

The Continuous Learning Cycle.

Investigating possibilities for experiential learning

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Abstract

Scholars focusing on experiential learning argue that experience should be considered as critical for adult learning. This research paper frames experiential learning within a Constructivist framework. This paper focuses on an investigation into the ways that facilitators use the Continuous Learning Cycle, a model for learning based on Kolb's Learning Cycle, to facilitate learning through experience during the triad skills observation role-play in a workshop, which is part of an induction programme, for a retail bank. Indications are that facilitators use the Continuous Learning Cycle in limited ways, and therefore undermine the possibilities for optimal experiential learning; and that the Continuous Learning Cycle has limitations.



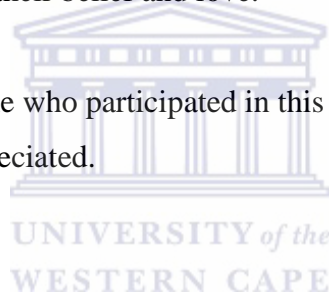
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DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master in Adult Education and Global Change at the Centre for Adult and Continuing Education, University of the Western Cape. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any university. All the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

Vanessa Welby-Solomon

Signed:

January 2016



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SECTION 1 - BACKGROUND

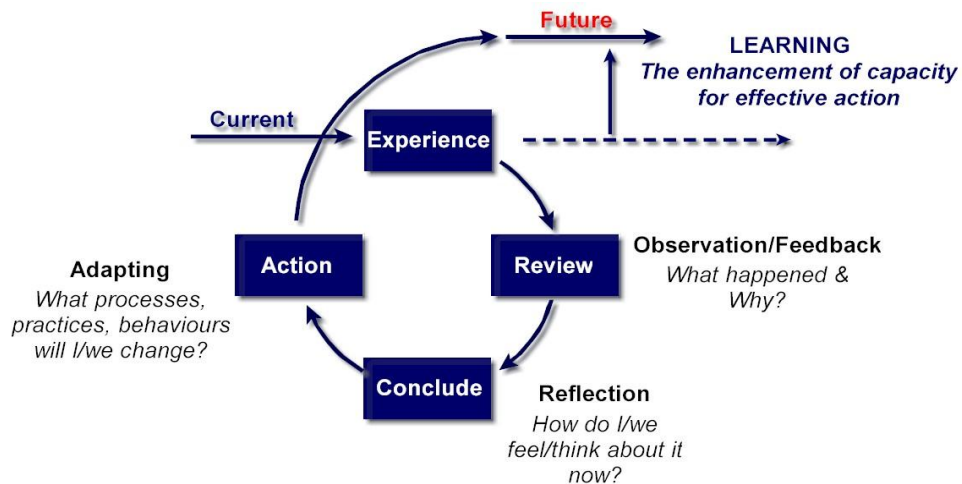
Workplace or Work-Based Learning is a large component of Adult Education. In South Africa, many large companies have their own Learning and Development Departments within a Human Resource Department, as skills development of employees is instituted in the law. The role of these Learning and Development Departments is to design, deliver and assess learning according to company needs.

Learning in companies, although necessary, is never the primary function. It is a secondary function needed to sustain the production of goods and services that will help the company reach their goals and objectives. In the same way learning shouldn't interfere too much with the day-to-day running of a business (Billet, 2002; Unwin et al, 2007), even though learning happens informally on a day-to-day basis.

What people learn at work is diverse including: task performance, awareness and understanding, personal development, teamwork, role performance, academic knowledge and skills, decision-making and problem solving and judgement (Tynjälä, 2008). Often what is learnt at work is necessary to improve efficiency, which has a direct relationship with profit but because of the nature of informal learning other topics may also be learnt.

I joined a Learning and Development department of a retail bank in 2012 as a learning facilitator. My particular department within Learning and Development is responsible for the delivery of the learning material. Our role included some design (which has since moved to our blended learning team who is responsible for design) and assessing delegates during a 10-day workshop.

On joining the team, I discovered that I would be on a formal learning journey as a facilitator. As I had previous facilitation experience, my learning journey was different from someone without any facilitation experience. I was quite surprised as I had expected to start working in my role almost immediately. My learning journey started with me attending the programme as a delegate. This included the pre-workshop onsite learning in one of our branches, completing all the necessary learning and then attending the actual workshop, which I would subsequently facilitate. It was during this time that I first became aware of the Continuous Learning Cycle used in the organisation. The model is used when reviewing an experience; to reflect on what happened and why it happened, how we think about it now and what actions we will implement to have a better experience going forward (see diagram below).



The cycle is introduced to new employees at the beginning of the learning journey for their roles and it is expected that employees will re-visit the model throughout their time at the company. The cycle is used for continuous progress. The company I joined is young and innovative and understands the rapid pace at which change happens. On that basis, the need for being able to take ownership of your own learning is important if you want to move with these changes. I assume that through the regular use of this model, learners may be able to implement it independently when they are in their working environments.

As learning facilitators, we use the same model when reviewing how we work, whether individually or together as small teams, on projects or our up-front and group facilitation skills. It is also used for coaching conversations. Often there are added tools like evaluation forms but the model forms the basis. Personal ownership, self-management and feedback to colleagues are encouraged and expected in our jobs.

The cycle is also being also used as a learning methodology, where learners are put through an experience, then asked to reflect on that experience through debriefing and feedback, and then they need to think about how to implement actions to have a better experience, one example of this is the Triad Skills Observations. The learner goes through a simulated experience where they help a client (another learner) who has a specific banking need. They are observed by a peer and a facilitator who gives them feedback after they have given themselves feedback. The entire continuous learning cycle is not usually facilitated by the facilitator but there is an expectation and an assumption that the learner will take that feedback, processes it and put actions in place to have an improved experience at the next Triad Skills Practice or Observation. I had a hunch that the Continuous Learning Cycle resembled Kolb's experiential learning cycle and by implication is therefore conceptualized

within a constructivist theory of experiential learning. By further implication the simulated triad skills practice is also conceptualized within constructivist theory of experiential learning.

Rationale

I believe that learning can happen anywhere, if we choose to learn. While studying for this course, I became interested in learning to learn or meta-cognition, which I believe is an important competency to have in this fast pace, ever-changing times we are living in. The workplace is not exempt from this continuous change. The Continuous Learning Cycle is a model which facilitates learning and which I believe can transcend the boundaries of work and deepen learning. The other aspect that interests me is the fact that, even though the model may be used, it does not always result in a change in behaviour and at times the same inadequate experience is perpetuated, so where does the model fall short and why does it? The model can have further possibilities for learning if we investigate where it or its implementation is falling short.

Research problem

When the Continuous Learning Cycle is not used to its fullest, it undermines the possibilities of deeper learning.

Research aims

This study investigated ways in which the Continuous Learning Cycle model could be conceptualized more fully within a constructivist learning framework to create further possibilities for experiential learning. Through the study, I had hoped to identify further possibilities the model offers to the maximise learning. Through the data collected, I had also hoped to gain theoretical insight into the factors hindering the application of this model as well as benefits beyond the workplace.

Research question

Main research question

What possibilities does the Continuous Learning Cycle model offer for experiential learning?

Sub-questions

- How can the methodology be improved in order for the model to offer greater possibilities for experiential learning?
- What factors enabled or hindered the use of this model in the workplace?

Anticipated findings

My study will generate new theoretical insights into how the Continuous Learning Cycle Model can be used more effectively to facilitate an enriching, deeper learning.

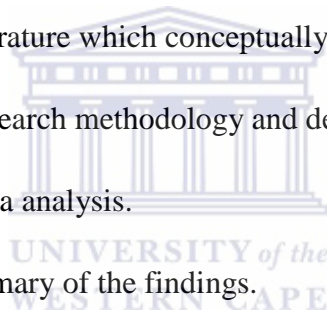
It will also give insight in how the model can be used in the workplace and beyond.

In Section 2, I will review the literature which conceptually frames this study.

In Section 3, I will discuss the research methodology and design.

In Section 4, I will present the data analysis.

In Section 5, I will discuss a summary of the findings.



SECTION 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, I will review the literature which conceptually frames this study

Experiential learning: An Introduction

Experiential Learning is often associated with workplace-learning. According to Chisholm, Harris, Northwood & Johrendt (2009),

Most work-based environments will effectively provide learning through a socialisation process where, for each particular environment learners will be introduced to a body of defined knowledge that is relevant to that environment. Although this approach was also described as passive, there is no reason why learners cannot challenge the validity of the socially appropriate knowledge deriving from that environment through continuous analysis of the experiential knowledge being gained. (p.324)

The above authors state that “‘work’-based learning is best characterised as an experiential-reflective learning approach” and that “the emphasis placed on experiential learning is the most meaningful and it is intimately associated with learning from everyday experiences” (p.325). Experiential learning in the workplace has been closely linked to the constructivist view of reflection and self-direction, a view that perhaps reflects the way business operates.

Experiential or experience-based learning has historical roots recorded in the work of Aristotle and other philosophers like Locke through the centuries (Andresen, Boud & Cohen, 2000). It is widely accepted that experience plays an important role in adult education and that learning takes place through a variety of situations in life, both formal and informal. In fact, most adults believe that they learn best through “doing” (Fenwick, 2000, p.1). According to Andresen et al (2000), “The distinguishing feature of experienced-based learning (experiential learning) is that the experience of the learner occupies central place in all considerations of teaching and learning” (p.225). The experience can be some event in the learner’s past or present, an activity they are participating in designed to achieve a certain outcome or everyday interactions with others or tasks in the person’s personal, home, work or community life.

Progressive educator John Dewey’s work has strongly influenced the theories of experiential learning. Dewey wrote extensively on learning and the democratic society. A democratic society stood for social continuity and therefore needed to develop a knowledge theory which

supported this continuum, where one experience informed and gave meaning to another. (Caulfield & Woods, 2013; Fenwick, 2003). He believed that learning would happen if the following two things were present: “the learner could connect new experiences with previous knowledge thus changing that knowledge; and that the learner needed to actively interact with their environment. He was interested in education for a democracy, the social nature of learning, and internal growth and process” (Fenwick, 2003. p.6). Dewey writes, “I assume that amid all uncertainties there is one permanent frame of reference: namely the organic connection between education and personal experience.” He also states that, “all genuine education comes about through experience [but] . . . not all experiences are genuinely or equally educative” (cited in Andresen et al., 2000, p 228). Many contemporary theorists agree that for an experience to be educational, the learner needs to reflect on the experience therefore making meaning in the process.

It is also important to note the difference between experiential learning and experiential education as they are often used interchangeably (Itin, 1999; Breunig, 2014; Mughal & Zafar, 2011). The Association of Experiential Education (2015) defines experiential education as, “a philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people’s capacity to contribute to their communities.” When Itin (1999) defines this philosophy, his definition is clear about “the trans active nature of experiential education that it interactive between learners, between learner and teacher, and between the learner and his/her environment” (p. 93). Itin (1999) further describes learning as an individual experience, “the process of change that occurs for the individual” (p.91). Breunig (2014) indicates that experiential learning is an important part of the philosophy of experiential education. She believes that Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle helps to understand experiential learning as a methodology and that many experiential education initiatives are based on this model. She explains the differences between methodology and philosophy as follows:

In essence, employing the experiential learning cycle without an intended educational aim represents a methodology, implying that there is a certain way of teaching and learning that makes the learning experiential. Experiential education as philosophy employs both methodology (experiential way of teaching) and philosophy as part of the educative process. Experiential education as philosophy implies that there is an intended aim toward which the experiential learning process is directed and this

philosophical/teleological orientation holds social and environmental transformative potential (Breunig, 2014, p.2).

Fenwick (2003) states that, “The term experiential learning is often used both to distinguish the flow of ongoing meaning making in our lives from theoretical knowledge and to distinguish non-directed “informal” life experience from “formal” education” (p.1). She points out that experiential learning has predominantly been presented as a “reflection-action...binary: recalling and analysing lived experience to create mental knowledge structures” which is centred on the individual and often ignores “identity, politics and discursive complexities of human experience”. (Fenwick, 2000, p.244). She and others (Yorks and Kasl, 2002; Dirks and Lavin, 1991) acknowledge that although the constructivist view of creating meaning plays an important role in the understanding of experiential learning, it is also important to look at alternative conceptualisations to get a clearer understanding of the learning process related to experiential learning.

The Constructivist Theory of Experiential Learning

In this theory of adult learning, adults independently construct their own knowledge where reflection on experience plays a big role in gaining meaning. “A learner is believed to construct, through reflection, a personal understanding of relevant structures of meaning derived from his or her action in the world” (Fenwick, 2000, p.248).

Reflection holds a central position in the understanding of experiential learning in adults and is the dominant view in this area of study. As Fenwick (2000) states, it “casts the individual as a central actor in a drama of personal meaning making” (p.9), not really taking into account his or her environment. The learner gains meaning through reflection and their own actions.

Constructivist theories

Although David Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory and Experiential Learning Model is fundamental to the constructivist view of experiential learning, there are other constructivist theorists who have developed theories and models based on reflection. Some of them include the following:

Boud, Keogh and Walker developed a model, similar to Kolb’s with an emphasis on critical reflection. They define reflection as a “form of response from the learner to experience”

(Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1985, p.18). In their discussion around reflection they point out that reflection can only be conducted by the learner on their own experience, that it needs to be intentional and that reflection is a complex process which considers feelings and cognition as they are inter-related. According to Fenwick (2003), Boud and Walker also take into consideration individuals' specific contexts and how their personal histories play a role in learning. Their model of reflection on experience is divided into three stages and emphasises the following: our preparation for an experience which is individual; noticing and intervening during participation and engagement in the actual experience; and reflecting after the experience based on our individual strategies and histories, processing what we have experienced (Fenwick 2003; Boud et al, 1985; Andresen, et al, 2000).

Donald Schön's work on reflection-in-action and on-action is important because it highlights that we need to identify the assumptions we bring to our reflections. His work is important for workplace learning as he concentrates on practitioners. He notes that "practitioners learn by noticing and framing problems of interest to them in particular ways, then inquiring and experimenting with solutions" (Fenwick, 2003, p 12). Knowledge is seen to be constructed by reflecting during the experience and after the experience. When we critically reflect we need to ask ourselves why we framed the problem in that way. What beliefs inform our practice? Even if no problem seems to exist, critical reflection would problemize the situation or the practitioner's actions. His three stages of reflection include: identifying assumptions, questioning their accuracy to reality and this may lead to a reconstruction of beliefs which are more inclusive and integrative (Fenwick, 2000).

Jack Mezirow uses the term "perspective transformation" which means that the learner becomes critically aware of the assumptions they've made and how this has limited them. (Boud et al, 1985). When we are aware of these it leads to transformative learning that is more "inclusive, differentiating, permeable, critically reflective, and integrative of experience" (Cited in Fenwick, 2001, p.13). Mezirow's theory of critical reflection suggests that most people reflect on content and process which results in "procedural learning". However, when they question what has informed their problem solving processes; that is critical reflection, resulting in us challenging accepted norms. This could lead to a shift in our perspective, resulting in transformative learning (Fenwick, 2000).

David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and Experiential Learning Model

David Kolb's work on experiential learning, especially his experiential learning model and experiential learning theory (ELT), is fundamental to the constructivist view of experiential learning. His work is influential in higher education and workplace learning. According to Kolb (1984), "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (p.41). The learner gains meaning through reflection on their own actions. For Kolb, experiential learning is a "holistic, integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition, and behaviour" (Kolb, 1984, p.2). His work is built on the foundations laid by James, Dewey, Lewin and Piaget. Like Dewey, Kolb maintains that experience alone does not result in learning. He developed the experiential learning model that shows learning in a cyclic form, emphasising the need for reflection and action.

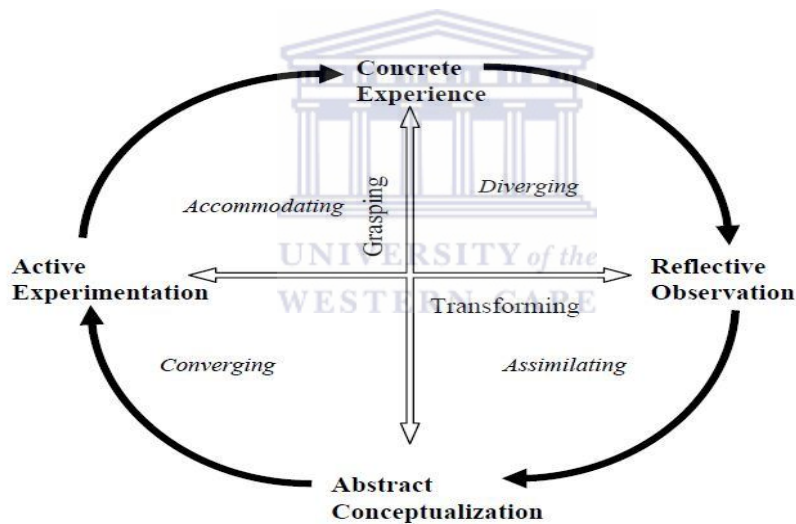


Fig.1 Experiential Learning Cycle

According to this model, there are four modes which are conflict and tension-filled, within this process. There are two dialectically related modes of grasping experience (Concrete Experience and Abstract Conceptualization) and two dialectically related modes of transforming experience (Reflective Observation and Active Experimentation). For effective learning to take place the learner needs to employ all four abilities and be able to choose the appropriate ability needed, in a recursive process. The learner has a *concrete experience*, simulated or real. The learner then does *reflective observation* on that experience. The insights gained by reflection are then used in *abstract conceptualization* where they are developed into logical theories and then these theories are used to problem-solve and make

decisions which will result in *active experimentation* or action. For Kolb, the learner moves, “in varying degrees between actor to observer, and from specific involvement to general analytical detachment” (Kolb, 1984, p.31). The model also illustrates the different learning styles that learners choose (Diverging, Assimilating, Converging and Accommodating) during the learning process. These learning styles can be influenced by many factors including personality, early education specialisation, professional career current job and adaptive competencies (Kolb, 1984).

According to Kolb (2005) the model is informed by the following six assumptions which he first stated in his book *Experiential Learning: Experience as the source of learning and development* in 1984: “ (i) learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes, (ii) all learning is relearning, (iii) the process of learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaption to the world, (iv) learning is an holistic process of adaptation to the world, (v) learning involves synergetic transactions between the person and environment, (vi) learning is the process of creating knowledge” (p.184).

