DEBRIEFING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING EXERCISES: A THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR SUCCESS

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Practitioners themselves learn to debrief by debriefing. Scholars and researchers seem to turn their attention more to the design and implementation of simulations and games and the educational effectiveness of them than to the same questions about the design, implementation or assessment of the debriefing sessions accompanying simulations and games. (Lederman, 1992a, p. 143)

An experiential learning exercise is a complex event. It needs to provide learners with the basis for understanding why and how the new knowledge they acquire is related to what they already know. It must convey to the learners that they have the capability of using this new knowledge not only in the classrooms in which they learn it but in other settings as well (Lederman, 1992b).

When rigorously administered, experiential learning exercises can be a powerful form of teaching in which participants acquire new skills by...

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internalizing theory through guided practice. Of crucial importance is the
often neglected processing stage of an experiential learning exercise known
as debriefing. Debriefing is the processing of the learning experience from
which the learners are to draw the lessons to be learned (Greenblat & Duke,

Using a debriefing process is based on two assumptions. First, the partici-
pation experience has influenced the participants in some meaningful way.
Second, a processing (often a discussion, but we will suggest other forms) of
that experience is necessary to provide insight into that experience and its
impact (Lederman, 1992b).

In this article, we will focus on the process of debriefing and the postex-
perience analysis in the educational setting (Lederman, 1983). The purpose
of this activity is to use the information generated during the experiential
activity to facilitate learning for those participants. After participants have
engaged in a learning activity, the instructor provides insight into the activity
through debriefing (Lederman, 1992b).

Debriefing is an integral part of any experience-based learning exercise.
The main function of the debriefing phase of experiential learning exercises
is to integrate experiences with concepts and applications that are transferable
to settings outside the classroom. The management educator’s role is to guide
the participants in transforming some of the generalizations into more precise
statements that can be applied to the “real world” (Warrick, Hunsacker, Cook,
& Altman, 1979).

This article provides a conceptual model for debriefing using Kolb, Rubin,
and Osland’s (1991) model of the learning process and offers practical ideas
for applying the model to debriefing. Special attention is also given to the
role of the management educator in providing the environment necessary for
a richer experience. The importance of the management educator’s role in
providing structure versus ambiguity is discussed.

Defining Debriefing

Many writers agree that the literature on the process of debriefing is scarce
(Lederman, 1992b; Wagenheim & Gemmill, 1994). It is not surprising, then,
that the debriefing practice also lacks the basis of conceptual models of
systematic and analytical process. A debriefing process, however, must be
planned as rigorously as the exercise itself to complete the learning experience.

Although a number of authors write about the debriefing process, not all
use the term debriefing to mean the same thing. Lederman (1992b) notes that
debriefing is variously defined as learning through reflection on a simulated
experience (Lederman, 1983; Lederman & Stewart, 1986; Lee, 1984; Pearson & Smith, 1986; Raths, 1987; Thatcher & Robinson, 1990); emotional recovery from critical incidents (Bergmann & Queen, 1987; Donovan, 1983; Walker, 1990); work-related tasks, such as appraisal and synthesis of input from focus groups (De Nicola, 1990) or job performance (Bailey, 1990).

The earliest documentation of debriefing is after military campaigns and war games (Pearson & Smith, 1986). After a mission or exercise, the participants were brought together to describe and account for the activity and to develop new strategies and tactics as a result of the exercise. More recently, we have learned about debriefings of prisoners of war, hostages, and other crisis victims (Walker, 1990). Not only do we gain information about their experiences but we also gain insight for those who were not there. In war/hostage trauma usage, the debriefing involves getting them to tell the story and describe their feelings. Similarly, in the educational setting, participants also tell their story and describe their feelings. Clearly, however, the experiences are substantially different.

