

(Download pdf) The Ambiguities of Experience (Messenger Lectures)

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James G. March

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James G. March : The Ambiguities of Experience (Messenger Lectures) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Ambiguities of Experience (Messenger Lectures):

15 of 15 people found the following review helpful. Excellent look at experiences as teaching/learning methods By Eric D. Brown While on vacation last month, I saw a review in US Airways' magazine for The Ambiguities of Experience by James G. March (affiliate link). The review was a short one but peaked my interest as it points out March's main question presented in the book. The question is a simple one...but has a very difficult answer. This simple question is: What is, or should be, the role of experience in creating intelligence, particularly in organizations? Simple

question right? Now... I've always been of the mindset that experience is a good thing. I've argued before that I'd normally hire someone with experience over education. This book makes me rethink that approach in some ways. I'll still hire for ability over experience any day though. The book is a short one - only 120 pages of content in a 5" by 8" book. While short, there's quite a bit of 'stuff' in it. As mentioned above, the main focus of this book is to question whether experience really is the best teacher. In this book, March argues that experience can be a good teacher if that experience is used as a means to build context for stories and models of history. The problems with 'experience as teacher' is that these experiences can be easily warped, misconstrued and interpreted in many ways. March does agree that experience can be a good teacher, but isn't always the best teacher. Using experiences alone as a learning mechanism can lead a person / organization down the wrong path. One of the things that I really enjoyed about this book was that there were no answers put forth by the author. March realizes that the issue of experience as teacher is a difficult one and there is no 'right' answer on how to approach using experiences as learning method. One caveat before you run over to or your local bookseller, know that this book is a bit difficult to read. It is written much like an academic paper and, as such, has a lot of academic language in it. Not a bad thing... but it isn't necessarily a book that you'll breeze through. You'll have to work at reading this book. That said, I like this book and have added it to my bookshelf to bring down and read again in the future.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A solid response to "I've done it before therefore I'm right" arguments. By James I have always believed that the defense of any position must be based on logic, not just experience. E.g. "I have done it before, therefore I know how to do it this time" is a non sequitur. Experience may inform logic, which is good; but experience cannot stand alone. Now I know why. Experience has several major limitations, as outlined in this book. These limitations are not limitations of the human mind (which is its own problem), but are inherent in the very nature of experience itself, so the limitations cannot be avoided, just considered carefully when using experience to inform the logic of a current position.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. at his best, he is keenly insightful. By Achmed McGillicuddy James gets just a tad prolix but, at his best, he is keenly insightful. He's got the faculty that Herb Simon had of making remarkable observations about things that you had thought were prosaic and pedestrian.

The first component of intelligence involves effective adaptation to an environment. In order to adapt effectively, organizations require resources, capabilities at using them, knowledge about the worlds in which they exist, good fortune, and good decisions. They typically face competition for resources and uncertainties about the future. Many, but possibly not all, of the factors determining their fates are outside their control. Populations of organizations and individual organizations survive, in part, presumably because they possess adaptive intelligence; but survival is by no means assured. The second component of intelligence involves the elegance of interpretations of the experiences of life. Such interpretations encompass both theories of history and philosophies of meaning, but they go beyond such things to comprehend the grubby details of daily existence. Interpretations decorate human existence. They make a claim to significance that is independent of their contribution to effective action. Such intelligence glories in the contemplation, comprehension, and appreciation of life, not just the control of it.

from *The Ambiguities of Experience*

In *The Ambiguities of Experience*, James G. March asks a deceptively simple question: What is, or should be, the role of experience in creating intelligence, particularly in organizations? Folk wisdom both trumpets the significance of experience and warns of its inadequacies. On one hand, experience is described as the best teacher. On the other hand, experience is described as the teacher of fools, of those unable or unwilling to learn from accumulated knowledge or the teaching of experts. The disagreement between those folk aphorisms reflects profound questions about the human pursuit of intelligence through learning from experience that have long confronted philosophers and social scientists. This book considers the unexpected problems organizations (and the individuals in them) face when they rely on experience to adapt, improve, and survive. While acknowledging the power of learning from experience and the extensive use of experience as a basis for adaptation and for constructing stories and models of history, this book examines the problems with such learning. March argues that although individuals and organizations are eager to derive intelligence from experience, the inferences stemming from that eagerness are often misguided. The problems lie partly in errors in how people think, but even more so in properties of experience that confound learning from it. "Experience," March concludes, "may possibly be the best teacher, but it is not a particularly good teacher."

"James March is a pioneer in the field of organizational decision making. For decades March, perhaps the wisest philosopher of management, has illuminated how humans think and behave, and he continues to do so in this book. He begins by reminding us of just how deeply beholden we have become, in our organizational lives, to the idea of experiential learning. . . . The problem is that learning from experience involves serious complications, ones that are intrinsic to the nature of experience itself and which are explored in the body of this book. . . . Besides being a broadly erudite scholar, March is also a poet, and his talent shines through in the depth of the insight he offers, the breadth of allusion he portrays, and the concise language he uses. Though this book is short, it is challenging: Don't pick it up looking for quick, easy lessons. Rather, be ready to ponder your assumptions about learning from experience in work

and life. The rewards are here."Jeff Kehoe, Harvard Business , May 2010