The Experiential Learning Theory is grounded in the concept that “people have a natural capacity to learn” (Kayes, 2002, p.139) and has gained momentum over the last few decades where it continues to influence a diverse range of topics. Miettinen (1998) suggests a reason for this influence:

[ELT] combines spontaneity, feelings and deep individual insights with the possibility of rational thought and reflection. It maintains the humanistic belief in every individual's capacity to grow and learn, so important for the concept of lifelong learning. It includes a positive ideology that is evidently important for adult education (p. 170). (Cited in Kayes, 2002, p.140)

In more recent developments to Experiential Learning Theory, Kolb addresses some of the critiques of his model and places emphasis on the fact that every part of the experiential cycle is really experience by referencing the work of William James who believed that everything is experience. From this view, “the duality between the mind (thought) and physical world (thing) is resolved because both are experienced but with different characteristics” (Kolb, A & Kolb, 2009. p.300). They also highlight the role of attention and intentional consciousness during the experience so that one's learning ability can be enhanced through meta-cognition.

A. Kolb & D. Kolb (2009) confirm that the spiral nature of the experiential learning cycle can help learner “learn how to learn” as they develop meta-cognitive learning capacity, as they consciously follow the steps in the cycle. They summarize these five key concepts of the experiential learning cycle as a meta-cognition model: (i) learning self-identity (ii) spiral learning process (iii) learning style (iv) learning space and (v) learning flexibility.

Learning self-identity refers to how the learner views their ability to learn. If a learner believes he or she can't learn, this causes a hindrance in the learning process. This is called a fixed self-identity. People, who believe they have the capacity to learn and develop, have a learning self-identity. In Experiential Learning Theory, the learner trusts the experience and that they can learn from it, with the goal being an ongoing process of learning from experience. Freire and his work liberating farmers from a self-identity ingrained by internalized oppression have influenced this viewpoint. Freire's method was “to facilitate critical consciousness through...praxis, “reflection and action on the world in order to transform it” which is aligned to definitions of meta-cognition (Kolb, A & Kolb, 2009. p.305). A learning self-identity is empowered through his problem-posing method. Hutt (2007) maintains that to move from a fixed to a learning self-identity, a positive learning space is required. The unconditional positive regard allows the learner to be vulnerable as they learn (Cited in Kolb, A & Kolb, 2009).

Spiral learning process refers to how the cycle actually works. When you go through the steps in the cycle, your new experience should be better. This speaks to continuous learning and always improving. The cycle never closes but continues to develop. Sir Theodore Cook writes this about the Spiral in life.

One of the chief beauties of the spiral as an imaginative conception is that it is always growing, yet never covering the same ground, so that it is not merely an explanation of the past, but is also a prophesy of the future; and while it defines and illuminates what has already happened, it is also leading constantly to new discoveries. (p. 423)
(Cited in Kolb & Kolb, 2009. p.310)

This differs slightly from the original Experiential Learning Cycle, although Kolb saw the original Experiential Learning Cycle to be recursive.

Learning styles refers to the way different individuals move through the cycle's modes, based on their learning preferences. Besides the styles mentioned previously, a fifth style called

Balancing has been included. This style finds the middle ground between the different modes of the learning cycle (Kolb, A & Kolb, 2009). Experiential Learning Theory also defines learning styles as dynamic and not fixed (Kolb, A & Kolb, 2005).

Learning Spaces refers to space where learning occurs. “In Experiential Learning Theory this space exists in the experience of the learner and is formed both by objective factors such as the physical setting and time available for learning and by subjective factors such as learning preferences and expectations” (Kolb, A & Kolb, 2009, p.320). When describing learning spaces, Kolb, A & Kolb (2005, 2009) draw on Urie Bronfenbrenner’s work on the ecology of human development which sees learning spaces as a “topologically nested arrangement of structures each contained within the next” (Kolb, A & Kolb, 2005, p.199).

The following four systems are described: microsystem – immediate classroom/course setting; mesosystem – concurrent system of family, place of residence, relationships in the person’s life; exosystem – social structures, both formal and informal that influence the immediate environment e.g. policies, procedures, work culture; macrosystem – institutional patterns and values of wider culture that has an influence on the microsystem and mesosystem (Kolb, A & Kolb, 2005, 2009). Other important contributions to learning spaces are Lewin’s concept of life space, Situated Learning Theory (which will be discussed later) and Theory of Knowledge Creation. The Experiential Learning Theory concept emphasises that “learning is not one universal process but a map of learning territories, a frame of reference within which many different ways of learning can flourish and interrelate” (Kolb, A & Kolb, 2009, p.321). Kolb, A & Kolb (2005) have also developed principles for creating learning spaces where learners can engage fully. It should be a hospitable, welcoming and supportive yet challenging environment which respects learners and their experiences. Within this environment space should be made for conversational learning, for development of expertise through recursive practice, for acting and reflecting, for feeling and thinking, for inside-out learning and for learners to take charge of their own learning.

Learning Flexibility refers to the adaptability of moving from one learning mode to another in the learning cycle to increase learning effectiveness.

Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory and Model remain important to experiential learning and scholars have used it as a basis for developing or reconceptualising further models.

Critiques of the Constructivist Perspective of Experiential Learning

In Fenwick's (2000) review of experiential learning literature, she summarizes some of the critiques of constructivism and groups them according to the following five areas:

The primary focus placed on reflection as a cognitive activity and by doing so reduces it to being simplistic and reductionist. This view emphasises a mastery and rational control of this skill, a view challenged by feminists. Also it doesn't explain the role of desire and resistance to learning, or the role of the unconscious on the conscious reflection, clings to binaries and reinforces an input-output method of learning, if reflection is seen as processing the experience. Constructivism also separates the learner from their environment and experiences. Reflection is seen as a bridge to these, but should be "reorientating us to the whole" (Fenwick, 2001).

The lack of robust consideration of interplay between people and context is seen as problematic by many theorists. A dominant viewpoint is that within constructivism, even though context is acknowledged, the learner is seen as separate and autonomous from the social context they operate in that is created by language, cultural, political and gender practices. These contexts are often power-laden, as in the case of the workplace, and cannot be ignored as they affect meaning making. Jarvis (1987) points out that these sociocultural influences might prompt the learner's response to be reflective learning, non-reflective learning (absorbing information, unconsciously internalizing new understandings, mechanically practising new skills) or even non-learning (rejecting learning, too pre-occupied or busy to learn, mechanically interacting).

The view of experience as something that is concrete is challenged as many theorists see experience as fluid and something that cannot be bound by the rational and categorized. As Michelson states, experience is "outrageous and transgressive, experience not easily reduced to reason and coherence" (Michelson, 1999, p.145) (Cited in Fenwick, 2001). The constructivist learning process of reflection "presumes that knowledge is extracted and abstracted from experience by the processing mind" (Fenwick, 2001, p.21) which ignores the fact that knowledge and experience are mutually driven and don't exist outside the sociocultural meanings but within it.

The notion of "learner" as a unitary self who can reflect unproblematically is assumed as constructivists see the individual as the primary actor in the process of knowledge

construction which is largely rational and conscious. Fenwick (2000) states “Access to experience through rational reflection is also assumed, as is the learner’s capacity, motivation, and power to mobilize the reflective process” (p.249). Theorists challenge this idea of unitary self as they believe self is shaped by context, and therefore shifts and is multiple.

Educators’ intervention as “managers” of others’ experiential learning has been challenged because some theorists see mainstream experiential learning as being too focused on the management of this learning. Fenwick (2001) cite Michelson and Kolb who both point out that, “experiential learning was politically focused on celebrating through acknowledging the importance of inner experience, human dignity, and freedom of choice” (p.23). However, programmes like APL (Assessing Prior Learning) have been restrictive about what experience counts with individuals that construct a self that fits in with the criteria of APL and looks at individual achievement. The process ignores social inequalities or how we have overcome discrimination across political, cultural, economic and gendered environments. Michelson (1996) states that, “the management of experience has become a way of regulating how people define themselves and construct themselves” (p.144). In the workplace environment, experience is often viewed as capital with benefits for the employer. Experience is seen as capital that can be processed into knowledge which is standardised and then commodified and sold “in the labor exchange relations defining capitalism” (Fenwick, 2001, p.24). Also with the trends of competitiveness, underemployment and the pace of change especially technologically, they can translate to learning problems that may become the responsibility of the individual who need to continuously learn and this learning is assessed. This might require people to “think on their feet” and may require the flexibility of reflection while they are doing, fluidly bringing together thought and action (Fenwick, 2013)

Alternative Conceptions of Experiential Learning

Fenwick (2000, 2001, 2003) frames four alternate conceptions of experiential learning which should be included in the discourse of experiential learning.

A Psychoanalytic Conception of Experiential Learning

According to Fenwick (2000), this conception opens discourse on the “realm of the unconscious, our resistance to knowledge, the desire for closure and mastery that sometimes governs the educational impulse, and enigmatic tensions between learner, knowledge, and

educator” (p.250-251). Knowledge dilemmas occur through struggles between the conscious and the unconscious. Britzmann sees learning, “as interference of conscious thought by the unconscious and uncanny psychic conflicts that result” (Fenwick, 2003, p.31). The unconscious comes to an individual at any time when it is ready. The conscious is aware of the unconscious but can’t access it. This results in anxiety for the conscious. This can influence whether the learner learns or not. Mughal & Zafar (2011) summarize the literature (Britzman, 1998; Fenwick, 2001; Vince, 1998; Miller & Rice 1967; Bion, 1961; Trist and Murray, 1990) and identify these directions which the learner can take as holding anxiety (promoting learning) and fight or flight (discouraging learning). They also state that the present is not included and focus is placed on past events and that taking into account, “...the relationship of the inner thought process to the outer world knowledge...may have a considerable impact on the interpretation of the experience of individuals in the cycle” (p.33). This viewpoint stresses the importance of learners working through these inner conflicts so that they can engage fully in the learning process (Caulfield & Woods, 2013).

A Situative Conception of Experiential Learning

Central to this conception is that “learning is inherently social in nature. The nature of the interactions among learners, the tools they use within these interactions, the activity itself, and the social context in which the activity takes place shape learning” (Hansman, 2001, p.45). Kim (2005) summarises learning in a situative perspective as, “Learning involves enculturation, reflecting realistic events and problems, experts’ tacit knowledge, and the culture of community rather than the accumulation of decontextualized, abstract knowledge and skills.” (p.3). There is “an intimate connection between participation and the social and cultural world within which that participation occurs” (Quay, 2003, p.107).

Situated cognition maintains that learning is grounded in the situation in which a person participates. It is not situated in the head of that person as just cognitive concepts produced by reflection nor as inner energies produced by psychic conflicts. They also don’t see knowledge as transferable but transformable when applied to different situations. Meaning is created between the individual and the community (Fenwick, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2006; Mughal & Zafar, 2011, Quay, 2003). This requires participation and judgement on behalf of the learner. “The forces such as external and internal motivation may play a key role in the judgment and decision process of the learner. However, internal motivation may be subject to the psychological and physical states of the learner” (Mughal, F. & Zafar, A., 2011, p. 33).

People learn as they participate and are involved in communities of practice (Lave,1991; Hansman, 2001; Fenwick, 2003) which can be described as any group of people who work together in a formal or informal setting a certain period across and who learn from one another through action and doing. This theory shows how knowledge is fluid and moves as individuals influence one another through a process of co-participation. Within these communities, learning is situated in the interaction between full participants and peripheral participants through modelling and gaining mastery. The community decides what is legitimate practice and the objective is to be a full participant in the community of practice. Through this practice new members become grounded in the norms and practices of the community.

Within workplace learning, there has been research to design authentic environments which reflect situated learning. One example of this is cognitive apprenticeships which is divided into five stages: Modelling which consists of observing experienced members of the community and where the experienced members share their ways of work with the newer members; Approximating which is where the new member plans for the activity, does the activity and then reflects on it afterwards; Scaffolding is where the new member is assisted to minimise risk, by an experienced member which will lead to the Fading process where the new member is given more autonomy as their abilities increase; Self-directed learning is where the new member works independently and finally in the Generalizing phase is where they can discuss and transfer information (Hansman, 2001; Fenwick, 2001).

Fenwick (2006) states that by learning collaboratively we ensure that being grounded doesn't result in stagnation, "Participation in collective action to define a problem and achieve an objective-with tools, language and action, individual and group – is interminably connected with skill transformation" (p.700). Quay (2003) notes that the questions of teaching, power and ethics are important considerations in this perspective.

A Critical Cultural Conception of Experiential Learning

This examines the role of power in learning and sees power as part of experience. The critical culturists state that the other theories of experiential learning "lack attention to inevitable power relations circulating in human cultural systems" (Fenwick, 2000, p.256). Mughal & Zafar (2011) state that, "power as an influence on one's self development cannot be denied" and that "resistance is formed when cultural power mechanisms are formed" (p.31). This can affect the social transformation of experiential learning (Caulfield & Wood, 2013). The work

of Paulo Freire is also important in this perspective as he believed that learning should result in social transformation. Fenwick (2001) cites Spivak (1998) and Said (1993) when discussing the role of colonization on education. As most of our histories have been affected by colonization it cannot be ignored. Colonization has resulted in the creation of different societies where local people were depersonalised and displaced. It has also resulted in creating a history of dependency between the colonizers and resisters and different forms of dissent. Therefore, one needs to be critical about the context in which learning is happening and the power relations therein. When discussing Kolb's Learning Cycle, Mughal & Zafar (2011) state that the cycle does not address these power relations and needs to incorporate, “(i) “creation of knowledge” through power relations and (ii) “role of subjectivity” in creating relations (p.33, Citing Vince, 1998). Learning is therefore influenced by our knowledge that was shaped by values, norms, society etc.

The Enactivist Conception of Experiential learning

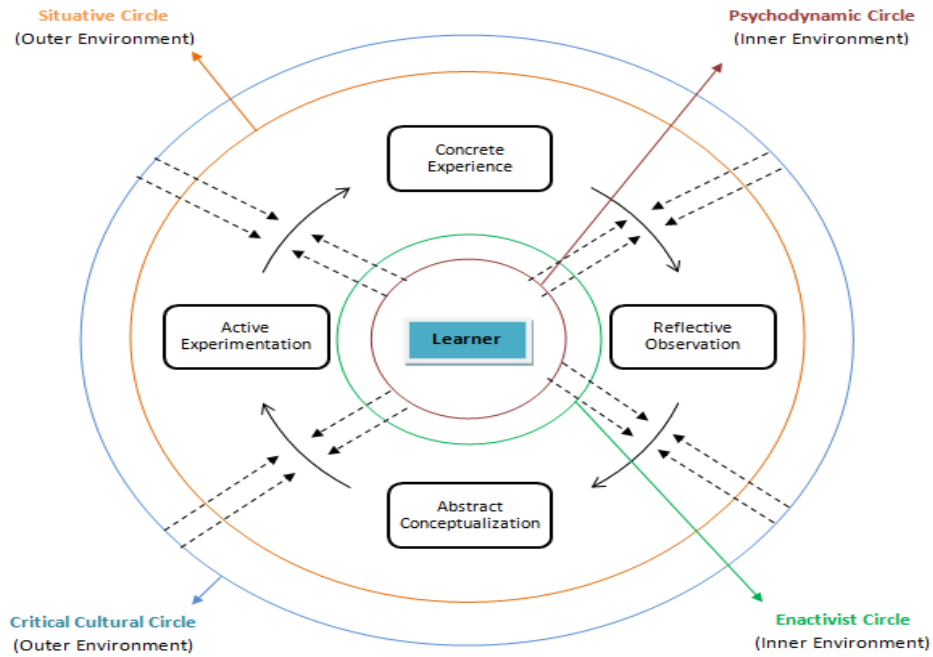
This view is influenced by ecological systems theory. “Enactivists explore how cognition and environment become simultaneously enacted through experiential learning. The first premise is that the systems represented by person and context are inseparable, and the second premise is that change occurs from emerging systems affected by the intentional tinkering of one with the other” (Fenwick, 2000, p.261). As learners, individuals are interconnected with a bigger environment system and individuals don't operate separately to that. One can further infer that a change in the system could result in a change to the individual. For enactivists, there is constant change as the individual adapts to the changes in the system, as they interact with it and therefore learning is constant. “Learning is thus cast as continuous invention and exploration produced through the relations among consciousness, identity, action and interaction, and objects and structural dynamics of complex systems” (Fenwick, 2000, p262).

The above discourses have highlighted the short comings of the constructivist view of experiential learning. When looking at Kolb's experiential learning model, which the continuous learning cycle models, Mughal & Zafar (2011) conceptualize a *table of facts* to identify the gaps and areas of future developments of the experiential learning.

S#	Alternate Conceptions	Deficiencies in Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle	Issues Identified	Future Development of the Experiential Learning Cycle
1.	Psychoanalytic Perspective –	Emotional experience of the learner	Anxiety (Internal Stimuli), Desire (Self-motivation)	Identifying immediate experiences, encourage to learn and reduce anxiety
2.	Situative Perspective	Participation of learner in a situation	Participation, Practical Judgment, Perception	Improving perception through structured learning
3.	Critical Cultural Perspective	Cultural aspects of self-development (Individually & Collectively)	Power influence, Power relations, Subjectivity, Socio-political perspective	Self -development through power relations (creation of knowledge)
4.	Enactivist Perspective	Simultaneous Interaction of cognition with environment	Dialect, Processing of thoughts	Facilitating reflection of experience through a process of dialect or interaction

Table of Facts – Self Extracted from Literature Discourse Analysis of Kolb's Learning Cycle and Corresponding Deficiencies (Mughal & Zaffer, 2011)

Although Fenwick guards against synthesising the conceptions above (2001, 2003), Mughal & Zafar (2011) propose that combining the above views with the constructivist approach will address many of the deficiencies in Kolb's theory. They also propose that the alternative views discussed depict two environments of the learner: the inner environment (psychoanalytic and enactivist) and the outer environment (situative and critical cultural) which asserts pressure on the learning cycle, reinforcing learning. The model they propose reconceptualises Kolb's model using these two environments.