Another use of debriefing is in psychological studies involving the deception of subjects. In these studies, the subjects have been deceived into doing something in an experiential context (Tenn & Gillen, 1979). The purpose of debriefing in this scenario is to provide rather than to gather information. To debrief them is to inform them (American Psychological Association, 1979); to reverse laboratory-induced experiences (Tenn & Gillen, 1979); or to undo negative consequences, inform and educate, and check on the method used (Mills, 1976). In the context of deception studies, debriefing is often synonymous with dehoaxing (Walker, 1990).

Note that in the educational setting, it is advisable to avoid deception (Warrick et al., 1979). For example, planting a disruptive person in a group to generate the desired result may create distrust and may sensitize the participants to look for gimmicks in future exercises. Another form of deception involves the fact that the choice of exercises may cause intergroup tensions that cannot be repaired. For example, prisoner's dilemmas or some power exercises may alienate groups from one another or the instructor for the remainder of the semester or workshop.

Planning for Debriefing

The debriefing stage must be planned so that it provides the learner with the continuity of the experience as opposed to participants losing the learning due to a lack of experiencing and understanding its application. For the experience to be maximally effective for learners, therefore, the debriefing
must be allocated an adequate amount of time or much of the potential richness of the experience is lost. No exact amount of time for the debriefing is recommended. The management educator can decide on the length of the debriefing session. Some of the factors the management educator may want to consider when determining the length of the debriefing session include purpose, complexity, and level of intensity of the exercise; responsiveness of the participants; and format of the debriefing session (e.g., collaborative discussion, debriefing game, etc., as discussed later).

**Debriefing Debacle—Bob Dennehy’s Story**

When I was a young instructor, I used an experiential exercise in which the class produced paper airplanes. During the production task, one group demonstrated an autocratic leadership style, another followed a democratic style, and the third used a laissez-faire style. The results of the exercise were that the autocratic group had the highest production and morale, the democratic group had moderate production and morale, and the laissez-faire group had the lowest in both production and morale.

The debriefing produced a consensus from the class that the autocratic approach is the best. They were absolutely convinced. Their experience proved it. For the highest productivity and morale, you must be heavy-handed. The more I introduced alternative choices, the more I raised questions, the more I competed for their attention, the more adamantly the class stood by its conclusion. They seemed glued to their experience.

Surely, many management educators can relate to this anecdote in which a learning experience was well planned and executed but where the application of learning was not achieved due to the lack of an effective debriefing to provide continuity in the exercise. A debriefing session that is equally as well planned as the learning exercise itself, however, may have changed the outcome.

**A Conceptual Model for Debriefing**

In pursuit of achieving a level in which learners not only absorb the knowledge presented but also apply this learning in practice, it is helpful to consider the entire process of learning and then to apply this learning process specifically to the debriefing session. Kolb et al.'s (1991) model of adult learning defines each stage of the learning process and is presented here for application to debriefing. For each stage, key questions are provided that may
help the facilitator progress through the stages, applying each to the debriefing (see Table 1). Additional questions are offered by Gaw (1979).

Although learners may naturally proceed through some of the stages in Kolb et al.’s (1991) model during a debriefing exercise, often the progression does not result in active experimentation (doing). For example, the educator’s goal may be to ultimately motivate a learner to use learned concepts in new situations yet some learners may merely conceptualize and not change practice, whereas others may try different methods of practice without integrating learned concepts in a meaningful fashion. Through applying Kolb et al.’s model to the debriefing session, however, the management educator can guide learners through the stages to achieve active experimentation.

The goal of the experiential learning exercise is for participants to engage in active experimentation. This is the phase of exploration that takes the participant from their own individual experience to the broader application of that experience. This stage is comparable to Lederman’s (1992b) phase of generalization and application. It is worth noting, however, a number of activities to which Lederman refers broaden the generalization and application process. For example, she includes expressing feelings (Nissen & Ransom, 1983); clarifying facts, concepts, or principles (Thatcher, 1986); assessing individual performance (Thatcher, 1986); and recapping achievement (Lederman, 1984; Pearson & Smith, 1986).

