

Enhancing Deep Learning: Lessons From the Introduction of Learning Teams in Management Education in France

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Abstract

Drawing from the reflective teaching and learning practices recommended in influential publications on learning styles, experiential learning, deep learning, and dialogue, the authors tested the concept of “learning teams” in the framework of a leadership program implemented for the first time in a top French management school (*Grande Ecole*). Qualitative feedback and personal observations on the implementation and outcomes of using this new learning paradigm reveal that although the steps from teaching to learning initially tested for MBA students in the United States are widely accepted, there were unexpected obstacles and opportunities in setting up the model in France. Some of these differences can be attributed to culture, particularly to immensely different educational philosophies that shape attitudes and norms within French classrooms and to the notion of learning itself, which is normalized by the social expectations of careers in management forged in French history. This article provides the theoretical basis of the particular learning model tested, describes the conditions

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within which it was implemented in one French *Grande Ecole*, and reports unexpected obstacles and favorable outcomes of the teaching/learning experiences from a cross-cultural perspective. The authors conclude with recommendations on implementing learning models across cultures.

Keywords

cultural case study, deep learning, conversational learning, dialogue, learning team, learning manager

Many observers of higher education have decried the prevalence of superficial approaches to learning that are increasingly vocationally focused and grade oriented—an issue particularly true for business education. Management programs have relied heavily on the traditional information transfer model to deliver authoritative scientific knowledge through lecture-based classes. In the 1990s, MBA programs were criticized for being too focused on abstract learning. MBA graduates were viewed as

(1) too analytical, not practical and action oriented; (2) lacking interpersonal and, in particular, communication skills; (3) parochial, not global in their thinking and values; (4) having exceedingly high expectations about their first job after graduation; (5) not oriented toward information resources and systems; and (6) not working well in groups. (Boyatzis, Cowen, & Kolb, 1995, p. 4)

These criticisms and challenges to management education extended beyond North America and influenced educators across national and geographic boundaries who were already concerned about the impact of their programs on student learning. Inspired by Boyatzis et al.'s (1995) influential account of steps on a journey from teaching to learning, EDHEC Business School in France initiated substantial revisions of its graduate degree curriculum based on leadership competency development (Boyatzis, 1982) and experiential learning (D. A. Kolb, 1984). Experiential learning was adopted as the school's philosophy of learning, and to deepen student learning, student learning teams facilitated by faculty "learning managers" were introduced into the competency-based, experiential curriculum.

This article explains how this innovative program, inspired by a U.S. model, was actually implemented within the French educational system by the EDHEC Business School. It explains the challenges, opportunities, achievements, and difficulties encountered. One especially intriguing aspect is the emergent

learning gained through the experience in this case study complemented by a theory-based analysis presented here. In addition, this case makes a substantial contribution to the management literature by displaying the integration of experiential learning and deep learning theory and practice. Although both these theoretical constructs are well known, very rarely are they linked (Border, 2007; Dummer, Cook, Parker, Barrett, & Hull, 2008) much less integrated, either from a theoretical perspective or as an implementation outcome. This case study makes a unique contribution to the literature by beginning to build this theoretical integration through the implementation of a program in a cross-cultural context.

We begin by briefly explaining the particular deep learning, experiential theories, and learning concepts on which the project was built. To set the case study in its context, we then elaborate on the distinctions of French culture relevant to the case and provide a brief description of EDHEC Business School and the challenges of cross-cultural learning. Then we describe the development of the new Masters in Management curriculum with team learning, the EDHEC learning teams, and evaluate how they worked from the faculty and student perspectives. We conclude with lessons learned and recommendations for using team dialogue to facilitate deep learning in management education across cultures.

Deep Learning and Experiential Learning

In experiential learning theory, learning is defined as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience” (D. A. Kolb, 1984, p. 41). The learning model portrays two dialectically related modes of grasping experience—Concrete Experience and Abstract Conceptualization—and two dialectically related modes of transforming experience—Reflective Observation and Active Experimentation. For decades extensive research has extended the usefulness and understanding of experiential learning (Bedford, 2006; Coyle-Rogers & Putman, 2006; Kayes, Kayes, & Kolb, 2005; A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2009; Koliba & Lathrop, 2007; Sims & Sims, 2006).

The spiral of learning from experience described in experiential learning theory (ELT; D. A. Kolb, 1984) can help learners “learn how to learn.” By consciously following a recursive cycle of experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting, they can increase their learning power. (A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2009, p. 297)

In this article, we propose that deep learning is a kind of learning that fully integrates the following four modes of the experiential learning cycle: experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting.

In the tradition of research developed by Ramsden (1992), Biggs (1987, 1992), and Entwistle (1981), deep learning is contrasted with surface learning. In this framework, surface learning focuses on accumulation of information and memorization for extrinsic reasons such as getting a good grade. Deep learning is more intrinsically motivated, integrated, reflective, and complex. Border (2007) has argued that the terms *surface* and *deep* have often been used superficially in education and that experiential learning theory (D. A. Kolb, 1984) provides a more substantive and usable definition of deep learning.

Following Jung's theory that adult development moves from a specialized way of adapting toward holistic integrated approaches, in deep learning the movement from specialization to integration involves a creative tension among the four learning modes. It is portrayed as an idealized learning cycle or spiral where the learner "touches all the bases"—experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting—in recursive processes that are responsive to what is being learned and to the context in which it is occurring.

