

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

# Experiential learning

Our unique approach

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**“Feel the mess, feel the confusion, feel the discomfort. Then imagine new ways to overcome it.”**

CHIARA FREGONESE, SENIOR CONSULTANT, IMPACT ITALIA



# Introduction

Lasting change for our world starts with people.

Sustaining meaningful change is not about processes, structures or metrics; it's about shifts in human behaviour, both individual and collective. It's about people doing things differently or doing different things. Because objectives only succeed if people are engaging with them.

Experiential learning is the most powerful approach when it comes to achieving lasting behaviour change. It's about learning how to learn, and equipping the learner with a repeatable process for continuous improvement that enables them to interpret every situation as a learning opportunity.

In particular, it is highly effective for:

- Learning and change to attitudes, beliefs, values and other personal drivers
- Learning that is transferable to different contexts
- Learning that is personally and organisationally transformative

Experiential learning is a powerful approach because it is reflective of the fact that meaningful change is not an event, but a dynamic and ongoing process.

It is founded on the understanding that any real change story is actually a story of multiple small successes and failures – all in service of something a person or group of people wants to achieve.

Each of these successes and failures is an experiment and a chance to test and calibrate. They are potent learning opportunities, and when combined with a dynamic blend of knowledge and skills, direct encounter, and deep reflection, they can lead to transformational and lasting change.

Impact have pioneered experiential learning as our core methodology since 1980. In the following pages, we will introduce our unique approach to experiential learning and what that could look like on your Impact programme.