Reconceptualized Outlook of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

(Mughal & Zaffer, 2011)

Holman, Pavlica & Thorpe (1997) use social constructionism and activity theory when redefining Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory for management education. They believe that experience and reflection are not separate entities as both are part of the same process to construct meaning and they are connected to the unique situation people are located in. Therefore, "Learning can be considered as a process of argumentation in which thinking, reflecting, experiencing and action are different aspects of the same process. It is practical argumentation with oneself and in collaboration with others that actually forms the basis for learning" (p.145). Effective learning does not have to be cyclic in nature and we learn from one another not only through internal thinking. As conscious individuals we can to some degree change our social and cultural context.

The field of experiential learning is vast and growing. Fenwick (2000, 2001, 2003) states that concepts of experiential learning needs to be challenged and explored further by researchers. Saddington (2000) concludes his paper by stating that, "New branches (forms) of experiential learning are continually being developed" (p.8). It speaks to the dynamism of this learning theory.

The Progressive, Humanistic and Radical Traditions in Experiential Learning

Saddington (2000) summarizes the experiential learning theories into three dominant traditions in experiential learning. According to him,

The progressive tradition sees education as life-long and therefore "learning how to learn" is important for learners. They can then continue to use both the knowledge they gain from their own experience and the knowledge they gain from others and books in solving problems and bringing about social change (p.3).

Experience and knowledge play important roles in this tradition. The integration of knowledge with experience supports reflection and learning from experience, important in experiential learning. According to Saddington (2000), this critique has been criticized by theorists for its focus on individual growth regardless of its impact on society as a whole which can be seen as elitist (p.4).

According to Saddington (2000) the goal of the humanistic tradition is self-actualisation.

In humanistic education experience is the source of knowledge and the content of the curriculum. As learners reflect on their own experience so they take possession of it in a new way and gain knowledge which is authentic because it is true for their life-worlds. This repossession of experience is a personal discovery of knowledge which enables the learner to become more whole (a "fully-functioning person") (p.4).

The focus of learning is to enable the learner to become more whole and therefore the responsibility for learning falls on the learner who is central to the experience. The usefulness of learning is therefore limited to the individual. The critique of this tradition, according to Saddington (2000) centres on how it ignores the world the individual operates in and whether self-directed learning is possible in all situations.

The radical tradition, according to Saddington (2000), education and learning is situated within a certain social, historical and political context and therefore not neutral. It is also central to social transformation. He refers to Freire's belief which states that, "societal and individual liberation is interdependent" (p.4) Freire believes that education should be,

bringing about a new social order by changing the structures of society and liberating the individual from a false consciousness which is unaware of the structural and historical forces which have domesticated her/him. Reflective thought and action (praxis) are seen to be dialectically related. It is through dialogue and engagement in

society that awareness and insight into the learner's world and social reality come about (p.4)

Critical analysis of a learner's life experience within their societal context is central to this tradition." Life experience is the source of learners' knowledge which liberates them and provides them with the tools for changing the society in which they live." (p.5). This tradition needs to guard against "using education solely as a political tool" (p.5). According to Saddington (2000), an emphasis on the learner critically reflecting on their socialisation and the contextualising of their experience within a broader societal structure and culture, should ensure that they look at learning more holistically.

Simulations - a constructivist and situative experiential learning pedagogy

Simulation activities and games can be very effective tools in experiential learning. Fanning and Gaba (2007) state that, "Simulation offers the opportunity of practiced experience in a controlled fashion, which can be reflected on at leisure. Experiential learning is particularly suited to professional learning, where integration of theory and practice is pertinent and ongoing" (p.116). According to Miller, Riley, Davis & Hansen (2008) in their study of teams, within a clinical setting, "The simulation recreates, as closely as possible, the real-world environment, equipment, and psychological reality for the participants. The individual and team experiential nature of in situ simulations allows for the systematic acquisition of knowledge of effective team concepts (what we think), skills in team behaviour (what we do and say), and attitudes about team performance (what we feel or value)" (Miller et al, 2008). An advantage of simulations is that it exposes learners to a "real-life" experience in a safe environment. According to Gentry (1990), "It is hard to argue that experience will not lead to learning. However, it will be argued that the resultant learning can be in error unless care is taken to assure that those conditions appear" (p.9). When designing a simulated experience, facilitators need to ensure that the necessary conditions are created, to insure a quality experience. When dealing with simulations there is also the notion of fidelity. "Simulation fidelity has been defined as the degree to which the simulator or simulation replicates reality or how closely they represent the real system".

Critical to any simulation or experiential learning activity is the debriefing or feedback, as an experience in itself does not always result in learning (Miller et al, 2008; Gentry, 1990). The debriefs are designed to "guide students through a reflective process about their learning" (Petranek, Corey & Black, 1992, p. 176), as not everyone can naturally analyse and make

sense of an experiential learning experience (Fanning & Gaba, 2007). The facilitator is responsible for creating an open space where learners can be open and honest about their ideas and feelings. Most times feedback is outcomes feedback as opposed to process feedback and students themselves may give more merit to the outcomes feedback. However, it is process feedback that adds more value. Debriefing allows the experience to be “grounded in purpose and theory” (Petranek, 2000, p.109).

Gentry (1990) cites Wolf and Byrne who point out that feedback should be a continuous from before the experience till the debrief. Facilitators will observe the learning process to encourage positive aspects and discourage negative aspects, in the hope of eliminating these negative aspects. A question that this evokes is whether students should be given the opportunity to fail, as we can learn from our mistakes. Wolf and Byrne suggest that the risk be weighed up. During the feedback or debriefing session the learner needs to be given an opportunity to “articulate their perception of what was learned, and the instructor needs to put things into a broader perspective” (Gentry, 1990, p.17). Fanning and Gaba (2007) emphasise that the skill of the facilitator is important when debriefing because learners have indicated that it’s an important factor in the learning process. They believe that facilitator training is vital, as well as experience and suggest methods where facilitators can learn from one-another.



Although oral debriefing is popular, and reflection is emphasised, the time is often limited. Therefore, it is argued that a deeper learning may occur through written debriefs, as it brings a perspective which can make sense of the activity and create meaning. Writing in itself is seen as an experience which helps us to organize our thoughts and feelings (Petranek, 2000).

Petranek and Thiagarajan developed a written concept technique which can be used by facilitators and other professionals. After a simulation, participants were given a worksheet with key concepts that reflected the goals of the simulation, which the learner used to complete the written debrief. With regard to the corporate world they noted the following:

Often in the corporate world, there was a great deal of resistance, but if they tried it, the employees appreciated their written account of the exciting simulation. The participants who gained the most from this technique focused on using key concepts in answering the question about the extent of their learning.

(Petranek, 2000, p.111)

With written debriefs, a dialogue can be established between facilitator and learner, as the facilitator can respond in writing to the reflections made by the learner. This may be time consuming and may be met with resistance from both facilitators and learners but may result in a deeper learning. Breunig (2014) found journalling enhanced the learning of her students but cautions that although journalling can be an effective tool when facilitating reflection, it is not something that is automatic which means that some structure is needed. Petranek et al (1992) mentions that journal writing helps with the organisation of material on a personal level, enhancing learning on a deeper level. Petranek (2000) mentions other written debriefs that he has experimented with. They include, learners writing letters to themselves at the end of a workshop, written exercises over a few days reflecting what they have learnt and giving guidelines for writing.

Learners felt that written debriefs gave them the time to compare different participants' experiences and ideas during a simulation and gave them time to reflect on their own experiences. It helped think to think about their choices and why they made them as well as think about new information about themselves. Written debriefs also give learners the freedom to say what they think and have learnt in a safe space, giving the learner an opportunity to explore feelings privately without fear of judgement (Petranek, 2000). It also gives the quiet learner a communication method and allows all learners to privately and personally communicate with the educator. In written debriefs, the learners' perspectives are broader as they include their backgrounds and cultures. A journal is also a record of their learning, their choices and growth and can be used to individually assess learners on their learning processes. By journalling learners are also able to link theory to their experiences.

Petranek (2000), who has worked with simulations for more than 25 years summarises his challenge and hope for simulations in learning,

My challenge to the simulation field is to make simulations the springboard for greater learning. Simulations excite, motivate, and challenge people. It is the responsibility of facilitators and professors to harness this raw energy and channel it to allow students to learn more by writing about the experiences and feelings. Writing is another experiential activity that helps to organize our world. (p.111)

In summary the literature supports experiential learning and acknowledges that experience plays an important role in adult learning and therefore workplace learning. Most of the experiential theory has been influenced by constructivist theory, especially the role of

reflection and the work of David Kolb. However, literature is also starting to reflect alternative conceptions which take into account factors such as the influence of social nature on learning, the role of the unconscious on learning, our resistance to and our desire for learning, the role of power in learning and the influence of ecological systems theory. These conceptions have also influenced and resulted in further development of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle.



SECTION 3 - RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this section, I will discuss the research methodology and design.

The research site

The research site for this paper was a training academy for new consultants at a retail bank. The academy is permanently situated in a hotel as delegates are flown in from all over the country for the 10-day workshop. There are no individual offices so facilitators and management work in one of the two technical rooms available. There is one meeting room which also serves as our eating area. Lunch and tea snacks are provided by the company.

The environment is one where self-management and ownership is encouraged and expected. The use of feedback amongst peers and learners is also encouraged.

The 10-day workshop is repeated every two weeks from mid-January to mid- December, with different participants. Each workshop has between 95-102 learners.

The Workshop under investigation

The workshop is part of an induction programme which started in 2002 when the company was started and the Learning and Development delivery team for this programme has been situated at this site since 2007.

Since then, the programme has had two major changes which accommodated a change in the organisation. In May 2013, another major programme change occurred to accommodate the company's new IT system, as well as to emphasise the company's drive to deliver an excellent service experience. In 2014, there was a review of the programme and the changes were implemented in May 2015. The duration of the Induction Programme is 9 weeks for new consultants. It is divided into 3 phrases:

The first phase is situated in the workplace for the duration of 3 weeks. The new consultant takes part in the daily life of the workplace while doing formal learning activities using different methods such as e-learning, workbook activities, observations, having feedback and coaching sessions and by completing simulated scenarios to attain technical competence. The aim of this phase is to orientate the new consultant to their working environment, into the culture of the organisation, for the consultant to obtain knowledge pertaining to the

organisation such as the organisation's structure, history, learning philosophy and product knowledge and to acquire relevant technical skills.

The second phase is a 10-day, on-site formal workshop which takes place at the training academy. This is where the delegates' knowledge and technical skills are integrated with behaviour and selling principles. Different methodologies include experiential activities, workbook activities, skills practices, role-plays and table discussions. The main emphasis is on integrating technical skills, company behaviour skills, selling skills and product knowledge in a simulated client interaction called triad skills practices and observations. These interactions are either observed by their peers or facilitator or both and feedback is shared after each interaction. The physical layout of the training rooms mirrors the consultants' workstations in the branch. The study will focus on this section.

The third phase is also situated in the workplace for 6 weeks after the workshop. This phase includes e-learning, observations and practices. For the consultant to be deemed competent, they need to be signed off on seven capabilities by management in the workplace.

Facilitator's role in the workshop phase

The learning facilitator has a group of 6 learners for the duration of the workshop. His/her role is to act as a guide and support for the learner. During the workshop, the facilitation is divided into upfront facilitation, table (group) facilitation and skills practice observations. The upfront facilitation requires that the facilitator introduce and debrief a topic for the entire workshop (90-100 learners) using a particular facilitation method. At the table, the facilitator will facilitate a discussion on that topic using the workbook questions as a guide, to achieve the outcomes of each activity. The outcomes are stipulated in the facilitator guide for each activity. During skills practice observations, the facilitator needs to observe the interaction with no or a little intervention and provide feedback to the learner after they have given themselves feedback and received feedback from their peers. The use of feedback is to help inform the learner so that they can put the necessary actions in place to have a better skills practice experience.

If a learner is struggling, coaching conversations happen where there is a reflection on what experiences have led the learner to the coaching conversation e.g. struggling on the system, not contributing to discussions, inputs in discussion are not accurate, failed an assessment. The next step in the coaching conversation will be a reflection on what the root cause could

be e.g. a lack of understanding, a language barrier, didn't study. Once root cause has been determined, actions are put in place to have a different experience. Learner ownership and accountability is encouraged.

Each facilitator is also a member of a smaller team. These smaller teams are responsible for different aspects of the programme. Each small team has between 2-3 facilitators and a team leader. One of the facilitators also acts as a 'successor' to the team leader. The team leader is also responsible for 2-3 operations staff who facilitate on the programme, after they have attended a workshop preparing them for their role on the programme. These persons only facilitate for one programme.

Research approach

As the aim of this research paper is investigative in nature, I adopted a qualitative approach. According to Denzin and Ryan (2007), in a qualitative approach the, "researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret these things in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p.580). Besides this naturalistic and interpretive approach, there was an emphasis on words in data collection and analysis as opposed to quantification (Bryman, 2012; Miles and Huberman, 1984). As I wanted to explore how the respondents interpret and apply the Continuous Learning Cycle, I would obtain richer data from a qualitative approach as well as a deeper understanding of the phenomena I studied.

When deciding on a research approach epistemological and ontological considerations are also important. For this study, I used an interpretivist epistemological approach.

Interpretivism is an approach that "requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action" (Bryman, 2012, p.30). Each facilitator may be influenced by different factors, in their use and understanding of the model and as researcher I had an awareness of that.

I used a constructivist ontological approach. Bryman (2012) states that constructivism, as an ontological position, "asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors. It implies that social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision." (p.33). The research site and environment is continually changing and if we are continuously learning, we are continuously in a state of revision. When I researched the understanding and application of this model, it represented a "specific version of social reality, rather than one

that can be regarded as definitive” (Bryman, 2012. p.33). I needed to bear in mind the social actors that influenced me as a researcher as well, to ensure that I remained unbiased.

Method of data-gathering

My method of data-gathering was a semi-structured in-depth interview. As Rubin, H. & Rubin, I (2011) stated, “Qualitative interviews let us see that which is not ordinarily on view and examine that which is often looked at but seldom seen” (p. xv). According to Bryman (2012), interviewing in qualitative research is centred on flexibility. It is more general and takes into account the participants’ points of view and perspectives and is more aligned to obtaining information that can result in new or developed theory. It also is less intrusive way of gathering data than participant observations (Bryman, 2012).

According to DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, semi-structured interviews “are generally organised around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee” (p.315). I chose this method because I did my research in the workplace. The interviews did not disrupt normal work patterns or responsibilities. I also wanted the participants to have the opportunity to explain their opinions and the qualitative interview suited that better.

Research instrument

The research instrument I chose to use was an interview guide (see Appendix A) which facilitated a semi-structured interview. According to Bryman (2012), “What is crucial is that the questioning allows interviewers to glean the ways in which the research participants view their social world and that there is flexibility in the conduct of the interviews.” (p.473). It also allows the researcher to change the wording of questions and sequence of the interview and whether to probe for more detail based on what the interviewee has said (Mason, 2002). This instrument gave the participants enough freedom to express their views the way they wanted to. Although questions are fairly specific to the topic, this instrument allowed me the flexibility to ask other questions not on the guide if I wanted to develop things the participants said to me during the interview.

Research participants and selection

I have used purposive sampling so that the sample is relevant to the research questions being asked (Bryman, 2012). The research participants were 12 facilitators/team leaders who have

facilitated groups and who have observed the Triad Skills Observation Role Plays in the last six months, up to June 2015, in the induction programme.

There were four females: Thandiwe, Hannalie, Nicole and Carol and eight males: Wayne, Bradley, Mark, Shaun, Darren, Thando, Senzo and Thabang who were interviewed which represents the gender make-up of this team, which has a higher percentage of males. The sample was culturally diverse with six coloureds, four blacks and two whites. All participants resided in the larger Cape Town region. The age group range was between 29-45 years old, with three of the women being the oldest in the sample. Five of the participants had been in the facilitation role for more than 3 years and eight participants for less than three years. The longest time spent in the role as facilitator was six years and the shortest was nine months. Four of the participants had been in the role for 10 months or less. Five of the participants have completed degree or diploma courses, three are in the process of studying for degrees, one has completed a qualification for Occupationally Directed - Education Training and Development Practices and one is in the process of RPL. Three participants have completed Train the Trainer and three have completed the Assessor and Moderator course. Ten participants have completed the Facilitating for Results workshop and eight people have completed the Make Learning Happen workshop. Both are courses which facilitators at this institution complete. Ten of the participants have previous facilitation experience as part of their work history and two have had facilitation experience as part of their role as a Branch Manager. Four of the participants were recruited from within the organisation and eight from outside the organisation, with experience in the NGO sector and private sector.

Research ethics statement

According to Israel and Hay (2006), “By caring about ethics and by acting on that concern we promote the integrity of research.” (p.5). To ensure integrity, there are ethical considerations for both the organisation and the participants to consider. These include confidentiality and anonymity, ensuring that the participants are fully aware of the nature of the study, reducing the risk of harm and exploitation to the participants, invasion of privacy and if deception was employees (Bryman, 2012; Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2000).

The organisation gave consent for the research to be conducted on their site, as well as access to the site. The organisation was also assured that the “intellectual property” (as a form of definition) of their programme content and their image would be protected. I provided the

organisation with a letter requesting permission to conduct the research and access to the site (See Appendix B). I also discussed possible benefits for them.

In order to ensure that participants fully understood their involvement in the study, I provided them with an information letter (Appendix C). Informed consent is a way to ensure that the participants “exercise their rights as autonomous persons to voluntarily accept or refuse to participate in the study” (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2000). Participants gave their consent to participate (Appendix D). Bryman (2012) states that, “The advantages of such forms are that they give respondents the opportunity to be fully informed of the nature of the research and the implications of their participation at the outset” (p.140). He also states that the benefit to the researcher is that they have signed consent. He does however point out that these may cause participants to have more questions and concerns from the outset. To make provision for this I included my contact details for them to use if they had any concerns and questions which need to be addressed. The information and consent form also stated that their anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained. This was especially important as participants may have been anxious that their individual input would be available to their managers. I also protected participants’ confidentiality by ensuring that interview notes, audio files and transcriptions were secure during the course of the research. To maintain anonymity in the dissemination of research findings, I have used pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants when I collate and publish the data.