Deep learning encompasses three recursive levels. At the first level, learning is performance oriented, emphasizing two learning modes of the specialized learning styles. The second level is interpretative and learning oriented, involving three learning modes; and the third level is integrative and development oriented, involving all four modes in a holistic process. The traditional lecture course, for example, emphasizes first-level learning through the modes of reflection and abstraction, involving little action (e.g., multiple choice tests that assess memory of concepts) and little relation to personal experience. Adding more extensive learning assessments that involve practical application of concepts prompts the second level, as the action mode supplements reflection and abstraction to deepen conceptual understanding. Further addition of learning opportunities and collective and individual reflection on personal experiences, such as internships or field projects, creates the potential for third-level integrative learning (D. A. Kolb, 1984). The collective reflection through team conversations can stimulate deeper interpretative learning. Linking interpretive, adaptive consideration of concrete experiences to the conceptual material adds the fourth learning mode through completion of the learning spiral. This integrated approach is further reinforced by the five stages of development toward expertise proposed by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) and articulately elaborated by Jones (2008) when a novice gradually incorporates more observation, practice, and experience eventually developing integrated expertise.

Team Learning

Recent research suggests that properly organized and facilitated student learning teams can generate deep learning. Mickelson, Knight, and Fink (2004) have developed an approach called team-based learning, which they argue will promote “the deep learning all teachers strive for.” Kayes, Kayes, Kolb, and Kolb (2004) have developed an experiential approach to team learning to develop deep learning and “executive consciousness” through recursive movement through the learning cycle by team members (Kayes et al., 2005). Likewise, if we broaden understanding substantially, then assumptions need to be called into question, which is the basis of double-loop learning (Argyris, 1999) that can be supported in the context of team learning. The opportunity for learning teams of students to engage in reflective conversations and explore different experiences and differing perspectives is directly related to learning and improving performance (Baker, 2009; Kayes, Kayes, & Kolb, 2005). Creating a receptive conversational space for these kinds of conversations, however, is essential (Baker, 2009). Furthermore, the importance of trusting relationships among students has been documented to be an important element of both learning and performance in teams (Edmondson, 1996, 1999) as well as other components that influenced the development of the program in this case study (Baker, 2004; Clark & Gibb, 2006; Harrison & Akinc, 2000; Kalliath & Laiken, 2006; Ramsey, 2002).

The French Cultural and Educational Milieu

We offer a brief introduction to the French culture and educational context as it relates to the case study. Leadership is perceived differently in France than in the United States. Today’s French educational system is republican, secular, and still strongly Napoleonic (i.e., individualistic and focused on academic excellence). The history and culture have forged an educational system with intense competition, selection through academic exams, and a hierarchy of schools serving different occupational purposes (Witte, 2010). The most prestigious schools, often engineering based, are called *Grandes Ecoles*, and they train France’s administrative elite (Schmidt, 1993).

These schools were mostly Paris centered (early 19th century), but now the *Grandes Ecoles* have expanded throughout France. They function under the control of the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research. This centralized education has its prime impact on secondary schools, which in turn influence higher education through strict policies regarding the types of learning considered credible. This approach is then further reinforced by the

eligibility criteria adopted for the selection of students by the *Grandes Ecoles* themselves.

The French educational system places an early emphasis on competition and selection, which is accentuated at the secondary school level. Mastery of French and mathematics are the two main criteria for selection (Pauca-Caceres, 2009). Having successfully completed their baccalaureate at ages 17 to 18, students seeking entry to the *Grandes Ecoles* spend 2 years preparing in one of the French preparatory schools, known in France as a *Prepa*, for the highly competitive entrance examination to the prestigious institutions of the *Grandes Ecoles*. This path is widely considered to be the “royal road” in preparing for learning at the higher educational level. Authoritarian discipline prevails in the *Prepas*; work pressure is considerable. Students conform to achieve the required standard for excellence in mathematics as a requisite for demonstrating rationalism and scientific forms of expression and analysis. The preparation is a solitary process where each student competes against others for a limited number of places. Being able to conform is inherent to the necessary socialization, and acceptance denotes entry into an elite group with access to the best higher academic studies, to social status, and to future jobs.

Schmidt (1993) explains how the top ranks of the majority of the top 200 firms in France are “dominated by products of the elite schools” (p. 420). Furthermore, the French theoretician Michel Crozier has written extensively on how this kind of education of French leaders paralyzes change in France. Specifically, Crozier and Tilliette (1995) denounce

education that renders any passion for deepening knowledge too dangerous to be tolerated. Students learn to work quickly and with specific method. They store considerable amounts of diverse knowledge. But they know what they must master, all too quickly and too early, and they acquire a belief that they must have a reply to everything. Before gaining any practical experience, they acquire an encyclopedic mind, a priority for delivering elegant solutions, and a logical conformist frame of reference that is difficult to shake. (Translated by one of the article’s authors, pp. 26-27)

Even so, it is important to recognize elements of the existing educational context as it developed overtime through history in its locale.

The EDHEC Business School

As mentioned previously, the *Grandes Ecoles* system is grounded in the French tradition of exceedingly selective education for high-level management

positions. This educational model is built on organization principles and classical 20th-century organizational theories that considered the corporation rational and, as such, gave birth to the development of hypo-deductive teaching, grounded in the fragmented components of management.

