

## Press Release

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### Do we *really* learn from experience?

It is always assumed that we do but history – recent and less recent – has often shown otherwise.

Though it was not the objective of the Experiential Learning Congress to find a definitive answer to this question, it certainly was a starting point of the discussion. EABIS President, Gilbert Lenssen mentioned the two ideologies represented in the building of the hosting institution ESMT – communism and capitalism – as one of the examples for great ideas and their subsequent failures.

Starting from the premises that learning from experience is indeed possible, the **Experiential Learning Congress** explored the *how* as much as the *why*. In the evening of the 25 November, the Congress started off with a presentation from Prof. Wolfgang Stark from the University Duisburg-Essen and Katrin Schöpf, who works on leadership development programmes at IBM. She highlighted in particular how the very competitive IBM Corporate Service Corps programme delivers benefits not only for the IBM employees who participate (in terms of increased confidence and cross-cultural teamworking abilities), and for the communities in the developing countries where projects in healthcare, education and entrepreneurship take place, but also for IBM as a whole, since it sees the programme as an effective tool for employee retention and building stronger loyalty to the company.



Friday 26 November kicked off with a presentation from Angela Whelan (Ashridge) and Patricia Riddell (Reading). For the first time, they presented an ongoing research project that looks into how our brains, and even more so, our bodies learn. Starting from the question to research participants: “What do you wish you had known ten years ago and how did you learn it?” they showed how the physiological response to a challenge has an impact – sometimes unconsciously – on long-term learning.

Afterwards, the programme continued with three workshops, giving insights into Service Learning as an all-purpose tool (Karsten Altenschmidt) and how Experiential Learning supports higher education and executive development (Gabriele Bartsch), but also actively engaging participants in exercises and concrete experience on the spot (Angela Jowitt and Billy Desmond).

A particular highlight – and challenge – was the 21 Pecha-Kucha style presentations. Each presenter had only 20 seconds for each of his 20 slides to share projects or ideas with the audience. Though it certainly



was not an easy thing to do, it allowed the audience to discover a great depth of knowledge and initiatives.

The panel session in the afternoon then looked more in detail at the different beneficiaries of experiential learning initiatives – leaders, students, communities and, of course, businesses. This panel, together with many of the presentations, demonstrated that we – academics, businesses and NGO representatives, do learn. It all depends on the right kind of facilitation, the recognition of the problems, the environment and, above all, the reflection process put in place to harness the learnings from the experience.

Summing up, EABIS Director Dr. Bevan referred to the philosophical and psychological approaches to experiential learning and gave more information on the special issue of the Journal for Management Development that will be one of the outcomes of the Congress.

The Experiential Learning Congress was hosted by ESMT Berlin, organised by EABIS and Agentur Mehrwert and supported by the Bosch Foundation.

### **For more information**

[Download the final programme](#)

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