

THE IMPACT OF THE TRAINING METHOD ON STUDENT SATISFACTION: THEORY VERSUS PRACTICE - ONE OF THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: *In my study, after a general introduction to the training method, I discuss its important role in higher education and link it to the learning pyramid theory. I will describe the so-called T-subjects integrated in the curriculum of our university (Hungarian Agricultural and Life Sciences University, MATE), which are implemented in the economics majors (bachelor, master and doctoral), and which are present in both our Hungarian and English language economics courses. In the empirical part, I summarise the opinions expressed in the textual reflections of a selected group of students from the Leadership Skills Training in five different classes of international students. The feedback clearly demonstrates that master's students need both the latest and most up-to-date theories and the skills acquired through experiential learning.*

Keywords: *training method; experiential learning; T-subject, university student feedback.*

Introduction

Nowadays, in addition to the application of traditional methods of higher education, there is a need for both instructors and students to find a new, effective method for transferring and acquiring knowledge. One of the trendy ways of training, the experiential training, is nowadays associated with the business sector, although it is effective in almost all segments. Our university was one of the first in Hungary to introduce training courses, initially through distance learning, and later full-time and part-time. Today, it is inconceivable that our students, whether they are studying for a bachelor's or master's degree or a doctorate, would not encounter personality development,

communication, career guidance, conflict management, negotiation techniques, etc., which help them to develop their skills, increase their self-esteem and integrate into society.

Poór (2006) says about why the training method can be a runner-up among methods that favour experiential learning that, training is a complex, sophisticated teaching method that can also be seen as a form of continuing education. It involves training to achieve a specific objective and the teaching methods used are always aimed at the acquisition of specific competences. It does not, of course, exclude theoretical lectures with presentations and common computer exercises, which are necessary to acquire certain theoretical knowledge. The training is a complex training and further training procedure (combination of methods), in the context of which goal-oriented (on demand) content and training for the acquisition of certain competences is provided, the necessary theoretical knowledge is processed, and its application is combined with self-monitoring (feedback). Through the assessment of the exercises and the use of tests, the application of the participant to a given activity is also explored and the development of personality traits for the activity is also achieved.

Learning about the training method and then practising and recommending it is, in my view, essential in management training courses, so it is not surprising that the curriculum of the Master of Management and Leadership at our university includes training courses. After discussing the training method, I will analyse the feedback from five different training groups in five different year groups (2019 -2023).

The training method (T-group)

The concept of training method is very often used in written and oral form. Training is offered, advertised, and implemented daily, but the definition of this concept and its content is very diverse (Poór, 2006). Also, the different naming, not to mention the variations translated into different languages, make it difficult to clearly define: a T-group or training group sometimes also called a sensitivity training group, human relations training group or encounter group. According to a broader definition is a form of group training where participants (typically between 8 and 15 people) learn about themselves (and usually about small group processes) through interaction with each other. They use feedback, problem solving, and role play to gain insights into themselves, others, and the group.

The method was pioneered by Moreno and his disciple Lewin: the concept of the encounter as "the meeting of two people, face to face, face to face" was formulated by Moreno (1946) in Vienna and matured into psychodrama therapy, and his protégé Lewin (1935) and his colleagues pioneered a way of understanding human behaviour as well as Gordon's (1977) efficiency improvement and Berne's (1958) theory of transaction analysis. Burk (2023) highlights Shein's role in the development of the T-group method to say that his contributions to the T-group movement were prolific.

Voss & Blackburne (2019) considers that the training is a group development method, essentially a skill development method, where participants gain personal experience, through experiential learning, new knowledge about themselves, others, and their attitudes to different situations. To this end, the trainers use a variety of games, situational and role-playing exercises, which are processed, the participants give each other feedback, the laws of group dynamics are at work. Légrádiné Lakner (2006) considers that the training does not take the processes through, it only sets them in motion, and the participants themselves must work on these processes in their everyday life situations. So, the didactic aim was not to close the book definitively, but to set a definite field, to present a framework of interpretation that would support the participants in developing their own ideas. Neményiné Gyimesi (2006) says the training is at the same time an "information product" which is consumed in the process of its production. Whereas in the case of the former, the consumer can obtain information about the utility, the properties, characteristics, and quality of the goods ex-ante, i.e., through a preliminary trial and search process, in the case of experiential goods, the utility and quality can only be judged ex post, through consumption experience, and therefore preferences are formed during consumption (Tirole, 1988). Bajkai-Tóth & Óri (2019) have a similar opinion, according to them training is a buzzword nowadays, often used in connection with various corporate training courses. In fact, because of its popularity, many people use the term even when they are taking part in a traditional, face-to-face classroom training course.