The two characteristics of this model, selectivity and elitism, which thrive in a competitive context, are reinforced by France's "high power distance" (Hofstede, 1991), which tends to favor an authoritarian management culture and an educational system where the "taught" receive knowledge as truth not to be questioned. As a result, those who succeed and access a *Grande Ecole* are the "good students," able intellectually but with minimal personal inquiry or vision and whose goal is primarily to acquire their degree. The degree, in turn, will permit them to step into the job market in a position of power on the merits of their academic journey. Ranked in France's top five *Grandes Ecoles* in management education, the EDHEC Business School offers a masters degree to students selected for their academic brilliance and their potential to hold management positions within leading global corporations.

In November 2002, the school's board of directors nominated a faculty team from the newly instituted Managerial Competencies and Leadership Chair to actuate a renewed focus *on leadership learning with the managerial competencies that underpin this process*. As with most business schools, apart from formal lectures, managerial competencies were only tacitly present within EDHEC's curricular design prior to this initiative. For example, there was no specific time or place to create links with what students had observed on company visits, theory from their lectures, internships, or opportunities to debrief or reflect on studies abroad, entrepreneurial projects, sustainable developmental projects, or humanitarian work.

The nominated faculty team, two of whom are authors of this article, chose to steer away from further formal leadership teaching of the existing expert-driven model. We designed experiential learning leadership workshops and seminars and, above all, created a context for leadership learning through inquiry, self-knowledge, and an appreciation of diversity. The challenge was to make the intrinsic, yet tacitly understood, competencies explicit in order to intentionally engage students in developing them. Thus, learning teams (LTs) were created as a "container" (Isaacs, 1993) or "receptive space" (Baker, 2009; Baker, Jensen, & Kolb, 2002) that would make possible the quality and sensitivity of reflection needed for "deeper learning." Furthermore, these teams are a medium for integrating conceptual and experiential components of the curriculum whether in the classroom or in work placements.

Seen within its *Grande Ecole* tradition, creating LTs was an ambitious move that was rewarded in 2005 by the French *Grandes Ecoles* Business School "Grand Prix" Trophy for Pedagogical Innovation.

Challenges Adapting Experiential and Competency Learning Across Cultures

Given the centralized, expert-focused French educational system, adapting an experiential competency-based approach created challenges as well as opportunities. A brief description of three areas that especially required adaptation is given below.

1. Authoritarian, top-down approach to management discourages inductive learning.
 - The professor, as expert, is reinforced by France's high-power distance culture (Hofstede, 1991). The legitimacy of a professor of management is based on the ability to teach solid material that guarantees certainty for the learner.
 - The professor provides the "answer to everything," modeling a deductive, expert-driven pedagogy with a large "gap" between teacher and taught, manager and managed. This stance is in direct opposition to inductive modes of learning built on assumptions that each person has inherent knowledge, even if tacit, meaning that both teacher and taught are learners.
2. Elite, noninteractive model of learning discourages group learning.
 - French students are encouraged to work alone instead of sharing their ideas or experience of learning with others. The French academic system favors students being passive (acquiring data to give it back later) in contrast to reflection, which is much more proactive.
 - The elite, expert-focused approach does not foster exchange or mutual inquiry. There is little opportunity for "insight" from conversation or collective reflection. Studying to pass exams has been the foremost goal rather than serving as a springboard to applying learning in a context with other people. Paradoxically, once students reach their *Grande Ecole*, most assignments are in groups for which they are ill prepared.
3. Didactic, reserved approach to learning discourages self-disclosure.
 - Self-disclosure is perceived as unusual, uncomfortable, and without any useful purpose. What in some cultures would be perceived as "appropriate self-disclosure" might be seen in the French *Grandes Ecoles* as a lack of social grace or education.
 - Being authentic is also troublesome. For example, the *Prepas* prepare students not only for competitive entrance exams to the *Grandes Ecoles* but also for a personal interview where their

authentic motivation for entry to the *Grande Ecole* is questioned. Because of the high stakes associated with the interview, the *Prepas* train students to present themselves to advantage emphasizing what the interviewer is seeking rather than reflecting on who they are and what their aspirations are. Thus, entering the *Grande Ecole* after 2 years at a *Prepa* is a cultural shock because they regard themselves as a “product” having had little experience with self-inquiry.

- Given the intense competition of the *Prepas*, students have generally not been asked to disclose or show interest in another’s progress. The *other* is a competitor. They needed to win and favored the *other* losing. Doubt had to be eliminated. Thus, reflection, inquiry, sharing experience, and reviewing is alien to the norms of their specific elitist culture.

Although some of the same dynamics are certainly present in U.S. schools, such as an emphasis on rational thinking and deductive learning, the degree to which they dominate the context is markedly different. Having class discussion, participating in group projects, and gaining experience through work and internships are much more common for the typical U.S. student. Moreover, although intense competition certainly prevails among certain groups of U.S. students, there is no U.S. parallel to the *Grande Ecole* in the French context.

Creating the Learning Team in EDHEC Business School

Now we will proceed with describing the new program instituted in EDHEC Business School beginning with the role of the Learning Manager (LM) vis-à-vis the learning summaries and LM meetings as reported by the LMs, followed by the students’ experiences from their learning logs. All new students became members of an LT on entry in the program and remained in the same team until graduation. Each LT consisted of 12 students although smaller groups would have been preferred. However, the size was chosen to reduce the financial strain on the school that would be occasioned by smaller groups requiring more LMs. Within the LTs, and under the guidance of an LM, students were encouraged to question their entrenched beliefs, hone their managerial skills, and become attentive to diversity in the thinking, behavior, and decisions made by team members. They also focused on systemic thinking about what underpins actions, whether at school or at work, in France or abroad.

