

Learning from Experience

It is a core assumption of lab training that we do not learn from experience itself; we learn from disciplined reflection on experience. The learning process is really one of learning about our experience from a structured reflection on our experience. The method offered here is called --- E - I - A - G.

E – Experience

I – Identify

A – Analyze

G – Generalize

This has been a core learning method in lab training. With adaptation it has been used in team development and Organization Development efforts.

Experience – This is anything that happens in the group. The behavior of the group or people within the group becomes the starting place for learning.

Identify – A specific behavior or pattern of behaviors is selected as a starting point. The group needs to identify what happens, when it happens, etc. The objective is for all the group members to adequately recall the experience so they can all contribute to the learning process. The assumption is that everyone may be able to learn from the experience.

Analyze – The group explores and examines the experience that has been identified. The group may look at the impact or effect of the behavior(s); sharing how they felt, what they thought, how they acted, etc. Judgments each person made may be shared – was the behavior helpful or hindering to the group's life and work? Analysis may include relating the experience to some theory, model or research?

Generalize – This is an opportunity for group members to state what they have learned; to generalize what has been learned into other situations. Based on the analysis, the members state what they might do in a similar situation, what they might have done differently in this situation, what conclusions they have drawn, etc. Members will not necessarily share the same learnings. In lab training two norms are useful in the “Generalization” discussion. First – Each person has his or her own learning. That learning has its own validity. It doesn't need to be shared by others to be legitimate. Second – It is acceptable for members to ask each other for information about the basis for stated learnings or generalizations.

The Reflection Process

First, be clear about roles

Name those in the group who share, first hand, the experience being explored. These are the people who will need to do most of the work in the process and draw the learnings. Others serve in a support role -- offering suggestions to consider based on similar experiences and the common skills and knowledge they share. In a training group it is usually best for the learning process if the experience being reflected on is shared by all group members.

E - Experience

This is the experience you have already had. It is the base for the process. The disciplined learning process really starts with **I - Identify**

I - Identify

An event in the life of the group that you want to use to learn from.

1. Select an event.
2. Describe the event so everyone understands what is being discussed.
3. Each person that was present during the event share what they saw, heard, felt. What behavior did you observe in yourself and others?

A - Analyze

Think about what happened.

1. Share about the event -- Concerns Likes
2. What helped or hindered the group
 - in terms of its task?
 - in terms of its trust?
 - in terms of ___?
3. What was the effect on you? What did you say and do? What were your feelings and thoughts?
4. Use appropriate theory, models or research to explore the event.

G - Generalize

State what you have learned

1. What would you do in a similar situation in the future? What would you repeat? What would you do differently?
2. State anything you have learned.

Learning from Experience: An Alternative Use of EIAG

The group goes through these steps in a disciplined process. It may help to have a designated facilitator and to use newsprint to record the group's thinking.

A. Identify the experience

1. Select an event in the group's experience to reflect upon and learn from.
2. Describe the event (do not try to resolve issues of "true and false", if people have different descriptions, receive them all)
 - a. who was involved?
 - b. what happen, what was the sequence of events, what did we see, hear?
 - c. what did people feel, think?

B. Analyze the experience

1. What assessment do people have of what happened? The concern here is with the results, outcome or consequences of the event and what effected the outcome. You might put the following on newsprint.

Outcome/Results of the Experience

NOT						VERY
SATISFIED	1	2	3	4	5	SATISFIED

What helped/hindered the group during the event.

2. We are also interested in the consequences of people's behavior during the event.

Compare the effects, impact, consequences of people's behavior during the event and --

- Its relationship to the group's goals, norms, results, etc.
For example -- "I think that my standing up and beginning to record on the newsprint when Harry began to 'tear up', violated our norm of respecting each others feelings and contributions."
- People's intentions; the effect the person hoped the behavior would have
For example -- "By remaining silent I hoped to avoid further upsetting Peter. What happen was that Peter's frustration grew and the group was unable to continue its work."

C. Generalize

This involves both drawing any conclusions based on the analysis and identifying what the group or individuals might do in a similar situation.

1. Each person share what they might do differently in a similar situation. And/or
2. The group brainstorm a list of what it would "wish" for in a similar situation. Each person then identifies which of the "wishes" they could and are willing to do something about. And/or
3. Each person share "What I have learned ...+about myself" +about how groups function"

Learning From Experience: Worksheet

Sometimes it is useful to have group members use a worksheet in doing the EIAG.

A. The group -- Identify a significant event that it wants to explore

B. Each person uses this worksheet in an individual exploration

1. During the event what did you

- Observe?
- Feel?
- Think?

2. What did you do during the event; what was your behavior?

3. What did you see as your choices at the time; what choices were you aware of? Was there something you thought of doing and now wish you had?

4. How did you block yourself from acting? What messages did you give yourself that interfered with your ability to act?

5. Is there anything you wish you had done differently?

C. Share what you want to share with the group.

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