

INTERACTIVE/EXPERIENTIAL LECTURETTES

Helping individuals to integrate personal learning with conceptual material based on theory and research findings is among the most important objectives of human relations training. Using inputs from participants can provide a stimulating and potentially powerful mode of presenting lecture material in a group. We call this approach the “experiential lecture” or “interactive lecturette”. In other words, the lecture “material” is embedded in the learners. It is facilitator’s task to tap that material, to focus it, and to make it come alive conceptually. Experiential lecturettes may also be used to provide short, succinct statements of principles, models, research findings, or theory. They provide stimuli to which participants can respond with new levels of awareness.

How to make Conceptual Inputs Experiential:

With a little imagination the facilitator can make almost any conceptual input experiential. The primary advantages for doing so are as follows:

Involvement: In general it is important to design any training activity in such a way as to avoid putting participants in a passive posture because commitment can result only from a sense of ownership through meaningful involvement.

Relevance: It is difficult to anticipate what will be significant to each member of a group. When participants are engaged in activities correlated with conceptual input they make the content immediately credible for themselves.

Expanding the data base: Using experiential techniques in conjunction with lecturettes capitalizes on the experience pool (both ‘here and now’ and ‘there and then’) that exist within the participant group.

Two-way Communication: The facilitator can have effective communication when the content is clear, and two-way exchanges are much more likely to meet this criterion than one-way telling.

Checking Understanding: Since considerable screening of information occurs as participants listen to a lecturette, experiential exchanges help the facilitator to determine the accuracy of the communication, isolate any misunderstanding of concepts, and correct possible misconceptions.

Maintaining Rapport: Presenting concepts inputs can create a sense of distance between the facilitator and the group. By maintaining an open relationship with the group, the facilitator can challenge the learners in a non-threatening way to look within themselves for conceptual models, rather relying on the “expert” to provide the answers.

Excitement: Participants are more likely to be receptive to input that they experience in a lively manner.

One potential disadvantage is that participants may become very involved in the experiential components of the event and may not gain a sense of perspective or overall understanding of the information being disseminated. The facilitator needs to fit each segment of input and activity into an overall framework and reinforce that overview throughout the experience.

Numerous methods for making conceptual inputs experiential are available. Several representative ideas are presented below which can be used before, during and after lecturettes.

Preparing for Conceptual Inputs

It is usually advisable to engage in some activity to promote readiness for a learning model. These methods are best carried out quickly, leading directly into the facilitator's discussion.

Energizers: These activities are usually fun, and they entail physical movement. Although they are almost content free, they prepare participations for a period of seated work.

Associations: Participants call out their associations with the topic of the conceptual input. This gives the facilitator a sense of the "audience", and it promotes a feeling of familiarity with the topic. A simple method is to put a heading on black board (for example, 'Training is') and record spontaneous responses from the group.³

T-Charts: On black board the facilitator makes two columns, headed "Good news" and "Bad News" and posts reactions to the topic from the participants.

Plus-Minus-Question Mark: The facilitator instructs the participants to make three column on note paper, headed with the symbols "+", "-", and "?". Individuals make notes about their predispositions towards the theory topic. These are called out and may be posted.

Assigned Listening: The audience is divided into three groups, with each group instructed to listen in a particular way. One group listens for points with which it agrees, another for points with which it disagrees, and the third for points that need clarification and/or elaboration. Reports can be solicited from these groups midway through the lecturette, and assignment can be changed for the second half.

Spontaneous Lecture: The group brainstorms ideas around the planned topic. Then individuals stand and without rehearsing talk briefly on various aspects of the topic.

Self-Assessment: Participants are instructed to apply the conceptual input to themselves in their particular situation. From time to time personal statements are solicited by the facilitator.

This method can be used together, of course, but the facilitator needs to be careful not to make the preparation so involved as to detract from the input that follows. The data generated by these activities can give clues about how to begin the lecturette.

Linking Input with Participation

During the presentation of the lecturette the facilitator needs to maintain effective contact with the participants, and to break up the input with interspersed activities that will give points added meaning. The following methods can aid in keeping participants at work during the event:

Soliciting Examples: Instead of giving examples related to the cognitive input, the facilitator can ask participants to offer their own. The request to "think of an incident in your experience that illustrates this point" can provoke both task-relevant thinking and productive sharing.

Current Events: The facilitator asks for examples from the news to illustrate points in the lecturette.

Dyadic Interviews: Participants sit in pairs and are instructed to interview each other at selected points when the lecturette is interrupted. A good practice is to encourage interviewers to avoid “yes-no” and “why” questions and to experiment with “what” and “how questions”.