Students were not evaluated in their monthly LT meetings although attendance was obligatory. In learning summaries that were evaluated quarterly, students wrote about their awareness of what leadership entails and their observations or experience of a given competence. There was a focus on “critical incidents,” which were unexpected moments or events that had a particularly unusual character and that, with reflection, shed light on behaviors, thinking, or even hidden assumptions. Keeping track of observations, reading, challenges, or conversations in a “log book” (or reflective personal diary) was encouraged as it provided material for reflection and the learning summary. Reading and noting relevant insights from the study of a competence were also encouraged.

By using this approach, students were encouraged to be reflective to increase their self-awareness and learning through their LT experiences. One purpose of the learning summaries was to get the students to transit the learning cycle and deepen learning through personal reflection and reflective learning. Students were evaluated on the process as opposed to the content of their writing. LMs debriefed the summaries during the LT meeting.

This approach required a lot of support from the LMs (Noel, 2004). As described by Landry and Donnellon (1999), LTs were not based on assumptions that knowledge or learning is transmitted from the faculty as the expert. Instead, they rested on the recognition of varied interpretations and the transformational shifting of social power dynamics in the group.

The Learning Manager Role

At the launch of the program, there were 50 LTs requiring a core of 25 LMs, usually permanent faculty, prepared to take on the role, learn to do so, and agree to participate in review meetings regularly. An outside trainer prepared the future LMs for their role. Training emphasized a learner-focused approach to development, experiential learning, reflective learning, and mentoring principles (Borredon & Roux-Dufort, 1998; Megginson, Clutterbuck, Garvey, Stokes, & Garret-Harris, 2006; Raelin, 2006). Dialogic exchange, examining assumptions, and reviewing experience were included in the design (Bohm, 1990; Isaacs, 1993, 1999). One of the major things the authors learned from this case study (which is addressed later in the article) was the impact of the lack of experiential reinforcement in the training for mentoring, the lack of institutional emphasis on mentoring, and the lack of ongoing mentoring for LMs during implementation.

Finally, the greatest challenge entailed shifting the focus of the LM from an expert, deductive approach to a student-centered inductive andragogy

(Forrest & Peterson, 2006), where the LM would be a facilitator of learning as opposed to an expert within a managerial discipline. Crozier (1982) comments on the inadequacy of the expert, one-directional approach in France saying, “our method of teaching still thinks of learning as the communication of a preestablished body of knowledge, but it must be changed to experience in the real world” (p. 147). Because of the “expert” role attributed to faculty in France and at EDHEC Business School as well by its students, the facilitator role is countercultural, as are self-disclosure and consideration of all contributions as being equally valid. According to Crozier (1982), “the schools are not places where ideas are exchanged or enlightenment takes place” (p. 48) because of the distance between elites and nonelites—for example, such as professors and students—and the pressure to conform. Thus, this program had the potential to address some of these problems while presenting challenges as LMs and students had to learn new behaviors.

Learning Summaries

The learning summaries were an opportunity for stimulating dialogue within the team. As described above, students gave the LMs their logs for the LMs’ comments. Either the students took up the challenge to continue the exchange verbally in open forum during the LT meetings or they responded directly to their LM.

In his/her learning log, one student debriefed a seminar about managing meetings, creativity, and decision making. The LM commented,

It is because I know this seminar that I understand your observation. On reading I am drawn into what you experienced or observed. But I do not know what use this is to you yet, and maybe you do not know either. On the one hand, you need to continue your observation and experience and at the same time be building up some core questions or concepts which can be tested out in action. You will need to be more explicit about what you have learnt.

Unfortunately, the student did not pick up and respond to this comment. His internship, which came immediately after his learning summary, was a considerable disappointment as his ideals were shattered by the lack of corporate leadership. Thus, when the LT met, the subject was “coping with disappointment.” The LM’s point made about testing concepts and challenging questions was not discussed again. Yet, had the written exchange continued, the learning could have been better consolidated.

The same need for follow-up appears in the following LM's comment to a student:

We could look upon these summaries or reports as a "learning document" or a "review of learning" where the learner makes sense of their experience. In this review I do not see much sense-making in as much as there are few links made between the instances where you describe experience. So there are "bits" or "fragments" that do not come together. I doubt this summary has been enriching for you. It does not take you closer to real lucidity about yourself.

In terms of dialogue between the LM and the student, neither of these LM's comments led to further exchange. We learned that the learning summary needed to serve more as a springboard into further reflection as well as discussion or written dialogue between LM and learner. As such, from the LM's comments, the first student would be referring to what was observed in relation to what she/he is learning; in the second case, the student would be questioning what the LM meant or addressing what it means to be lucid. In both cases, the tentative exchange needed consolidating and further development.