To maintain transparency in the research, I will make the findings available to the participants.

Since potential participants were my peers in the workplace, they may have felt pressured to volunteer for the study (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2000). I included a paragraph in the information letter ensuring them that they were volunteering for this study and that they had the option to withdraw from it without any consequences.

As a researcher, I needed to be aware of my own bias and social context (Bryman, 2012), as I work in this environment and I have been influenced by its culture and philosophy on learning.

As this research project is registered with the University of the Western Cape, I have adhered to the research ethics procedure as outlined in the university’s research ethics policy.

SECTION 4 - DATA ANALYSIS

In this section I have analysed the data collected.

The aims of this study were to investigate ways in which the Continuous Learning Cycle model could be conceptualized more fully within a constructivist learning framework to create further possibilities for experiential learning; to identify ways that the model could maximise learning and to gain theoretical insight into what was hindering the application of the model in the workplace and beyond.

The Main research question was, “What possibilities does the Continuous Learning Cycle model offer for experiential learning?” with the following sub-questions: “How can the methodology be improved in order for the model to offer greater possibilities for experiential learning?” and “What factors enabled or hindered the use of this model in the workplace?”

There are similarities and overlaps between the Continuous Learning Cycle and Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle that implies that they are related. The Experience section of the Continuous Learning Cycle is captured in Kolb’s Concrete Experience stage. The Review and Conclude Section of the Continuous Learning Cycle are both captured in Kolb’s Reflective Observation stage. The Action step of the Continuous Learning Cycle is captured in Kolb’s Active Experimentation stage. The difference in steps between the two cycles is Kolb’s Abstract Conceptualization Stage which is not convincingly represented in the Continuous Learning Cycle. The Continuous Learning Cycle is also represented as spiral and therefore continuous. Although Kolb’s initial Learning Cycle was circular, his later work indicates that the cycle is actually spiral (Kolb, A & Kolb, 2005).

The Triad Skills Observation is a simulated learning experience which was interrogated as an example of a learning activity which is based on the Continuous Learning Cycle. The learner experiences a simulated scenario where they need to open an account for a client. The experience is followed by a feedback session which includes the Review and Conclude steps of the Continuous Learning Cycle. During the feedback session, the learner reflects on their own performance and gives feedback on it, the peer observer and facilitator observer will also give feedback on the learner’s performance. During feedback, the facilitator guides the learner, so that they can decide on Actions to put in place, to have an improved experience next time.

I gathered information in the interview on how the facilitators in a learning workshop understood the model and their application of it in the workplace, particularly the triad skills observations and beyond the workplace.

When organizing the data, I themed it according to the theoretical view it supported or challenged. To introduce the data, I will give an overview on the facilitators' understanding of learning and experiential learning

Learning

The definition of learning in academic literature is diverse and dependent on the field of subject matter. Traditionally learning is seen as acquiring knowledge, skill or behaviour through experience, teaching or study, but some definitions have become more complex and more inclusive.

This was mirrored in some of the responses of the participants.

Some of the participants' understanding was traditional. They saw learning as "acquiring" knowledge:

Learning is a process of acquiring information, skills and knowledge and ability to retain it... ja... in your mind (Thandiwe)

Learning is acquiring new knowledge of something (Shaun)

Learning is really just gaining knowledge and insight into things (Thabang)

Bradley and Darren when describing learning, made reference to the movement that takes place when learning happens, moving from the unknown to the known:

...learning is taking you from a place of not knowing to a place of knowing (Bradley)

...getting from a point where you don't understand something to a point where you understand something fully and be able to apply it (Darren).

Senzo and Thabo developed the idea of acquisition, displaying a more sophisticated understanding especially around critically engagement:

Learning is a process of acquiring information, there is no traditional process, we learn differently. Learning is about making yourself vulnerable and being open to new

things... learning is not just about getting information and without questioning that process. Learning must be viewed like that. (Senzo)

...learning is... it's a process in which one acquires new information through engagement and challenging the existing information with the new information and making decision based on that, that's what learning is for me (Thabo)

Nicole described learning as continuous, often an extension of what you already know, therefore adding to your schema. She also mentioned that this happened daily alluding to informal learning:

For me, learning is about continuously broadening your knowledge or your experience... getting to know new things, it's about developing old things – it's an extension of what you know currently. For me, that's learning, and learning happens through experience, it happens through knowledge. So theoretical, technical skills – learning happens every single day (Nicole)

Carol described learning in terms of behaviour change, as is common from a psychological perspective:

So for me, in a nutshell, learning is when there's a behavioural change. It can be positive and a negative, because we can also learn things that are bad behaviours (Carol).

Mark and Wayne made reference to consciously choosing to learn and the role of the subconscious in learning mirroring the psychoanalytic conception of experiential learning:

I would say learning is something that we do every single day – consciously or subconsciously.... I also would say learning is more often than not a choice, because you can be in the experience and decide not to learn from it (Mark).

I don't think that people, if they are not really conscious – if it doesn't mean anything to them, they are not going to learn. So people really kind of select when they want to learn. If we go through an experience and it's like we don't really care about it and it doesn't really bother us, we're not going to take anything from the experience.

(Wayne)

Carol referred to wisdom and how that was on a higher level of learning and linked it to experiential learning:

I think for me a very high level of learning is wisdom, and wisdom it comes –wisdom comes from learning through experience. It becomes a part of our fibre and our value system, our belief system (Carol).

Carol also stated that by following the Continuous Learning Cycle's process and by reflecting, the learner may use the model independently, even subconsciously:

...when people reflect themselves and then they themselves identify what they will continue with or change, and then in the next time round do it. And for me, it's going – so it's not just the one time I observe them, you'll see them doing it naturally, going or without even thinking about it (Carol).

Experiential learning

In the academic literature the definitions of experiential learning and experience-based learning are often blurred but there is agreement that the experience of the learner plays a central role (Fenwick, 2001). My understanding is that experience plays an important role in informal and formal learning. In the sphere of formal adult learning, it can also form the basis of pedagogy which informs a methodology of putting the person through a simulated experience as an impetus for learning to happen.

When describing experiential learning, the definitions were varied.

Some participants declared a basic view of experiential learning in that it is learning through an experience both real and simulated, your own or another person's:

Experiential learning would be – it can either be an experience that someone has – you can use and experience that someone has gone through in their life, or you could create that experience artificially – as close as possible – and you can use it in a variety of things (Carol).

...experiential learning is allowing people to go through experiences that really guides them to learning how to do something new or different (Wayne).

...I'm gonna explain this to someone as learning through experiencing something. (Bradley).

For me experiential learning it's, learning through getting hands dirty (Thando).

Bradley and Hannalie made reference to experiential learning being a methodology as indicated by Breunig (2014) who believes that Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle helps to understand experiential learning as a methodology and that many experiential education initiatives are based on this model:

...we do apply experiential learning in our workshop as a whole where we give you the experience, where you have a chance to identify stuff with the help of feedback and then it's up to you. The next steps. We have also the energisers, which is also thought of as experiential learning, however, you don't have the latter parts of the stuff happening... But we don't apply it consistently for all our activities (Bradley).

Experiential learning is the opportunity to learn either through experimenting something, experiencing something, figuring something out, problem-solving – so it's having an opportunity to go through an experience without necessarily knowing up ahead what I'm supposed to be learning from that. It's like go through an experience and someone, or we as a team talks through/debrief the exercise and come up with conclusions as to oh, what do I take from this, what are my conclusions, what can we do differently (Hannalie),

Some mentioned that it was about energy and fun probably because there are facilitators in the team, who are called the experiential facilitators. Their role is to do activities which are kinetically-based called energizers:

Fun, you don't realize learning is happening (Thando)

Visible, tangible energy (Nicole)

Break in learning process. Relieves your thinking brain to bring focus (Shaun)

Thandiwe saw experiential as a holistic methodology

For me it's looking at learning holistically so we not looking at one dimension we looking at the person as a whole because you learn differently and people have different learning preferences.

Constructivist Approach to Experiential Learning

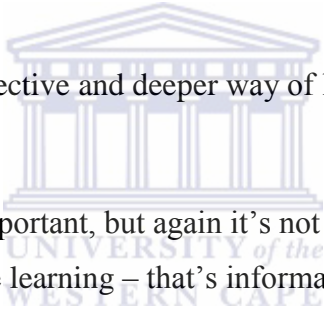
Constructivist perspectives of experiential learning were evident in the Triad Skills Observations, as the model followed the steps of the Continuous Learning Cycle which resembles Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle. Participants were asked questions about each step of the Continuous Learning Cycle related to the Triad Skills Observations. I use Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle to interpret and analyse the data.

Experience and Learning

The Experience section of the Continuous Learning Cycle is captured in Kolb's Concrete Experience stage.

In agreement with the constructivist approach to experiential learning, all participants agreed experience was important for learning, whether real or simulated, although their reasons for this agreement varied.

Carol stated that it was a more effective and deeper way of learning even if it isn't the only way to learn:



I think an experience is important, but again it's not the only way we learn. I think we learn faster, and I think the learning – that's information becoming your own truth – part of your own value system – so much more deeper and entrenched if you've gone through an experience – it's a much quicker way – learning – (Carol).

According to Gentry (1990), "It is hard to argue that experience will not lead to learning. However, it will be argued that the resultant learning can be in error unless care is taken to assure that those conditions appear" (p.9). Thandiwe noted that one could learn from the experience and the mistakes made, whereas Thabang warned against learning the wrong thing during an experience and where to or if we should intervene in the experience.

Definitely, yes, ...I think it's important for learning because you learn from it and you also learn from your mistakes as well (Thandiwe)

It is important, but also equally important, you also don't want people to learn the wrong stuff. So I think one needs to also apply a certain level of judgment and discretion because in as much as we don't want to intervene in what you say, go through an experience – we all know that you also don't want to learn the thing wrong

because it's more difficult to unlearn the wrong thing – to learn the correct thing the first time round. So you almost need to assess the situation and gauge ok – this person is consistently doing this thing the same way. Do I want for this person to go and reinforce this (Thabang).

Thando's response favoured an environment of support and not judgement, where you can learn optimally:

I think going through an experience where you see what you did and without being pressured obviously without being judged because that's another thing, ... You not there to judge them but you there to support them where they need support (Thando).

Constructivists like Boud et al and Kolb believe that the learner gains meaning by reflecting on their own experience (Boud et al, 1985; Kolb, 1984). However, Bradley expressed that learning can be based on someone else's experience:

Yes I do...um... I feel with this one (*learning through experience*) you are touching on one person and potentially touching on all the others because they've been exposed to the other ways that leads up to the observation (Bradley).

Senzo's view supports the constructivist view that reflecting on your own experience results in the most impactful learning. He emphasized the nature of the experience is holistic as your entire being is part of the experience:

Because experience gives you an opportunity, because you have done something, and you have an opportunity... You will be able to reflect on that. It's relevant, it's something that you went through, there were emotions there; it was all there ... we learn from other peoples experiences, and that's fine, but I think if you the one who went through the experience it has a huge impact in acquiring learning (Senzo).

Hannalie shared that the experience was real and lent itself to "hands-on learning" or learning by doing:

Absolutely. I'm an experiential facilitator; I think it's very, very important. Albert Einstein said that playing is highest form of learning. My mom, being a kindergarten teacher – growing up with very hands-on learning experiences – because it's real I don't think that people learn by being told stuff (Hannalie).

Mughal & Zafar (2011) state that "...the relationship of the inner thought process to the outer world knowledge...may have a considerable impact on the interpretation of the experience of individuals in the cycle" (p.33). Mark commented on the fact that going through the experience, often showed learners that they were actually more capable than they thought thus dispelling a certain perception a learner may have of themselves and their ability:

Absolutely. I think what we do as human beings, very often or not, is we underestimate – we underestimate ourselves. Often when your back's against the wall you find out who you really are. Be it survival instincts, be it just determination to get it done – and very often you see learners that when they get to this stage their confidence are low – but when they go through it and they see it, and they realize that I'm actually not that wide off the mark (Mark).

Wayne and Darren indicated that the simulated experience of the Triad Skills Observations would help application when the learner goes back into the performance environment which is the aim of most workplace learning interventions. The experience therefore plays an important role in developing the necessary skills and capabilities required for the learners' jobs:

I think it's very important for learning because we could do this differently. We can get them to sit in a class and give them books to read and stuff, and go through that. But how much would they learn, and how much would they be able to apply once they go back to the branches if they don't go through an experience where they need to apply it. So therefore, I think experience is really necessary when you – when you learn (Darren)

... it's about an experience that brings it to reality and this is what I should and shouldn't do when there's an actual client in front of me. I don't think it's the only way that we can learn, but I do think that it's an effective way in which people learn. So in terms of the continuous learning cycle I would think that it should be there because it just really helps people to think of a personal experience that they've been through and to really reflect on what is working and what is not working (Wayne).

Kolb's Reflective Observation, The Continuous Learning Cycle's Review, Triad Skills Observation Feedback

In this section I combine Reflective Observation, Review and Feedback Steps to analyse the data.

In the case investigated, feedback is an important aspect of the learning process and a vital part of the Review and Conclude Steps of the Continuous Learning Cycle, which involves reflection. Feedback is used to debrief or review the simulated experience of Triad Skills Observations. According to Petranek et al (1992), The debriefs (reviews) are designed to “guide students through a reflective process about their learning (p.176.) Feedback happens in two ways: self-feedback and external feedback from peers and facilitators:

Ok – I think the most learning happens in two ways. The one is self- realization while you are busy in the flow. So self-realisation that I don't know this. The second one where you learn through the experience, once you get feedback from an outside person (Darren).

Reviewing is about the learners themselves checking amongst themselves and also it's an individual thing where you do some introspection. Is a decision that I took working? If it's not working, why? Or I went through this experience and I now... sort of... I'm about to take a decision to make sure that I don't experience that same experience but the decision that I'm about to take is this is a good decision that I'm making to make sure that I won't go through that experience again. So it's important also (Thando).

I think reviewing is – it almost forces or encourages you to really critically look at things (Thabang).

Thabang offered an explanation of the difference between reviewing and reflecting. His view on what reflection is supports the constructivist arguments especially the Abstract Conceptualization step of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle:

I think – for me there is a different meaning to reflect. Review it's almost as if how things played out. But in terms of reflecting, you almost want to highlight what you take out from that experience – this is just a review – yes, those things are all ok, so

this is what happened. But for me, when I reflect I almost want to get to what new insight do I come to (Thabang).

Senzo highlights that that when they understand that reviewing is important in knowing how to learn they would apply it anywhere. This ties-in with meta-cognition which Kolb believes the Experiential Learning Cycle enhances (Kolb, A & Kolb, 2005):

I think once again...cos they understand the importance of going through a learning experience as well, and review because they know that and importance in how they learn. And they able to self-assess themselves, so when they go through any experience they understand the importance of going through the experience and reviewing, review yourself and give yourself feedback and all of those things, I think that they do apply it in that context (Senzo)

Carol voiced the importance of reviewing because going through an experience alone does not create learning and that reflection made learning happen. This mirrors the constructivists' view of the role of reflection:

Because you have to reflect back on something you've just been through – that's why you won't only learn from that experience but if you've just been given information or feedback or what, you know, to think back, process it – I always think of the mind it's got files – you need to find a place – if it's something new – you need to create that file and put it in that file so that as you build on that learning you've got a place to put it in. So I think reviewing and reflecting - I sometimes don't think in this crazy, busy world that we have that there's been enough of that. We don't have time to process... then sometimes we end up in the same situation, so that's why it's going through experience doesn't always necessarily mean that there's learning – that's why the reviewing part for me is so important (Carol).

All participants indicated that they thought feedback was useful in this Review step of the Continuous Learning Cycle. Their reasons however, as to why feedback is useful varied:

I think it motivates them. It encourages the person to learn better (Thandiwe).

I think it's very useful...the reason why I think it's useful is because of the obvious, it helps you to identify things that you are doing well, things you could be doing

differently. I also think it helps the learner to become comfortable with, if I'm gonna use their words, being criticised (Bradley).

... it's very important that learners review because it challenges you to face – because we almost have a false sense of – we always just want to just look at the negatives – on things that don't go well – or sometimes just look at the things that go right and ignore what is wrong – so reviewing helps you to actually look at everything holistically and then decide (Thabang).

The feedback they get back is immediate, it's relevant, it's specific to what's just happened. So they've gone through an experience, and it's just really relevant – they – and also the process that we use – so they have to reflect on and give – so often we're just topping up – so they've already – through the process that we use they've already identified their own gaps – what they've done well, because we want them to give balanced feedback (Carol).

I think it's the reflection and the opportunity then – you know the reviewing, reflecting on what's just happened – the experience you've gone through. And then looking at how you can do it differently, and then having the opportunity to apply it. So for me it's a circular thing – it's happening all the time and in every aspect of your life. It can happen after a conversation you've had with someone that went wrong, or a learning experience (Thando).

However, the learner's desire to change played a role in their progression, a criticism which Kolb addresses in his later work (Kolb, A & Kolb, 2009) when he discusses learning self-identity, even though the possible reasons for this learning self-identity is not discussed.

It is absolutely useful. You can see it in the progression of the learner... depending on that persons' want to change, or no need to change (Mark)

Wayne and Thabang explained why as facilitators, they also need to develop an awareness of where the learner is in their learning journey when giving feedback after a Triad Skills Observations, implying that the facilitator's own competence needed to be good:

Feedback is very useful depending on how people give feedback as well. You have to be very aware of what you are doing when you are giving feedback. So if you give feedback without bearing in mind where this person is in their learning journey, and

you are not also – particularly when people are – they didn't do very well, and you are unable to really think of balance feedback as to really be genuine – I think that is important, and to let them know – look the situation didn't go as good as what it could have been based on this and that and that, but also to encourage thereafter and say that look, but there are things that we can do to get that right, you know (Wayne)

...very useful, but also depends on how – and also – because there's a lot of negative – negativity around in that because of the way feedback is shared, because of previous experiences, a counter that has been created around feedback and obviously also about the intent of the feedback. So you need to make sure that you almost consider all of those facts when you give feedback because it's very, very useful. It builds people, it modulates them, it encourages them to do better, it makes them aware of – it makes them aware of strength and all of those things (Thabang).

