Learning to Learn: Meeting the Challenge of Change

An Experience-Based Paper

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Abstract

“We now accept the fact that learning is a lifelong process of keeping abreast of change. And the most pressing task is to teach people how to learn.”
Peter F. Drucker

As leaders, consultants, and university faculty, the co-authors of this paper recognize the need to engage with organizational managers to enhance the quality and effectiveness of managerial practices. Ours is a context of persistent tumultuous change on a global scale. Social, political, cultural, demographic, environmental, technological and economic challenges interact in ways that heighten complexity and uncertainty. Identifying key managerial competencies for this time, this context, is itself a challenge.

“. . . the one competence that I now realize is absolutely essential for leaders—the key competence—is adaptive capacity. Adaptive capacity is what allows leaders to respond quickly and intelligently to relentless change”
(Bennis, 2009, p. xxvi).

Adaptive capacity (Bennis, 2009; Heifetz, 1998/2009) can be developed in individuals and organizations only with skilled attention to how we learn.

“We have a very strong belief that the first imperative to being a good leader who makes good judgments is a commitment to be a learner, to keep building one’s knowledge and wisdom”
(Tichy & Bennis, 2007, p. 238).

The experience-based paper describes a rich variety of approaches to better understanding the ways individuals learn, both individually and collectively; the shared approaches include training designs, classroom activities, instruments, readings, tools.
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“We live at a time of vast changes—changes seemingly so epochal that they may well dwarf those experiences in earlier eras . . . No one knows precisely how to fashion an education that will yield individuals who are disciplined, synthesizing, creative, respectful, and ethical. I have argued that our survival as a planet may depend on the cultivation of this pentad of mental dispositions” (Gardner, 2006, p. 11; p. 19).

As leaders, consultants, and university faculty, the co-authors of this paper recognize the need to engage with organizational managers to enhance the quality and effectiveness of managerial practices. Ours is a context of persistent tumultuous change on a global scale. Social, political, cultural, demographic, environmental, technological and economic challenges interact in ways that heighten complexity and uncertainty. Identifying key managerial competencies for this time, this context, is itself a challenge. “. . . the one competence that I now realize is absolutely essential for leaders—the key competence—is adaptive capacity. Adaptive capacity is what allows leaders to respond quickly and intelligently to relentless change” (Bennis, 2009, p. xxvi). Adaptive capacity (Bennis, 2009; Heifetz, 1994/2009) can be developed in individuals and organizations only with skilled attention to how we learn.

This paper is built from the experiences of the three co-authors, interacting within a variety of settings and sectors: academic institutions, governmental agencies, for profit organizations, and nonprofit organizations. No matter the sector, a persistent thread is the need for both organizational and individual learning. “. . . the basis for leadership is learning. . . This is how learning is meant to be—active, passionate, and personal” (Bennis, 2009, p. 178; p. 82). A growing body of research built from diverse fields of study makes clear that people do want to learn and to grow in skills and knowledge; learning is a key element in organizational life and success (Wagner & Harter, 2006; Pink, 2009). “We have a very strong belief that the first imperative to being a good leader who makes good judgments is a commitment to be a learner, to keep building one's knowledge and wisdom” (Tichy & Bennis, 2007, p. 238).

Continuing awareness of and attention to learning, and to how we learn, help address Howard Gardner’s compelling question: “. . . how best can we mobilize our skills—and those of our co-workers—so that all of us will remain current tomorrow and the day after tomorrow?” (2006, p. 10).
An Exploration, Only

This paper is experience-based. It does not attempt to consider all that we know and continue to discover about how individuals and their organizations learn. In this paper we will not revisit concepts and practices of adult learning theory (Cross, 1992; Knowles, 1990 and others) or the burgeoning field of distance/online learning. Instead we will first highlight three specific approaches to learning and designs of learning opportunities and training which we have found especially meaningful in our own work. These are:

The power of reflection; right and left brained approaches; using the arts to engage full learning.

We will then share three short stories with details of our individual experiences in a variety of settings, using a variety of additional approaches, to help managers and their organizations recognize power-filled ways they learn—ways that can continue to be used beyond the specific encounters of which we were a part.