What should occur during the application and transfer stage seems more clearly found in the active experimentation stage as described by Kolb et al. (1991). The focus in the debriefing is to influence people in an active way and to transform situations in a dramatic fashion. It emphasizes practical applications as opposed to reflective understanding, a pragmatic concern with what works as opposed to what is abstract, an emphasis on doing as opposed to observing. Here, the focus is on getting things accomplished and achieving objectives. Impact and influence on the environment are valued. Active experimentation allows for testing the implications of concepts in new situations. These hypotheses are tested on future action, which, in turn, lead to new experiences.

Providing continuity of the learning experience is necessary and can be achieved by proceeding through all the stages in Kolb et al.’s (1991) model. It leads learners to understand the relationships between what they are currently learning and past and future experiences. The richness and strength of the experiential learning exercise can be enhanced if debriefing proceeds through all of the stages of Kolb et al.’s model: from concrete experience to reflective observation to abstract conceptualization and, ultimately, to active experimentation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage in Kolb’s Model of the Learning Process</th>
<th>Description of Kolb’s Stage</th>
<th>Questions for Application of Learning Stage to Stages in Debriefing Session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concrete experience (feeling)</td>
<td>The participants objectively describe the experience in terms of who, what, when, where, and how. They also subjectively describe their feelings, perceptions, and thoughts that occurred during (not after) the experience. They tell their story. If the event is stressful, emotional, or disturbing, the participants can gain composure.</td>
<td>Did you complete your assignment? Were the objectives of the assignment clear? How did you feel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective observation (watching)</td>
<td>At this level, the experience is viewed from different points of view, which add more meaning and perspectives to the event. This approach values patience, impartiality, and considered, thoughtful judgment.</td>
<td>Did you make assumptions about X, Y, Z? What was happening for you during the exercise? What did you observe in others? What did the exercise mean for you and in relation to others? (Clarify differences of opinion.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract conceptualization (thinking)</td>
<td>The debriefing relates concepts from the readings and lecture to the experience in the activity. An original model or theory can be created.</td>
<td>What policies/rules could you make based on your experience in this exercise? With what variables would the rules/policies not apply? Given such variables, what would be a better rule/policy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active experimentation (doing)</td>
<td>The participants apply what has been learned in the experience of the activity to the world outside the classroom. What-if scenarios may be explored.</td>
<td>How would you change aspects of the experience for a better outcome? In what situations could this strategy be utilized? What situations would call for a backup strategy?</td>
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The Debriefing Model in Action—Ron Sims's Story

The following is an example of how one of the authors used the debriefing model to debrief an experiential exercise, “Instructor/Participant Interviews” (Kolb, Osland, & Rubin, 1995), which was used in the first class of an introductory organizational behavior course. Briefly, “the goal of the exercise is for the instructor to learn from the class members their expectations for the course regarding what they hope to learn. In addition, the instructor will try to learn what members feel they can contribute to the achievement of their expectations and to the learning process” (see Kolb, Osland, & Rubin, 1995, p. 11, for a more detailed description of the exercise). During the exercise, the instructor first interviewed the class members, representatives of the class then interviewed the instructor, and finally, before the debriefing discussion, the total group compared the interview and identified potential pinches (differences that will influence the learning process). It should be noted that the exercise was preceded by reading, lecture, and in-class discussion on Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning model, the Sherwood and Glidewell’s (1972) psychological contract, and socialization.

In the first step (concrete experience) of debriefing the exercise, I asked the students to take 3 to 5 minutes to write down their individual feelings, perceptions, and thoughts that occurred during the exercise. I also completed the task at the same time. The students were then asked to take 10 minutes to share their work with other members of the groups in which they were working during the exercise. Following the group discussion, I then asked members of each group to share some of the information gathered in their group discussion with the total class.