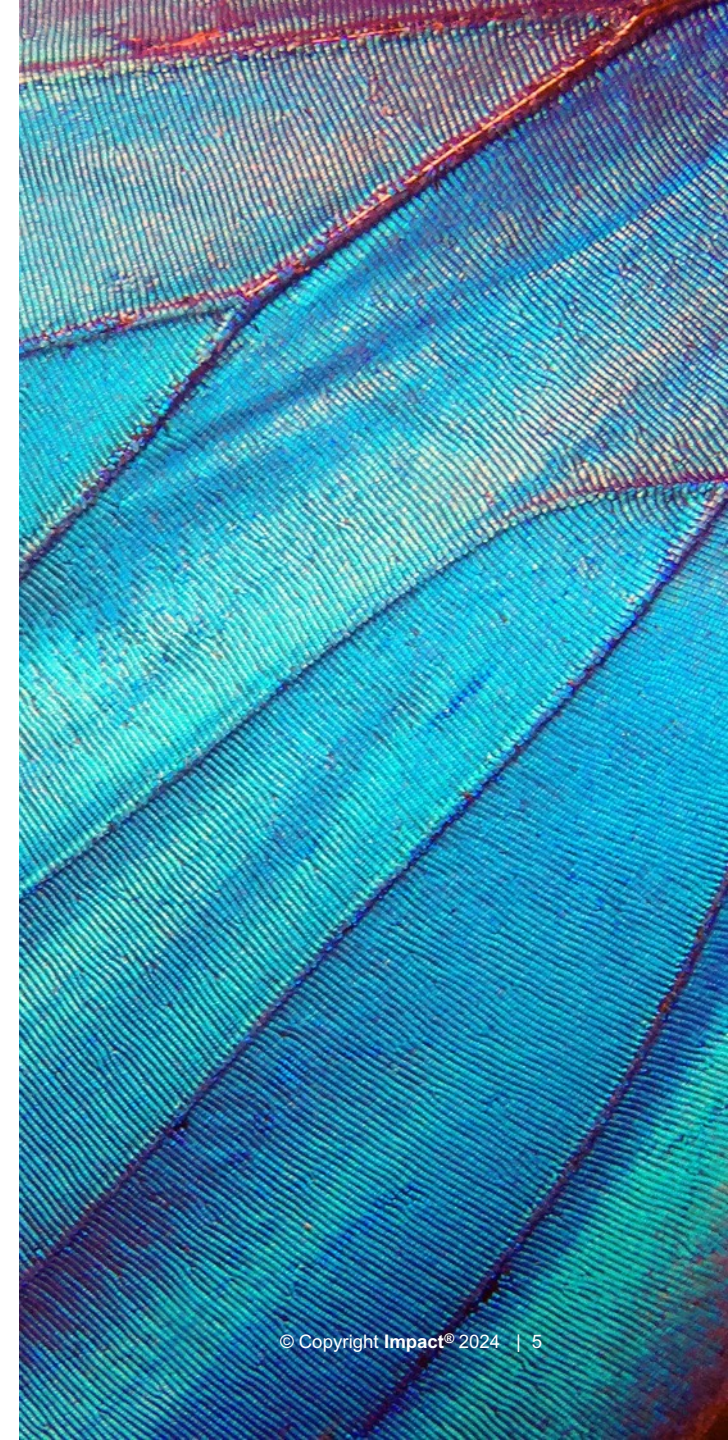




# What are the **benefits**?

Our approach to experiential learning is effective for achieving lasting change because it:

- ▶▶ **Accelerates learning** through powerful, challenging and consequential experiences
- 👤 Is **participant led**, putting the learner at the centre of the learning
- 🌱 Provides a **psychologically safe** learning environment for experimentation and practice
- 🔥 Is **emotionally engaging**, fun and highly memorable
- 🔄 **Bridges the gap** between theory and practice
- 🧠 Produces **changes in behaviour and mindset** that emerge from deeper levels of self-awareness and a personal commitment to development
- 👤 **Increases engagement levels** by **accommodating different learning styles**
- 👤+ Develops the **capacity for learning** and provides a methodology for continuous personal improvement



## Why is it relevant for learners now?

In a world of complexity and disruption, the ability to lead through uncertainty is number one in the leader's toolkit. Our experiential learning approach is about creating safe spaces in which people can practise this, developing their **leadership and learning agility**.

This disruptive landscape also presents organisations with the imperative to **transform** – fast. Experiential learning provides a methodology for leaders to assess change initiatives at all levels. Getting people together, engaging them in the change, and facilitating reflection and dialogue equips leaders with the information they need to continuously adapt their change initiatives for success.

Experiential learning is as effective with senior leaders as it is with graduates because it's all about learning from new, in-the-moment experiences, which create a level from which everyone can learn. Further, it is highly suited to diverse, multi-generational workplaces as it **brings people together**, facilitating dialogue, generating understanding, and empowering people to solve problems by leveraging their different lived experiences.

## How is it **human-centred**?

Our programmes involve inviting people into discomfort – whether it be a provocative conversation, a challenging team exercise, or outdoor adventure. Guided by our principle of 'challenge by choice', we provide a psychologically safe environment for people to step outside of their comfort zones.

This is because, when it comes to learning, in order to do new things successfully we must first do them badly. No one likes being in the 'new thing badly' space, but as human beings it is when we feel most stretched and destabilised that we learn best. This is when the **growth mindset** is unlocked.

Exposed to different perspectives and unusual situations, participants are empowered to reflect on their own behaviours and mindsets, delve into the beliefs and values that underlie them, and, deeper still, examine the sense of identity and purpose that underpins the way they see the world.

These experiences kickstart a deeply human learning process that increases self-awareness, builds empathy, and catalyses quality dialogue – cornerstones of growth and performance.

**Experiential learning works  
when it is **memorable,**  
**consequential** and **transferable.****

# Our experiential learning model



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At Impact, we have our own unique approach to experiential learning. This is what informs our selection of learning vehicles and methods, it is what underpins our belief in the value of certain practices, and it is the philosophy that links together all the different elements of our programmes.

This approach is anchored in our model, which integrates the four ways in which learning can be pursued:

- **Knowledge:** This is about theoretical knowledge that the learner acquires from external sources, such as books, podcasts or data. It is knowledge that is externally codified or accepted, rather than personal opinion.
- **Skill:** This type of learning is all about competence and it happens through practice or repetition. The skill is driven and imparted by another person in the role of 'expert' – not the learner's own sense-making and enquiry process.
- **Direct experience:** This mode is all about real-world immersive experiences, encounters, action and challenges. In an Impact context, these experiences normally see groups of people working together rather than individuals sitting alone.
- **Reflection:** This is the space in which the learner processes the content of the other modes. Reflection might take place collectively, through dialogue or peer feedback; or it might be individual, through solo reflection time, journaling or going for a walk. Powerful reflection must be intentional, and it may well be uncomfortable.