The main features of training are goal-orientation, active participation in the training and immediate feedback, which is a bit like language learning, but the differences are much more striking in the case of vocational training. The aim of training is to enable participants to use their existing knowledge in a creative way and to create something new on their own. Furthermore, in this type of training, the role of the training leader is not to provide a replicable, learnable model, such as a

mathematics teacher in secondary school, but to guide, organise and, where necessary, encourage the learning process (Neményiné Gyimesi, 2006).

According Balogh (2016) complexity, in a nutshell, means that the participants apply the knowledge they have acquired in exercises modelling their everyday environment and, during the feedback, they gain feedback and experience on the development of their activities - their personality. The complexity of the training method can be expressed, on the one hand, in the fact that it synthesises elements of 'classical' education and training procedures and integrates them into the process in accordance with the objective. There is considerable scope for the prior and ongoing processing of the literature (selected sections of the literature), the presence of a lecture form of communication, and the use of procedures based on the activity of the participants (the training community), the inclusion of discussion, debate, and workshop as a dominant factor. An important factor is the active participation of all members of the training group (learning group) in the processing of theoretical knowledge, to build on this in the application, the putting into practice and the feedback of what has been learned. A very important element of complexity is that the process is not only about learning, but also about applying the knowledge acquired in situations specific to their own activities. This is applicable knowledge, which means that the knowledge acquired can be applied by the participants in situations specific to their work. The skills, competences and abilities acquired during the training are the result of a development process which, through and as a result of the training (by virtue of its complexity-intensity), characterises the participants according to the following stages: learning to perform the sub-actions of the action; the coordination and consolidation of the partial actions into a smoothly rolling whole action; abandoning unnecessary movements and effort; reduction of external control; mastery of variants of operations and a shift to continuous autonomous work. The first level in the process of instructional training is usually the reflective-reproductive level, when the participant implements the activity well by example, which can be called an executive, "copying" type of activity. During the training (based on a deeper processing of what has been learned), we reach the "reflective-creative" level, when the participant (student) is able to create something new, to use (apply) the acquired knowledge in a creative way. This is a characteristic of the intensive nature of the training process, properly implemented (Poór, 2007).

Since one of the most important characteristics of the training method is that the experience, intelligence, and motivation of the participants, mainly adults, leads to quick and effective results, it was natural for us to base the training on the professional background, knowledge, and wide range of knowledge of university students. During the preparatory phase, we identified the topics that we considered essential, and then, in line with the time available for the training, we narrowed down the issues to be examined, while at the same time, at this stage, we felt it necessary to continue the training later, organising specific courses after gathering the needs. First, the topics to be covered in the training were selected from the incredibly large and varied range of definitions, and theories (Raynolds, 2019).

A T-group is a learning laboratory in which group members explore and learn leadership and group membership skills by participating freely with one another, sharing “here and now” experiences and reactions and giving/receiving feedback to/from each other. The focus is on what is happening in real time among the participants. In a T-group, the participant has no choice but to address issues in the moment. Everyone is a witness to what has occurred. This makes for a very rich and complete data set to be “mined” for learning. The learning is “self-referential” and individualized. Different participants have different learning needs. Every participant sets and works his or her own learning goals. The goal-oriented nature of training means that it is a shorter training period in which the specific knowledge needed to perform a task, to develop a competence is processed and put into practice. In the case of these training courses, goal-orientation also means that, because of the training, the knowledge is applied in the appropriate way at the end of the course, the personality traits developed and reinforced are put into practice in the workplace and, as a result, work is more effective (Juhász, 2009).