Synonyms and Euphemisms: Participants devise an alternate terminology for any technical language or jargon in the conceptual input. This task can be carried out in subgroups.

Checking Understanding: The facilitator stops from time to time and asks the simple question “what do you hear me saying?” Distortions, misinterpretations, and omissions can then be dealt with before continuing the conceptual input.

Interviewing the Facilitator: Participants act as reporters at a news conference and pose questions to the facilitators on the points just raised in the lecturette.

Right Now I ...: At appropriate points in the presentation the facilitator solicits statements from the participants. These statements begin with the phrase “Right now I...” Variations include “Right now I am thinking...” “Right now I am feeling...” and “Right now I am imagining...”.

It is important to note that using these techniques in excess can work against effective learning. The significant considerations are to keep participants actively involved with the content and to make certain that they see the big picture.

Stages of Doing an Interactive Lecturette

An interactive lecturette is different from the formal lecture given by some teachers in traditional academic institutions. It is short, usually not longer than 10 or 15 minutes, and involves participants in discussion as much as possible. There are four basic stages to go through when presenting an interactive lecturette; getting yourself ready, starting, presenting the major points and closing.

Getting Yourself Ready

Some of the things should be done when getting ready are:

- Prepare yourself mentally to be as clear and helpful to the participants as you possibly can.
- Avoid doing a “canned” presentation possibly-every word you want to say is written out. Prepare yourself to be spontaneous.
- Sense the audience so that you are able to perceive their mood and whatever else may be on their minds.

Starting

Starting is a time to get you, as well as your audience, warmed up.

- Make an appropriate transition so that they know you realize their present situation-what they are going through on their job or in the session.
- Tell participants what you are going to do- For example, “I am going to speak about; fertilizer, and compost, and I would like to have a lot of discussion with you.”
- Prepare people mentally in your opening remarks by answering the following questions for the group:
 - (i) What are they going to do afterwards?
 - (ii) How do you want them to listen?
 - (iii) Why should they be interested?

Presenting the Major points:

When presenting the major points be sure to have rehearsed them in advance and then list them on flowchart paper.

- Use concrete examples which the participants can easily identify.
- Use simple visual aids.
- Keep the flow of your talk clear by regularly summarizing what you have covered.
- Let yourself get enthusiastic and use humour.
- Give your own point of view; don't just repeat someone else's.
- Interrupt your presentation from time to time to invite participant's views and solicit examples.
- Keep eye contact with the audience.

Closing:

Closing is when you tie it all together and check for understanding.

- Summarize by telling the participants in abbreviated form what you have covered.
- Encourage them to take some risks when it comes to applying the points you mentioned.

Using Visual Aids

An interactive lecturette is verbal, yet any group facilitator who has lectured and obtained feedback know that participants want to see the key points of the lecturette, even if this involves no more than a summary outline on a flipchart.

The great variety of such aids can be divided into three basic groups, defined by the level of technical sophistication required to use them:

- At the most basic level are newsprint charts and chalkboard.
- The mid-level includes overhead projectors and handouts.
- The "advanced" level comprises slides, films and video recordings.

Most facilitators will use the technologically sophisticated aids only rarely. They are better reserved for the detailed presentation of information. Videotape can be particularly difficult. Its effective use requires considerable skill when group participants are not themselves being taped. With both videotape and film, one precaution must be kept constantly in mind, because this equipment requires technical familiarity for correct operation, as well as set-up time, everything must be prepared in advance. Slides are easier to use, but have even more limited utility.

The overhead projector and handouts, at the mid-level of visual aid technology, can both be most effective for the presentation of tables of data and of complex charts and diagrams. For the most complex tables, an overhead projector is best, since the facilitator can point to the items being examined. For example, diagrams, on the other hand, handouts are better since participants will not have to try to copy the diagram while listening to the lecturette. Facilitator must know how to operate an overhead projector. Handout can also provide simple, brief summaries of the content of a presentation, which can be consulted during the lecturette, thus giving a clear structure to the talk.

Finally, on the most basic level, are the flipcharts and chalkboards. It is obvious that participants should not be forced to decipher illegible handwriting. The simple way around this failing is to prepare charts in advance. (In extreme cases a friend or an associate can do

the writing). A second major point for the written presentation is to summarize and to emphasize key words; the reason for the written presentation provide emphasis or to give an outline.

Two guidelines may be kept in considering how to use visual aids:

- To have everything ready in advance
- To keep visual aids simple.

