

Experiential Learning: Expanding Leadership Self-Efficacy



SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING
AND TECHNOLOGY

INDIANA UNIVERSITY-PURDUE UNIVERSITY
Indianapolis

Jennie Pitman · Brandon Sorge · Katrenia Reed Hughes

Introduction

Experiential Learning is a process of learning based on reflection of experiences and the capacity to develop new behaviors and habits from those experiences. Experiential learning has played a role in educational, athletic, musical, personal, community, and cultural fields, in both behavioral and work. Being able to comprehend the learning experience and put those skills to use to expand upon the ability to adapt to changes in the environment is an important product of experiential learning (Kolb, 2014).

Leadership is about relationships, behaviors, skills, or processes of influence (Northouse, 2018). Universal leadership attributes that are imperative include: Credibility, Competence, Ability to Inspire, Vision, and Emotional Intelligence (EI) (Green & Leonard, 2016).

By bringing experiential learning into leadership, interpersonal skills are cultivated to create a leaders ability to connect with others in a positive way that provides the opportunity to work prosperously with a wide range of individuals. Responsibility and dependability feed into building trust and credibility within individuals or groups. Motivation and optimism lead to inspiration. Patience, flexibility, and empathy lead to effective conflict resolution and communication skills. These are all soft skills that lead to the development of effective interpersonal skills.

Table 1. The Five Leader Imperatives of the Leadership Model.

Credibility	Competence	Inspiration	Vision	Emotional Intelligence
Ethics or personal accountability	Discernibility	Enthusiastic	Commitment	Resilience
Honesty	Perception	Energetic	Sense of Direction	Communication & Listening
Responsibility	Conflict resolution	Passionate	Professionalism	Happiness
Trust	Problem-solving	Optimistic	Decisive	Personality traits
Integrity	Relationship building	Genuine	Work ethic	Sense of humor
Sincerity	Assessment & Evaluation	Courageous	Concern for the future	Assertiveness, Flexibility, Empathy

Adapted from (Green and Leonard, 2016)

Enacting Experiential Learning

Enacting Experiential Learning in Interpersonal Skills

This graduate-level Interpersonal Skills for Leaders course followed the experiential learning process throughout the course. Each year the course was offered as a both online and in-person hybrid. Class met every other week while alternating between in-person/online and all online. During the first course meetings students develop a set of class norms that provide the rules of the class and their interactions with one another. The norms have been similar each year and are also displayed on the screen before each course meeting. An example of class norms are:

- Inspire and motivate each other
- Respect each other
- Be non-judgemental
- Do not interrupt one another
- Keep all discussions confidential
- Keep an open mind
- Show honesty and integrity
- Communicate openly
- Innovate
- Encourage one another

Peer review and self-reflection played a consistent and ongoing role with each submitted assignment. As stated by many students, but exemplified by the following student end of course reflection:

The thing I learned that I really wanted to mention, though it is not from reading others assignments, but is their reviews of mine. Everyone had kind words and was supportive of my struggles to develop my public speaking and reading their thoughts and processes was a great way to see different views. I can take these tips and tricks and utilize them to make continued progress. So I have learned about others in this class is that even though their goals did not fall in the same category almost everyone struggles or has struggled in public speaking. Whether it is in a large group or a small group it takes some kind courage to speak their mind and to continue to push through their fears. This feedback that I received helped in the way that I think more others that struggle and it makes me feel at ease knowing it is not that unusual.

Results & Discussion

Table 2. Pre- and Post-Construct Means with Effect Size.

Construct	Pre-Survey		Post-Survey		Cohen's d
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Credibility	37.43	3.522	38.68	2.855	.329
Competence	42.71	4.421	44.68	3.289	.600
Ability to Inspire	34.14	4.919	36.82	3.722	.718
Vision	36.07	4.868	37.93	3.800	.588
EI	47.93	5.773	50.61	4.349	.622
Overall	198.14	20.869	208.71	15.192	.713

Twenty-eight students from two offerings of the course completed both the pre- and post-survey. All constructs, but credibility, showed statistically significant increases and a moderate effect size.

Figure 3. Paired-Sample t-test results by construct.

	Mean	Std Dev	Std Error	95% Confidence Int of Difference		t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
Credibility	-1.250	3.797	.718	-2.722	.222	-1.742	27	.093
Competence	-1.964	3.271	.618	-3.233	-.696	-3.177	27	.004
Inspiration	-2.679	3.732	.705	-4.126	-1.231	-3.798	27	.001
Vision	-1.857	3.159	.597	-3.082	-.632	-3.111	27	.004
EI	-2.679	4.312	.815	-4.351	-1.006	-3.287	27	.003
Total	-10.571	14.831	2.803	-16.322	-4.821	-3.772	27	.001

These results provide insight into the role experiential learning can play in enhancing leadership self-efficacy through experiential learning related to the development of interpersonal skills. In their reflection, the majority of students commented that reflection on what they wrote, on what their peers wrote, and their peers reflection on their own work played an important role in their growth (see student quote in Enacting Experiential Learning).

By providing student leaders the opportunity to experience and reflect upon their skills as a leader, while also getting input from their peers, provides a unique change for leadership and interpersonal skills growth in a minimal period of time.

Methods

Participants

Race/Ethnicity	Gender	
	Male	Female
White	2	12
Black/African American	3	2
Asian	2	7

Data Analysis

- Paired sample t-test were run to compare pre- and post- course Leadership Skills self-efficacy.
- Cohen's d was calculated to look at the effect size between pre- and post-survey responses

Instrument

The Leadership Skills Instrument was used to collect student leadership self-efficacy data. This survey contains sub-constructs of:

- Credibility (6 questions),
- Competence (7 questions),
- Ability to inspire (6 questions),
- Vision (6 questions),
- Emotional intelligence (8 questions).

Questions asked the individual to rate themselves across a continuum based upon a word pair. For example, unethical and ethical would be presented along a continuum of 7 areas for ranking oneself between them.

References

- Green, W. S. M., & Leonard, E. E. (2016). *Leadership intelligence: Navigating to your true north*. Rowman & Littlefield.
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