Senzo made reference to the quadrants in Johari's Window, a model which describes how to think about known and unknown information, within personal relationships and how feedback moves us from the unknown area to the known area, which resonates with some of the participants' definition of learning:

Sometimes when we do things, there are things that are subconscious and we do not know, so hence it is important to move from the point of unknown to the open area, as if we were to follow what you call a window (Senzo).

Bradley indicated that feedback can be used to be destructive, implying a power-laden approach from those giving feedback. These power relations are a reality in most workplaces. This destructive, past experience of feedback has often influenced people's perception of feedback resulting in an aversion to feedback:

I mean people have been using it for...as a weapon for ever and ever... That's why I'm sure that when a lot of us say the word criticism we get this bad feeling inside because there is a negative connotation towards it, that's why we will change words to feedback and things like that, but they all come down to the same thing. It's about how you use it. So from that point of view I think it prepares people for that world out there (Bradley).

Three participants indicated that most learners seemed to default to negative or developmental feedback when giving self-feedback instead of positive feedback. This could

be influenced by past experiences where they have learnt that feedback is mainly outcomes based and not process based (Petranek, 2000), so they focus on the outcomes they are not attaining in their experience.

When you actually ask somebody, so how did you do – obviously automatically it goes into negative mode. (Nicole)

So I think that's a trap that we, as humans, fall into because we tend to see the- we tend to filter out the positives and focus on the negatives because we want to work with it – so ja, I give them positive – positive feedback as well. (Darren)

I would just remind them, because I think in general people are not easy to give themselves positive feedback (Mark)

As most participants believed that feedback was important, they also indicated that the way in which feedback is shared is also important as this could influence the learning, either positively or negatively.

If I'm doing something wrong and you're not going to tell me that I'm doing something wrong, and I'm not aware of it, I'm going to do the same thing over and over, and I'm not going to improve. So feedback is very important. I think however that it's just how we share that feedback is also vitally important. (Nicole).

The model used to give feedback at this workshop is the EEC model (Example, Effect, Change/Continue), an existing model which was adopted by the company as the preferred method of giving feedback. When using this model, you give an example of what you observed, discuss the consequence thereof and what must continue or change. The use of this model is encouraged when reviewing a Triad Skills Observation. The process followed is: learner first gives feedback on their own performance after which the peer observer and facilitator observer will give their feedback:

The EEC model, and it makes them reflect – it makes them think about it, not just giving answers because they need to give answers. And by doing that they realizing what they did and what they need to change (Shaun).

I write EEC and say “Ok you now going to give me feedback for 5 minutes can we please follow this model?” ... feedback it needs to be used within a certain model. And the idea for that model is for the learners to see consequences not only negative

consequences, if there are such things. But to see what could be the benefits for the learner for the business, for the relationship that the learners built when he's building with the client (Thando).

When I give feedback... I normally give feedback; we've got a model that we follow which we called EEC, giving an example of what I've observed. Because obviously the way that we do it, you observe throughout the Triad without saying anything, so when I give feedback I give them an example of what I saw (Thandiwe).

Some participants also used their questioning skills to facilitate learning during the Review session after the simulated Triad Skills Observations:

Well, I try as much when I am giving feedback to ask questions to guide people to see what are the possible consequences or results if they do certain things in a certain way. So without me telling them you must do it like this, and this is why – so I ask them those questions so that they can actually start thinking for themselves (Wayne).

...then I can find out ok, are you conscious about the fact – about the stuff that you don't do well – if not, then I need to give you feedback on that. If you are, then I don't have to necessarily go back and give feedback on that again. So, once the learner's done I will then share feedback from my point of view – and that sometimes brings them to a new, different realizations. (Darren)

I think if the level, if the depth of conversation is good enough, I think the learning is also going to change a lot (Mark).

Feedback also helps to rectify mistakes and guide continuous improvement which is an aim of the Continuous Learning Cycle and The Experiential Learning Cycles:

Ja, if we don't review we won't identify what didn't work or what worked. So what do we do when we go – when we leave? So we've been through this experience – I've experienced it, I'm not too sure if it's right or wrong, so that's my – that's my go to place. Whatever happens in the branch I'm going to go to that place because I never got feedback on it so it must be good (Darren).

So it's almost like thinking back, thinking forward, ... So it's about encouraging them to go back and say ok, the last time you gave yourself feedback do you remember what feedback you gave yourself (Thabang)

Kolb's Reflective Observation, the Continuous Learning Cycle's Conclude, Triad Skills Observation's Feedback

In this section I combine Reflective Observation, Conclude and Feedback to analyse the data.

In the Continuous Learning Cycle, the Conclude step is a deeper reflection where the learner thinks about how they feel about the experience, once they've received and given themselves feedback on the Triad Skills Observations, and therefore have a better insight on the experience. The step is where the learner reflects on the "why" of their behaviour or performance and what that means to them going forward.

A huge obstacle to effective concluding, asking reflective questioning and reflecting was time after the simulated Triad Skills Observations:

I think not really, because, unfortunately we are challenged with time (Thandiwe).

...but sometimes there's not enough time to reach – to dig deeper as to why people are doing what they're doing – because sometimes they don't know why they're doing or what they're doing, and then you need more time. So, in my opinion, there might not be enough time to reach the deeper issues of why they're not doing something (Darren).

We don't have that opportunity at the triad because there's only five minutes to give feedback, and there's three people that needs to give feedback in that five minutes (Shaun).

Time I think is a big challenge for us, ja – to do that. I don't think that we do that really enough, and I think that sometimes the delegates kind of really need that because they know what they did wrong. By them coming up to a effective solutionchallenge for them. So, ja, I think that we could actually – so yes, they do have the time after class to go and do that, but how effective are they coming up with actions on their own (Wayne).

No I don't really do that a lot. I think we are missing that. I think we need to spend a lot of time in reviewing (Senzo).

Not always – not always. I think that conclude could come out in coaching – so, and that’s sometimes where I’m just thinking again, we only coach when we have gaps, and you could have a learner that you could go deeper, why is this learner being....., why you’re successful, what is it that you’re doing (Carol).

If they had more time to reflect, most would ask more challenging questions and have a deeper conversation with the learners

I would ask the learner a lot more challenging questions – a lot more probing questions (Mark).

I think it’s to just speak to the learner that you see whether what are some of the plans of actions that they have with regards to the conclusions (Thandiwe).

So go through that thought process and guiding the thoughts perhaps and asking good questions to get this person to think perhaps differently and then the next day I think is also important. Cos when you observe them again, to review again, “How did it go?” “What do you think worked, didn’t work? (Bradley).

If I had more time I would definitely take stuff deeper (Darren)

If we could have those conversations with our learners – those deeper ones – and with all of them not just when they’re not managing or coping – I think they would help them understand themselves so much more, that they would then be less reactive, not be overwhelmed by – by life and the stuff that goes – cause that’s going to happen when they go in the branches (Carol).

I think it comes down to effective questions again, and not so much the first question but the follow-up questions based on what they’re saying. So getting to a place of why did that happen, why do you think you felt that way — if we can get to that place it would be ideal. If it’s done correctly, you’re empowering someone to not just change the symptom of a thing, but to unpluck the root. So I think if it’s done lekker, in a safe environment where the intent is clear, and the intent is trusted, you might be able to affect real change – cause someone will be empowered to really try something different next time (Hannalie).

However, some participants believed that there were other opportunities, besides after the simulated Triad Skills Observations for learners to reflect and review:

In abundance, I would say. In abundance. More often than not we can argue with – the time period that was allocated to it, but I think there's a lot of time (Mark)

So I think for the learners there's lots of opportunity – every day they reflecting, every morning they're reflecting, they're have a team review, and they discussing the previous day – after every triad practice, after every HEAT scenario there's a feedback session that they are reflecting (Shaun).

Yes, because learning doesn't stop after the lesson is done. So people have to actually go through – and I think the way that the programme is designed as well – there's assessment and all those things, so learners really have to go back and reflect on what they'd learned and talk to other people and all those type of things. So, there is opportunity ... But when they actually get to their room and they reflect and chat to their teams, that is where they are doing that reflection more because the time allows it (Wayne).

Kolb's Active Experimentation, the Continuous Learning Cycle's Action

In this section I combine the Active Experimentation and Action steps to analyse the data.

Participants realised that the action step was important for change but the feedback time after a Triad Skills Observation in most instances, meant that this step was forfeited and not facilitated. The assumption is then made that the learner will take ownership to decide on appropriate actions to take to improve their experience. The learners however, may not have the necessary skill or be conscious about what needs to happen in this step:

...we don't necessarily always have time or we will prioritise a problem learner above the learner whose in the middle or a learner whose doing well (Bradley).

So for me, the action part is very important because the learner needs to get to the actions themselves in order for it sometimes to make – to have meaning for them and to be committed to them, andfor the actions. But sometimes the time allowed for getting to the actions is not enough ...so sometimes you don't get to all the actions, and you trust the process that they will get to the actions themselves. But they might not be skilled enough to do that, so the question was is there enough time? So, so getting them to realize their actions takes time because you have to – because sometimes they're not conscious about anything within.....and actions (Darren).

Because it serves no purpose that we had an experience we talked about the experience, the learner came to the realisation that they need to be doing something and their actions are not taken in terms of the learning, the learners get lost. It needs to be taken “So not their experiences, ok again, because the experiences could be unpleasant experiences or negative experience (laughing) but it has to happen so a person can also sort of use that as a bench mark. “OK I’ve moved from this now, this is where I am”. And because it is continuous improvement. (Thando).

By trusting the process there is an assumption that learners are thinking about this action step on their own or they may not be:

They can work out their own action plans. But the difference is that they will be doing it on themselves. Not within the Triad setup (Thandiwe).

If actions are not happening, how are we improving? Luck? What was that – by default or design? (Nicole)

Wayne suggested that we collectively work through the actions learners need to decide to take to improve their performance and Carol noted that follow-up by the facilitator was also important. However, this may take away from the learner developing an ownership for their own learning

So maybe we should actually have extra time for them to explore it together in a facilitated manner – and not necessarily just allow them also to do it on their own, but there’s also value there because people get to learn from each other, and that is an experience on its own (Wayne).

I think for me, the nature of the beast is sometimes you can – they can identify actions but an important part of action is the follow-up (Carol).

Nicole noted that she definitely saw an improvement as the simulations progressed but was not convinced the learners reflected and decided which actions to put in place. This supports literature that indicates that the cycle of learning is not necessarily sequential but that the steps are integrated and the learner could for example be thinking about which actions to put in place while reflecting.

So from these formative assessment to the summative assessment, absolutely, and you have to ask - I’m asking myself this question, so what are they doing differently. Are

they actually going back and reflecting, are they actually doing homework? I don't think they're doing homework – I don't know what's happening but there's a change, and it's a positive change (Nicole).

The action step in experiential learning is linked to the concluding step and Thabang sees it as an opportunity to develop problem-solving skills and critical skills

I think the action step one helps them with problem-solving skills, and that to me is important because you realize that the more you ask the person so what else in terms of action can you do to solve this problem, the more deeper they go... – there's a deeper level that they go into in terms of their critical reasoning and just problem-solving, and realizing that you don't just think the first thing that comes up (Thabang)

...cause sometimes the actions that I've come up with might be wrong, which will mean that that's not the initial problem that I identified initially, so then I need to go back and say – then my problem isn't that I write slow for instance, because now.....is writing faster but I'm still not asking. So my actions were wrong, so my root cause is wrong, so it also helps them to come to new realizations that actually maybe it's a knowledge gap that I have and not a time thing because I thought I didn't finish because I just write slow. But I write slow because I don't understand, type of thing (Thabang).

Carol shared that spending more time on this step may have a positive impact on behaviour change

...sometimes people can think things through – they will think about it but then they do nothing about it. So very little learning or change – behaviour has taken place. If you encourage them to take that next step of actually doing something, then perhaps that should help

Darren noted that because the learning is self-directed, facilitators need to be comfortable with the level of action as this may be what the learners want to learn

Some people are comfortable with having the same experience, in some instances, some people aren't, so the actions part is important to talk about to get to the next. The people that are comfortable because that's questions that I ask – so are you comfortable going through this experience again – and they answer yes, then I need to

be comfortable to let them go and experience it again because that might be a learning again for them (Darren).

However, facilitators may not be comfortable with that decision as the performance of the learner in assessments is used as an indicator in the facilitator's performance measurement so that may influence how much time is spent coaching a learner after the triad simulation.

I mean again, in the nature of our business we need people to achieve, so whether you want to do better, you need to come to me to say you want to do better, and I will help you. But if you don't I'm satisfied because my learners are more than 80% and I'm going to get a good KPI... So my increase will be based on the performance of the learners. So if you don't achieve 80% or whatever for example, I'm going to make sure you achieve it (Shaun).

The next step in the Continuous Learning Cycle: New Improved Experience

The Continuous Learning Cycle and Kolb's experiential learning cycle support continuous improvement. In his later work, Kolb uses the term spiral to describe the cycle indicating that it is never-ending (Kolb, A & Kolb, 2009). Practice is an important of this model. Two participants indicated that the continuous, non-static nature of the model was what they found useful and that that was how things worked in life:

It's the fact that it's continuous – it's not a once-off – you can implement it, and implement it, and implement – it's one where you can progress... Knowledge, experience – it's basically how our life works as well – it's not a once-off thing – it's something that you can implement throughout (Mark).

It never becomes full circle, ever – so it's just as soon as you start somewhere, there are gaps, you put actions in place to close them. There's obviously a performance requirement, then you speak to it – whoops, then you've never arrived – it keeps growing, growing, growing, growing. The work continues (Hannalie).

The continuous nature of the model suggests that in a learning environment opportunity should be provided for that improvement to happen, a reflection of Kolb's view of the recursive nature of learning. Participants mentioned that practicing was important in cementing the learning and for improving the skills. This gives the learner the opportunity to

put actions in place and have a better experience the next time. That also affects confidence and allows the learner to witness their own improvement:

I like the repetitious nature...from a bigger picture point of view I like the fact that it gives someone an opportunity to improve on your own pace, because... um... you gonna go through an experience, you've identified one or two things. If we don't give you an opportunity to do it again, you possible won't be able to practice your solutions for your gap. So that's why I like the repetition and that why I like the Triads in general (Bradley).

...it's as close to the – real life as possible, and it's a progressive one. It's not one where it's a once-off. We're going to hold your hand initially, we'll be with you initially and then as you mature, you then will have the confidence to fly solo. And I think we're made a certain way that the learner can see the progression themselves, without even us saying can you remember where you were - ...at the facilitation group, the learner themselves will then say, I remember where I was on day three compared to day nine now. There's a confidence, there's a competence because of the kind of experiences that we put them through. (Mark)

...so its reinforcement, reinforcement, reinforcement, reinforcement, what else can you ask for. It's reinforcing what you know. Reinforcing what the learners themselves read. Getting there and learning through doing the work, reinforcing or whatever the skills (Thando)

Participants indicated that they mostly saw an improvement in the learners from one Triad Skills Observation simulation to another which is an indication that the methodology based on the Continuous Learning Cycle and Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle has a positive impact on learning:

Definitely yes. Because they are familiar with the tools that we use. Are familiar with their environment as well, they are familiar with the feedback and the knowledge that they need to gain. So when they go for second round there's quite a lot of improvement in that (Thandiwe).

I didn't always see it and that's why I feel there is a need for us to repeat it. Perhaps 3 times so that you have another opportunity to now get feedback on your bad stuff again (Bradley).

I actually did have an experience like that where I purposefully decided to observe somebody, and then give them feedback and then on their second opportunity to do the triad skill practice I went again to go observe the same person just to see if the feedback that was given was use... And there was actually an improvement. It felt actually that – it was encouraging to see that the Continuous Learning Cycle is actually being used by somebody (Wayne).

You know you would hear learners when they give feedback or when they share learning out of their experiences they share learning. Especially day, week 2 they will tell you “I’m not the same person that I was in week 1. For me that’s evidence right there to say the model is working. Cos a person will tell you “You know what I’m not the same person that I was in week 1 (Thando).

Challenges to reflective observation in experiential learning

Participants revealed several problems and challenges with regard to reflection for learning. Although the facilitators only work with these learners for 10 days, most felt that the programme and facilitators could influence the use of reflection for learning beyond the programme:

...Erm I think we need to do something about it. Like I mentioned earlier we don’t really facilitate a lot of reflection, it’s not something that’s necessarily consistent. (Wayne).

According to Fanning & Gaba, (2007), not everyone can naturally analyse and make sense of an experiential learning experience which implies that reflection is a skill which can be learnt:

I think have more activities around that because I do think it that is a skill to be able to reflect. Because it is one thing just reflecting but what now? Like I said before, so now this is it. How do I then tackle this? So the more we practice it and the more we give them the opportunity to practice after certain learning activities, the more they can then apply it back in the branch and their own personal life (Thando).

I think reflection is a skill which needs to be learnt and needs to become a habit. (Darren).

To my surprise, the majority of the participants offered constructive strategies on how they could influence this:

So I think encourage a lot more reflective reflection – writing – encouraging them to write it down (Mark).

And I think that if we could actually facilitate reflection or align our facilitation of reflective questions, that they could take a lot of it back to the workplace and into their lives to think about what they would do differently to have a better experience going forward. (Wayne)

I think we need to be more courageous to ask those questions they need and more often that they need for them to stay in a reflective space longer. (Darren)

We can only try to create that pattern by modelling (reflection) ourselves and I think also honesty (Nicole)

One participant spoke about how she had grown and learnt without realising. On reflection she realised that she had grown and developed over the last three years.

So like for example when I was going through – I believe that learning happens holistically. So this is my personal experience as well. So when I was going through the divorce and things, a lot of things were happening and I thought – I felt like a hamster stuck in the wheel and nothing was happening for me. I didn't think I would get through it. I remember when the – when he told me that he was going – he wanted the divorce – I was still pregnant. There was many days that I was in the parking lot here and I couldn't drive because I was just bawling my eyes out like that. And I was stuck – I thought I was stuck. And that was three years ago. Last year I didn't even think that I – there was any growth that happened. And this year, all of a sudden things started happening, and I actually took the time to actually just – take a step back and just breathe. And look at what has happened, and where I've come from. And I have changed so much. Or maybe I haven't changed but I'm just more aware of the change that has happened. So, for me that is learning. It's development, it's growing, and I've grown so much (Nicole).