Some of the comments generated by students were, “We weren’t sure what we were supposed to learn from this first class and we all agreed that this class was very different from other classes we had taken here at the college,” “We don’t believe we got anything out of today’s class,” “What was the main purpose of this class?” “We weren’t sure whether or not our expectations of you and this course would really make a difference!” At this stage of the debriefing process, it is important to remember that I was concerned with getting as many student’s feelings, perceptions, and thoughts expressed as possible. To accomplish this goal, I asked students, “Are there any more questions?” and “Did other groups have similar feelings, thoughts, etc.?”

After spending about 10 to 15 minutes on the first stage of the debriefing process, I made a transition to the reflective observation stage by asking
students to take a few minutes as a group to look back over what had occurred during the exercise and to reflect on the questions they raised during the first stage of the debriefing process. In particular, I asked them to think about what ways their group’s expectations and contributions agreed or disagreed with mine. One of the key questions I posed to students during this stage was, “In looking back over today’s exercise and your group’s discussion, what did you observe?” “Did you make any assumptions about what I and your other class members expect of you?” “What did the exercise mean for you and others?” With these questions, I tried to concentrate on encouraging students to reflect on their experiences and articulate their perspective so that the total class could explore these understandings and learn from them.

Some of the students’ points that came out of this reflective observation stage of the debriefing were: “No course we had ever taken had asked us questions like—What were my learning objectives for this course?” “Was I willing to participate actively in the setting of those objectives and in their attainment?” “Several of us think this is what today’s class was all about.” “Though in retrospect these questions seem important, our group thought that we were wholly unprepared to answer them; in fact, as queries, they made no sense to us.”

As I reflected on the comments made by the students not only in this course but also in previous courses, I recognized that students have been conditioned in previous first-class experiences to listen and accept objectives, to take a passive role in the learning process. Thus, when they were asked during my first class to participate actively in an objective-setting and in an active learning process, they were unprepared to respond in a meaningful way. As a result, I have found that I have become increasingly sensitive to the need for me, in my role as an instructor, to recognize and appreciate how much diversity there is within the class in students’ ability to understand and respond to a different learning expectation and environment.

In the next stage of the debriefing process (abstract conceptualization), I asked the students, first individually and then in their groups, to discuss the following question: “What theories or course concepts that you heard in the lecture or read in preparation for class relate to your understanding of today’s exercise?” Although all the groups seemed to respond effectively to the question once the total class discussion began, one group’s comments (with a little prodding from me) were clearly on target with the learning and insight I wanted to come out of the exercise and the first class. The following comments highlight the result of this debriefing stage: “First, this is to be an active learning experience. This sounds almost trivial but it is the basis of the psychological contract between you (the instructor) and the class (the organization) and furthermore is fundamental to learning in this course.”
member of another group followed with, "To be active learners means that I and the rest of the class will learn about interpersonal interactions in organizational behavior by actively experiencing those interactions. I must scrutinize the functioning of the group of which I am a member, observe important interactions, make hypotheses about these interactions, and actively test these hypotheses within the group in order to learn." Finally, after some generous discussion among the students in which I was an observer, one student commented, "I am to be responsible for setting learning objectives of this and other experiences. These objectives are not given and thus cannot constrain or limit in any way the scope of learning which I can obtain." After this comment, I pointed out that these comments almost directly flow from the first element (students are active learners) and the second element (a psychological contract between me as the instructor and them as students). The elements directly concerned the learning process in which I would engage them in the course.

My comments were intended to make a transition in the debriefing discussion from relating concepts and theories of the experience in that day's activities to focusing on the specifics (or rules of thumb) for students to be active learners in the remainder of the course. Both my own and the students' comments about active learners in my course were the main focus of the active experimentation stage of the debriefing model for this particular class.

