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Mind the Gap: Workshop Satisfaction and Skills Development in Art-Based Learning

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Abstract

In general, research on art-based leadership development suggests that this kind of multimodal experiential learning enhances soft skills. However, quantitative studies on learning results are rare, and verifying the learning transfer into professional practice is neglected. Against this backdrop, two quantitative sub-studies from a research program on art-based leadership development were used to highlight skills development and transfer. Both sub-studies applied a longitudinal pretest-posttest design using similar questionnaires. Study 1 refers to a two-day vocational training based on improvisational theater that imparted how to communicate according to the situation, particularly in conflicts. Study 2 used data from a one-month intervention based on visual arts that addressed coping with uncertainty in working environments. There was no significant increase in desired skills in Study 1. In Study 2, a significant learning effect was limited to one of two relevant skills. For both sub-studies, we compared skills development with learner satisfaction and perceived usefulness of educational content. Our findings suggest that participants overestimate training success because very high satisfaction and favorable opinions on the programs' practical relevance are not reflected in desired skills development. We interpret this discrepancy as a halo effect, in which the fun factor of art-based learning and other facets of aesthetic experience outshines actual learning results. Despite limitations—such as small sample sizes, the lack of waiting control groups, participant dropout, and possible ceiling effects—our findings contribute to research by putting overly positive assumptions on art-based learning's effectiveness into perspective.

Keywords: art-based learning, art-based training, leadership development, soft skills, halo effect