This suggests that only on reflection and realization are you aware that learning has taken place even though learning may have happened. Being conscious of the learning is important for continuous improvement.

Lack of Reflection on Practice by Facilitators: the barrier to deeper learning

In the business world, efficiency is a priority, even in learning. New colleagues must be competent in the shortest amount of time and this was evident in Wayne's response:

It simplifies your learning because if you know what is working in your learning then you obviously continue to do that. And it just helps you not to focus on changing everything, but only changing things that doesn't work. So it's more – it saves time, so you learn quicker if you're just focusing on the thing that you really need to focus on (Wayne).

However, as a facilitation team, this same level of efficiency was not evident. Some participants expressed that as a facilitation team they were not reviewing and reflecting effectively, if at all which theorists like Brookfield (1995) believe is important in a learning environment:

I feel it's sometimes something that's lost all... it's an oversight... possibly could explain why we are so reactive, cos we really only work on stuff if something goes wrong. We are potentially had foresight to preview what could happen, we could actually have a more proactive view on stuff... um... cos there consequences to us not doing something well the first time around (Bradley).

I think a lot of us were using it as – we're not using it as effectively as what we could because if we were, this team would have grown so much more and at a quicker pace as well (Nicole).

No I don't really do that a lot. I think we are missing that. I think we need to spend a lot of time in reviewing... You not going to learn and you not going to improve as a facilitator. Because now, all that you doing you are reacting, you don't even know what you doing, you doing it according to the standard that is required. So proactiveness is key, so that you able to learn and you able to improve yourself as well (Senzo).

...especially when we brought in the new stuff – have time to reflect -what worked, what didn't work – and it would have probably cut out of a lot of the reactive stuff (Carol).

That's a gap. It's a huge gap. That we really don't review. There's an opportunity there (Thandiwe).

Thabang and Thando offered a reason for the lack of reviewing and reflecting as a team

I think for both (*facilitators and learners*) – if we have an environment that encourages this – because I do think that we do have time, but we don't have an environment that encourages us to reflect (Thabang).

I don't think accountability amongst us is consistent. If I'm more comfortable to you I might give you feedback and more often than not is the feedback that I would have received is the feedback where I need to improve on as opposed to balanced feedback where see how you doing. I don't think we do enough as a facilitator. Maybe we do that individually but I'm saying as a...As a big team I don't think that we do that enough we more of reactive. When something bombs out, we then group together. Because we reactive on that experience as opposed to saying "You know what this time we did well...let's talk about it" (Thando).

However, one participant was using the Continuous Learning Cycle to improve their practice

So what I'm consciously doing every day, or especially when something stands out in my mind as ok...why am I so worried, I will jot it down I would write down the good stuff I would write down the bad stuff

I think it's useful and I think it also helps from a confidence point of view cos I like to think I'm a little bit different to what I was a while ago. And one of the reasons...and I must tell you one of the reasons is because I'm using the model on a daily basis, and it's so simple which I love cos my brain can't think intricate, it doesn't work well. So it's so simple. Its having the two pods and then and what are you going to do differently and then reviewing it once you apply it (Bradley).

It surprised me that many facilitators saw the research interview as a reflective exercise and gave them insights into their practice.

...it got me to actually reflect on experiential learning and my experiences with it, and what did I take from it, you know. so it actually added a lot of value to me, going through that thinking (Wayne).

I think that asking these questions it creates a lot of awareness as well. It just made me think a lot more as well of what I can do differently and what I can do more of as well. So even though I'm not consciously doing it or I wasn't consciously doing it, I am going to be more consciously doing things now as well. So this has helped me as well (Nicole).

I also like how it encouraged us to think differently about what we are doing. Because our intentions are up there, but I'm starting to realise that we aren't following through with all the steps 100 percent. There's perhaps an opportunity for us to look at stuff differently. And as challenging as it now, to see some of these things doesn't mean its impossible (Bradley).

This is really exciting, you kind of challenged me to think a little bit in terms of my practice when I facilitate, but I think it was a good conversation (Thandiwe).

I think doing this exercise with you now, kind of made me realize and think you know, the effect that we have on these guys (Mark).

Although the participants were not necessarily using the model to reflect on their practice, most participants used the model outside of the workplace environment in various aspects of their personal lives.

Thandiwe, Darren and Thabang described how they have applied it to their formal and informal learning:

Yes,...um... so ... like now I'm writing exams so one of the modules that I wrote, Accounting (laughs) I used this model, because I went through an experience, it was difficult for me when I wrote that module ... I used that same thing, going through that experience to see what other things that I used previously to help me pass and what were the gaps. So when I was preparing for this exam I actually looked at the development areas that I needed for now in order for me to get a better result. I must say it was very comfortable for me when I was writing the exams compared to last

year because I think I reflected a lot on what I know and I reflected a lot on what I need to improve on and I planned my time accordingly (Thandiwe).

I do use the cycle, ja. I actually – the other night I went through – ok so up until now since five years ago, what have I – what new stuff did I learn and what is the – I went through my books, so I didn't use stuff that I've learned up until now – I didn't – can I use some of the parts of the books better, differently and so forth. So I do use it in my own learning – yes (Darren).

Ja, there's many things that either I come across I want to apply in my own learning and I'm able to evaluate do I learn better, and one thing is with my qualification that I'm currently busy with, There was a time where I just stopped studying because it was just too much for me, until I learned about learning styles and all of those things, and I then went back and I said, ok, now I understand learning styles. Now I can go back and apply some of these things so that I understand myself better – I've reflected. So I'm applying all of those things now in my, in my studies and I can find that it is working better for me (Thabang).

Thabang indicated that he used the tool of journaling as part of that reflective process:

..the biggest thing was – for me it was a new model and I never really reflected – and there's so much value in reflecting. Personally and just reviewing how things worked, and you come to realize – you come to new realization – and for me it actually inspired even journaling, where I've started ok, I want to journal certain things where I can say this is the experience that I went through, and after reviewing this is the outcomes that I've reached, or the new learnings that I've come to...(Thabang)

Relationships were another area where participants used the model:

I do actually go through a process like that a lot - in my family life I'll go through an experience of, as an example, Jill and Caryn, so Jill is my partner and Caryn is her daughter and I'm not her father, so that is a bit challenging at times ... so I sometimes really have to go through an experience of uncomfortability where because I'm not her – Caryn's biological father, I'd have to go through a process of, am I doing things correct in my efforts to try and be a father to her, and really evaluate my actions, you know, because it is a relationship that is important to me, so I find that that – me learning how to get that right is important. So I really apply it a lot in my personal life

where I think of situations and how could I deal with the situation appropriately so that I'm actually building a relationship with her and not breaking down that relationship because it's a bit tricky (Wayne).

My 7 year old, I sit down, I listen, I obviously, as a parent I have better experience than them but I not imposing anything. I talk about what could be possible consequences of whatever, help them and I allow experiences to happen to my kids and they learn from their experiences as well so in my relationship it's about talking, it's about saying "its ok, its ok if we don't agree on certain things, we don't have to agree about anything else, but what's important is lets engage let's talk about lets clear it out and take action after that" It's a life skill, it's a tool that you can use. Not only at work, you got to practice it every day, and you become, even the level that you use, the dialect everything changes completely, you see things different, if you have any experience where there's an unpleasant experience you reflect on it, you think on it, you think of possible, you know, probabilities, on the experience rather than reacting ...(Thando).

Darren shared how he uses it to guide conversations to influence others to learn from their own experiences

I use it a lot in conversations with people – sometimes without them knowing – or sometimes even without me knowing. So some of them would come and tell me – so I went – so this happened recently, now I don't know if I want to put it on record though, but this happened recently – so some of them told me about their issue in life or their marriage, and the husband is abusing her and so forth. And so I immediately thought of the continuous learning cycle because it's a learning for her to understand now that she has got the right to do things differently. It's almost like giving her the – I don't know what to say – the right. So, I went through each step, so tell me about your experience. So she told me about her experience. Ok, so conclusion – is this what you want or not what you want? No this is not what you want, ok therefore, what worked for you in this and what didn't work for you in this, and what do you do to have a different experience. So I do use it in my personal life as well (Darren).

Psychoanalytic Conception of Experiential Learning

In the next section, the evidence seems to support the psychoanalytic conception of experiential learning and the criticism of constructivism that *The primary focus placed on reflection as a cognitive activity* which doesn't explain the role of desire and resistance to learning, or the role of the unconscious on the conscious reflection. Participants were in agreement that a level of personal motivation or desire was needed when learning.

When asked about which personal attributes needed to be present in the learners to make use of the Continuous Learning Cycle model, the following were identified by the participants:

Learners needed to be open to learning:

... being open to try new experiences (Carol)

...open-minded because experiential learning doesn't only guide you to the outcomes I want you to take out. You can take out whatever you want to. So, open-minded to the learning. (Wayne)

Darren and Bradley also noted an attitude of knowing that "I have more to learn" as an attribute which ties in with openness because if a person feels they know it all they are resistant to learning and therefore could find adapting to change difficult. One has to be honest about what you don't know:

Because in order for you to apply the Continuous Learning Cycle you need to humble in order to find, "What did I do wrong?" and the actions. Because if I'm not humble enough, I will think I'm the shit...erm ja (Darren).

But you come... sometimes I feel people come in with this overconfidence I know stuff. "My cup is full man". I think we all know how challenging it is to throw something in a cup that's already full. It's almost like you have to come in here with the possibility that I might not know everything (Bradley).

I think being honest to yourself that I don't know that you'll be able to apply the continual learning cycle much more effectively (Thandiwe).

The majority of participants pointed out that the learners needed to be self-motivated or have a drive or a want to learn:

I think the biggest thing is really about motivation. Er...whether it be in a sense of wanting to learn more, wanting to improve yourself, wanting to become aware of things...er...and just to learn in general (Thabang).

... you must be hungry for it (Bradley).

There must be a level of wanting (Hannalie).

Some of the participants also noted that there needed to be a desire for self-development.

...is wanting to improve myself, is wanting to improve my situation, is wanting to grow (Nicole).

We throw the word ownership around but I should want to be here. I should want to succeed in my career (Hannalie).

Just a need to progress – a need to want to do better...(Mark).

Adopt a mind-set of continuous learning (Wayne).

...passion, passion for people, passion for development of people. Passion for your own development (Thando).

Definitely drive, to want to develop, a flexibility, being open to trying new experiences – not being rigid, and also to be teachable (Carol)

Darren, Nicole and Thandiwe also noted that self-awareness played a role in learners using this model to learn.

I think awareness of where I am now, where I've been and what my future holds (Darren).

Self-awareness. I think that is vital (Nicole).

I think its understanding themselves, it's respecting there learning and what they are given. It's also taking owner ship of their learning. (Thandiwe).

Many factors affect learning and the psychoanalysts are particularly interested in what hinders and motivates learning:

... um... because if you go into the roots sometimes of why some people find it challenging to move forward, is potentially they don't identify with the root to my problem and the cycle allows you to do that to identify "but why aren't I catching this? What should I do differently?" so it helps you to think a little bit deeper as an individual. So from that point of view I think it not just only helps you to learn... um... but it also helps you in a personal capacity to identify the stuff that is obstacles for you to learn as an individual (Bradley).

There are also social, psychological or physiological factors that play a role in enhancing or hindering learning for the individual:

...one of my buddies had a learner and they were not confident that they could actually do the – and the reason for that is because they've just – only just made it at school and under pressure of being the breadwinner and – so ja – so we had to go back and have them reflect on positive experiences in their lives, and how they felt, what they were doing, why was it a positive experience, and to sort of like pull on the energies and the things that led to that type of experience so that they can use that and be aware – it's almost for them to be aware of those things, and then they can use it going forward, or use it when they look at things and you know – difficult situations or whatever (Thabang).

That's why I love chatting – when I have – we don't have the time for that – so who are your parents, what's your background, where do you come from – because we have such a diversity – we have kids that are really kids/adults wealthy, and you have those that their whole family is depending on – this is the income for the family. You have those that come from rural areas – so just to find out what their motivation is – ja. I think I would spend more time in – so what is your barrier, what is stopping you from being successful – if someone's challenged, and you can see it clearly, it's not ability or aptitude or an attitude problem (Carol).

The intent of the facilitator plays a role in creating a positive learning space. Bradley states that there must be an attitude of wanting to help and develop the individual:

I think it (Continuous Learning Cycle) contributes quite well, especially if you've got an underpinning thing where you want to just not just help the learning process but help the individual (Bradley).

A Situative Conception of Experiential Learning

The following section identified with the situative approach although aspects of constructivism are evident, especially in the data describing the learning space wherein the Triad Skills Observations takes place. When describing what is central to the situative approach, Hansman (2001) states, “learning is inherently social in nature. The nature of the interactions among learners, the tools they use within these interactions, the activity itself, and the social context in which the activity takes place shape learning” (p.45). The Triad Skills Observations simulates a client interaction within a replicated environment.

According to Miller et al, 2008, “The simulation recreates, as closely as possible, the real-world environment, equipment, and psychological reality for the participants. The individual and team experiential nature of in situ simulations allows for the systematic acquisition of knowledge of effective team concepts (what we think), skills in team behaviour (what we do and say), and attitudes about team performance (what we feel or value)”. Majority of the participants found the simulated experience of the Triad Skills Observations useful because it closely mirrored the real environment, an important characteristic of simulated activities:

So what I (*the learner*) learn about it is it’s as close to the – real life as possible, and it’s a progressive one. It’s not one where it’s a once-off (Mark).

I think it allows them to see what they would be doing back in their branches (Thandiwe).

I think it gives them a really close example of what it would be like in the branch when they have to assist clients (Wayne).

So when we talk about their workplace environment, this is what they’re going to have to do to – in their work most of the time – ninety-nine percent of the time – so getting them in front of the system, in front of the client for most of the time (Darren).

Well, I hope it goes without saying – I mean what we’ve got here is a simulated experience, so this is possible scenarios that can happen in the branch, and it’s kind of a preparation ... (Nicole).

...so it’s actually letting them do – cause as I said we can create that experience for them, and that’s what the triad is – so it’s creating it as close as possible to the real thing (Carol).

It mirrors exactly what's going to happen in the branch (Thando).

Shaun and Senzo indicated that the tools and artifacts used in the Triad Skills Observations simulation is similar to those used in the real working environment and therefore helped to cement that knowledge:

...although it's simulated I think it brings back to the reality of the branch. It's the same system or a very similar system that they're using here versus back in the branch (Shaun).

It's because learners will be serving clients and the same system that they will use, we use the same system that will be using as well, when they go back to the branch (Senzo).

It was also noted that the Triad Skills Observations allowed learners to practice in a safe environment. This resonates with Kolb's work about learning spaces (Kolb, A & Kolb, 2009) and the scaffolding phase within cognitive apprenticeships (Hansman, 2001; Fenwick, 2001):

It gives them an opportunity to practice various skills and kind of hopefully improve on it while they are in a safe learning environment before they go back to a branch (Wayne).

It's also – I think it's sort of comfort zone – you can make a mistake – it's ok to do things wrong (Mark).

...because it provides practice ground for them and it's also a safe environment because there's no clients – it's my colleagues (Thando).

I think it's great because it's a safe environment where it's ok for them to make the mistakes here (Carol).

I think there's a lot of value in them having the safety of a learning environment and putting that into practice before there's a performing environment with the real clients. I think the leap from just – because of the nature of what we do the leap from theory to the client will be too big. So that environment that it creates – the fact that they can ask questions, make mistakes like we encourage them to do, I think the real benefit for me lies there (Hannalie).

It (the learning cycle) also helps them to reflect, so in that way it creates a conducive learning environment for them to reflect, to learn, to practice, to be given feedback, so all of that's it's looking at learning holistically (Nicole)

Interestingly, Shaun, Darren and Thabang acknowledged the challenge of making mistakes in a safe learning environment. They state that if mistakes are made in this safe, low risk environment and they are not realized, this then compromises the learning and competence in the performing environment

It would be unfair for us just to expect them to go back to the branch and be a consultant if they think they know what to do but they don't – so when they're sitting over here in a simulated environment acquiring the knowledge (Shaun).

...when we are making mistakes in a simulated environment, you won't know what mistakes you are making if you are not – if you don't realize it. So by you realizing the mistakes, you know that you need to change something (Shaun).

So I think making mistakes is very important. However, we must be very careful because it's - it's good for them to make mistakes at that stage, however, when they go back to the branch and they go through the same thing, you might want to intervene because the impact is so broad when they make a mistake there (Darren).

Experiencing mistakes – I think experiencing mistakes is good if you will be aware or be made aware of the fact that it is a mistake, and you can learn, and you can – so you've made a mistake, you need to know what the correct way of doing things are, and be made aware of the mistake so that you can bridge that gap. Cause making a mistake alone doesn't really help you... you need to close that loop in terms of knowing the correct way of doing things and how you can actually bridge that stuff – that gap (Thabang).

However, Thabang mentioned that the Triad Skills Observations simulation can also rectify the mistakes the learners learnt while observing consultants in the performance environment:

I think they (Triad Skills Observations) of very big value because they help the learners to actually get a different view cause – learners go through an experience in the branch. Sometimes it's the wrong stuff – but the triad observations give them

insight into so, this is how the company structure things, and this is how it should be done. For alignment purposes (Thabang).

Wayne and Thabang believe that the positioning and input from the facilitator before the simulation is important, so that the experience can be as authentic as possible:

Sometimes because the delegate get a script to act like a client they don't really think of the situation like a client would actually. They don't really put themselves in the real shoes of the client. They manage to behave like a new client; the consultant doesn't always deal with them in a way that they are – like a new client. So I think for me what I like is that I can get to guide them to this is how it's actually going to be like in the branch – just bear that in mind when you are doing your role plays and try and do your skills practices and role plays in that way. Think about the situation that you are in like it is – live – I'm doing this in the branch. (Wayne)

One, we position it. As far as possible let's link this to the performing environment. So in as much as we are colleagues – and I think there's value in that – in as much as we are – we appear, we must treat it as – as if it's the performing environment – and really reflect on some of the things. So I think for me, and asking the people to be as natural as possible, but obviously making sure that they don't deviate from the script, and to apply their discretion in some instances because we cannot cater for every eventuality. So it's just about positioning that, and obviously positioning the roles of each individual in the triad so that everyone is aware that this is the role this person is playing because I find that many a time people just want to run to the rescue of the facilitator. So if I clarify that role and we clarify what their role is, and that they need to find their way, (Thabang).