The personality revealing and developmental factor of the training - showing continuous development - is based on the evaluation and analysis of the exercises. In the context of the various types of exercises, feedback is given on the solution, the expression of personality in activity, the content and personality factors of the task solution during the evaluation and analysis work, and the participant concerned can gain an idea of his/her own "role" and the quality of his/her work. Analyses of tasks that gradually represent the requirements (recall from memory images or objective visual or aural recall) provide the participant with feedback on the initial situation and the ongoing development of the activity, which, reflecting a given

situation, may indicate stagnation or a certain progress or development (Forintos, 2006).

We must also address the reception of the feedback process by the person concerned, which tends to be accompanied by a certain confrontation phenomenon, self-confrontation. The 'image' of an action retained in oneself, and the 'image' of the action recalled often do not coincide, a positive or negative difference may appear for the 'actor', even though the (contributing) partners in the process do not perceive this, and even consider it as an objective 'reflection'. The essence of self-confrontation is that the individual may be confronted with hitherto unknown aspects of his/her behaviour (activity, personality), and may become aware of the shortcomings or falsity of his/her self-image. In the first stage of this process, the external traits come to the fore (cosmetic effect), i.e., the attention is wrongly directed not to the activity, not to the content, not to the personality. This stage should be reduced to focus attention on the content of the training, i.e., the 'performance confrontation', in which attention is directed to the essence of the training, the development of personality and the development of competence (Rudnák et al., 2016).

To summarise, training is intensive training in the processing and practical application of a specific body of knowledge, where almost all the senses are mobilised, and the knowledge is applied in an activity-specific environment. In the context of training, all the senses are activated, the knowledge is applied in situations typical of daily activities, and all the tools are used to acquire and apply knowledge, which is a prerequisite for its solid memorisation and long-term retention, and thus for its secure recall. The complexity of the training is essentially provided from several sides and can be said to be the essence of the method.

The training method in higher education

According to Piercy (2013) the use of experiential learning techniques has become popular in business education. Experiential learning approaches have significant advantages in teaching contemporary management practices such as cross-functional and team-based work. However, there is still relatively little empirical data on the success of experiential pedagogy in supporting such efforts. Awasthy et al. (2015) examines the role of Sensitisation Training (ST) methods in higher education institutions as a provider of training for future managers. The original contribution of this study is to review the process of experiential learning (EL) in ST. ST is a form of EL, yet it is a different process as it mediates through confidence building.

Based on the knowledge retention pyramid, we can expect the following retention rates for different learning techniques (Figure 1):

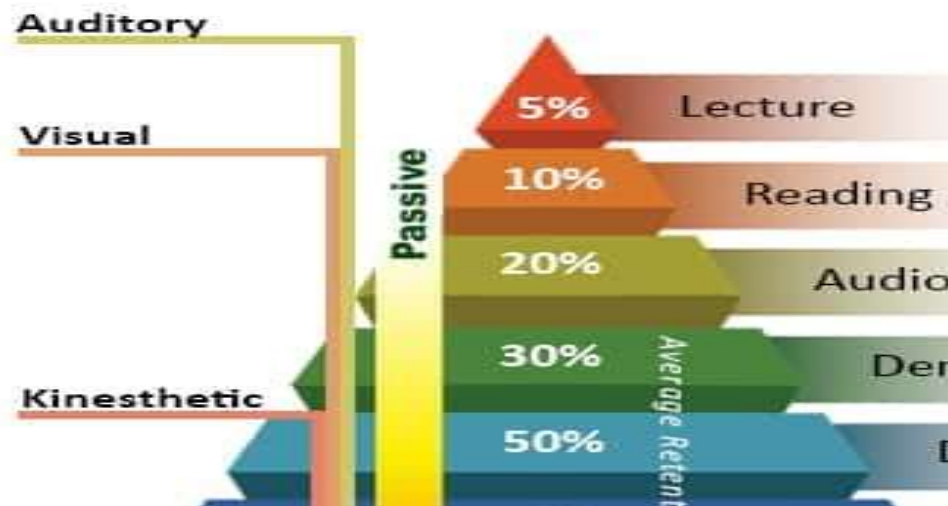


Figure 1: Learning Pyramid

Source: National Training Laboratories, Bethel Maine

Intensification, on the other hand, means that the training (as a complex) process seeks to ensure that what has been acquired, the knowledge, is firmly retained. The methods of training involve listening and seeing; processing and communicating what has been read; and the practical application of the knowledge processed. This is a crucial element of training, since it mobilises almost the entire range of the senses, ensuring that knowledge is retained only by means of a thorough grasp of the application in a variety of ways. Thorough memorisation and long-term retention require that as many of our senses as possible are functional during the acquisition of knowledge (Alosaimi, 2016).