Other sessions and paper presentations at this conference are attentive to content—the “what” of future-focused management needs. Our focus is on the “how”—ways to connect and engage managers that lead to learning that lasts.

For ourselves, and for those we encourage, guide, counsel, teach and lead, the centerpiece of effective learning is always self awareness.

“The more we know about ourselves and our world, the freer we are to achieve everything we are capable of achieving” (Bennis, 2003, p. 63).

Learning How We Learn

Leaders are learners. “There’s no simple test for determining the best tactic for learning. But it’s clear that leaders approach each new and unfamiliar experience with a willingness to learn, an appreciation for the importance of learning” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 204). This paper touches on just a portion of the rich variety of approaches to better understanding the ways individuals learn, both individually and collectively. These approaches are drawn from multiple disciplines: psychology, learning theories, theories of multiple intelligences, communication, organizational behavior, organization development, sociology, management theory . . . . The approaches include training designs, classroom activities, instruments, readings. Each approach shared in the paper as a story-based example is one used by the authors to help experienced mid-career and senior managers recognize their own individual ways of learning, and then to use that understanding in an organization to further develop others.
‘. . . nothing is quite so powerful, or so natural, as engaged managers who are committed to developing themselves, their institutions, and their communities” (Mintzberg, 2009, p. 232).

Multiple Modes to Enrich and Enhance Learning

The complexities of contemporary organizational life and the challenges of leadership at this time encourage multiple modes to convey new knowledge and practice. McGill University’s Dr. Henry Mintzberg, summarizing Dr. Jay Conger’s research and analysis of various leadership development programs, wrote this:

“Conger concludes overall that the four approaches should be brought together: a conceptual part to understand leadership; skill building to practice teachable skills and awareness building for others; feedback to understand personal strengths and weaknesses; personal growth to bring out emotions and stimulate imagination” (Mintzberg, 2004, p. 214). As Kouzes and Posner (2003) advocate, leadership development and related learning occur with attention to education, experience and example—three ways to learn that must be enriched through active reflection.

Reflection is Central to Learning

“. . . I don’t believe anybody is going to give us time to think. We have to reclaim it for ourselves. . . . Thinking is the place where intelligent actions begin. . . . If we feel we’re changing in ways we don’t like, or seeing things in the world that need to be different, then we need time to think about this. We need time to think about what we might do and where we might start to change things. We need time to develop clarity and courage. If we want our world to be different, our first act needs to be reclaiming time to think. Nothing will change for the better until we do that” (Wheatley, 2005, pp. 214-215; p. 217).

“. . . a remarkable number of effective managers are reflective: they know how to learn from their own experience; they explore numerous options; and they back off when one doesn’t work, to try another” (Mintzberg, 2009, p. 208).

We have found ourselves highly attentive to Henry Mintzberg’s approach to management education. The rich use of learning entry points is just one example of the theory/practice bridge he advocates. Writing in Managers Not MBAs, Mintzberg (2003) describes what he terms experienced reflection, a process of continuous interplay between the experiences practicing managers bring to the graduate education classroom (or training center), to meet there with conceptual ideas, theories, and models introduced by faculty/coaches.
We can say that the managers live in the territory while the faculty provide the maps. Reflection takes place where these meet: experience considered in the light of conceptual ideas. The resultant learning is carried back to the job, where it impacts behavior, providing further experience for reflection on the job and back to the classroom. This constitutes a recurring cycle . . . (p. 264).

Reflecting does not mean musing, and it is not casual. It means *wondering, probing, analyzing, synthesizing, connecting*—‘to ponder carefully and persistently [the] meaning [of an experience] to the self.’ And not just about what you think happened but ‘**why** do you think it happened?’ and ‘**how** is this situation similar to and different from other problems?’ (Mintzberg, 2004, p. 254).

Demanding, busy, over-scheduled lives are typical. Setting aside meaningful time for thoughtful reflection is a challenge for mid-career and senior professionals who may also be enrolled in graduate study, juggling professional work, family responsibilities that often include aging parents and ‘acting-out’ teenagers, commuting time on congested highways, community involvement. In one example of learning experiences, graduate course design includes opportunities both in-seminar and away from the classroom for significant reflection linked to course content. Students are asked to keep journals and to prepare reflective personal essays. An excellent leadership workbook (George, McLean & Craig, 2008) guides students through power-filled questions and writing exercises into meaningful reflection that supports insight and related action.