Learning Manager Review Meetings and Experiences

Two Learning Manager Review meetings were held each year. Whereas the first review had a euphoric character to it, with LMs expressing surprised satisfaction as opposed to skepticism; the end-of-first-year assembly was more agitated and revealed unanticipated degrees of challenge. LMs said they "lacked guidance and support material," which had resulted in the following:

- *Prevailing anxiety and lack of confidence among LMs:* Most of the 25 LMs on the two campuses had no previous experience facilitating learning in this format.
- *Varying degrees of engagement:* Some LMs designed their meetings in response to the group, others according to their own vision or the reception given to them on meeting their team.
- *Undermining congruence and credibility:* Some LTs met for 2 hours, others for 15 minutes.
- *Lacking clarity regarding process:* There was little control or ongoing follow-up.

During these early review meetings, there was an exchange of anecdotes and frustration about not having been able to put their “mentoring” into practice, not having been able to take their learners into a reflective space, disbelief that the learning summaries served a purpose, and requests for more guidance or support material. For instance, one LM said,

During our LT training seminar, we had to talk about our own challenges or what we wanted to change. I find I don’t know how to do this with students. I ask questions, but they do not answer.

We had encouraged LMs to listen to students and allow questions to arise out of what was said rather than forcing them into an arbitrary study. As we listened to the LMs and read the logs, we were becoming aware, however, that they needed more support and guidance.

In addition, there were those who wanted a skills focus. Some wanted to be armed with articles, books, or research papers, whereas others preferred to focus on what emerged during the meeting. For example, the following exchange occurred in a review meeting as an LM said,

I am especially concerned about the LM role; I have to be seen as expert in my (Finance professor) role. When I am asked a question, I need to provide the perfect answer. Suddenly students see me as not having the answer. I do not know how to cope with that.

Another LM in the room responded,

I have the same problem. I am very uncomfortable when students ask me what they should be doing. I keep saying to myself that I need to provide a solution, and yet we have been asked not to do so.

The above exchange illustrated how difficult it was for some faculty to facilitate learning through deepening the question because they had little personal experience being a member of a reflective learning group. Thus, they had not learned through their own experience. Over the summer, we created Learning Manager Guidelines and included themes for each LT meeting. In the third LM Review meeting in December of the second year, an LM commented,

I find having themes very useful because I am not so lost as to what to say or what to ask. But I am still concerned about being seen as not having the answer.

Some LMs considered that LTs should not begin until students had work experience and a better understanding of what leadership and managerial competencies meant. Other faculty insisted that it was precisely because of the experience of the difficulties in the first year that in the second year the LT members would create actionable knowledge through their conversations. Not surprisingly, these paradoxical responses challenged our thinking.

We, the original instigators, came up against a managerial obstacle: We did not have enough credibility to assume a managerial function with the peer LMs. The project was launched on the incorrect assumptions that each LM would fully engage and that managing LT meetings was outside the jurisdiction of the instigators or their leader. Thus, the only place to develop the LM's role was during the review meeting because the mentoring component had developed inadequately. At the review meetings, the team of LMs had to learn to talk to one another and build a climate of trust (Baker, Jensen, & Kolb, 2002; Baker, Jensen, & Kolb, 2005) that would allow for their own deeper learning. Yet most of them lacked the prior experience to prepare themselves.

LMs observed that even if a given LT meeting was rich in reflection, there was no guarantee that during the next meeting students would engage in authentic exchanges, self-disclosure, listen to one another, or find their meetings a learning experience. They noted how entrenched defensive routines could be and the difficulty they and students had in entering skillful conversation. Yet there were times when judgment and self-defense were suspended and moments with reflective dialogue.

For instance, during one specific LT meeting when ethics was the topic, members transited observation of others, expressed concepts, examined their own and others' ethical actions, and considered possible applications of an emerging understanding of ethics. They increased their understanding of the role ethics plays in their managerial and business intentions. Most notable in this incident is that the deeper learning had an undeniable impact on all members of the group. The LM reported it this way:

When I started the meeting there was silence. Students sat round the table with their arms crossed, and it seemed to me that no one wanted to be there. For myself, I did not want to "rescue," so I asked them what they wanted to talk about: There was silence. Eventually I said that we could sit in silence, but this seemed a waste of time. It would be better to leave; if we had nothing to say, we would call the meeting to a close. . . . Several disagreed, saying they had come and wanted to stay but that talking was difficult without a theme or purpose. They were

not used to this. Unexpectedly, someone asked if we could talk about what ethics meant to them. The resulting exchange was one of the most memorable LT conversations we had that year. Some were dismayed at the values held by fellow team members. The impression differences made was considerable and was picked up again during the learning summaries over the following 2 years.

The LM's remarks in the team meeting were essential to deepening the team's learning, suggesting that this type of learning is inclusive, even if members will experience the "learning moment" differently.

From the case study, we understood that the deeper learning challenge was to encourage more engagement of faculty and students. It is a challenge because without experiencing the breakthrough into deeper learning, students and faculty may not have enough motivation to engage in a process such as that offered by the LT above.

As instigators, we had not adequately considered LM reasoning nor had we understood the degree of reluctance of highly skilled professors in having students reflect, listen, question, and engage in their own and peer development. This reluctance stemmed from their perception of themselves as experts in a field and yet unable to facilitate learning through this expertise. A frequent comment in the LM reviews was, "When I am in 'class,' I must have answers to everything; without having all the answers I am not credible." Yet others adapted and had rewarding experiences as in this report from one LM.

One day while I was doing my shopping in a city store, I heard a voice behind me cry "my learning manager!" It was the first time that I was recognized other than as a "professor." Here, I was identified as an "LM" in a positive way.

