

Four Fundamental Types of Workshop Learning Activities

This summary is based on Chapter 4 of Workshops: Designing and Facilitating Experiential Learning by Jeff E. Brooks-Harris & Susan R. Stock-Ward (1999). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

When designing a workshop, it is often helpful to use different types of activities that will meet the needs of participants with different learning styles and, when presented together, will provide a complete learning experience. We suggest that most workshops use four different types of teaching-learning activities which are based on David Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning and learning styles. This is a brief description of the four types of workshop activities:

Reflecting on Experience activities are used to capture the motivation, imagination and energy of a workshop audience. Reflecting activities encourage workshop participants to look back on their own personal or professional behavior in a way that prepares them for new learning and change. Reflection is often used at the beginning of a workshop or at a transition from one topic to another. To design a reflecting activity, it is important to identify the past experience that you want to invoke and to do so in an engaging way that can be linked to the workshop topic. A simple and adaptable reflecting activity is to have participants break into pairs and briefly answer questions about their past experience related to the topic.

Assimilating and Conceptualizing activities are used to provide workshop participants with new information. These activities can provide outside information in the form of theories, data and facts, or can inform the group about itself or individuals about themselves. These activities also encourage workshop participants to apply concepts to their own lives. To design assimilating and conceptualizing activities, you need to decide on the content it is most important to teach and to present this in a dynamic and comprehensible manner. Demonstrations, questionnaires and brief lectures are frequently used to encourage assimilation in workshops.

Experimenting and Practicing activities encourage participants to use knowledge in a practical way. These activities provide an opportunity for participants to practice and involve themselves in new behaviors and skills. The workshop can provide participants a safe environment in which to try out new things before putting them into practice in the "real world." To

design experimenting activities, it is important to identify the specific skills you want participants to acquire and to provide ways for these skills to be practiced in a useful way. Role plays are commonly used as experimenting activities in workshops.

Planning for Application activities provide a stimulus for implementing and utilizing new learning outside the workshop context. Planning activities prepare participants for and increase the likelihood of transfer of learning. These activities are often used at the conclusion of a workshop or when the focus of the workshop is about to shift from one topic to another. To design planning activities, it is important to identify ways to have participants look toward the future and identify specific ways to put new learning into practice. One way to do this is to have each participant complete an action plan at the conclusion of a workshop.

Reference: Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

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