Moving beyond the theoretical—often the principal component of an academic course—to the action orientation so essential for these mid-career professionals, is well supported by scholar Chris Argyris as described in his *Harvard Business Review* article (1991), Teaching Smart People How to Learn:

. . . *most people define learning too narrowly as mere “problem solving,” so they focus on identifying and correcting errors in the external environment. Solving problems is important. But if learning is to persist, managers and employees must also look inward. They need to reflect critically on their own behavior, identify the ways they often inadvertently contribute to the organization’s problems, and then change how they act.* (pp. 106-107)
Right Brain Learning to Complement Left Brain Learning

Bransford, Brown and Cocking (1999), editors and authors of a comprehensive volume summarizing research on human learning, describe the significance of “transfer” in competency development, and identify abstract representation—such as that made possible through literature and art—as one approach to enable learning transfer:

Processes of learning and the transfer of learning are central to understanding how people develop important competencies. Learning is important because no one is born with the ability to function competently as an adult in society. It is especially important to understand the kinds of learning experiences that lead to transfer, defined as the ability to extend what has been learned in one context to new contexts. Educators hope that students will transfer learning from one problem to another within a course, from one year in school to another, between school and home, and from school to workplace.

In the discussion below we explore key characteristics of learning and transfer that have important implications for education:

- Initial learning is necessary for transfer, and a considerable amount is known about the kinds of learning experiences that support transfer.
- Knowledge that is overly contextualized can reduce transfer; abstract representations of knowledge can help promote transfer.
- Transfer is best viewed as an active, dynamic process rather than a passive end-product of a particular set of learning experiences.
- All new learning involves transfer based on previous learning, and this fact has important implications for the design of instruction that helps students learn. (p. 39)

The designs for classroom-based or training centered activity build on what Betty Edwards (1999) writes of as

two parallel “ways of knowing.” . . .

You probably are familiar with these ideas. As with the left/right terms, they are embedded in our languages and culture. The main divisions are, for example, between thinking and feeling, intellect and intuition, objective analysis and subjective insight. Political writers say that people generally
analyze the good and bad points of an issue and then vote on their “gut” feelings. The history of science is replete with anecdotes about researchers who try repeatedly to figure out a problem and then have a dream in which the answer presents itself as a metaphor intuitively comprehended by the scientist. . . In another context, people occasionally say about someone, “The words sound okay, but something tells me not to trust him (or her).” Or “I can’t tell you in words exactly what it is, but there is something about that person that I like (or dislike).” These statements are intuitive observations that both sides of the brain are a work, processing the same information in two different ways. (p. 37)

In Edwards' book, The New Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain (1999), she presents a table comparing nine different left-mode and right-mode characteristics. This variety of approaches (only a portion shared here) to designing and experiencing learning enriches the experience and helps ensure the transfer described by Bransford, Brown and Cocking (1999).
## Left Mode | Right Mode
---|---
**Verbal** | **Nonverbal**
Using words to name, describe, define | Using non-verbal cognition to process perceptions

**Symbolic** | **Actual, real**
Using a symbol to stand for something | Relating to things as they are, at the present moment

**Abstract** | **Analogic**
Taking out a small bit of information and using it to represent the whole thing | Seeing likenesses among things; understanding metaphoric relationships

**Logical** | **Intuitive**
Drawing conclusions based on logic: one thing following another in logical order— for example, a mathematical theorem or a well-stated argument | Making leaps of insight, often based on incomplete patterns, hunches, feelings, or visual images

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**Centering Learning in Powerful Approaches Using the Arts**

“The quest for ideas must always take place on all fronts of human capacity, and, in fact, we have reason to believe that human beings think primarily and most effectively by means of what the senses explore and control . . . ” (Arnheim, 1961, 361).

