

February 2007

People Profile: Adam Murray

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Recommended Citation

Editor (2007) "People Profile: Adam Murray," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 19: Iss. 1, Article 23.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.5244>

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hire, the position of Head of Acquisitions was vacant, resulting in a substantial gap in modern policies and procedures, especially regarding electronic resources and collection assessment. Preliminary steps towards acquiring an **Electronic Resource Management System (ERM)** had been undertaken, including product demonstrations and the formation of a planning committee.

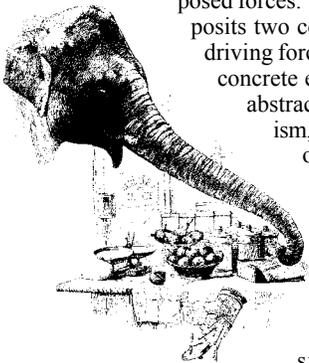
Policy gaps had a direct impact on both the needs of the institution and of the attendee. Staff members were aware of these shortcomings, but required a supervisor to suggest possible solutions; however, the attendee — being a recent library school graduate — needed confirmation from professional colleagues as to the viability of any solutions he suggested. The attendee also had the added need of an introduction to the world of library acquisitions in order to identify concerns of the position that had not occurred to either himself or his staff. The author had been on the job for three months when he attended his first professional library conference.

This background information provides context to the application of **Kolb's ELM**, particularly with respect to the concrete experience stage of the learning process.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Model

The **Experiential Learning Model** developed by Kolb (1984) is used as an analytic framework for this exploration. There are a number of experiential learning models, such as those developed by **Lewis**, **Dewey**, and **Piaget**. Each of these models is based on the **Hegelian** notion that learning takes place through conflict between diametrically opposed forces. **Kolb's** model posits two conflicts as the driving force of learning: concrete experience vs. abstract conceptualism, and reflective observation vs. active experimentation. The component factors of these two dialectics are also the stages in the process of learning. They are outlined in sequential order below:

- Concrete experience: focuses on dealing with immediate situations and has a concern with "the uniqueness and complexity of present reality as opposed to theories and generalizations" (**Kolb**, 1984, p. 68).
- Reflective observation: focuses on "understanding the meaning of ideas and situations by carefully observing and impartially describing them" (**Kolb**, 1984, p. 68).
- Abstract conceptualization: emphasizes the creation of general theories rather



against the grain people profile

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IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Read, of all things!

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Since graduating from library school...getting a first job! 🐘

than being concerned with understanding the meaning of one specific area

- Active experimentation: practical applications rather than observation

Individuals tend to emphasize different parts of this learning process to different extents, resulting in individual learning styles based largely on Jungian personality types. **Kolb** states that "each of these four dimensions becomes more highly integrated at higher stages of [individual] development" (**Kolb**, 1984, p. 140).

Rather than focusing on individual learning styles and their integration (there is some evidence of poor correlations between **Kolb's** learning styles and the Jungian personality types upon which **Kolb** based his model), this paper emphasizes the process by which learning takes place (**Garner**, 2000). In **Kolb's** model, concrete experience and abstract conceptualization are diametrically opposed, as are reflective observation and active experimentation, yet these pairs of opposites are linked by the actions **Kolb** calls grasping and transformation, respectively. **Kolb** states:

The simple perception of experience is not sufficient for learning; something must be done with it. Similarly, transformation alone cannot represent learning, for there must be something to be transformed, some state or experience that is being acted upon (**Kolb**, 1984, p. 42).

From this perspective, **Kolb** posits the following working definition of learning: learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (**Kolb**, 1984, p. 38).

For the purposes of this exploration, **Kolb's ELM** was chosen not for its emphasis on the different individual learning styles, but for its presentation of the learning process as the result of two dialectics. This process-oriented perspective lends itself to an exploration of learning at the institution level, where individual learning styles are not taken into account.

Analysis

While this exploration takes the form of a case study, the methodology utilized does not warrant calling this a true case study. Despite this, an attempt was made to record impartial observations of the actions taken by the institution (not its constituent individuals) in order to provide a context for readers wishing to apply this model to their own institution. These observations are presented below under the appropriate stage of the learning process.

Concrete experience

The first stage of the learning process in **Kolb's ELM** is concrete experience. Concrete experience forgoes general theories to focus on the present reality of any given situation and forms the basis for observation and reflection (**Loo**, 2004, p. 99). This stage highly emphasizes direct sensing and feeling and values feedback from peers (**Kolb**, 1984, p. 201).

In the context of this exploration, concrete experience takes place prior to the conference. The conference was viewed by both attendee and non-attendees as a method of obtaining information applicable to the issues and problems faced by the institution. Recognition of these needs was based on the staff's 20+ years of experience as well as the attendee's efforts to grasp the details of each area of responsibility. Attending product demonstrations and implementing a planning committee for a future **ERM** is an example of concrete experience. How the conference could address these institutional needs was included in an active planning process prior to the conference. This entailed a meeting to review the conference schedule and proceeding abstracts in order to determine what best suited the needs of the institution.

At this level, concrete experience is highly individualized, as each person in the institution has different areas of responsibility and levels of expertise. Despite this, each individual's concrete experience lends to the institutional

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