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The experiential cycle

Kolb defined learning in the context of a cycle: the experiential cycle.

This cycle includes two axes, representing two dimensions of learning on a continuum. The vertical axis symbolizes the collection of information and the ability to integrate it, while the horizontal axis represents the ability to analyze and transform the information recently acquired.

This learning model illustrates a process comprising four stages (concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation), forming a loop that can be repeated indefinitely, which are all essential steps to acquiring new knowledge. The learner in a learning or problem-solving situation is going through an experience. He then moves from one stage of the cycle to the other.

1. The individual first goes through the stage of **concrete experience**. He gets involved. He collects information through the emotions he is feeling and by actually carrying out an action. He forms an opinion based on the feelings he experienced.

2. At the stage of **reflective observation**, the individual transforms the information collected during the concrete experience. He makes observations on the experience and reflects on their significance. He observes the situation and analyzes it from various perspectives. This reflection brings about new knowledge. The individual does not proceed to motor actions during this stage.

3. At the stage of **abstract conceptualization**, the individual collects information through his thought process. He analyzes, frames concepts and formulates generalizations that integrate his observations, reflections and experiences. He establishes links with theory and synthesizes information to understand the problem.

4. At the **active experimentation** stage, the individual tests out his new theories. Once done, this new test will inform the way he reacts or functions in a similar situation or experience in the future. The individual is now ready to face new experiences and to restart the cycle.

The cycle forms a loop that can be repeated indefinitely, which is why it is also called the **learning spiral.**

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Each loop constitutes a complete cycle. For a learning to be long-lasting, the learner must go through the whole cycle. Otherwise, knowledge will not be as effectively integrated.

For each cycle, the supervisor fosters the transfer of knowledge to various learning contexts, for instance with a different client.

As the trainee evolves in his placement, his learnings and knowledge transfer will become more refined. The trainee will be able to apply his new knowledge to different settings, and with various clienteles and equipment.

(Armstrong, 2005; Armstrong & Mahmud, 2008; Fleming et al., 2011; Fortin, Chevrier, Leblanc & Théberge, 2000; Hagan, 2011; Kolb, 1984, as quoted by Armstrong & Mahmud, 2008; Ethridge & Branscomb, 2009; Gemmell, 2011; van Beek & Malone, 2007; Kolb & Kolb, 2009; Kolb & Kolb, 2008; Kolb, 2015; Sims & Sims, 2006; Wolfsfeld & Haj-Yahia, 2010)