Being recognized as an LM was a change of paradigm. This LM appreciated being recognized in a dual role: a facilitator of learning in one context and an expert in a different context. The LM perceived this change as a radical shift. Next we explore the students' perspectives.

Student Reviews: A Journey From Confusion to Deeper Learning

As explained previously, LT members were encouraged to keep a record of their learning in their learning logs and note what they observed, experienced, or questioned. They learned to write about what surprised them or critical incidents that momentarily destabilized them or led them to being

able to see themselves or others in a different light. Yet, as with our LMs, students found the launch into their initial LT conversations especially difficult as when one wrote:

At the beginning, I was very skeptical concerning the impact and utility of the LT meetings. The first talks were very conceptual because we had no real experience for use as a basis for discussion concerning management or leadership.

At this early stage, the students did not really understand the purpose of the LT; learning summaries were a burden. Managerial competencies, leadership, and critical incidents were almost derisive terms in the early LT experience, and then some students began to shift substantially, as in this example.

Looking back [at a much earlier entry in her/his learning log] I see what had happened. My LM was waiting for us to move ourselves and not be taken by the hand. We moved out of the so-called rut when H asked us questions about the finance course. It seemed strange to be talking about a finance course during the LT, but we had all found the course exceptionally difficult and yet fascinating. Talking about it was great. We listened to each other and put different aspects of our understanding together in a new way. I wish we had more opportunities to talk together like that.

In this entry, we can see students engaging in unfamiliar behaviors, such as listening to each other. They also began exploring self-disclosure about personal values and assumptions. In the words of another student,

At the start, I really disliked the notion of Managerial Competencies. . . . I really did not know how to make sense of any of this. In addition, I have always been taught that to tell others about my feelings or hopes was indiscreet. Suddenly, I saw things differently; this happened during the LT when B talked about how she did not know why she was at EDHEC. Everyone listened. I think this was the first time I saw others listening to another student. She was so real. She was not faking, and yet it was OK. Since then I have been turning all this over in my mind. I do not think I am able to be as honest as she was, but I want to do it my way. This is already a big change for me. . . . This is not how it is in class where the course is programmed. In the LT we deal with what is important at the time.

The difficulties the students experienced, similar to those expressed by the LMs, continued until students left school at the end of the first year for their first 2-month internship. Many went into chain stores, banks, or luxury goods stores; others went into niche markets outside Europe. On their return to EDHEC at the end of the summer, attitudes shifted and team members entered with a different level of learning. With a degree of hesitation, themes such as initiative, responsibility, self-mastery, and managerial communication emerged, and gradually students made connections with observations from the previous year. One student said,

This year the LT meetings have been so much more interesting. We have talked together about what we did during our work experience. It was concrete and yet at the same time made me think. When S talked about selling perfume at Harrods in London and how she had to dress up and wear heels all day long, I realized she was talking about self-management (a concept referred to by our LM at the beginning of the LT meetings which meant nothing to us!). She had to accept what she called “stupid regulations” and “arrogant customers” and focus on service to the client. I think she had a hard time and learned more about herself than sales. I had not seen this aspect of work experience before because I thought it was the business challenge and it turned out to be the personal development angle.

Exchanges between LT members also became more personal; there was more self-disclosure, and perhaps more strikingly, members manifested interest in appreciating differences among themselves. We noted that “critical incidents” became a familiar term, depicting moments of transition from “automatic” to “awareness” mode. For instance, a student wrote,

What I gained from the last LT was that developing competencies starts now and not when I leave school. This started with talking about the “comfort zone” and pushing this outward. When M said she had set herself to take initiative, I realized that was her challenge, not mine. I said “this is not a challenge for me” as if it was not justifiable as a challenge. Before I had finished bursting this out, I realized I was only seeing things from my perspective. I was so surprised at what I had said. Now I realize it was a critical incident during the LT meeting because it made me see how I reacted. It also made a link with our LT meeting when we talked about assumptions. I think I am seeing links between different LT conversations.

One of the notable outcomes at this stage was a natural progression into exploring assumptions and entrenched beliefs such as in this student's entry:

We talked about goals for our next work experience. J wanted to work in Luxury Goods but said they would only recruit people who had been to *Prepas* so he was not going to apply. We almost accepted this but T suddenly said "is that an assumption?" At first I thought he was just criticizing J, but J was very silent. When I looked at him, I saw he was thinking. None of us dared break the silence. It was the first time I had experienced silence in the LT that was not embarrassing. We did not return to T's question that meeting, but in the next meeting J said he had thought a lot about T's question. This started a long exchange about assumptions and how sometimes they prevent us from doing what we wanted. Many of us talked about what blocked us. I am still surprised about the way we talked together.

We see here the shift from nonengagement to engagement; the students were initiators and then participants by choice. In addition, the role of reflective learning becomes more prominent as they carry the topic over to the next meeting. The entry below from another student shows similar insights.

After two years in my learning team, things have changed. Firstly we start by recapping on what happened last time and how we feel or think about it. Then we report on what we had undertaken to do since the last time we met. I want to remember this because I think it could be useful when I come to manage a team. Looking back seems to be taking on more importance; it is allowing me to see how things have developed and that I cannot always predict outcomes. Reviewing with others has shown me that I can foresee so much and anticipate but that I need to be vigilant in the moment when the unexpected occurs.