Letrud & Hernes (2018) study finds the following: the family of cognitive models, sometimes referred to as the "learning pyramid", is highly regarded in many areas of educational studies, even though no one knows how they originated or whether they are supported by empirical evidence. It has been noted that versions of the learning pyramids have been part of educational debate and practice for over 160 years. These results show that the models were not derived from empirical research. They also argue that today's Learning Pyramids have not kept pace with advances in cognitive psychology, despite continuous modifications and modernisation. The conception of memory suggested by the Learning Pyramids differs significantly from the standard picture of human memory.

Rudnák et al. (2016) lays down training is a complex, sophisticated teaching method training design has many intuitive elements and can be seen more as a trend or an intention than an actual lesson design. Many schools prescribe thematic plans, which are like the timetable of a regular school curriculum. This form is certainly possible, but even a trainer with minimal experience knows that if the group is leading the process, the use of time can only be influenced indirectly. In designing the training, we have used the method of space grid design, i.e., the participant experience/learning is guided by the following space grid:

- Axis 1 the individual/personality dimension. Sub-dimensions: perception, cognition, attention, thinking, emotions, learning, remembering, action/activity, etc.
- Axis 2 group dimension. Sub-dimensions: group development (from formation to leaving the group), group dynamics (from exploration to the 'we know' motive), quantitative and qualitative aspects of communication, task situation from problem perception to managing resistance to getting results, group roles (role taking, role delegation, identification, collisions, etc.)
- Axis 3 is the dimension of tasks and interpretations, or in other words the methodology, method, and tool's part (see programme)
- Axis 4 is the number of participants. This is also where small group work, the classical diad, triad structure, etc. can be represented.

In the evolution of the training market, quantitative characteristics have been replaced by qualitative ones: clients demand sophisticated objectives, professionally based training programmes with professional, well-prepared trainers. Experiential learning of almost all professional competences can be provided through training. Self-confrontation during training can become an essential element of the development activity if it is analysed from the right perspective and contributes to the achievement of the training objective by means of a 'step'. It is important when conducting training to define the purpose of each exercise (task), the criteria for observation, analysis and evaluation, so that each statement serves the output of the training (development of skills and competences) and each observation helps the trainee in one direction (Neacsu, 2014).

Higher education has a big role to play in shaping the personalities and interpersonal relationships of the students who come out of it. This

requires the acquisition of appropriate competences and skills development, and a high level of practical skills alongside theoretical knowledge. For trainers, the challenge is to balance the emphasis on the transfer of lexical knowledge with the emphasis on practical skills. Indeed, business organisations expect their future employees to have social and personal competences as well as knowledge and awareness. It is in their interest and their aim to train and develop human resources as a strategic factor. The increasing integration of training into the curriculum provides an opportunity to develop the above-mentioned areas. University lecturers and trainers need to correctly and timely identify the development directions that will apply the most effective training methods in response to the accelerating economic environment (Bajkai-Tóth & Óri, 2018).

Mészáros (2015) assesses Hungarian higher education practice in terms of the effectiveness of the training method. Kurucz & Magyar-Stifter (2018) analyses the usefulness of the training already implemented, Kóbor (2021) reports on the usefulness of training in the social sector. Méhes & Kópics (2022) report on the introduction of new methods by their institution: the aim of the programme is also to familiarise participants with the basic concepts of training, interactive training elements and their use in education, as well as to learn basic facilitation techniques. The programme will take the form of an eight-hour training session and the number of participants will be limited, considering the methodologies used. The first important step in the training is to develop a common set of concepts, with the aim of ensuring that all participants have the same understanding of the concepts used.

In conclusion, the effectiveness of the curriculum-based training tool in higher education has been proven, and it is therefore recommended that not only a wider range of higher education students, but also teachers, should be increasingly involved in its use and enjoyment.