To continue our discussion on active learning, I asked them, "What will you need to do in future classes to meet your own and my expectations for this class?" I specifically asked the students to think about and generate the rules of thumb or action resolutions. In response, one group commented, "In the future you (as the instructor) and us as students must take responsibility for raising a pinch (a key component of the model of psychological contracts) if and when it develops. We thought that pinches could either be raised via written comments or informal discussion, say at the end of a class."

As evidenced in this debriefing example, the richness and strength of using the debriefing model introduced in this paper can be enhanced if debriefing proceeds through all of the stages: from concrete experience to reflective observation to abstract conceptualization and, ultimately, to active experimentation. The model allowed for testing implications of course concepts and theories in new situations which, in turn, lead to new experiences and learning.

An important learning tool related to the above example is that the two elements (i.e., [a] the psychological contract between the instructor and students and [b] that students have some responsibility for setting the learning objectives), in combination, lead to a higher motivation to learn and make a broader scope of learning possible. In point of fact, I have found that both
my attitude and the students’ toward learning and our subsequent behavior have reflected these efforts. As a result of using the debriefing model, I believe students are more inquisitive, more committed to learning and, in short, more involved in the learning process. It has been my experience that this involvement has resulted in large rewards for both myself and the students.

The Role of the Management Educator/Facilitator

Equally important to the effective planning of a debriefing exercise is providing an environment that is conducive to completing the entire learning experience. It will be helpful to the management educator to understand the difference between the need for ambiguity and the need for structure in the exercise. Finally, providing ground rules in which participants will be able to experience all phases is helpful for keeping the session focused and effective. Both are described below.

ENCOURAGING AN ENVIRONMENT OF AMBIGUITY

As mentioned earlier, skills and knowledge gained from the exercise will differ for each participant. Thus, the debriefing session will be perceived with some degree of ambiguity. For example, in Ron Sims’ story, the students were unprepared to respond to an objective-setting and active learning process. His questions made no sense to some of the students! Ambiguity is necessary so that individuals are personally stretched to apply concepts to real situations. It may seem paradoxical that the pursuit of a conceptual model for debriefing is urged, yet ambiguity is also urged, to meet the subjective needs of individuals. Both requirements (structure and ambiguity), however, can be met if the management educator is cognizant of each of the steps of the debriefing model and uses it as a road map to facilitate discussion so that all learning stages are experienced.

When adult learners reach the level of active experimentation (doing), they will use new skills, having experienced their usefulness/meaningfulness, and will feel capable of using the skills, having experienced the competency to do so (Bandura, 1977; Kolb et al. 1991). The challenge for the management educator is to encourage the necessary amount of ambiguity so that learners can apply theories in practice. The facilitator must provide guidance by assisting participants in keeping focused and effectively translating abstract conceptualization (theory) into active experimentation (practice). For example, in the Ron Sims’ story, the students generated rules of thumb or action resolutions as part of the psychological contract.
This is similar to the notion of self-efficacy in Bandura’s social learning theory, where human beings acquire new skills vicariously. Bandura (1977) argues that human beings think about and interpret their experiences as opposed to absorbing blindly. From self-directed learning experiences, one gains a sense of self-efficacy in which new skills are used because the individual (a) has experienced their usefulness/meaningfulness and (b) feels capable of using the skills, having experienced the competency to do so. The management educator must encourage individuals to give and to get so that they develop their own meaningful applications of theory and will be more likely to experience their usefulness (Kolb et al., 1991). You will recall that students soon recognized the Ron Sims’ role as facilitator even though some had not experienced this situation in other classes.

To provide ambiguity, it is necessary to create an environment of mutuality (two-sided exchange) where learning is self-directed. Although there is no set method of creating such an environment, it may be helpful for the management educator to consider the lecture-oriented environment, which is typically one-sided, where teachers give and students get. In contrast, adult learning needs are best fulfilled in an environment conducive to two-sided exchange. As Kolb et al. (1991) state,

In adult learning both giving and getting are critical. In getting, there is the opportunity to incorporate new ideas and perspectives. In giving, there is the opportunity to integrate and apply these new perspectives and to practice their use. (p. 58)

As a general rule, Thiagarajan (1992) recommends that the facilitator take on a cooperative role (as opposed to hierarchical or autonomous) in which the balance of power is equal between facilitator and participants. This mutuality allows for the fulfillment of the “contract of reciprocity” (Kolb et al., 1991) where learners take an active role, responsibility, and interest for their learning.