## How does it work?

Through each of these distinct modes, the learner adapts, changes, embeds and reinforces the things they learn. However, one mode in isolation does not make learning experiential.

**Experiential learning is a dynamic process that occurs when some or all of these four ways of learning are intertwined and used to test and build on one another.**

What's unique about our approach is that there is no set order or cycle through which the learner should move through the four domains – often it is in the movement between the domains where the learning happens. Ensuring that there is repeated interaction between all four areas is how we use experiential learning in our solutions, as it enables people to experiment, make sense of, and drive their own learning. **In this way, the learner is always at the centre of the learning.**

In practice, this means that we take participants through memorable – and often uncomfortable – experiences. We facilitate deep, consequential reflection on these encounters, both individually

and collectively. We provide theories through which they can interpret them. And we help them build tangible, transferable skills by creating safe spaces in which to experiment and practise them, before taking them away and applying them to other situations.

The experiences participants have with us lead to profound shifts in behaviour because they are **memorable, consequential and transferable.**

The objective isn't that participants come out of our programmes as fully formed, maximum-potential leaders (although many do find them to be powerful and life-changing experiences). This is unrealistic because experiential learning is an ongoing process. The goal is that people are empowered to transfer the techniques they have learnt into the workplace and beyond – that they are equipped to combine and move through the four domains in whatever situation they find themselves in, in whatever order they need them, to constantly learn and grow.





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## How do we **facilitate** it?

Truly powerful experiential learning is an authentic and ongoing process that requires ownership from participants. Our facilitation creates this engagement by being **fundamentally human-centred**.

It is rooted in the expert blend of **support and challenge** that we know people need in order to move away from their comfort zones and usual ways of thinking, and it is practiced with genuine **empathy, curiosity and care** for each individual and their needs.

Our programme designs are based on a deep understanding of each client's context and are tailored precisely to their objectives. But our facilitators are also attentive to what emerges from participants. Our facilitators are world class because they are capable of this **in-the-moment delivery**, which is guided by the people in front of them – not the content.

Experiential learning requires the ability to not just facilitate experiences, but curate **environments of learning** in which people can think differently and act differently, challenge their beliefs about what they and others are capable of, and experiment with new behaviours and skills so that they have more choices for the future. These spaces of growth allow courage, honesty and vulnerability to emerge, and lead to deep self-discovery and profound shifts in behaviour.

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**“What makes experiential learning unique for me is that it anchors the learning deeply for participants – on a mental, emotional and physical level.”**

SÉGOLÈNE BRANTSCHEN, LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGER,  
AGEAS GROUP





# The power of **adventure**



The world is an increasingly volatile, complex and uncertain place to lead in. It can paralyse decision making and limit growth. But it can also force leaders to be bold, take risks, adapt, and be comfortable failing and learning fast. For us this is adventure, and it is part of what makes our experiential learning approach unique.

Adventure isn't just doing something new, difficult or outdoors. It can be capsizing a canoe, climbing a rock face, or hiking in a storm. But it can also be inviting feedback, engaging with a community partner, listening to new and different perspectives, or participating in high-quality dialogue.

Adventurous experiences that lead to learning and growth don't happen by accident. They are cultivated through a careful and expert set of factors that allow us to grow and accelerate in our risky realities:

- Challenge
- Uncertainty
- Authenticity
- Agency

# Challenge, uncertainty, authenticity and agency

All of these factors combine to accelerate learning, build confidence, and empower participants to **liberate their human potential**.

At Impact, we not only keep all these factors present and in play with each other, we also develop participants' capacity to do this for themselves and their people in turn.