Rudolf Arnheim, in books that discuss art and perception, speaks directly, concisely, to the power of visual learning: “. . .arts are the most powerful means of strengthening the perceptual component without which productive thinking is impossible in any field of endeavor” (1969, 3).
A novelist may convey a message with perfection over three hundred pages. A poet may do it in ten lines. One artist may evoke an emotion through an intricate and detailed oil painting on a flat canvas. Another may evoke that same feeling through abstract three-dimensional form. . . . We can't measure the effectiveness of one form against another. They each do what they do in their own unique way, and they all have their usefulness. (Carlisle in Benedict and Carlisle, 1992, 57)

There is in place already in the literature of organizational life and leadership repeated discussion of the power of story for individuals and for organizations (a few examples are Bennis, 2009; Bolman and Deal, 2001; Cashman, 1999; Denning, 2004; Gardner with Laskin, 1995; Kouzes and Posner, 1993).

Daniel Pink identifies ‘story’ as one of six essential right-brained aptitudes for the 21st century. He writes: “. . .

[This is] the essence of the aptitude of Story—context enriched by emotion. Story exists where high concept and high touch intersect. Story . . . sharpens our understanding of one thing by showing it in the context of something else. . . . We are our stories. We compress years of experience, thought, and emotion into a few compact narratives that we convey to others and tell to ourselves. That has always been true. . . . [we are] freer to seek a deeper understanding of ourselves and our purpose. . . . [We have] a hunger for what stories can provide—context enriched by emotion, a deeper understanding of how we fit in and why that matters. . . . we must listen to each other’s stories . . . we are each the authors of our own lives” (2005, p. 103; p. 115).

Shared stories, or engaged reading of both fictional and non-fictional stories, offer a rich opportunity for learners to see, experience, understand and apply ideas from one source (a literature which appeals to multiple senses) to another (professional work settings and the theories which support managerial practices).

“Research studies generally provide strong support for the benefits of helping students represent their experiences at levels of abstraction that transcend the specificity of particular contexts and examples” (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 1999, p. 53).
“When we explore a literary work, we, too, believe it is more than words on the page. There are insights into human thought and feeling that can enlarge our lives. . . . literature opens a window into human life that enriches readers beyond what they might conceive of by themselves. This why we read and why we encourage children to read. . . . we have an opportunity to bring ourselves to a poem, story, play more completely than other theoretical systems allow” (Rollin and West, 1999, p. 1; p. 2; p. 12).

No textbook in theory can do what a novel can do: “Literature helps to restore what the professional scientific literature necessarily omits or slights: the concrete, the sensual, the emotional, the subjective, the valuational” (Waldo in de Monthoux and Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994, p. 7).

“With stories and inquiry, both mind and heart are fully engaged, and transformation can begin. As the Irish poet and novelist James Stephens wrote, “I have learned that the head does not hear anything until the heart has listened, and what the heart knows today the head will understand tomorrow” (Cashman, 2003, p. 7).

Recent publications have centered on the power of poetry for the development of leaders in business and other sectors (Brown, ; Grisham, 2006; Intrator & Scribner, 2007; Morgan, 2010; Whyte 2001). Dr. Margaret Wheatley has often brought her own poetry and that of others into her work and publications. Learning through poetry has great power, captured well in these words:

“. . . in our ultra-busy, competitive, and desperately breathless world, we need tools that slow us down, talk to our heart, and inspire conversations, both within ourselves and with others, about what it means to lead, to serve, and to journey with heart. . . . we do our best work when we are inspired, challenged, and absorbed in the perplexing but essential conversations about the meaning of our lives and work” (Intrator & Scribner, 2007, p. 234).