Nicole stated the following:

I think the skills practice and the way we're doing it now, it's got a huge impact – and I think we're seeing it already in the results of the summative assessments. The branch managers are saying that the guys are coming back a lot more ready as well (Nicole)

Collaboration and participation plays an important part in the situated approach and according to Fenwick (2006) it counteracts stagnation. Collaboration was mentioned by some participants.

Hannalie noted that communication was important “because it was not a solo journey. It is a journey of checking in with my facilitator, checking in with my team.” This alludes to the collaborative and participatory nature of learning which some participants mentioned when discussing how they experience review the simulated experiences of the Triad Skills Observations.

I think one, it's (*the triad skills observation*) interactive and it uses various tools and means of learning in as much as it's scripted it's also not – there's things that could come out when you could learn certain things from just interacting with a colleague (Thabang).

So one person is doing the triad but you're picking up quite a lot in terms of behaviour and interaction, EQ and feedback, so that's what I like about it. You can also – I mean and it's learning from – how they learn from one another (Thabang).

I'm not able to get feedback from each other they learn from each other, if you make mistakes I'm watching I'm learning, I give you feedback and also learning out of it, the enrichment and everything, even if I'm a client I'm listening to feedback that is being given. There's an opportunity to sort of consolidate the learning, where the other person learns something (Thando).

And the same thing with the observers – I mean what I really like is that the learning takes place there for them as well. The observer is forced to learn to give peers feedback – which you want them to do in the branch, and to give balanced feedbackto edify (Carol).

When exploring strategies to include a deeper reflection, collaboration and participation was highlighted:

I would get them to think of certain actions as a collective. Instead of one person thinking on their own – there's a lot of ways that you can do that – get them to work in pairs and to discuss that so that you get different inputs, and you don't have one person just shooting the whole time and giving their opinion – so maybe pair up – collaborate and come up with ideas of how you – what would you do different to that, and then bring it to the table and share it. Or, just use your time more effectively to do that. So if it's in-between and we're getting individual feedback, maybe we have two group huddles. In the first group huddle position that they need to also be thinking

about that, and then the last group huddle really talk about their actions, because once the individual has their own feedback of what they could do differently, it's really only for that individual, but in that last group they can really talk about what actions would they do to address their gaps – there's an opportunity over there (Wayne).

It was also highlighted as an area of improvement for the Continuous Learning Cycle Model:

once you've learned something and you've gone through that experience as an individual now you, now take that experience back to a group and you share that experience with them... In doing so, you are not just only...um... growing yourself in terms of the way you do things, you also potentially helping the person next to you who might learn through your experience. and then instead of just helping one person at a time we could potentially be multiplying the amount of people that we are helping at the same time... if you don't share your experience, what could happen next programme? A colleague or a learner could go through an exact same experience which could have been avoided if they were shared what you've encountered (Bradley).

Bradley also shared that if we used review and reflection effectively in a community of practice, we may not need workshops:

We could potentially not need Workshops anymore because you would not only be helping yourself you could potentially be helping your group as well (Bradley).

Thando alludes to the influence of learners on each other:

If you speak about it you... it's not only about that you are here to please. Were you able to receive feedback, uncomfortable feedback, it depends on how you look at it, but the model challenge you to always see positive you know... It challenges you to be able to engage with people whether you talking about uncomfortable stuff but be able to engage with them. It challenges you to work in a team. It challenges you to... it... for me it's just a holistic approach to an individual who will then go out there and influence others so you could see the repercussions (Thando).

Simulations in experiential learning, allows the learner to experience and learn things by involving the whole self. In simulations there are certain intended outcomes, the designer of the activity wants us to achieve.

Participants acknowledged that the simulation activity helped the learners to achieve these outcomes.

I think they learn how to interact with a client effectively (Bradley)

They learn how to apply skills better, and they learn how to navigate on the systems – that they need to navigate on better. (Wayne)

I also think that they learn how to use their skills that they've now newly learned – how to appropriately apply it. So the questioning techniques and those things, they get to learn how to use that differently and not be like a robot. (Darren)

Thabo pointed out that often feedback was sacrificed because in the learner's mind, finishing is the outcome not learning:

...for some learners it's about finishing. They forget that even you made a mistake then and out of the discussion you could be learning from other people so it's so useful in that sense even though sometimes it's not always followed (Thabo).

However, participants noted that learners learnt more than the intended outcomes and that what was learnt could be applied beyond the workplace these include assessing which of their skills to use, self-control, learning about self and confidence:

That it's not only, ok here you've got a triad I need to apply these sets of skills – you know – you can pull on different skills as we see to be able to solve this for the client. (Darren).

I think they learn to control themselves a lot better in crucial situations – pressure situations. I think they get to understand how to manage their emotions. Also they get to learn how to do a lot of things at once. And also they get an opportunity to build confidence (Mark).

But I also think that they learn about themselves as well. Because it kind of really forces you to be confident and to be free to put yourself out there (Thandiwe).

I think it helps with confidence (Bradley).

I think also maybe human skills – social skills as well because they have to adapt to each client. So that is just a skill that they can use in their social life as well to adapt to different (Darren).

Darren indicated that the Continuous Learning Cycle model was built into the methodology of the programme but alluded to the fact that facilitators were not always conscious of that.

I think it's built into the programme, however, I don't – sometimes I don't think people know that we're using it. So, if we – it's part of the tool set – so we don't say ok I'm going to use the continuous learning model right now, but it's built into the process (Darren).

The idea is there but practically I feel that it is not necessarily used enough (Thandiwe).

the real direct way of us applying it is through the team review... But is the individuals really getting the message that maybe I should be doing something for myself as well, because now I'm just applying it in a team process where I don't even need to do it for myself I could potentially be either passing by default... um... or I could just not grow (Bradley).

Some participants felt that the Continuous Learning Cycle helped the learner to take stock of where they are in their learning journey:

– you can't move forward when you learn if you don't know what you've learned and where you are. So the learning cycle helps you to understand what do you – what don't you know and what should you know – and then moving from the A to the B, and I think that benefits the learning environment also (Darren).

One, it boosts confidence levels for individuals to check progress, to see how far they've come, where they are, and often we take those things for granted, but I think the model assists learning in that space because once you get to a place where you feel there is actual learning taking place, then you're in a much better place in terms of learning, and be able to take on – then it suddenly seems like this huge chunk of elephant is no longer so huge (Thabang).

And to evaluate the learning environment itself:

A learning environment in itself cannot, cannot be static in itself and that model assists us when we review the environment itself. It helps us to be able to see if we created a safe learning environment, so to speak, so it helps you to be able to do that, cos it's a model that assist us and gives you an opportunity to do all of the reviews and everything (Senzo).

So there's a lot of things that really influence the learning environment, and if the learning environment is not conducive for learning people won't learn (Wayne).

Critical Cultural Conception of Experiential Learning

Although the role of vulnerability was discussed briefly by A. Kolb & Kolb (2005), it was largely absent from the literature I used. Vulnerability may be reflected within the critical cultural perspective which addresses the role of power as the core of the experience and addresses a critique of constructivism, which doesn't take into context the power relations in different contexts (Fenwick, 2001):

Wayne, Darren and Thandiwe acknowledged that there's a certain amount of vulnerability that needs to accompany this model especially if you invite feedback from an observer in the process and when allowing yourself to go through a simulated experience:

there might be yes...its often uncomfortable to go through the experience for first time- so vulnerable to go through the experience (Wayne).

You need to be vulnerable with yourself but now there's someone else as well that must listen to your vulnerableness and share feedback on that.. (Darren).

Because there are people watching you while you do what you are supposed to be doing , which in a normal space it's not natural, but it forces them to be more malleable and be exposed (Thandiwe).

Interestingly, participants also noted that facilitators needed to display vulnerability and allow learners to see them as people who make mistakes. In a way this can be related to distilling the power relationship between facilitator and learner by the facilitator showing that they are not all-knowing and that the learner's prior knowledge has value in the learning process:

I want these learners to also know that as a facilitator we don't know everything – learning happens every day. I learn every day. I don't know everything, and if I don't know something I will tell you – you know (Nicole)

I'm showing that I'm also real (Carol)

...and I think we don't make ourselves vulnerable enough before them – or in front of them... We as facilitators – so that they also realize that we are also on a learning journey, we're also not perfect. So I think sometimes they come with those preconceived stuff that – I can't do things wrong because ja – I'm in front of an expert and all of those things (Thabang)

Senzo alluded to the importance of the relationship between reflection for learning and critical thinking which will result in application beyond the workplace and where the social transformation Freire refers to will happen:

When we apply, when we demonstrate especially if we facilitate we need to conscientize them of the importance of following the process of reviewing. And I think when they go back in their lives or when they in a learning environment, they understand the importance of that model, of reviewing and reflecting and all of those things. We need to ask more questions so that they begin to think that make them think, if their level of consciousness of thinking is critical. That's what they will do in their lives. We want them to think critically so when they go back to their lives they can apply it (Senzo).

This suggests a more sophisticated understanding of reflection for learning as it makes the link to critical thinking. It also alludes to the transformative nature of learning.

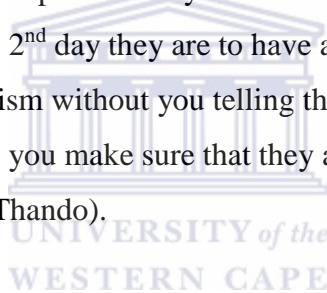
Thando also mentions the power aspect of learning..."You have to control the process without being controlling" As facilitators, an assumption is that they are in charge of the learning, that they know more, are the expert. This is an assumption that could be held by learners and by some facilitators who consciously or sub-consciously hold onto that power in a way that asserts it on others. In the performance environment these power relations may affect feedback:

as a facilitator you look at... You got to... you got to be in control without being controlling (Thando)

...also for feedback, I don't think that the culture of feedback for instance is on standard when they go back to the performing environment (Thabang)

Thando shares about rankism and how the conscious decision to free oneself from rankism as a facilitator can also distill the power relationship whether perceived or real.

Because the model does not only speak to, cos the model dismiss the whole idea of rankism, it challenges you as a facilitator first of all as to say "According to the model I should not be, because if I believe in the model I should not say rank, so therefore I cannot act rankism because I don't believe in rank, I don't see a rank, and you open a space where other people know that this is a space for adult learning. And people are able voice their voices, concerns, without fear, they able to engage ...I mean, if you think about it, there's young people when they get here they not young. If you think about the delegate, what they getting, they don't know each other and they going to be here for about 10 days so to speak. So if you as a facilitator you get your basics correct from 1 day and the 2nd day they are to have a successful learning experience without you showing rankism without you telling them what to do, they know what they need to do, as long as you make sure that they able to get the idea and to see the rational and get a buy in (Thando).



Interestingly, Thando also brings attention to manipulation when using the continuous learning cycle, especially during feedback:

I also think that you have individuals that manipulate... Well in the sense that in the process of giving feedback, you know where feedback is used as a tool to nail people down that as opposed to being a developmental tool (Thando).

Manipulation is also mentioned by Carol with respect to facilitators wanting a certain outcome from the learning or how it is applied:

It can become manipulative because when you want behavioural change there is an outcome. There's an outcome that we want and – for me the difference is you can either manipulate something or you can influence it. If you manipulate it, it's to your best interests – when you influence it, it's to the other person's best interest – and I think there's sometimes manipulation that happens here (Carol).

A personal attribute which the workshop wants to develop is ownership in the learner and facilitator and it is weaved into all aspects of the workshop. Developing ownership within the learner is aligned to the constructivist view that the learner her/himself is responsible for their learning. Although this self-directed learning is important, especially in this ever-changing world we live in, this places the responsibility of learning solely on the shoulders of the learner and disregards other factors which could influence learning. In my opinion it also allows learning departments to take minimal responsibility for the success of learning interventions. I believe that a sense of ownership is important but should not be addressed in isolation of other factors:

I think that is very powerful because once you can identify your own mistakes then you can therefore as an individual able to come up with solutions for those mistakes. As apposed, for me, to tell you your mistakes, cos therefore those mistakes will remain mine. I think the model is powerful in that way, cos it allows you to come up with your own plan of action especially with regards to learning (Thandiwe).

I like that people find their own truth – so this is just my own belief system is that you can tell people stuff, you can throw information at them, you can give them everything that they need, but what they select and what they make their own comes from a personal need, a personal experience situation they're put in - so if I'm just telling them, just giving them information – it's what I like about the model is that they need to reach for it and find it themselves – through the process we use they have to find it themselves, they have to think, they have to work for it. I find when you work for something and you earn it, it's a lot more valuable to you than if it's just given to you (Carol).

To the learners it really comes back to ownership, ja, it comes back to ownership definitely. If they own the process it's going to work for them (Hannalie).

It's adult learning. It's creating a space where adults take ownership of their own learning. When people want to learn, they learn best (Thando).

...the idea that it's about independence at the end of the day where learners come in and throughout learning they need to be taking their own ownership for their own learning... Because at the end of the day you do not want to have breed people who are dependent...but at the end of the day you want people to go out there and strive on

their own and be able to influence others as well. So if you think about it, its speaks directly on sustainability...(Thando).



SECTION 5

SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research problem that I addressed is: The fact that the Continuous Learning Cycle is not used to its' fullest, undermines possibilities of deeper learning. The research problem was confirmed and although some participants identified this, solutions were not entirely addressed.

The aims of this study were to investigate the ways in which the Continuous Learning Cycle model could be conceptualized more fully within a constructivist learning framework to create further possibilities for experiential learning. Through this, I wanted to identify further possibilities the model can offer to maximise learning and gain theoretical insight into the factors hindering the application of this model, as well as benefits beyond the workplace.

I investigated the following research question: What possibilities does the Continuous Learning Cycle model offer for experiential learning? I also investigated the following sub-questions: How can the methodology be improved in order for the model to offer greater possibilities for experiential learning? What factors enabled or hindered the use of this model in the workplace? These questions guided me in my research approach.

I used a constructivist theoretical lens to frame the investigation of the Continuous Learning Cycle. There are similarities between this model and Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, which is a constructivist model. I represented the similarities as follows:

The Continuous Learning Cycle	Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle
Experience	Concrete experience
Review	Reflective Observation
Conclude	Reflective Observation (Abstract Conceptualization is not convincingly represented in the Continuous Learning Cycle)
Action	Active Experimentation

Within the conceptual framework, I relied on Fenwick's work on experiential learning to guide me with the alternative conceptualisations to constructivism.

I adopted a qualitative approach as I wanted to explore how the respondents interpreted and applied the Continuous Learning Cycle. This approach was therefore most suitable to what I wanted to achieve.

The research instrument that I used was an interview guide (see Appendix A) which facilitated a semi-structured interview. As the research was investigative in nature, this instrument gave me the flexibility to ask more questions when I wanted participants to elaborate on their answers. The research question, sub-questions as well as the Continuous Learning Cycle steps guided the design of the questions for the interview guide which was divided into the following themes: The Continuous Learning Cycle; The Triad Skills Observation, an application of the Continuous Learning Cycle with questions on each step i.e. Experience, Review, Conclude and Action; Experiential Learning and Reflecting Beyond the Workplace. In hindsight, I could have asked more questions which reflected the alternative conceptions of experiential learning.

I collected the data by voice recording each participant. The audio files were then transcribed. The magnitude of the amount of data collected was at times overwhelming, but I organised the data using the questions in the interview guide to identify themes and trends. I represented the analysis in the different conceptual themes identified in the conceptual framework and I have reached the aims of the study.

FINDINGS

The Constructivist view of Experiential Learning, especially Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, on which the Continuous Learning Cycle is based; as a methodology or philosophy contributes to learning which confirms the views of some scholars (Breunig, 2014; Kayes, 2002; Miettinen, 1998). However, a participant noted that even though facilitators were aware of the model, they were not always conscious of the use of the model as a methodology. The data revealed that the certain steps in the Continuous Learning Cycle were well executed in this learning environment while others were not. There was also indication that the Continuous Learning Cycle was flawed in its interpretation of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle and therefore may contribute to a lack of deeper learning.

Steps in the Continuous Learning Cycle which were well executed in the programme:

Experience (Kolb's Concrete Experience)

- Experience plays an important role in adult education and that was confirmed by the data, confirming the first step in both cycles. Participants described how the experience whether real or simulated was important for learning and noted that the experience in the simulated experience of the Triad Skills Observation was of value especially since it mirrored the performance environment where the learners would be working. Although they found experience important, they also stated that experience on its own did not necessarily result in learning which confirms work of John Dewey who states, "all genuine education comes through experience [but]...not all experiences are genuinely or equally educative" (cited in Anderson, Boud and Cohen, 2000) as well as the work of other constructivist theorists. Constructivism emphasises learning and reflecting on your own experience but some participants also noted that one could learn from and reflect on others' experience. However, one participant emphasised that if the experience was your own it had a bigger impact on your learning.
- Some participants indicated that more than the explicit outcomes were met during the simulated experience which could result in the type of characteristics which would benefit the learner beyond the workplace.

Review (Kolb's Reflective Observation)

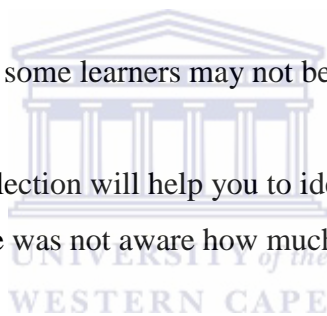
I combined these Review and Conclude aspects of the Continuous Learning Cycle as they both represented aspects of Kolb's Reflective Observation

- Reflection was viewed as integral to learning. There was also an indication of meta-cognition, or learning about learning and ownership which supports the Constructivists' self-directed view of learning.
- The use of feedback or debriefing is important in the reflection step, especially if it follows a simulated activity (Miller et al, 2008; Gentry, 1990; Petranek et al, 1992) to highlight errors and to highlight which skills are meeting and exceeding the outcomes of the activity. The data confirmed the usefulness of feedback in learning, in that it does highlight the errors and the things the learner is doing correctly.

