

Learning Styles

Learning styles were developed by Peter Honey and Alan Mumford, based upon the work of Kolb (detailed below), and they identified four distinct learning styles or preferences: Activist, Theorist; Pragmatist and Reflector. These are the learning approaches that individuals naturally prefer and they recommend that in order to maximise one's own personal learning each learner ought to:

- understand their learning style
- seek out opportunities to learn using that style

The characteristics of the four learning styles are summarised in the table below.

Learning style	Attributes	Activities
Activist	<p>Activists are those people who learn by doing. Activists need to get their hands dirty, to dive in with both feet first. Have an open-minded approach to learning, involving themselves fully and without bias in new experiences.</p> <p>They enjoy the here and now, and are happy to be dominated by immediate experiences. They are open-minded, not sceptical, and this tends to make them enthusiastic about anything new. Their philosophy is: "I'll try anything once". They tend to act first and consider the consequences afterwards. Their days are filled with activity. They tackle problems by brainstorming. As soon as the excitement from one activity has died down they are busy looking for the next. They tend to thrive on the challenge of new experiences but are bored with implementation and longer term consolidation. They are gregarious people constantly involving themselves with others but, in doing so, they seek to centre all activities around themselves.</p>	<p>brainstorming</p> <p>problem solving</p> <p>group discussion</p> <p>puzzles</p> <p>competitions</p> <p>role-play</p>
Theorist	<p>These learners like to understand the theory behind the actions. They need models, concepts and facts in order to engage in the learning process. Prefer to analyse and synthesise, drawing new information into a systematic and logical 'theory'.</p> <p>Theorists adapt and integrate observations into complex but logically sound theories. They think problems through in a vertical, step-by-step logical way. They assimilate disparate facts into coherent theories. They tend to be perfectionists who won't rest easy until things are tidy and fit into a rational scheme. They like to analyse and synthesize. They</p>	<p>models</p> <p>statistics</p> <p>stories</p> <p>quotes</p> <p>background information</p> <p>applying theories</p>

Learning style	Attributes	Activities
	<p>are keen on basic assumptions, principles, theories models and systems thinking. Their philosophy prizes rationality and logic. "If its logical its good." Questions they frequently ask are: "Does it make sense?" "How does this fit with that?" "What are the basic assumptions?" They tend to be detached, analytical and dedicated to rational objectivity rather than anything subjective or ambiguous. Their approach to problems is consistently logical. This is their 'mental set' and they rigidly reject anything that doesn't fit with it. They prefer to maximise certainty and feel uncomfortable with subjective judgements, lateral thinking and anything flippant.</p>	
Reflector	<p>These people learn by observing and thinking about what happened. They may avoid leaping in and prefer to watch from the sidelines. Prefer to stand back and view experiences from a number of different perspectives, collecting data and taking the time to work towards an appropriate conclusion.</p> <p>They collect data, both first hand and from others, and prefer to think about it thoroughly before coming to a conclusion. The thorough collection and analysis of data about experiences and events is what counts so they tend to postpone reaching definitive conclusions for as long as possible. Their philosophy is to be cautious. They are thoughtful people who like to consider all possible angles and implications before making a move. They prefer to take a back seat in meetings and discussions. They enjoy observing other people in action. They listen to others and get the drift of the discussion before making their own points. They tend to adopt a low profile and have a slightly distant, tolerant unruffled air about them. When they act it is part of a wide picture which includes the past as well as the present and others' observations as well as their own.</p>	<p>paired discussions</p> <p>self analysis</p> <p>questionnaires</p> <p>personality questionnaires</p> <p>time out</p> <p>observing activities</p> <p>feedback from others</p> <p>coaching</p> <p>interviews</p>
Pragmatist	<p>These people need to be able to see how to put the learning into practice in the real world. Abstract concepts and games are of limited use unless they can see a way to put the ideas into action in their lives. Experimenters, trying out new</p>	<p>time to think about how to apply learning in</p>

Learning style	Attributes	Activities
	<p>ideas, theories and techniques to see if they work in practice.</p> <p>They positively search out new ideas and take the first opportunity to experiment with applications. They are the sort of people who return from courses brimming with new ideas that they want to try out in practice. They like to get on with things and act quickly and confidently on ideas that attract them. They tend to be impatient with ruminating and open-ended discussions. They are essentially practical, down to earth people who like making practical decisions and solving problems. They respond to problems and opportunities 'as a challenge'. Their philosophy is "There is always a better way" and "If it works it's good".</p>	<p>reality</p> <p>case studies</p> <p>problem solving</p> <p>discussion</p>