Adventure is not about being 'thrown in the deep end' or 'hand holding'; it is about **enabling people to create effective learning environments for accelerated growth**. It is core to our experiential learning approach and is at the heart of all our solutions, whether they're face-to-face, blended or virtual.

**Challenge:** Adventure presents challenge to people, and this level of challenge is shaped by the interplay between three different factors: the environment, the individual's emotional and intellectual state, and the task. We work to develop a person's capacity to keep these in the right balance for them and to maintain their space for accelerated learning.

**Uncertainty:** The ability to operate in uncertainty has never been more important. Whilst uncomfortable, uncertainty can provide an opportunity to step out of the comfort zone and experiment with new ways of doing things. Enabling people to more easily head into uncertain situations – and develop that as a habit – transforms both individuals and organisations.

**Authenticity:** Adventure must matter to an individual, providing an emotionally engaging experience and an element of risk, and tapping into what is important to them and their organisation. When they are authentic and aligned, adventures provide people with unfiltered, eye-opening opportunities for self-discovery – for noticing their own behaviour and mindset and linking that to their workplace realities.

**Agency:** Agency is at the heart of any truly adventurous experience, because adventure empowers people with the need to make decisions and live with the consequences. And this is why it's crucial for our experiential learning approach. Without the exploration of knowledge, the development of skill, and the capacity to reflect, people have little agency. The adventurous experiences we offer – and the ones participants find themselves in at work – become opportunities for new ways of thinking and doing, rather than trials to endure.

# Experiential learning in the digital world

We deliver powerful solutions that are in-person, blended and fully virtual.

**Experiential learning is the foundation of all our programmes; digital technology is one vehicle for it.**

At its worst, learning technology replaces genuine human connection, reduces people to numbers, and manipulates individuals into compliance. In this way, learning becomes commodified – just one more box to tick off.

But at its best, technology can be used to connect people across time and space, empower learners to take control of their own learning, aid our understanding of one another, and deliver meaningful experiences. Many of our digital experiences allow clients to engage a wider population of learners, facilitate cross-functional collaboration, and weave learning and work together seamlessly.

We have been developing our own learning technologies (such as [air™](#) and [Inscape Rooms](#)) since 2017 and we have a strong point of view on how digital technology can be used to deliver powerful experiential learning.

**The learning is the work:** The most effective leaders are those that practice continuous learning, that see no separation between learning and application. Digital technology can be used to support the process of seamlessly integrating learning experiences into the daily reality of work.

**Context not content:** Accessing information and knowledge isn't the problem; the problem is applying it. Experiential learning provides learners with the ability to build skills through direct encounter, use knowledge to reflect on experiences, and transfer their learning to their own unique context.

**Let the learning lead:** We prioritise clients' learning objectives rather than a particular platform, device or tool. This means starting with a deep understanding of the need and designing from there, choosing technology that will support these objectives. We use third party tools where they can deliver excellent experiential learning and create our own tools where necessary, using our deep understanding of pedagogy and facilitation.

**Responsible use of technology:** Our position on technology recognises the immense benefits that it can bring, whilst striving to use it responsibly and shield ourselves and others from irresponsible use.



**“We don’t tell people what to do. We enable them to think and to try something different. Experiential learning is about people really seeing themselves.”**

MARK QUEST, SENIOR CONSULTANT, IMPACT UK







# What does it look like on a **programme**?

Experiential learning is about powerful human experiences, whether they're face-to-face, virtual, or an innovative blend of the two. Take a look at some of our client stories to discover what customised experiential learning could look like for your organisation...





**A women in leadership programme in the jungles of Laos**

This Brandon Hall gold award-winning leadership programme supported participants in building a new picture of themselves as leaders – not as women filling men’s shoes, but as mindful, empowered masters of their own professional lives.

The programme incorporated challenging adventure activities, coaching, deep reflection, and cultural community immersion in the jungle. During the pandemic, it was redesigned to be virtual, with immersive experiences still providing the foundation of the learning.



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**Accelerated leadership through innovative blended learning**

PepsiCo and Impact co-created two innovative blended programmes with the aim of securing the leadership pipeline needed for continuous business growth.