The data also highlighted that the manner in which feedback is conveyed was important to participants as it could influence learning positively or negatively. Most learners saw feedback as negative, probably due to prior experience where it was used as a “punishment”. The manner in which feedback is shared would then help the learner to see it as a developmental tool. Manipulation in feedback was mentioned by a participant, as well as the sacrifice of feedback to complete an activity which could affect the quality of the learning.

The participants also pointed out that feedback was mostly used to close a performance gap to meet the standard but not focussed on how to deliver above standard excellence. This was also reflected in the reason for coaching learners. This suggests that feedback is outcomes and not process driven. Interestingly, a participant noted that his performance evaluation was based on the learner meeting the standard (or outcomes) not excelling and questioned why he should continue coaching if he was not measured on it.

- Reflection is a skill which some learners may not be competent in and may need to be taught.
- Being conscious about reflection will help you to identify if you have learnt. A participant shared how she was not aware how much she had grown until she reflected.



Steps in the Continuous Learning Cycle which were not well executed in the programme:

Conclude (Kolb’s Reflective Observation)

This step in the Continuous Learning Cycle is also represented by aspects of Kolb’s Reflective Observation

- Lack of time after the Triad Skills Observations, was identified as the main factor why participants are not facilitating a deeper, more critical reflection. If they had the time participants would question more critically to facilitate a deeper discussion and maximise learning. This brings into focus facilitator skill and competence.

Action (Kolb's Active Experimentation)

- This step was not always facilitated mainly due to time. It was assumed that it took place as most participants saw an improvement in the learners' skill over the duration of workshop. Although there were suggestions as to how to facilitate this, a question may be, "Is it necessary to facilitate this or should the individual take ownership of this step to improve their own experience?" I am of the opinion that one could use scaffolding in this regard, where one can facilitate this step in the first Triad Skills Observations and then relinquish it to the learner themselves.

The missing step: Kolb's Abstract Conceptualization

- Where the model fell short was the absence of a clear similarity to "Abstract Conceptualization" step in the Continuous Learning Cycle which in my opinion is where there is a "general analytical detachment" (Kolb, 1984, p.31) as the learner. In the Abstract Conceptualization Step, the insights gained by reflection are developed into logical theories and then these theories are used to problem-solve and make decisions which will result in *active experimentation* or action. Although the Conclude step is a deeper reflection where the learners look at "why?" of their behaviour, this is not strongly linked to Abstract Conceptualization.

Emphasis on the facilitator

Even though the Continuous Learning Cycle and Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle can be used autonomously, the facilitator's role was highlighted in the data.

- The facilitator's competence was discussed in the review and reflection process especially with facilitating critical reflection. Fanning and Gaba (2007) emphasise that the skill of the facilitator is important when debriefing because learners have indicated that it's an important factor in the learning process. They believe that facilitating training is vital as well as experience and suggest methods where facilitators can learn from one-another. It appears that facilitators do not reflect as a bigger team regularly and therefore may miss opportunities to share best practices.
- Some participants expressed that facilitators themselves needed to show vulnerability during the learning process creating a learning space where learners felt comfortable

to be vulnerable. This for some may mean relinquishing the power status of being a facilitator.

- A surprising finding was that facilitators didn't seem to reflect on their own practice even though they used the Continuous Learning Cycle in the personal lives quite often and that to some of them it was a way of life. In my opinion, this can affect the quality of the learning as facilitators are not looking for ways to improve or correct their practice. They are therefore not questioning their assumptions which can be a hindrance to learning with so many diverse learners. Factors that were identified as contributing factors to the lack of reflection on practice were that the environment didn't support facilitator reflection, time and accountability amongst peers. Interestingly, many participants found the research interview to be reflective of their practices.

Alternative concepts and their contribution

- Supporting a psychoanalytic conception of experiential learning, the desire to learn and develop plays an important part in learning. Most participants were in agreement that this would also be a factor in the use of the model. What hinders or encourages the learner to learn also needs to be taken into account.
- Hansman (2001) states that, "learning is inherently social" (p.45) and it was confirmed that collaboration and participation can enhance meaning making and learning.
- Simulations are an effective way of learning especially as it mirrors the performance world but in a safe environment. It also helps to correct mistakes with minimal organizational risk.
- The power relations especially within learning environments need to be acknowledged. Facilitators need to be aware of them and how the notion of power relations influences learning. Facilitators also need to be aware of their own assumptions and behaviours.
- Learner ownership is and should be a focus but should not detract from the collective ownership of the company, organization and learning department.

Theoretical Insights

The constructivist view of experiential learning was confirmed. Reflecting the critiques of constructivist experiential learning, the alternative concepts such as desire and motivation to learn, the role of power and the advantages of situated learning also featured in this study.

As Kayes (2002) stated, Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory is grounded in the concept that "people have a natural capacity to learn" which holds possibilities for learning for everyone and supports lifelong learning and his experiential learning cycle supports this. This theoretical view can however be enhanced when we look at the contributions of the alternative concepts.

The importance of experience remains integral to experiential learning. It was confirmed that it is an efficient and impactful way to learn further confirming that the individual and their experience is central to this approach.

Within the reflecting step, the use of external feedback, both peer and facilitator was emphasised. Including the role of feedback into the experiential learning cycle could strengthen the theoretical argument. The importance of feedback in simulations is documented (Petranek, 1992) and should be part of experiential activities which are designed for learning. Feedback is also beneficial in everyday interactions could aid the reflective process and the consequential learning which should take place. It does reflect a more collaborative approach to reflection which situative theorists would support. This approach of shared learning can be applied to all parts of the model and can influence the model positively.

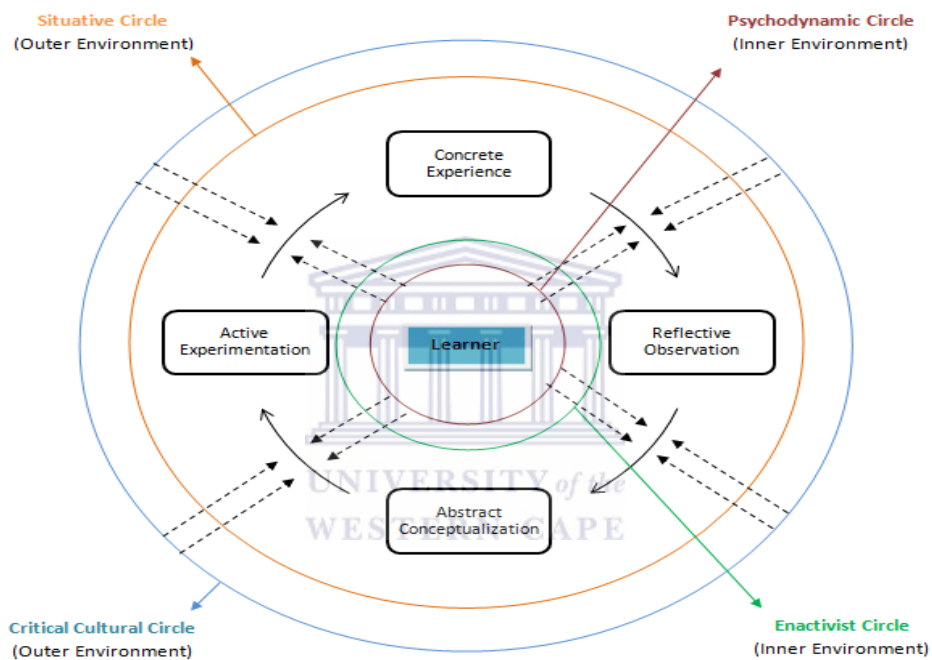
The role of power relations is not addressed in the Experiential Learning Cycle as noted by Mughal & Zafar (2011) and Fenwick (2000). It is also not addressed in the Continuous Learning Cycle either. I agree that this needs to be incorporated in the models especially with regard to facilitators and their assumptions of power relations in the learning environment.

The study confirmed the spiral nature of the models as most participants saw improvement with practice.

Although the Continuous Learning Cycle is simple to understand, which makes it accessible to everyone, it may come across as rudimentary when used in isolation of the knowledge of

experiential learning. The inclusion of a step that is truly similar to Abstract Conceptualization will also strengthen the model.

I am in agreement with Mughal & Zafar (2011) who propose that to strengthen Kolb's Constructivist model and through implication the Continuous Learning Cycle, the alternative conceptions need to be combined to all parts of Kolb's Experiential Learning model, as shown in the diagram below.



Reconceptualized Outlook of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

(Mughal & Zafar, 2011)

I believe that my conceptual framework was limited for the investigation. In hindsight, I should have included a greater theoretical insight on the facilitator's role within experiential learning. Although there was mention of feedback in the conceptual framework and the fact that it played such a useful role in the model, it would have been useful to have a more comprehensive knowledge of its role in learning. The concept of reflection was discussed in the conceptual framework but I think I should have had a greater focus on it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this study was to investigate the ways in which the Continuous Learning Cycle model could be conceptualized more fully within a constructivist learning framework to create further possibilities for experiential learning. Based on the research findings I recommend the following to enhance the workshop:

- Ensure that facilitators have a clear understanding of the Continuous Learning Cycle and its theoretical background, as well as the use of the Continuous Learning Cycle as a design methodology and philosophy. This will ground their understanding as to why they should use it consistently in their facilitation and make the use of it more explicit. The use of it may influence the learners to make use of it beyond the workplace.
- Create a space for individual facilitator reflection and team reflections to combat reactivity and encourage pro-activeness and sharing of best practices. This should also help to combat complacency and ensure that assumptions are critically reflected on.
- Include a step which reflects Abstract Conceptualization to conceptualize the model more fully.
- Structure feedback time and huddle times to maximize reflection, especially critical reflection and learning. Investigate other forms of debriefing such as writing in the form of journaling and completing worksheets with guiding questions (Petranek, 2000; Breunig, 2014)
- Ensure that the learners have acquired the skill of reflection.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that the Continuous Learning Cycle based on Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle and therefore grounded in Constructivism, is an effective methodology to adopt for experiential learning. Aspects of psychoanalytic, situative and critical perspectives were evident and the inclusion of some of these will enhance the model. As this model is introduced in an induction programme, to mostly persons in their twenties who are starting their careers, it has the potential to inform and shape the way the learner decides to learn at work and within their own lives. If people learn to critically engage and reflect, we will be a step closer to societal transformation.

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Appendix A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Profile Questions

- Name
- Age
- Address
- Gender
- Qualification
- Current role
- How long have you been in your role as a facilitator?
- What is your previous work experience?
- What other facilitation experience do you have?
- What training have you had in facilitating including courses at work?

The Continuous Learning Cycle Model and Experiential Learning

- When did you start working with the continuous learning cycle model?
- What do you like most about the continuous learning cycle?
- If a new colleague asked you to describe the continuous learning cycle model, what would you say?
- Provide some examples which demonstrates that the model facilitates learning
- If a new colleague asked you to describe what learning is, what would you say?
- As a facilitator, what do you find most useful about the model?
- If a new colleague asked you what the benefits of the continuous learning cycle model are, what would you say?
- If a new colleague asked you what improvements could be made to the continuous learning cycle model, what would you say?
- How does the continuous learning cycle model contribute to the learning environment?
- Is the model used enough in the programme?
- How else could you use the model more effectively in the programme?
- Do you apply the Continuous Learning Cycle in your own learning?

- If so how do you apply it?
- Provide some examples of where you could use the Continuous Learning Cycle outside of work?

Triad Skills Observations Role Play

- Of what value are the triad skills observations role plays, to the learners?
- Of what value are the triad skills observations, for facilitating learning?
- What do you like most about the triad skills observations?
- What do you think the learners learn during the triad skills observations?

Triad Skills Observations Role Play and Experience

- How do you use the triad skills observations role plays to facilitate learning?
- Reflecting on the triad skills observations role plays, do you think going through an experience is important for learning?
- If yes, why? If no, why not?
- How do learners link the simulated experience to their learning?
- How would you describe the link between experiencing mistakes and learning?
- Do you see an improvement in the learners' next triad skills experience?

Triad Skills Observations Role Play and Review/ Feedback

- Why is reviewing important for learning?
- How do you review the experience of a triad skills observations role play with the learner?
- How useful is giving feedback for learning?
- Do you ask the learner any reflective questions during feedback, at a triad skills observation role play?
- If so, what kinds of questions?
- Is there enough opportunity to review and reflect at the workshop for the learners and facilitators?

Triad Skills Observations Role Play and Conclude/ Critical reflection

- Do you have the opportunity to facilitate the conclude section of the Continuous Learning Cycle, after a triad skills observation role play?

- If you had the time what would you do?
- How would this facilitate learning?

Triad Skills Observations Role Play and Action

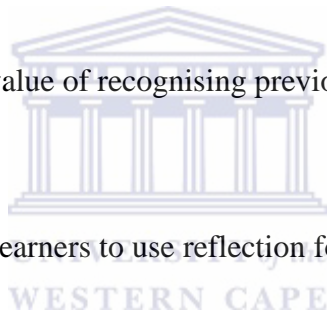
- Do you have the opportunity to focus on actions to improve their next experience of triad skills observation role plays?
- If no, how do you think it could improve learning?
- Why is the action step in the Continuous Learning Cycle important for learning?

Reflections on Experiential Learning

- If a new colleague asked you to describe experiential learning, what would you say?
- The triad skills observations role-plays, simulates a client interaction. How do you understand the triad skills observation role plays to be an example of experiential learning?
- What do you think is the value of recognising previous experience?

Workplace and beyond

- How can we better equip learners to use reflection for learning in the workplace and in life?
- Which factors/ personal qualities do you think need to be present for learners to make use of this model in the programme, in the workplace and in life?



Appendix B

LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Date

Manager

Future Bank

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: Permission to conduct research study

My name is Vanessa Welby-Solomon. I am currently enrolled in the online Masters Programme in Adult Learning and Global Change which is offered collaboratively by the University of the Western Cape, South Africa, The University of British Columbia in Canada, Linköping University, Sweden and Monash University in Australia.

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study on the Continuous Learning Cycle as used in your department. The study is entitled: *Continuous learning cycle. Investigating possibilities for experiential learning*

This study investigates how this model can be conceptualized more fully to create a more enriching learning experience which will affect learning beyond the workplace. I believe that the study will benefit the business as the model is used throughout the business where you are trying to create a culture of continuous learning.

I would appreciate it if could be allowed to interview between 10-17 permanent facilitators who have facilitated groups in your department for more than a six months.

If approval is granted, I will interview the facilitators, who volunteer to participate. The interview should take an hour to complete, will be audio recorded and will not infringe on the responsibilities of the learning facilitator. Results of the interview will remain confidential and anonymous. Should this study be published only the collective results will be documented. No costs will be incurred by either the company or the individual participants. Participants will be given a letter with information on the study. I have enclosed a copy of

the information letter as well as consent forms which will be sent to the participants, to be signed and returned to me, as the researcher (see the attached copies).

I am aware of the intellectual property of the company and I will conduct my research in accordance with the ethical and professional guidelines as specified by the University of the Western Cape.

Your approval to conduct the study will be greatly appreciated. I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you might have. You may contact me at my email address: vanessawelby@gmail.com or telephonically at 082 5930927

If you agree, kindly submit a signed letter of permission on your institution's letterhead acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this study on the Continuous Learning Cycle.

Kind Regards

Researcher: Vanessa Welby-Solomon

Student Number: 9178725

Course: Masters in Adult Learning and Global Change

University of the Western Cape



Appendix C

INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Research Title: The Continuous Learning Cycle. Investigating possibilities for experiential learning

Date

(Participant's name)

Learning Facilitator

Future Bank

RE: Information regarding participation in a research study

Dear (Participant's Name)

My name is Vanessa Welby-Solomon. I am currently enrolled in the online Masters Programme in Adult Learning and Global Change which is offered collaboratively by the University of the Western Cape, South Africa, The University of British Columbia in Canada, Linköping University, Sweden and Monash University in Australia. As part of the course, I am required to conduct a research study which will allow me Graduate from the Masters programme.

I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study on the Continuous Learning Cycle as used in your department. The details of my study are provided below.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to investigate how this model can be conceptualized or understood more fully, to create a more enriching learning experience which will affect learning beyond the workplace.

Your participation: As a volunteer for this study, you will be required to be a participant in a one-to one interview, which I will facilitate. The duration of the interview is about one hour and it will be audio-recorded. You are free to choose if you wish to participate or not. All information you provide will be confidential and anonymous. Should you choose to participate and decide to withdraw at any time, all information you have provided will be removed from the study.

Benefits and Risks: The benefit of participating in this study is to contribute to understanding the continuous learning cycle more fully so that it can enrich the learning of learners and facilitators. Another benefit is that you will be able to reflect on your practise as a facilitator. There are no risks associated with this study and no cost will be incurred on you as a participant.

Questions about the study: If you have questions or concerns before, during or after your participation in this study, please contact me or my supervisor:

Researcher: Vanessa Welby-Solomon
Institution: University of the Western Cape
Email: vanessawelby@gmail.com
Contact Number: 082 5930927

Supervisor: Professor Zelda Groener
Email: zgroener@uwc.ac.za
Contact number: 021 959 2911

If you agree to participate in the study, please fill in the attached consent form and return it to me at vanessawelby@gmail.com

Thank you.

Kind Regards

Vanessa Welby-Solomon

Appendix D

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Research Title: The Continuous Learning Cycle. Investigating possibilities for experiential learning

Researcher: Vanessa Welby-Solomon

Email: vanessawelby@gmail.com

Institution: University of the Western Cape

Course: Masters in Adult Learning and Global Change

Supervisor: Professor Zelda Groener

Email: zgroener@uwc.ac.za



Dear (Participant's Name)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study on the Continuous Learning Cycle. This form indicates your consent to participate in the research study. Please complete it and return it to me via email at vanessawelby@gmail.com by (date).

Consent

I, (participant's name), the undersigned

- have read the information letter outlining the study
- understand my participation in the study
- have been given the opportunity to ask questions
- agree to my interview being audio-recorded
- understand that my personal details will not be shared with anyone outside the study
- understand that my words may be quoted in the final research paper and any other publication that may arise from that, but my name will not be used
- understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

