Title: ***Can experiential learning be achieved in asynchronous online education? An exercise on resistance to change***

Abstract

Experiential learning is a challenge in asynchronous eLearning contexts. This paper presents an online, asynchronous adaptation of the activity developed by Bridgman (2020) in a face-to-face context as a way for students to experience resistance to change. We asked online students to move from one communicative tool to the next with little explanation of the reasons for such changes. Afterward, we stimulated reflection and discussion on the experience to learn about resistance to change in organizations.

Keywords: experiential learning; resistance to change; e-learning

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Introduction

The Covid 19 pandemic has pushed many teachers to move all their previously face-to-face activity to an online context, forcing them to rethink their teaching strategies. A common strategy has been to maintain the synchrony of face-to-face classes, transferring them directly to the videoconference format. However, eLearning offers the possibility of asynchrony, making it easier for each person to be involved in the teaching-learning process when it suits him/her best, enhancing the balance between the different personal, training, and professional activities of both students and teachers.

The main difficulty of asynchronous education for teachers is that it requires detailed prior planning, especially when we want students to live experiences through dynamics that, in contrast, require little preparation in a face-to-face class or even in online synchronous sessions. The activity presented in this paper sets out to overcome the challenge of promoting learning from experience in asynchronous education: a fully online asynchronous workshop designed for students to experience resistance to organizational change.

The exercise we present is an adaptation of the activity Bridgman (2020) designed for a classroom setting, simulating an organizational restructuring. In Bridgman's activity, students had to reorganize themselves in multiple ways, moving physically in the classroom, under the teacher's directions. To achieve a similar effect in an asynchronous eLearning context where students cannot physically move around, we asked students to make a series of tool changes within an evaluable activity.

Theoretical Foundation and Teaching Implications

We based the activity's design on the experiential learning cycle, which has at its core John Dewey's concept of continuous experience and interaction. Experiential learning focuses on nurturing the student's curiosity through engaging learning experiences so that they want to extend beyond the boundaries of their knowledge (Weinstein, 2019). Kolb (1984; p. 28) described it as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience."

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle consists of four steps: 1) concrete experience-the students engage in new experiences; 2) reflective observation-they reflect on and observe those experiences from various perspectives; 3) abstract conceptualization-they create concepts from which to draw new implications and theories that can be developed, and 4) active experimentation-they apply the steps derived from the implications and theories to experimentation.

The main challenge in our activity was to define the first stage so that the students would experience resistance to change in an asynchronous setting and in a relatively short time that would allow the other stages of the experiential learning process to proceed. Stages 2 to 4 are relatively easy to design and dynamize in an asynchronous learning environment.

In this paper, we do not focus so much on the lessons on resistance to change derived from the activity, which can follow Bridgman's guidelines (2020) as on the specific dynamics of the activity itself in an online, asynchronous context. The methodology we present enables the experiential learning of resistance to change to be developed through a simple process that is perfectly adapted to asynchronous online training. It uses tools usually available on virtual campuses or free web versions and is suitable for both undergraduate and graduate levels.

Learning objectives

The primary learning objectives we expect students to achieve with this activity are as follows:

- To experience resistance to change in order to identify the main behavioral and affective elements involved.

- To reflect on individual responses to change that is not understood.

- Analyze change experiences to identify common elements in the management of organizational environments.

- Develop strategies to manage resistance to change among the people involved in a change.

Beyond the learning objectives, the activity aimed to determine if the students' beliefs about resistance to change would evolve after our online, asynchronous experiential activity.

Exercise Overview

This exercise was part of the Change Management course in an Executive MBA in a fully eLearning format. The class consisted of 24 students.

The way to provoke resistance to change in the activity consisted in asking the students for a set of changes in the communication tool they had to use in an assessed exercise. We presented the changes in succession until the point at which there was sufficient resistance from the students to terminate the activity, or up to a maximum of 5 changes.

We presented the activity as a one-week Workshop on Resistance to Change in an asynchronous format. In the workshop, we asked the students to work on a case

study on resistance to change in a real-world organization and analyze their beliefs

about change resistance. We asked the students to present similar information in the

following virtual classroom tools during the first five days of the Workshop,

sequentially: Forum, Discussion, Microblog, Google Slides, and Video.

Parallel to the activity, we asked the students to write a journal to comment upon

the activity, to which the other students and the course faculty had access. The journal's

purpose was to encourage student reflection and learning and provide teachers with

clues about possible reactions and resistance to successive tool changes.

The sequencing of the activity was as follows:

- Before the Workshop: from the first day of the course, we communicated to

  the students about the workshop's existence and the specific conditions of

  required participation. One of the indications we gave them was that they

  had to connect daily into the classroom to follow the proposed dynamics.

- Days 1 to 5: As activity 0, the students answered a questionnaire about their

  beliefs about change, both personal and professional. Activity 1 consisted of

  answering questions about the proposed case study. From day 1 to day 5,

  we asked the students to answer the case questions on five different virtual

  classroom tools: the forum area, the discussion area, the microblog, Google

  Slides, and a video recording.

- Day 6 - We unveiled the whole experience with an explanatory message on

  the classroom board. Firstly, we informed the students of the ultimate goal

  of the proposed tool changes. Secondly, an asynchronous individual

  reflection and a group discussion were conducted in which we asked the

  students to contribute their thoughts on what they had experienced and

  learned.

- Day 7, closure of the experiential workshop - Synchronous session: In a synchronous session, we discussed the experiential experiment with the students and presented a guiding solution to the case study. At the end of the session, the students again answered the questionnaire about their beliefs on resistance to change to determine whether their perceptions had changed after the workshop.

As explained above, the Workshop was developed following Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model, as follows:

1. Students experience the continuous changes asked of them in the activity - Use of classroom tools.

2. Students comment on what happened, how they felt, and why - Joint reflection in the forum.

3. Case study solution, analysis of the resistance to change experienced - Submission of the individual report.

4. Introduction of the literature on resistance to change and analysis of the experience - Synchronous session.

Session Description

At the beginning of the session, we would like to prompt participants to go through a process similar to that of our Workshop students. The participants will have to perform a small task (introducing themselves and briefly describing why they are interested in our session) on different online tools sequentially without explaining the need to repeat the task in different ways.

Following this initial experience, we will describe the activity that we carried out in our online course. Afterward, we will open a discussion about the possibilities of

online experiential learning and the improvements or additional ideas suggested by this experience. We propose using oral dialogue and chat comments to enhance the participation of people with different levels of extraversion.

References

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