of the following:

Purpose or Objective of the Activity. For an activity such as a participative lecture, begin by saying "What we're going to talk about today is" For a true experiential learning situation, such as a structured experience, the objective may be a part of what is discovered by the participants, so it would not be discussed at this point.

Explanation of What You Will Do. For a participative lecture, you may give information, show graphics, or ask and answer questions. In a small-group discussion, you may divide people into groups, give the assignment, and be available to coach and help groups as needed. Explain your role to the group.

What Participants Are Expected To Do. For a small-group discussion, the participants may be asked to discuss a situation, brainstorm ideas or solutions, and report to the group at large. During a video presentation, the participants may be asked to watch for key points, answer specific questions, or take notes for further discussion.

Rules That Accompany the Learning Experience. For an icebreaker the rules may be that participants should form groups of at least four members who have not previously met. For a technical lecture, the ground rules may include when to ask questions, for example, ask clarifying questions as they occur, but hold other questions until the end of the presentation.

Experience

The second step in the experiential learning process is the learning experience itself. The purpose of this step is to involve the participants actively in the learning experience. Types of learning experiences include the following:

- Case studies
- Computer-assisted learning
- Crossword puzzles
- Decision-making groups

- Demonstrations
- Discussions
- Giving and receiving feedback
- Hands-on experiences
- Participative lectures
- Practice sessions
- Questionnaires
- Role plays
- Self-study
- Session starters
- Small-group discussion
- Videotapes

The learning experience may be learner-directed or facilitator-directed. The more independent the learner and the more motivated to learn he or she is, the more learner-directed the experience can be. The novice learner may require more direction to facilitate learning.

Debrief

The third step in the experiential learning process is to debrief the learning experience. The purpose of the debrief is to help learners discover and share their reactions and experiences during the learning experience. The focus of the debrief is on the *content* of the learning experience. It is important that you not let the learners jump to concepts and learning principles too quickly.

If the learning experience was a structured experience, a game, or a participant activity, this step is meant to help the participants conclude the activity and get ready to move on to the learning points. This is a critical step, especially when an activity generates feelings, explores beliefs or values, or involves personal reactions. Some participants become involved in the topic or details of an activity and need time for discussion before they are ready to move to the next step.

It is most effective to use structured discussion as the instruction technique to facilitate debriefing a learning experience. To do this, explore what actually occurred during the activity, discuss issues specific to the content, and ask questions to generate reactions. In addition, there are several other instruc-

tion techniques that can help facilitate the debriefing discussion. You can (a) have each person write down his or her reactions or thoughts and then discuss them; (b) have small groups generate common reactions and then share them with the large group; or (c) have partners interview one another and report back to the large group.

Unveil Concepts

The fourth step in the experiential learning process is to unveil concepts. The purpose of this step is to help the learner identify and discuss the broader concepts and principles discovered during the learning experience. It is the “So what?” step. So, what was the point? So, what did we learn? So, what does it mean?

It is critical that the thoughts and ideas generated during this step come from the learners. If you reveal and explain the concepts and principles to the learners, they will still be your thoughts, “owned” by you rather than “discovered” by them. An inferential leap is necessary for the learners to move from the experience to learning about themselves or others.

If this step is omitted, the learning will be incomplete. Participants may later say that they enjoyed the activity, the lecture, or the discussion and may understand the specific issues of the learning experience, but be unable to report what they learned from it in broader terms. Some learners easily move from the specific to the conceptual; others will require prompting and coaching to discover broader concepts and principles.

Your role during this step is to guide the discussion so that it focuses on the learning points and moves away from the specific activity. In a discussion of a case study, for example, it is important that the discussion move to the concept taught by the case rather than stay with the details outlined in the story. After a participative lecture, ask questions of the learners to help them to summarize the main points and paraphrase key concepts.

This is the best time to chart answers, ideas, and concepts. It will help the learners remember the main points and will reinforce the concepts. Prompt the generation of concepts by asking, “What did you learn from this activity [discussion, practice session, case study] in general?” Ask about the general topic of the learning experience, for example, leadership, helping adults learn, managing time, or whatever. When listing concepts on a flip chart, avoid writing words or phrases that are specific to the activity. Help the participants move to a more general, conceptual level. For example, in the discussion of a case study in which unclear directions were an issue, rather than writing “Joe needed to give clearer directions,” write “Give clear directions.”

Execute

The final step in the experiential learning process is to “execute.” This is the “Now what?” step. The purpose of this step is to help the learner identify what to do with the new information or skill. Without this step, some participants will be unable to apply the new learning in real-world situations. It will remain a theoretical, classroom idea. This step is the key to the entire learning experience.

Your role in this step, as in the last step, is to lead the discussion without generating the content. Instructional techniques that can help facilitate the application of the learning include: (a) asking each person to identify how he or she will use this new information and generate a personal action plan; (b) asking like-interest groups to discuss common applications and share them with the large group; (c) asking partners to contract with one another about action items; and (d) conducting a role play using a real situation to practice newly learned techniques. The role play restarts the “discovery learning” process. Debrief afterward, revealing any additional concepts and discussing how to execute what has been practiced.

When you use this approach with experienced learners, that is, those for whom the knowledge and/or skill has been a part of their daily work for some time, such as coaching techniques for long-term supervisors, you may find that they move more quickly from the learning experience (Step 2) to Steps 4 and 5, unveil concepts and execute. Novice learners have a tendency to remain stuck in the learning experience and may have a difficult time recognizing the broader concepts and principles and their application. Thus, you must determine the experience level of the participants and be prepared to help those who are having difficulty moving on.

FACILITATOR EXPERTISE

Conducting effective experiential learning activities requires basic facilitation skills, such as how to ask and respond to questions and how to encourage dialogue and discussion. Complex learning objectives require more advanced facilitation skills, such as how to address conflict and how to recognize and customize for various learning styles. The same is true when participants will be learning about complex issues involving risk, motivation, resistance to change, and so on. In addition, facilitators must have presentation skills, such as recording information on a flip chart effectively and the ability to use other audiovisual equipment.

CONCLUSION

The experiential learning cycle, although acknowledged as important, is often forgotten or short-changed during training. The SEDUCE acronym will help any trainer or facilitator keep this important process in mind. The approach can be used to design and deliver content on any topic. SEDUCE *your* learners.

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