Training subjects in the economic courses of MATE

Since many of the teachers at our institute and in our department are also qualified as vocational trainers and counsellors, teaching experiential learning in T-groups is not a problem. When compiling the curricula of our bachelor, master, and doctoral courses, we pay particular attention to the timing of the training courses. Naturally, the training courses in the first semester also have a team-building function, while the training courses in the last semester also cover current challenges of the labour market in addition to the specific objectives. The T-subjects listed in Table 1 present lessons on different topics of experiential learning at the different levels of education.

Table 1: Subjects taught using the training method at MATE

NAME OF THE TRAINING	COURSE	CONTENT
Personality development and communication	Business Administration BSc 1 st semester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> two-day training self-awareness, confidence, feedback, active listening, assertiveness, communication methods
Business communication and negotiation technique	Business Administration BSc 2 nd semester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> two-day training meeting, eight-phase negotiation, DISC model, coaching, time management, teamwork
Preparatory training for a multicultural environment	for all courses both semesters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> two-day training ethnorelative and ethnocentric view, multiculturalism, integration competence, cultural intelligence (CQ)
Career orientation	Business Administration BSc 6 th semester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> two-day training job application: resumes, interviews, business etiquette, the ability to say no, time management, presentation
Leadership skills	Management and Leadership MSc 2 nd semester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> five-day training trust building, engagement, delegation, team building, communication, conflict management, motivation, self-awareness
MBTI and Communication	Management and Leadership MSc 1 st semester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> two-day training MBTI dimensions, field of use, additional personality theories, leadership types, confidence, self-esteem
Negotiation and Conflict	Management and Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> two-day training sources and types of

Resolution	MSc 3 rd semester	conflicts, techniques and theories of conflict management, the negotiation situation, negotiation techniques
Management organization and human resource management	doctoral school 3 rd semester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • two-day training • human qualities of a leader, HRM, change management, organizations, leader and boss

Source: own edited

Feedback from Master of Management and Leadership students on the Leadership Skills Training

The Leadership Skills Training is a four-semester course in the second semester of the master's degree and is usually delivered over 5 full days between 8.30am and 6pm, with, of course, face-to-face attendance - although unfortunately this has been overtaken by the Covid-19 epidemic.

The situational exercises focus on the following topics, among others: Trust building, Change management, Engagement, Delegation of tasks, Management communication, Conflict management, Motivation, Self-awareness, Team building and from two perspectives (manager and subordinate), we will examine and discuss roles, situations, accompanying phenomena and further influencing factors.

Guinot (2021) confirms the importance of these topics, as he believes that the growing implementation of horizontal structures means trust has become an essential value in many companies' operations. Teamwork, the need for constant collaboration and communication and the delegation of tasks and responsibilities inherent in this type of structure require a high degree of trust between all parties. On the other hand, companies frequently collaborate with each other to maintain their competitiveness. These business alliance agreements must be based on a close relationship of trust that allows them to work effectively together. Another study explains that trust has also been shown to improve individual and collective performance. Thus, when there are higher levels of trust, workers tend to perform better, teams function better and organizational performance increases (Guinot & Chiva, 2019). Only by evolving towards a culture and environment of trust will companies be able to develop their full human potential and possibilities of success. Zolfaghari & Farsan (2022) investigates how

organizational members activate multiple sources of cultural values to develop trust with their colleagues from different cultural backgrounds. Through a series of surveys followed by semi-structured interviews, data were collected from members operating in five different multinational organizations based in Germany and South Africa. Analyzed abductively, our findings illustrate the multiple sources of cultural values that influence members' disposition to trust and their assessment of their colleague's trustworthiness.

Table 2: Leadership Skills Training by year and participants

year	number of international students
2019	17
2020	16
2021	15
2022	12
2023	12

Source: own edited

A detailed description and analysis of the training exercises will not be presented in this paper, but some of the general evaluation formulations will be presented:

We felt many feelings such as fun, stress, fear, happiness, friendship love, joy etc. It was very interesting because we all understand that we are here to make change and we are here to become a real and good leader in the future that is why we should be more responsible for what we are doing, be more flexible and adaptable with the environment changes, people mood and needs changing and so on. We should at the end trust each other, trust our jobs because the notion of trust and confidence are very important in the job world and trust everything that we do because that what makes difference and make us special from the others. / a student from Tunisia