“. . . I have pursued parallel careers in both business and poetry. The experience has persuaded me that the connections between the world of business and management and the world of the arts and humanities are manifold, profound, and resistant to easy conclusions. It also has convinced me that those connections are terribly important” (Barr in Morgan, 2010, p. v).
Adaptive capacity (Bennis, 2009; Heifetz, 1998/2009) can be developed in individuals and organizations only with skilled attention to how we learn. For example. In the immediate days following the advent of the financial crisis, the employees at a successful wealth management company in southern California found themselves needing to adapt to a very different work environment. The firm had recently recruited three financial advisors and a marketing manager to complement its existing team of nine advisors, an attorney and a large support staff. The new team was just beginning to coalesce and the office atmosphere was becoming comfortable, collegial and satisfying. With the critical changes occurring in the financial markets, however, the office atmosphere quickly became stressful, disruptive and uncertain. Former colleagues became competitors and all around decisions were challenged at all levels of the organization. While the owner and president of the company was preoccupied with dealing with his most crucial clients, the firm’s management director had to deal with the worrying concerns of the firm’s advisors, mid-level managers, senior directors and support staff. These concerns were prompted by the change in the firm’s atmosphere and the need to serve in an unprecedented way the firm’s clients whose financial life was placed in jeopardy by the recent market events. In a conversation with one senior manager who in frustration declared that she "hadn't a clue how to work any more," the management director realized that the complex and ever changing call for intelligent decisions to be made by every member of the firm created a need for a new way of learning – learning as individuals, as members of a team, and as an organization. Learning that would also carry the firm and its clients through the crisis with dignity, respect and profitability. In response, the management director asked this consultant to help her work with the entire staff to improve employee morale and to develop strategies that will
assist them in serving their clients. To begin, each member of the firm was asked to complete the VAK learning indicator and Kolb’s Learning Styles Inventory. The VAK, originally developed by Fleming in 1987, considers the sensory preferences in learning in three categories: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Kolb’s theory of learning is built on six propositions (Kolb 1984), all of which were identified as important to this firm:

1. Learning is best conceived as a process.
2. All learning is re-learning.
3. Learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world.
4. Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world.
5. Learning results from synergetic transactions between the person and the environment.
6. Learning is the process of creating knowledge.

A workshop was held following the completion of both instruments with all employees of the firm present. Attendees were given information about each instrument, guided in interpreting the results, and given the opportunity to interact with fellow employees who shared a similar identified sensory preference and/or style. The employees also participated in an experiential exercise after completion of Kolb’s Learning Styles Inventory to further enhance understanding of their own learning style and the style of their fellow employees.

According to the management director in the days that followed the workshop, there was a renewed atmosphere of camaraderie and respect among the financial advisors and a marked improvement in the mood of all employees. Laughter was heard once again in the lunchroom and reference to “my learning style” echoed throughout the office. The management director reported that she finally understood why the president of the firm kept talking and appeared “incredulous”
when she mentioned that she needed to get pen and paper to write down what he was saying. (The firm’s president is an auditory learner; the management director is a visual learner.) Two of the financial advisors adjusted their study habits in ways that supported their learning style and sensory preferences. Both subsequently scored in the 98th percentile on an exam that was required for licensure in the state of California. Other members of the staff reported a renewed sense of ease in working with their clients when they utilized what they learned about learning styles and learning preferences.

It’s a year later and the firm continues to adapt to the complexities of doing business in a world whose financial markets are still creating uncertainty in its clients. New hires are asked to complete Kolb’s Learning Style Indicator and the VAK; they are given written materials from the original workshop; and offered the opportunity to meet with me to provide guidance in interpreting the results. The management director brings pen and paper with her to each meeting with the firm’s president and the president gives the management director time to write down the information she wants to remember. From a management perspective, mid-level managers and senior directors all agree that knowing staffs’ learning preferences has been effective in managing the time and talent of the individuals who report to them. In addition, the support staff reports a greater understanding of their own learning style and how their strengths and weaknesses affect their peers, their supervisors, their clients, and the firm.
One of the most important banks in Italy sought out consultant support to cope with a persistent issue of lack of women in the highest organizational positions.

Prior to designing an appropriate training program, the consultant to the project, Wise Growth, conducted a focus group with women employed by the bank. The focus group was designed to better understand why women were not reaching these executive positions, and barriers they recognized in their career paths.

The results from the focus group were very interesting: Most of the woman had not experienced active discrimination. They were aware of organizational efforts to identify and change any policies that excluded women from career growth, such as attention to issues of work/life balance. Still, the women emphasized the difficulties they found within themselves to move forward to demanding high level professional positions.

Further discussion led to a deeper understanding: for these women (and many women), positive relationships in the workplace are essential. They were finding it difficult to manage people and then deal with the inevitable unpopularity that could result when difficult decisions needed to be made. Performance evaluation of others, as well as receiving feedback on their own performance, was another significant challenge. The women recognized how difficult it was for them to separate their emotions from the opinions of others, and how sensitive they were to the overall organizational climate and culture.