Finally, Gunz (1995) suggests that the instructor provide a great deal of tutorial support. A tutor with a good understanding of the exercise can ask appropriate questions of the participants, guiding them to appropriate observations from which they can build more helpful hypotheses. If this is not done, there is a risk that learners will not make any successful circuits of the Kolb cycle, and learning will not take place.

PROVIDING STRUCTURE FOR THE EXERCISES: THE GAME PLAN

Once the format for the debriefing session (i.e., discussion, game, constructive feedback, etc., as discussed later) has been decided on, the management educator should consider explaining the game plan and ground rules for
the session to the participants. By game plan, we mean a specific description of events and timing of them during the session. In terms of the game plan, the educator may choose to describe the game or discussion format to the group and how it will occur in the context of the stages. For example, if a constructive feedback session is used within the framework of Kolb’s model, the management educator could describe that the experience will be discussed (concrete experience), followed by feedback from group members (reflective observation), followed by a conceptualization of rules that may apply to other situations (abstract conceptualizations), and concluded with practical applications of the concepts to work situations (active experimentation). In describing the stages, the facilitator can set a time limit for discussing each to ensure that there is ample time for all stages. If the group becomes lost in a digression, the facilitator can refocus the debriefing by redirecting the group back to the game plan that had been previously articulated. The facilitator can ensure focus by asking the types of questions for each stage provided earlier in Table 1. Using Table 1, the facilitator has a tool for guiding the experiential learning cycle at the pace, depth, breadth, and intensity that seems appropriate (Gaw, 1979).

Following the explanation of the game plan, setting ground rules for the debriefing session is important because it will involve discussing the actions of others, especially during the concrete experience (feeling) stage. Specifically, the management educator should convey that feedback should be descriptive (as opposed to evaluative), nonjudgmental, and noncritical. The constructive (as opposed to destructive) purpose of the exercise must be underscored (Borisoff & Victor, 1989).

**Practical Suggestions for Management Educators/Facilitators**

The goal of the experiential learning exercise is to ensure that it has provided valuable learning that is practical for the individual. Similarly, in our effort to assist in the application of debriefing concepts, we offer the following suggestions for implementation.

**SHARED WORK EXPERIENCES**

Participants discuss scenarios from their work experience in which the newly acquired learning would be/would have been helpful.

*Instructions.* Start the exercise by asking questions relevant to the concrete experience and reflective observation stages. During the abstract conceptu-
alization and active experimentation stages, invite participants to share previous or potential work experiences in which the concepts learned would have been/would be beneficial. For example, in the abstract conceptualization stage, ask, "Think about work experiences you have had that are similar to the situation you experienced in the exercise. Based on both experiences, what rule could you follow that would be beneficial to both situations?" In the active experimentation phase, ask, "Can you think of other work situations in which this rule would apply? How about situations in which it would not apply? In situations where it would not apply, what would be a second alternative?"

*What this exercise achieves.* It brings to life the concepts learned and offers practical data for analysis (concrete experience) and ideas for applying concepts (abstract conceptualization). It encourages active experimentation.

**THE ENVELOPE GAME**

This game was developed by Thiagarajan (1992). In it, each group has the opportunity to explore what might have occurred during the exercise given different variables. Each group's questions are answered by other groups, inviting views from diverse perspectives. It provides the grist for lively classroom discussion.

