

Discussion on 'Experiential Learning'

Despite its proven results, 'Experiential Learning' is not the default communication methodology for most companies. The majority are schooled in and comfortable with 'one-way information flow' delivered usually through presentation slides. The following section discusses why the alternative method of 'Experiential Learning' is considered a more appropriate method for these types of engagement needs.

The challenges with internal communication

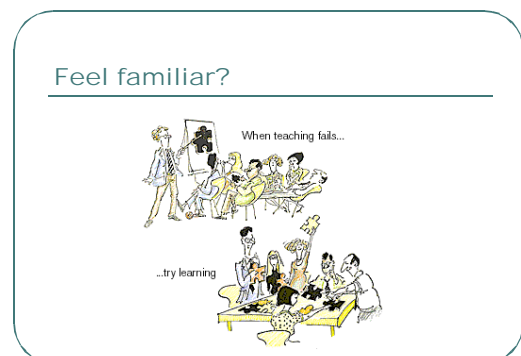
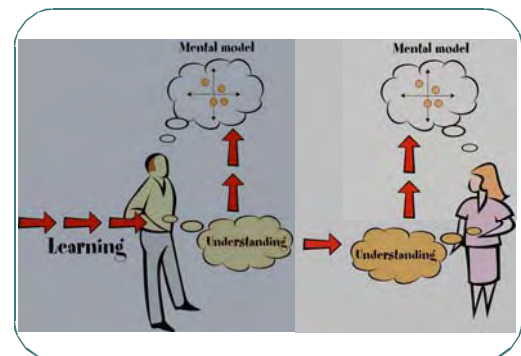
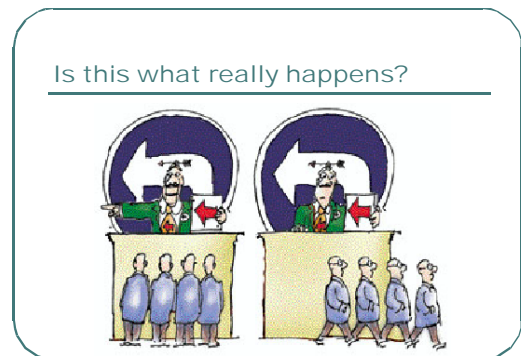
Many firms struggle with or apply too much effort to, the task of internal communications. The aim of any communication is to impart a level of understanding, and obtain engagement and acceptance of that needed to be communicated at an intellectual and emotional level.

There are a number of challenges associated with communicating effectively including:

- The communication generally needs to be effective for a large, diverse and dispersed workforce.
- That being communicated normally includes some complex and possibly controversial concepts.
- The message(s) needs to be consistent and compelling.
- Ideally the communication should be done soon after the need arises and to most people at the same time.

It is often difficult to achieve the dissemination of consistent and compelling messages using a number of communicators

This is where reliance is on the strength/ability of the presenter to sell the message. Often the result is a different message (both in style and content) and very different levels of engagement depending upon the ability of the specific presenter to sell a message.



How do firms rise to these challenges?

We all want to be involved in the change process but all too often and in spite of good intentions, this does not occur.

Consequently many change/intervention processes fail. This failure is usually caused by poor design of the communication process.

In general when people have a need to communicate a change or a concept they approach the task through a 'push' process i.e. they begin by defining what it is that they have to 'tell', then go out an attempt to 'sell the tell'. The tendency is to overload the process with content, resulting in information overload and/or confusion. Of course when the audience don't 'get it' we tell them again and again adding in more and more content.

Over the years we have seen and heard of many instances in which significant amount of resources have been applied to 'convince' the audience of the merits of an idea only to see that morale actually drops, and cynicism and resistances rise. In general it is the audience who is blamed for their apparent lack of insight or intelligence. Rarely is the actually communication process used questioned.

We have learnt that true understanding requires proper involvement. The most effective approach is to adopt an experiential style of communication.

The most common form of these are generally paper or screen-based combinations of text and pictures that combine exercises for the participants to complete.

The exercises engage the participants and inform them appropriately without the need for a lecturer or presenter.

“Tell me, I'll forget. Show me, I may remember. But involve me and I'll understand.” - Lao Tzu 500BC

“People do not resist change, they resist being changed!” - Peter Dyson 2003

“The journey will not make sense without the destination in mind.” - anon



Why an experiential approach?

The actual process of experiential communication convey's the message rather than the presenter.

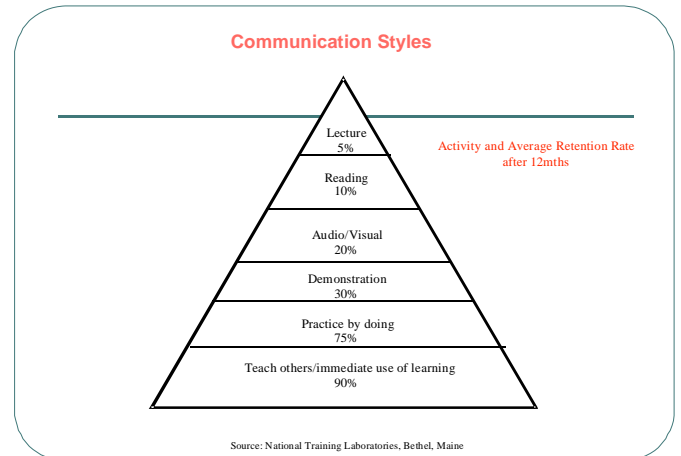
- The strength/skill of the presenter is therefore irrelevant
- Many people can be used to communicate the plan
- This enables the plan to be communicated across dispersed geographic areas concurrently
- The message is more likely to be consistent both in content and style (quality control)

Learning by doing or more particularly, active participation in an activity, reflection and then feeling are more likely to result in retention, engagement, support and ultimately action¹. It should also enable people to reach clearer conclusions about 'what's in it for me' (WIIFM).

The typical 'push' methodology of communication through simply written papers and PowerPoint presentations rarely engages the higher brain functions or stimulates the senses to the point where the communication is integrated into existing schemes.

The 'Experiential' method is a process of corporate communication which has evolved from the theory of adult learning built on the principle that action and participation are much more effective than other more passive, pedagogic methods of corporate communication.

This approach is particularly effective when organisations want to engage people quickly and deeply, especially large and geographically dispersed workforces. 'Speed to market' is achieved through 'speed to people'.



¹ Conner, M. L., 'Learning from Experience'. Ageless learner, 1997-2004. (Exploring Kolb's theory of Experiential learning)

