



Welcome to our latest bulletin, in which we focus on experiential learning. In this edition we explore how this often under-used approach to executive learning can develop the insight and capabilities needed when assessing, developing and operationalising strategy.

In our lead article my colleague and I explore a form of experiential learning, called Learning Journeys. We share our experiences of designing and facilitating Learning Journeys for executive teams and discuss how they are an effective means of developing shared understanding and collective leadership – particularly when it comes to strategy.

In our second article we share the thoughts of Claus Benkert and Nick van Dam from McKinsey who believe that the broken link between change programmes and their success is the lack of experiential learning aimed at developing the capabilities needed to operationalise the intended change.

Finally, we review Colin Beard and John P Wilson's book on experiential learning. First published in 2002. This third edition (2013) provides comprehensive coverage of the theory and practice of the topic.

As always, we welcome your feedback.

Best regards
[David Trafford](#)

Experiential Learning Journeys – a source of shared insights and collective leadership

All organisations are on a trajectory to a given future, preferably one that is better than today's. This trajectory is a manifestation of their strategy; a strategy that has either been intentionally and explicitly defined or has evolved over time. But how can executives be sure that their strategy will be successful? If the purpose of strategy is to significantly change their organisation's trajectory, how can they be sure that this will happen? Equally, if in assessing their current strategy they conclude that a new one is required how can they be sure that it will in reality be any better? And, if they believe their current strategy will put them on the correct trajectory how can they be sure it will be successfully implemented and the targeted outcomes sustained over time?

These are some of the strategic challenges executives continually face – and they do this in the knowledge that few strategies actually achieve their target outcomes. So, what can be done to increase the chances of success?

In their article *Experiential Learning Journeys: A Source of Shared Insights and Collective Leadership* [Peter Boggis](#) and [David Trafford](#) explore how Experiential Learning Journeys can help executives exercise more collective leadership when it comes to strategy. They begin by describing experiential learning in general and then focus on Experiential Learning Journeys for executive teams.

Illustrated by three case studies, they discuss how custom-designed Experiential Learning Journeys can help executive teams gain the collective capabilities needed to assess the effectiveness of current strategy, explore different strategies and successfully operationalise their chosen strategy.

To read their full article, click [here](#).

Experiential learning: what's missing in most change programmes

In a recent McKinsey article Claus Benkert and Nick van Dam argue that the broken link between change programmes and their success is the lack of attention given to developing the necessary capabilities to operationalise and sustain the intended change. In their article they quote recent McKinsey research that revealed that two-thirds of business transformations do not adequately meet their objectives and that only 1 in 10 companies actually sustain cost improvements beyond four years. They argue that one of the significant factors for the poor success rate is the lack of attention given to developing new capabilities.

They also quote research conducted in 2014 that indicated capability building has become one of the top three priorities of executives around the world. The question they explore in the article is how can these leaders best address this priority?

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We provide thought leadership and thought partnership on all aspects of strategy.

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Assess your current strategy by understanding your organisation's current trajectory and the factors driving it.

Develop your new strategy by defining an organisational trajectory that leads to an improved future.

Operationalise your strategy by creating the conditions that enable the organisation to pull itself towards its target future.

More details can be found on our [website](#).

Parting thought

"Experience is the child of thought, and thought is the child of action – we cannot learn from books."

Benjamin Disraeli
British Prime Minister,
1804 – 1881

The approach they advocate, particularly for adults who are accustomed to learning through action and experience, is a learning process that integrates shared contextual exploration with reflective thought processes: a combination that amplifies individual and group comprehension.

To read their article, in which they give examples of where experiential learning has been applied in a range of situations, from lean manufacturing to digital marketing, click [here](#).

A new model for unlocking powerful learning

The model Colin Beard and John P Wilson refer to in their book [Experiential Learning: A Handbook for Education, Training and Coaching](#) is what they call their 'learning combination lock'. The model provides a conceptual framework that helps the reader understand the interconnected nature of the learning 'experience' and thereby be better able to design powerful learning experiences, whether it be in the context of executive development, coaching, corporate training, therapy or youth development.

The model is represented as a visual metaphor of six tumblers that represent the different facets of experiential learning and the complexity of the many possible experiential choices. The six tumblers represent:

- The learning environment.
- Learning activities.
- The senses.
- Emotions in learning.
- Reasoning and intelligence.
- Learning and change.

The first three cover the external environment and the latter three the internal environment. From a philosophical perspective the tumblers represent belonging, doing, sensing, feeling, thinking and being.

The power of the model comes from the recognition that all six facets (tumblers) of experiential learning need to be considered when designing learning experiences, and that within each facet there is a myriad of options. The implication being that the possibilities are endless.

The book covers both the theory and practice of experiential learning and is an excellent handbook for all those interested in the subject. Furthermore, along with David Kolb's seminal work on this subject, this book is a must-read for all those involved in designing and delivering executive development programmes.

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