When suspending judgment, they gained insight into others' values and their own, which were previously tacit. Once again a student's example illustrates their team experience.

It was great for me to open up myself and trust the group. At the same time it was very difficult for me to know how far I should go, especially some group members came from a culture in which telling personal things is not common. At the same time, this was also a very valuable experience to learn more from non-Western classmates.

In this case the students also expanded their exposure to and awareness of diverse perspectives.

Early on they had not made links between their work within their student-run voluntary associations and the development, or even observation, of managerial competencies. Yet with more experience we see the blending of reflection, openness to differences, and increasing self-awareness as in the quote below.

We visited a charity that deals with collecting food for the underprivileged and then distributing it. As a group, we worked with the volunteers. These were people who were really rough to my way of seeing things. They did not have our education or upbringing, and at first I found it difficult to relate to them. Gradually, as we worked according to their instruction, I realized that education or upbringing was not the issue! These volunteers were devoting so much of their time and care in order to help others even less fortunate than themselves. We were connected through the activity of doing something rather than through social gathering or common background. We did not need to talk that much. But when I left, I had the feeling of making a deep connection with the somewhat dirty, long-haired man I had worked with. I did not want to leave and yet I knew we had finished what we had undertaken. . . . I am not sure what I now need to do but I am reflecting (and seeing what reflecting means!).

Grappling with these moments gave the students material for personal and group reflection and served as a basis for their learning summaries as they experienced their journey from confusion to deeper learning.

Astin suggests “learning and personal development . . . [are] . . . directly proportional to the amount of . . . involvement in [a] program” (Astin, 1984, p. 134). The power of the learning for a student fully involved in the program can be seen in this quote.

I think it can be one of the most valuable experiences during an MBA. . . . We want to become the future leaders. . . . So what should MBAs learn? Understanding business and understanding people; to understand people, we need to start with ourselves. . . . But it is also very difficult to make a learning team work. We are all under great pressure to perform—if it’s not homework or exams, it is preparing to find your next job. And the class mainly consists of very pragmatic people, with careers in which we were trained to focus on tangible results. So

getting a learning team to work is a big challenge but almost essential for being well equipped for the road ahead.

Through their learning, they had thought-provoking questions, and learning summaries came to be based not only on superficial opinions. There was some search for meaning, even if observations and questions were voiced with discomfort and uncertainty as to the why of the exercise. As we looked back on these findings, we were excited and surprised by our own journey into deeper learning, which is explained in the next section.

Lessons Learned

Among the lessons learned, we recognized that we had underestimated the following:

1. *The time factor*: Creating this type of deeper learning context needs time before LT members (and LMs) are able to learn from experience and reflection.
2. *Learning is not simultaneous*: Although genuine insight does affect others, individuals learn from experiences unique to them. Thus, the intensity of engagement or inquiry needed for deeper learning cannot be maintained by each team member in parallel.
3. *Variation in LM capacity for the role*: Fully entering the LM role is to accept, and manage, students' resistance at the launch of the LT.

In support of the above, we noted that in most teams there was resistance from students and/or LMs. Cohen (2003) provides a frame of reference,

The greatest readiness to change occurs with moderate dissatisfaction . . . deriving from learning theory which says that readiness to learn is greatest when there is moderate anxiety. Readiness to learn and readiness to change are two faces of the same phenomenon. (p. 157)

We also noted a member's resistance did not necessarily obstruct team development. The LT offers a degree of liberty regarding individual inclusion and involvement. We learned that while defensive routines (Argyris, 1999; Raelin, 2006) are difficult to bear, it is often through them that deeper learning is accessed. As explained above, we understood the deeper learning challenge was to encourage engagement of faculty and students. It remains a challenge

because without experiencing the breakthroughs into deeper learning, some people do not become motivated to engage in a process such as that offered by the LT.

Partially because of how ambitious the project is and the large number of students and faculty involved, there is institutional resistance to continuing the existing program. Given the expense of facilitating the current number of LTs, consideration is being given to making the LT process optional to reduce the cost.

Whatever future is envisaged, we could say that andragogy at EDHEC will never again be considered as it was before the LTs were instituted. Reflection and the creation of LTs genuinely intrigued faculty members, provoking a more global and certainly more transversal learning perspective, with students more confident in their capacity to learn from and through others. So is there potential for taking this type of learning forward?

Our concluding comments, drawn from the contexts in which we have been working, can be considered from two major standpoints: institutional factors to be taken into consideration when launching LTs and the role assumed by the LM, which includes the manner in which the LT is managed.

Institutional Factors

First, as doubt and anxiety are consistent characteristics displayed by LT members, it is vital to establish a climate permitting each member to experience confidence in other members as well as in the LM. Adequate confidence is especially difficult to establish without an explicit message from the top of the institution to all LT stakeholders, whether in an academic institution or a corporation.

In the case of an academic entity, it needs to consist of the following:

- Positive discourse that acknowledges the mentor (or coaching) role adopted by a professor as an integral part of his or her professional contribution to the institution.
- Explicit recognition from the academic leaders of the role of LM so it is valued alongside, and at the same level as, the more traditional professorial roles (Cohen, 2003; Schnaubelt & Statham, 2007).

It is also important to consider the cultural context within which the LT is launched. In a business school founded on deductive, Cartesian teaching practices, LTs are a considerable cultural shock given the contrasting value for inductive approaches and collaborative interactions.

