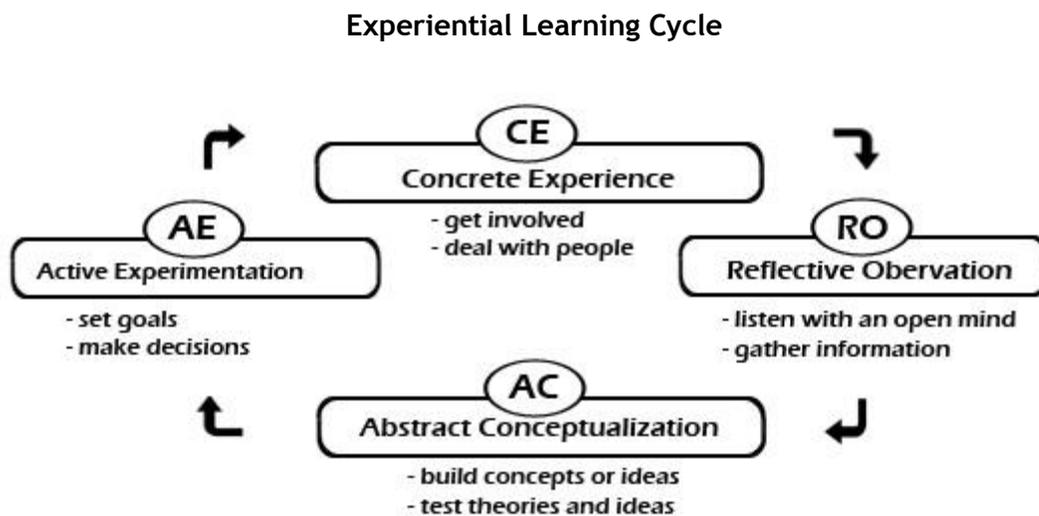
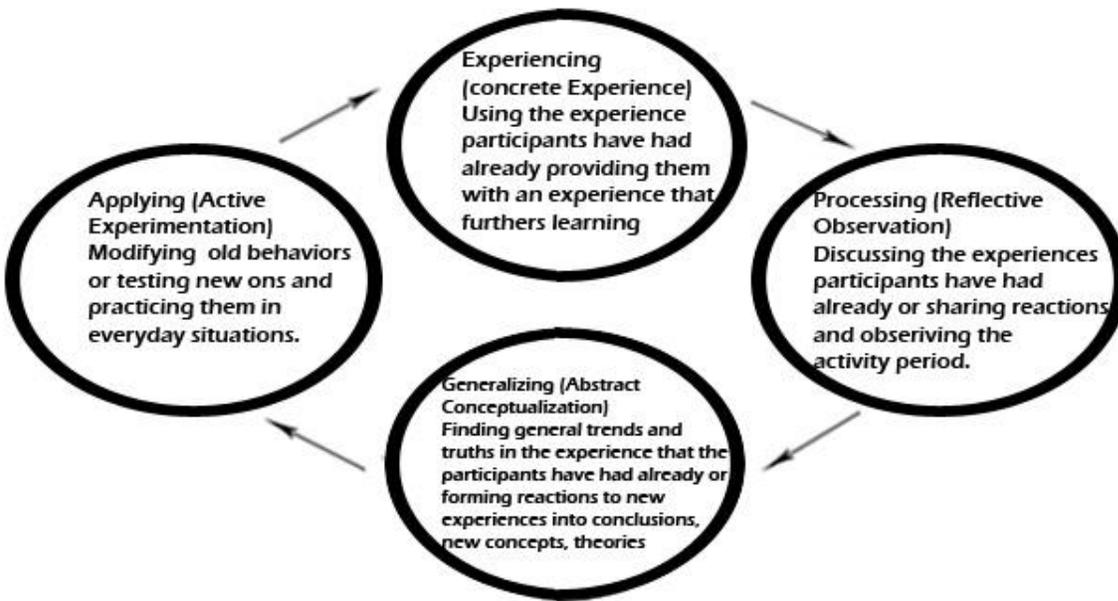


D. How Adults Learn

When you are learning, the process often seems complicated and confusing. But there are really only four basic steps in learning. These four steps occur time after time, each one building on the earlier ones. If you understand these four steps, you control one of the basic keys to increasing your ability to learn, both in workshops and in “real life”. The process is also called “Experiential Learning”.



Although adults learn continually, they do have preferences about how they learn. David Kolb (1976) calls these “Learning Style Preferences.”



Some adults have a receptive, experience based approach to learning: these individuals rely heavily on feeling-based judgments and learn best from specific examples, involvement and discussions. Kolb calls these learners **Concrete Experiencers**. In the Experiential Learning Cycle, the Concrete Experiencer may be excited by experiencing the activity (step 1). However, the Concrete Experiencer may become glassy-eyed in Step 3, when the group generalizes about the activity.

Some adults have a tentative, impartial and reflective approach to learning. Such individuals rely on careful observation and learn best from situations that allow impartial observation. Kolb calls these **Reflective Observers**. These individuals, in terms of the Experiential learning Cycle, obtain insight and learning most easily from processing (Step 2) and generalizing (Step 3) rather than from doing the activity (Step 1) or applying the activity (Step 4).

Continuing around the Adult Learning Cycle, other adults have an analytical and conceptual approach to learning, relying heavily on logical thinking and rational evaluation. These individuals learn best from impersonal situations, from the opportunity to integrate new learning with what is already known, and from theory. This group is termed the **Abstract Conceptualizers**; they tend to be most comfortable in generalizing, step 3 of the Experiential Learning Cycle.

Finally, there are adult learners who are called **Active Experimenters**. Their approach to learning is pragmatic and practical. (“Yes but will it work?”) They rely on experimentation and learn best from projects, back-home applications and “trying it out”. They must have the answer to the question: “Now that I know all this, what am I going to do with it?” Step 4 in the Experiential Learning Cycle, applying, is especially necessary for the Active Experimenter.

The Experiential Learning Cycle cannot be changed simply because an individual prefers one particular approach to learning. If effective, lasting learning is to occur with any individual, the Experiential Learning Cycle must be completed. It is therefore necessary that a trainer is able to lead the learners skilfully through all aspects of the learning cycle.