With this understanding in place, it was possible to design learning activities responsive both to the individual and organizational needs identified, and to the
women’s preferred ways of learning and knowing. Relationship, coaching, a safe
environment—these were central to the development activities designed and
implemented with a mentoring program that included shadowing senior managers.
The process is summarized as follows:

Experienced and well-known mentors, both women and men, were chosen.
The project’s meaning and goals were shared. This was followed by mentor
training with practical examples about how to manage the process; ideas were
shared concerning the critical issues found in the focus group work.

Mentees had a special meeting, which was necessary to advise them of ways
to maximize the experience of the mentoring program.

Pairing of mentors and mentees was done randomly, but with two significant
rules: there should be no workplace connection between each mentor/mentee
pairing, and also no great hierarchical difference. The mentees were allowed,
after several meetings with their designated mentor, to request a change of
mentor, but no one made that request.

Over an eight-month period, mentors and mentees met often for discussion of
issues, problems, ideas, approaches and advice.

Within the program design there were two shadowing days. The mentors
invited the mentees to stay with them throughout these working days. The
ideas was to provide mentees with an opportunity to observe the mentors’
practice of management.

The program ended in a meeting with all mentors and mentees to reflect on the
process and to better understand weak or strong points.
The results were exciting both for mentees and their mentors. Mentees had, for the first time, the possibility to share their problems with experienced and motivated mentor; mentors found a new way to reconsider their ways of managing and, from the male point of view, gained a better understanding of women’s problems.

The program was designed in ways that ensured awareness of preferred ways to learn, and gave attention to self-awareness, reflection, example, experience and practice (Mintzberg, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

Using One Theory of Learning in a Graduate School Academic Setting
Carol’s Story

For the past six years, in all graduate classes I teach, I have been asking students to identify their preferred "learning entry points" based on ideas from educational psychologist Howard Gardner (1999). Gardner is best known for his theories of multiple intelligences. In recent years he has expanded his thoughts/research in that field to address the related implications for planning learning experiences, impacting managerial practice, and effecting change.

Gardner helps us understand not only the power of attention to multiple intelligences in designing learning opportunities, but also the inevitability that the learner will seek out and utilize her own preferred pathways to understand and retain information and knowledge. He captures the value of such learning design in a single sentence “When teachers are able to use different pedagogical approaches, they can reach more students in more effective ways” (Gardner, 1999, p. 168). Gardner further develops these ideas: “The key step is recognizing
that a concept can be well understood—and can give rise to convincing performances of understanding—only if a person represents the core features of that concept in several ways. Moreover, it is desirable if the multiple modes of representing draw on a number of symbol systems, schemas, frames, and intelligences” (1999, p. 175)

Here is a way I bring Gardner’s ideas into my classrooms: I first ask students to read carefully a short file/handout that includes a lengthy quotation describing seven learning entry points Gardner has identified: narrational (story), quantitative/numeric, logical, foundational/existential, aesthetic, hands on, social.

I ask students to think about themselves and to identify the primary and secondary learning entry points most powerful for them individually. I note that each of us can probably learn in all seven ways, but some ‘thresholds’ are easier for us to cross than others. For instance, I acknowledge to students that I am primarily an aesthetic learner. I am happiest absorbing new ideas and experiences visually, graphically, and through film, art, music, theatre, poetry. My secondary learning entry point of preference is storytelling—the one Gardner identifies as "narrational".

