

Interaction and learning: Conference formats at the 2017 annual conference of the German Association for educational and academic staff development in Higher Education (dghd)

Relevant literature

The study is based on the current empirical research literature on conference participants' goals (attendance motives), studies on the relation between interaction at conferences and participants' learning success as well as on the evaluation of conferences (including specific conference formats, for the reference list, see below). The current study researched the relation between participant interaction and their learning gain at a conference, as well as relations between learning gain and work experience.

Methodology

Data were gathered with evaluation questionnaires for the 2017 annual conference of the German Association for educational and academic staff development in Higher Education (dghd) in Cologne, Germany. The conference contained formats such as "discourse workshop" ("Diskurswerkstatt"), traditional workshops, paper and poster presentations. Two-hundred forty-six conference participants completed the questionnaire, which was administered after the closing of the conference in March, 2017.

Findings

Compared to the other conference formats, participants rated the "discourse workshop" and the (traditional) workshops as highly interactive; they likewise their learning gain as higher, compared to the poster presentation. Positive relations were found between the interactivity of a conference format and the learning gain at this format, for all four format types. Work experience correlated negatively with learning gain (with the exception of the poster presentation). Taken together, the data indicate that the more often participants at a conference interact and the less work experience they have, the higher their self-assessed learning gain at the conference. We will discuss explanations and implications for the practice of conference organization.

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