

Techniques

Using the Discovering Model to Facilitate Transformational Learning and Career Development

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Abstract

Transformative Learning Theory has become one of the leading adult learning theories today and yet students, practitioners, and faculty can find it difficult to understand and apply. This article presents The Integrative Discovering Model and describes how it may be used for advising, teaching, career, or organizational development.

Introduction

Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991; Taylor, 2008) has become one of the leading adult learning theories today and yet students, practitioners, and faculty can find it difficult to use. This useful theory has been applied to a variety of settings, including helping to describe the process which occurs as life mission is related to self directed learning (Kroth & Boverie, 2000). In our book, *Transforming Work: The Five Keys to Achieving Trust, Commitment, and Passion in the Workplace* (2001), we proposed a Passion Transformation Model, intended to help leaders and individuals create passionate work and passionate work environments. A process we call Discovering is embedded in that model.

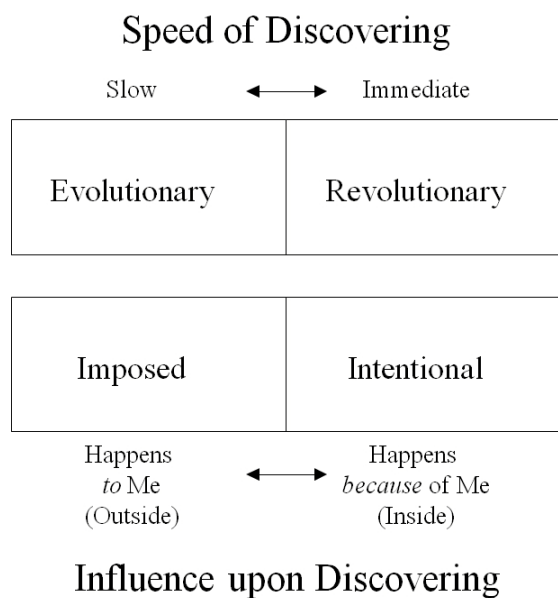
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It is grounded in Transformative Learning Theory and is intended to demonstrate how one's passion might be discerned. The purpose of this article is to present a model which can be used to help understand and facilitate the Discovering process.

The Discovering Model

We have been using the Discovering Model (see Figure 1) in our training, classroom, and presentations for several years. It is a practical tool to help understand and apply transformative learning in all arenas but particularly for student and employee career choice making.

Figure 1: Discovering Model



Transformative Learning Theory has evolved since Mezirow first proposed it and scholars have elaborated upon it (Kitchenham, 2008; Taylor, 2007). At its core, however, transformational learning occurs

when an individual's frame of reference – his or her paradigm – shifts to become more inclusive, permeable, integrated, and differentiated (Mezirow, 1991). In *Transforming Work*, we describe how transformative learning (TL) theory undergirds the Discovering process. Briefly, Mezirow suggested that learning might be the result of deliberate inquiry, which he called intentional; a by-product of another intentional learning activity, which he called incidental; or assimilative, which he said was mindless (Mezirow, 2000).

For our model, we modified these to say that transformation – or what we call Discovering - may be *imposed*, that is, it happens to me, or *intentional*, that is, it happens because of me. For most of us, when difficulties we did not expect – like divorce, health problems, disasters like 9/11 or Katrina, or losing our jobs – come our way, we are shocked and our worldview is inalterably changed. Those times are imposed – they happen to us - often very painfully and cause us to rethink what we believe about our careers or even lives.

Alternatively, we can be intentional about Discovering by immersing ourselves in new experiences, projects, relationships, or communities. Ibarra (2003) says that we learn about and change our working identities as we start doing new things (crafting experiments), interact with different people (shifting connections), and rethink the stories we have about our lives (making sense). This intentional, Discovering, process can be exciting, affirming or disconfirming, and adventuresome. It has the positive attribute of being more within our control.

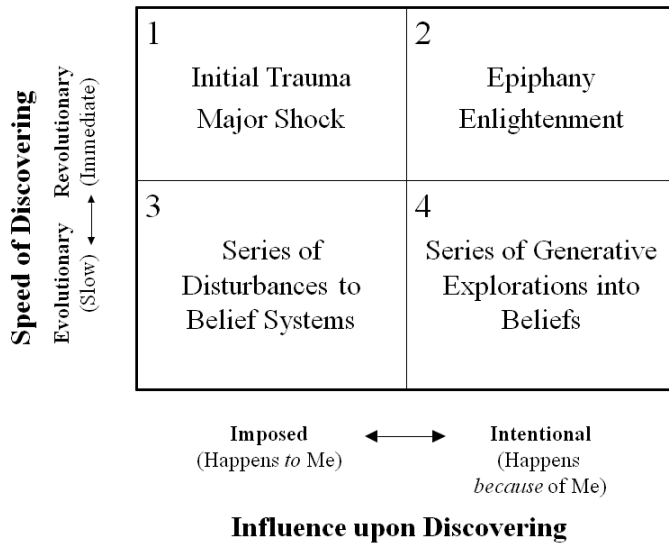
Mezirow (2000) also said that transformations might be incremental or epochal. Incremental change occurs through a progression of smaller shifts in frames of reference. Cumulatively, over time, they might result in a significant shift in beliefs about the world. Epochal, he said, in contrast is sudden and dramatic. Our model uses Evolutionary to describe the incremental Discovering process, and Revolutionary to describe the Epochal process.

The goal of personal Discovering is for individuals to come to understand that about which they are passionate. In the case of careers, it means learning what one loves to do, which might change, as Ibarra, suggests, over time. By its nature, Discovering is an emotional process. It involves danger, excitement, fear, taking risks, and learning. Facilitators of Discovering – career coaches, OD consultants, leaders – should consider the most humane and effective means of transformation.

The Integrative Discovering Model

The Integrative Discovering Model (see Figure 2) is a heuristical model and coaching tool for change facilitators and theoretical thinking. Presented simply here, it demonstrates the means of moving toward positive change by combining the two dimensions – speed of and influence upon Discovering – into a four quadrant model which can be used to explain the processes of transformation and to identify useful tools. Even Quadrant 1, where imposed, revolutionary Discovering can cause shock and trauma, can eventually result in positive change as people adapt their meaning structures, relationships, goals, and so forth, much as Mezirow (1991) describes the Perspective Transformation (PT) process to occur.

Figure 2: Integrated Discovering Model



Quadrant 4 implies that Mezirow's steps of Perspective Transformation might be incomplete. Mezirow (1991) has said that PT requires "self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame" (p. 168). Using the Integrative Discovering Model, it is easy to see that transformational learning might not include guilt or shame at all. Instead, a disorienting dilemma might cause joy and happiness to occur as a result of finding vocation, calling, Right Livelihood, enlightenment, or other forms of passionate work.

Conclusions

This model only considers two aspects of transformative learning. Still, practitioners and scholars can use the Integrative Discovering Model as a simple tool to communicate and study the transformational learning process. In particular, adult educators interested in helping non-traditional and other students develop or reconsider life and career direction might use this model for advising and career exploration.

References

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