When materials are ready beforehand, the facilitator can be more relaxed and let the lecturette flow more easily. In addition, simply stated concepts can be discussed refined and elaborated much more easily than they can be clarified or extracted from a complex text.

When used with conceptual input, visual aids can help provide a structure for thought as well as a focus on key points. If the complexity of the structure interferes with the thought, however, or if problems with complicated technology obscure the content, the facilitator is better off avoiding such aids and concentrating on making a coherent, lively verbal presentation.

Reinforcing the Effectiveness of the Lecturette

After the lecturette there should be some activity that builds on conceptual learning. Otherwise, the retention of the content will be lessened. Lecturette should be sequenced in such a way that they link the previous activities with later ones. Several methods can be used to “nail down” the learning.

Question/Answer Period: This traditional teaching method helps to clarify points in the lecturette. A good practice is to have participants rehearse their questions with each other before asking them to the facilitator.

Quiz: The facilitator administers a test based on the concepts in the lecturette. The presentation may be oral, poster, or in print. Individuals respond to the items, compare their answers with each other, and discuss any disagreements with the facilitator. It is important not to establish a traditional classroom like atmosphere with adult learners in KVK. The use of this method should not result in anxiety about learning or getting the right answers.

Statements: The trainer explains that most questions posted after a lecturette imply points of view, the participants are invited to make declarative statements to the facilitator and to the group. The facilitator directs a discussion of the points raised. This method requires some patience on the part of the trainer since many participants have been heavily conditioned to ask the “expert” questions rather than to look within themselves for meaningful reactions. Participant’s questions are sometimes statements in disguise, however, and need to be turned around before the facilitator responds.

Handouts: Conceptual learning can be reinforced by giving participants the essential content in print form after the lecturette has been presented. If this is done before or during the presentation, participants may distract themselves by reading instead of listening. The facilitator needs to announce before hand that a handout will be provided after the lecturette because some participants will resent having taken notes unnecessarily. A significant proportion of participants, however, will listen better if taking notes at the same time and will do so even if handouts are going to be distributed. A general rule is to provide a handout for any lecturette in which participants are likely to feel anxious that they will not be able to write everything down.

Application Planning and Goal Setting: Participants are instructed to work individually or in pairs to apply the concepts presented to actual situations.

Role Playing: Subgroups are formed to create role plays which can illustrate various points in the conceptual input. These skits are presented to and discussed by the total group.

Skill Practice: The facilitator demonstrates the application of one or more concepts from the lecturette and then provides opportunities to act out effective behaviours in practice activities.

The major concerns the facilitator after presenting a lecturette are to ensure that the input has been understood clearly and that it has practical usefulness for the participants. The above activities are examples that can meet this need.

In a sense all learning is experiential in that there must be some experience on which to base one's behaviour changes. What these methods can do is to increase the likelihood that the learner will have meaningful contact with concepts, and that talking through this experience will result in a self-directed change towards more effective behaviour. The purpose of the lecturette in human relations work is not to enlighten so much as to provide the basis for choice.

Some Key Points to Make your Lecturette Effective:

- 1. Two-way Communication:** Keep the lecturette interactive in nature. Ask participants if points are clear, if they agree with them or they have anything to add. If your voice is the only voice to be heard you can be sure people are "checking out" concentration is being lost.
- 2. Handouts:** When it is practical and feasible provide handouts with all key learning.
- 3. Duration:** The difference between lecture and lecturette is duration. Lecturette are usually no longer than 23-30 minutes. They don't bore people.
- 4. Pace:** Speak slowly, give participants a chance to think about what you are saying, Repeat key points.
- 5. A Questioning Attitude:** Constantly ask questions. Keep the participants active at all time. Pull learning from participant experience at every opportunity. A good trainer approaches new learning with a questioning attitude, and gets participants to provide as much of the "new" information as possible from their experience.
- 6. Trainer Notes:** Notes tends to be a distraction and barrier between you and the participants. Refer to notes but do not read from them.
- 7. Visuals:** Adult learns more effectively when they hear and see something at the same time. Don't present FCs with tiny drawing or print. Make your drawings big and clear. If you use overheads do the same.
- 8. Eye Contact/ Movement:** Establish and maintain eye contact to stimulate interest and check understanding. Move slowly in different parts of the training area. Don't stand in one place.
- 9. Concrete Examples:** Illustrate points with clear and specific examples that participants can relate to.
- 10. Joint Ownership:** Particularly difficult questions should be thrown back to the group. Search for the answer together with the participants and generate joint ownership of learning. But don't let unfocused or unproductive discussion continue for very long.