The training was highly valuable, offering a well-rounded learning experience. The tasks and activities were thoughtfully designed to address key aspects of transitions, teamwork, delegation, and monitoring. The trainer's guidance and feedback were instrumental in facilitating learning and growth. I feel confident that the knowledge and skills acquired will have a positive impact on my personal and professional development. / a student from Kyrgyzstan

After five days of training, I think this training is very necessary. Because before this training, although we were classmates and had been through more than one semester, we did not have much contact

and communication with each other due to online classes, and basically, we were strangers to each other. But after this training, I felt that we all knew each other and got closer to each other, and we had more communication and developed mutual understanding through some group activities and increased everyone's sense of belonging to the whole team. With the help of the professor, we continued to gain a deeper understanding of some leadership skills and personal development. Overall, during the five days of training, we all worked hard to learn the points that the trainer wanted us to understand and to present ourselves in the best way possible in all the exercises to fully integrate ourselves into the group, which I think was the trainer's hope. For the professor, I think she took this teaching style instead of the traditional lecture style to better allow us to learn from doing. But it increases the trainer/professor's workload in the preparation phase, which I respect very much. Also, the trainer was very patient and helpful, and we got along very well. / a student from China

As a suggestion, encourage students to keep a diary about their leadership lessons and their personal learning about themselves. Great leaders need to know about themselves, and they can also journal feedback given to them which will help them to grow. They should always read back on this and observe how they have changed over time. / a student from Jordan

If student desires feedback, then you should try to set up a short meeting after class to give them feedback or during the break. Alternatively keep doing what you have done in class. Get the students to give each other feedback. From the time they started the training to end and what has changed in the person. That's all I can offer from this amazing course. Thank you. / a student from Ghana

The course of Leadership skills helped me a lot in this field. I really appreciate our trainer's effort on us. She really wanted us to learn and to be a good leader in the future. She never made a difference between introverted and extraverted people. She always motivated the introverted people to speak up. Just like me. I am a quite introverted person and always hesitated to speak up in front of many people. But after this course I learned to overcome some barriers in front of me which would be a big danger for my future development. In this training I learned for to be adequate and to socialize. I learned how to act in the team. Also, I learned how to analyse a problem and discuss with the colleagues about the problem. / a student from Turkey

I realize that we all have ways we see things and perceive things. What you may see as good may seem to be bad to another person. So as a

good leader you must respect and tolerate the ideas and thoughts of people to achieve a desired success and results. This training has helped me to believe in myself and given me great conviction with optimistic to achieve to greater height. There is still more to learn since leadership is practical, we need to practice and get experience to be better leaders. / a student from Nigeria

The training days provided an exciting range of activities that contributed to personal and professional growth. The tasks fostered self-reflection, collaboration, cultural awareness, and skill development. They offered practical insights and knowledge applicable to various contexts. The overall assessment of the training days is positive, as it facilitated learning, engagement, and personal development. / a student from Syria

The training program enables me to obtain leadership skills in aspects of widely fundamental information and theorizing, which could prove beneficial to me as a character and behavioural realization of a leader with aspects of globalized alterations. By the value of the lesson itself, trainer experience, and trainee participation. I personally state that this training is successful in knowledge transfer, mutual understanding, and multicultural awareness. The training will effectively lead to behavioural changes, attitude alternatives, and being effective in a human context. /a student from Laos

I hereby with due respect and whole heart acknowledge that you were good during training. You were little bit strict during the training regarding timing, presence, but still I think that it was all for our benefit. It was for us to learn the time management. It was because of your hardworking and sincerity we learnt about, what we never knew before. Thanks for all of this. / a student from Turkey

“We came here alone and individually, but we are going home as a TEAM.”

And finally, this word cloud is the result of the aggregation of the submissions written on the analysis of the training exercises (Figure 2):

As a matter of fact, most managers will readily admit that the interpersonal aspects of their job are more challenging than the technical ones. Furthermore, it is well known that more than 80% of managers who are dismissed lose their jobs because of poorly developed interpersonal skills, therefore the justification for Leadership Skills Training is indisputable. Even those who don't lose their jobs find that their inability to increase their interpersonal skills limits their career, which clearly demonstrate the importance of skill development methods, experiential learning, and the effectiveness of the T-group method.

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