*Instructions.* Start the exercise by asking questions relevant to the concrete experience and reflective observation stages. During the abstract conceptualization and active experimentation stages, learners are divided into groups. Each group passes around an envelope that contains a what-if exercise question, which is written on the outside of the envelope. Groups collaboratively answer the questions of other groups on paper (based on their experience and learning), which are then inserted in the appropriate envelope. For example, in the exercise of ranking those slated for layoff or firing, a what-if question is, "What if O.J. Simpson, Mother Theresa, Madonna, or Newt Gingrich made these decisions?" Another example from Bolman and Deal's (1979) power simulation is, "What if, rather than $1, you contributed $10, $100, or $.01?" Still another, "As a member of the bottom group, what if you could steal the money from the top group?" From *The Ancient Tale* by Ritchie and Thompson (1980), what-if questions are, "What if you were asked to describe our organization in terms of the Ancient Tale characters?" "What if you were asked to rewrite the Ancient Tale?" As group responses are read, rules are formulated and summarized on a chalkboard to engage learners in the abstract conceptualization stage. The management educator can then
conclude with a discussion of the rules and how they apply to other settings (both from the resulting what-if scenarios and other discussion).

*What this exercise achieves.* It invites many different questions that help to personalize the learning. It provides ideas for practice from many different perspectives that may not have otherwise been discussed and provides an opportunity for active experimentation.

**COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION**

*Instructions.* During the concrete experience stage, the facilitator asks individuals to use the rules of constructive feedback to describe their performance. Group members are then invited to offer feedback on the performance of others in the same fashion. Finally, the facilitator synthesizes comments to provide transferable ideas for practice (Klepper, 1994).

*What this exercise achieves.* It helps participants to view their behavior and that of others objectively. It helps participants conceptualize the experiences from the learning exercise from many different perspectives and provides a guideline for participants to evaluate real-world situations and apply the concepts learned, thus encouraging active experimentation.

**JOURNAL WRITING**

Participants record their experience, the relevant concepts, and future application of concepts.

*Instructions.* After the learning exercise is completed, the facilitator instructs students to write about the experience in a journal. A general guideline for journal entries might be

1. Experience: Explain what happened during the exercise. Include your observations of others and how you felt about these interactions.
2. Theory: Based on the readings and class lectures, what theories apply or would be helpful to implement in the exercise?
3. Application: Considering the objectives of the exercise and your performance, how could you change the experience for a better outcome? How do you think the outcome would have changed and why? In what situations could this strategy be used? What situations could call for a backup strategy?

The instructor could then provide individual feedback in writing for each learner. (Note: depending on the format of the exercise, time limitations will dictate whether writing will occur before or after the exercise. Journal writing
is an effective method of debriefing and may be creatively used within program format/time constraints.

*What this exercise achieves.* Writing allows for uninhibited expression, the opportunity to reexamine written ideas, and the ability to proceed through all learning stages in a structured manner. It also provides the opportunity for the facilitator to comment and enhance each individual's needs and goals (Klepper, 1994; Petranek, Corey, & Black, 1992).

**Conclusion**

It is suggested in this article that debriefing is a necessary part of the experiential learning process, which is crucial to completing the educational experience. The literature neglects the subject of debriefing, and writers are not in agreement about what it means to debrief. Kolb's model of the learning process is offered as a conceptual model for achieving the ultimate goal of active experimentation from the experiential learning exercise.

Attention has also been given to the role of the management educator in the process. This individual must provide the environment in which learning can occur and be transferred to nonclassroom situations. To meet these goals, structure is required. It is also necessary, however, that ambiguity is allowed so that learners can personalize the learning, experiencing meaningfulness in its application, where learning is truly relevant to the individual.

Experiential learning exercises can be a powerful form of teaching in which participants actually use new skills in the workplace. It is urged that to obtain the optimum pay-off (active experimentation) from the experiential exercise, close attention must be paid to debriefing. Reaching the level of active experimentation requires an approach based on a conceptual model of systematic and analytical debriefing, which is as rigorously planned as the experiential learning exercise itself.

**References**