Together we discuss the significance of taking responsibility for our individual and collective success in the two graduate programs that are my principal teaching responsibilities: an MBA program and the MSLM—a master of science degree in leadership and management within a business school—a degree that complements an MBA with attention to the “people dynamics” of organizational life—change, conflict, communication, ethics and decision making, team work, diversity, partnerships and collaboration, leadership. . .).
Students quickly recognize how their own professional managerial responsibilities can also be met more effectively with recognition of and attention to differing learning entry points in workplaces. The graduate students with whom I interact are, on average, forty-one years of age, and most hold significantly responsible mid-career or senior positions. On the course website (Blackboard-based) I then post a matrix (see example below) of the students’ preferences as well as my own, and the ways each of Gardner’s learning entry points is reflected in the course design and assignments throughout the term.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Howard Gardner’s Learning Entry Points (1999)</th>
<th>Leadership: Theory and Practice MGMT 520 – Winter 2010</th>
<th>Related course assignment or material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrational</td>
<td>Mary, Diane</td>
<td>Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative/Numeral</td>
<td>Tom, Sam</td>
<td>Leadership Practices Inventory (360 degree feedback)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical</td>
<td>Betty, Georgina, Kate, Paul</td>
<td>LPI analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundational/Existential</td>
<td>Paul, Mary</td>
<td>George, McLean &amp; Craig readings; final essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td>Harry, Teri, Georgina</td>
<td>Theorist power point report posted to wiki; poetry; video clips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands On</td>
<td>Bob, Hildegard, Larry, Sam, Tom, Teri</td>
<td>Weekly attention to “what is of value to us, now, as practicing managers and leaders?” Model creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Diane, Kate, Larry</td>
<td>Study group project tied to Chaleff’s book; in-class activity linked to Wheatley’s book; duet/trio talk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Italics* indicate a secondary learning style. All student names are fictionalized.
We reference this matrix throughout the term, influencing seminar-based duet and trio in-depth conversations about readings and assignments. Attention to preferred learning entry points becomes part of the grading/evaluation criteria as students finalize plans for a variety of assignments when they will be in front of the class, such as for an individual presentation, reporting out a study group project, sharing a research activity, designing and guiding a learning activity. Students realize immediately that it is both interesting and important to have knowledge of others’ learning entry points as well as their own. Their work in study groups and teams is better informed, and their skills in engaging others in the course are strengthened. I have had graduate students identify the insight of Gardner’s learning entry points as among the most valuable components of a course—powerful as a way to bridge theory and practice and also to ensure enhanced professional achievements beyond the academic classroom.

I note for students that every time we, as managers and leaders, address an individual or a group, facilitate a planning session, chair a meeting, we want our communication to “connect.” One way to help ensure such connection is by understanding the audience/listeners and the preferred ways to learn of those persons individually and collectively. Managing and leading people to understand and accept a new policy or procedure for a workplace parallels graduate school activities: everyone has an opportunity to learn.

“Learning focuses on the student and how he or she develops”
(Mintzberg, 2004, p. 268).

Gardner’s ideas provide students an engaging way to better understand both themselves and others with whom they connect at work and in their many other
organizational settings beyond the classroom (service clubs, community leadership, leisure/hobby groups, church choirs, book clubs, sports coaching. . .). From my own perspective, I am confident that course design and teaching and learning are all strengthened with the conscious planning I do to ensure a variety of assignments and activities that together touch upon all seven of Gardner’s learning entry points.

Finally . . .

For ourselves, and for those we encourage, guide, counsel, teach and lead, the overarching purpose is “to bring out the energy that exists naturally within people” (Mintzberg, 2009, p. 214). Reaching that goal requires what Peter Vaill has termed “a continual process of learning about learning” (1996, p. 82). Only through attention to and understanding of “learning about learning” can we, together, move toward the adaptive capacity so essential for individuals, managers, leaders, organizations, and society.

“If we take learning as a way of being seriously, we have to take the idea of multiple pathways to knowledge seriously” (Vaill, 1996, p. 193).
The experiences, approaches and designs the authors use in working with practicing managers in organizations and academic settings are grounded in ideas from these and other sources:


Arnheim, Rudolf. 1966. *Art and visual perception; A psychology of the creative eye.* Berkeley, California: University of California Press.


Bombelli M.C. 2009. *Alice in business land: diventare leader rimanendo donne (How to become leaders while remaining women).* Guernini & Associati.


Bryans P. & Mavin S. Women Learning to Become Managers: Learning to Fit in or to Play a Different Game? *Management Learning.* March 2003 vol. 34 no. 1 111-134d


Sawyer, Carol. Beyond the Lecture: Meeting the Needs of Mid-Career Graduate Students. This article will be published in December 2010 in *Global Management Journal*. The paper was shared in May 2010 at the Innovation in Management conference in Poznan, Poland.