Both programmes are fully documented for internal delivery and are now part of the global leadership curriculum to help key talent accelerate their career.

In 2015, the programmes won a Brandon Hall award for Best in Content Excellence, based on the design, functionality, innovation and overall measurable benefits.



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**A fully virtual, eight-week learning journey**

Conversations that Count was designed to support Modulaire Group leaders to develop the behaviours, in themselves and in their teams, that will help create a positive impact on safety, customer service solutions, and profit.

Participants used Impact’s digital learning app, air™, and Microsoft Teams to complete the virtual programme in four phases over eight weeks, including real-time, facilitator-led classes, group-led circle meetings and self-led learning.



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**Leveraging a hybrid work environment for transformational leadership**

OutLEAD is a global, cross-business virtual experience that enables PGIM leaders to help others reach their full potential and deliver on the business strategy. Offered either in-person over three days or virtually over six weeks, this programme was designed to leverage the power of a hybrid work environment.

It won a Brandon Hall gold award for the Best Unique or Innovative Leadership Programme and silver for Best Advance In Leadership Development.



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**A three-day programme of immersive experiences**

Shutterstock’s award-winning leadership journey equipped their 60 most senior leaders with the skills needed to lead change in a highly dynamic marketplace.

Seamlessly combining virtual and face-to-face elements, this two-year journey combined inputs such as experiential ‘installations’, short virtual skill inputs, coaching calls, an interactive audio tour, and an immersive leadership challenge at Shutterstock HQ in the Empire State Building.



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**Three tiers of blended leadership development**

This solution equips three levels of leaders to navigate change, tasking them with real business projects that foster new leadership capabilities and jump-start strategic thinking to future-proof the business.

”This programme is award-winning because it connects people across the organisation to the changes, to the opportunities, and to the challenges. We then apply that knowledge of dealing with those external forces to how we can be better as a team by working on real business projects.” – Darren Evans, Calder Stewart CEO.



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**Community Action Learning on the Great Barrier Reef**

Springboard is a multi-award winning, flagship programme that enables employees to learn about themselves and make progress towards the Lendlease Sustainability Focus Areas.

The 12-month programme incorporates a five-day Community Action Learning component that gives participants the opportunity to engage with and learn from local community partners, such as the Great Barrier Reef Foundation.

Past Springboard programmes have generated over \$20 million in social and economic value.



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**Award-winning blended learning for global transformation**

Over 12-18 months, this uniquely designed solution, Drive, develops leadership competencies and embeds behavioural change.

Drive involves a dynamic mix of face-to-face and virtual experiences with digital and social learning, including bringing colleagues from all over the world to three central learning hubs.

Drive has won awards for its innovative approach to delivering new knowledge and practically applying that knowledge to build new skills and capabilities.



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# Summary

Lasting change starts with human beings – with human behaviour, relationships and action. And **experiential learning is the human-centred approach.**

We have been pioneering our experiential learning approach since 1980 and are constantly developing our practice.

Our programmes take place in psychologically safe environments that are constantly being adapted to keep people in spaces of learning and growth, rather than performance or panic. They provide adventurous, memorable experiences that move people out of their comfort zones, combined with transferable skill building and consequential reflection and dialogue.

Our programmes are facilitated with genuine empathy and care, as well as an openness and agility that responds to participants' needs as they emerge. And they provide the unique balance of challenge and support that people need to experiment, think differently, and take action.

This approach isn't about offering a single, isolated learning intervention; **it's about developing the capacity to learn.** It's about equipping people with the capabilities to practice learning as an ongoing, dynamic process and empowering them to create these environments and opportunities for their own people.

As we look to a future of increasing uncertainty and complexity, experiential learning is a powerful way for us to partner with our clients to make a positive impact in the world. Our programmes lead to deep self-discovery and profound shifts in behaviour. They also transform whole organisations.

Whether it's delivered through a face-to-face, blended or virtual programme, our core experiential learning approach engages participants as human beings, empowers them to drive their own learning, and **liberates their potential to create positive change.**





Get in touch to discover how you could partner with Impact to transform your organisation through experiential learning.