Role of Learning Manager

The second standpoint concerns managing the LT. The LM role is different from the traditional French teaching that emphasizes the expert and receiver dimensions. Especially when adapting this approach to a high distance context (Hofstede, 1991), students' and LMs' expectations and norms for being told what should be happening are challenging to bypass. Learners within the French educational model, it would seem, expect to be informed in order to comply and then to experience. Yet, paradoxically in LTs, students and LMs began to identify success as a radical shift in attitude about their own acts of management. The shift occurred largely as a result of having experienced what a collaborative approach to sense-making entails because, in the dialogic process, knowledge emerges as the participants draw on their collective experiences and expertise to create new understanding and knowledge together.

As managers of LTs, LMs need to redefine how they position themselves with respect to the following three areas: distinguishing between engagement and consent, negotiating time and space, and managing periods of doubt and rejection.

Distinguishing between engagement and consent. As the LM role does not include delivery of specific knowledge, the objective becomes the creation of conditions in which members of the LT can produce knowledge or transform experience into actionable knowledge. Consequently, the LM is not responsible for the team's output or productivity. In legal terms, we could say there is a procedural obligation but without an obligation to produce specific results. The LM needs to be free to assume the facilitator role of transferring energy, ensuring respect for ground rules, listening, and questioning as appropriate. In turn, each team member is jointly responsible for the outcome of LT meetings.

LMs need to be debriefed or receive what can be termed *supervision*. This term should not be confused with *supervision* as used in psychotherapy, because an LT does not investigate emotional difficulties but focuses on conditions that favor learning and integrating aspects of managerial practice. LM debriefing can take a number of forms: with several other LMs, with another LM in one-to-one sessions, or with their own external supervisor. Whatever form it takes, effective debriefing increases rigor, lucidity, and the questioning required to facilitate learning.

Negotiating time and space. Gradually, team members learn to acknowledge the importance of time and space provided by the LT. Because of institutional constraints, short deadlines, and the prevailing culture, LT members initially have difficulty accepting the importance of taking time to reflect

(Hedberg, 2009). Thus, members may want justification for time invested. Moving from an active to a reflective mode involves letting go of habits and often entails a period of turbulence within the team and the LM.

Managing periods of doubt or rejection. LMs experience discomfort in transitions. When team members become aware that team effectiveness involves investing personally during meetings as well as outside meetings, they experience a degree of unease. They may become resistant, defensive, and critical of the process in general or toward the LM. LMs need to prepare themselves for this phase. To ensure they do not add voice to doubt or criticism, champions or providers within organizations also need to be aware that the group may transit a period of rejection. This phase is difficult for all stakeholders, and yet it plays a vital role.

Through this doubt and difficulty, the group creates a completely new type of communication and dialogic exchange. Then, and sometimes for the first time, we can say that the team has reached collaborative and reflective dimensions of deeper learning, as is recorded by a member, "Logging critical incidents somehow gives us the 'permission' to doubt; in fact I think one of the keys to management today is the 'permission' as well as the 'capacity' to doubt and to call oneself into question."

Conclusion

At the beginning of this article, we defined deep learning as learning that fully integrates the four modes of the experiential learning cycle—experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting. We also referred to double-loop learning (Argyris, 1999), dialogue (Bohm, 1990; Isaacs, 1999), and team learning, which the EDHEC experience demonstrates are all interrelated in practice. The intention was to present a case study of the challenges and opportunities of adapting experiential learning, team learning, and deep learning in the French educational and cultural milieu.

From our observations, student logs and interviews, LM review meetings, and business school experiences, we suggest that deep learning does integrate the four modes of the Experiential Learning Cycle. However, it is the double-loop process (Argyris, 1999) of Kolb's conceptualization mode that enables the learner to reexamine previous sense-making and make a profound shift in learning that goes beyond the light of new ideas. Unlike Babson's and Weatherhead's major transformations, where scale and investment far exceed what we have undertaken at EDHEC, we suggest that transformation is not always a matter of scale. On the contrary, in our experience the impact on the development of students and faculty has been considerable in terms of

the shifts from passive to proactive, from submission to responsibility, and from inhibited individualism to collective spirit of inquiry among both students and faculty.

With all the difficulties, challenges, resistance, and diversity described here, deep learning occurred; that is, students learned something infinitely more challenging and distinctive than acquiring technical skill, passing an examination, or gaining in competition over another. The EDHEC students have grown inwardly, gained more confidence in questioning certainty, and become able to cope with doubt. Many of them are more authentic and accepting of themselves and others. From the program thus far, we see very different leadership strengths emerging.

Even when working in a different culture and context where centralized authority is a norm, the time when deep learning takes place cannot be programmed. On the other hand, we can prepare the terrain and be engaged andragogues. We can favor the building of a learning community, but the actual moment when the learner learns is not under our control. There is a moment when the learner is present; our task is to be attentive to this moment. If we are not, the opportunity could be lost.

The article demonstrates that this approach to learning can be implemented and adapted with intentional effort across cultural contexts. Deeper learning can be achieved in spite of the obstacles encountered and cultural differences. In fact, resistance can be an important vector of progress, not only for the piloting group in setting up the project but also for the members of the LTs and team leaders once in place. The challenge of confronting resistance is a way of deepening learning and contributes to bringing about change. Perhaps one of the longer lasting effects of the LT process has been the creation of new mindsets for all those involved.

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