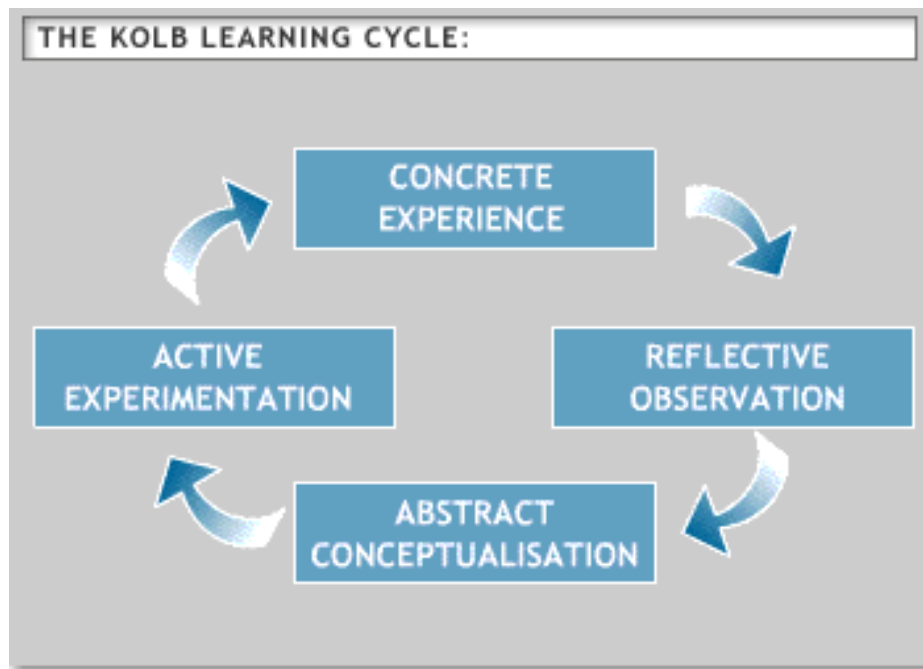
Additional detail

Learning Style	Type of Learner	Learning preference
Activists	Hands on	Trial and error
Reflectors	Tell me	Briefed before proceeding
Theorists	Convince me	Clarity - Does this make sense?
Pragmatists	Show me	Likes an expert to demonstrate

The Theory – How do people learn

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) provides a holistic model of the learning process and is a multi-linear model of adult development, both of which are consistent with what we know about how we naturally learn, grow, and develop. The theory is called "Experiential Learning" to emphasize the central role that experience plays in the learning process.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle



The most widely used learning theory is Kolb's experiential learning cycle. There are four stages starting with Concrete Experience.

Stage	Description	Activities to help
Concrete experience	Kolb's cycle starts with a concrete experience. In other words it begins with doing something in which the individual, team or organisation are assigned a task. Key to learning therefore is active involvement. In Kolb's model one cannot learn by simply watching or reading about it, to learn effectively the individual, team or organisation must actually do.	ice breakers & energisers team games problem solving discussion practical exercises, e.g. making a presentation debates

Stage	Description	Activities to help
Reflective observation	The second stage in the cycle is that of reflective observation. This means taking time-out from "doing" and stepping back from the task and reviewing what has been done and experienced. At this stage lots of questions are asked and communication channels are opened to others members of the team. Vocabulary is very important and is needed to verbalize and discuss with others.	ask for observation write a short report on what took place give feedback to other participants quiet thinking time tea & coffee breaks completing learning logs or diaries
Abstract conceptualisation	Abstract Conceptualisation is the process of making sense of what has happened and involves interpreting the events and understanding the relationships between them. At this stage the learner makes comparisons between what they have done, reflect upon and what they already know. They may draw upon theory from textbooks for framing and explaining events, models they are familiar with, ideas from colleagues, previous observations, or any other knowledge that they have developed.	present models give theories give facts
Active experimentation	The final stage of the learning cycle is when the learner considers how they are going to put what they have learnt into practice. Planning enables taking the new understanding and translates it into predictions as to what will happen next or what actions should be taken to refine or revise the way a task is to be handled. For learning to be useful most people need to place it in a context that is relevant to them. If one cannot see how the learning is useful to one's life then it is likely to be forgotten very quickly.	give learners time to plan use case studies use role play ask learners to use real problems

Activities that support different aspects of the learning cycle

Concrete experience	Reflective observation	Abstract conceptualisation	Active experimentation
readings examples fieldwork laboratories problem sets trigger films observations simulations/games text reading	logs journals discussion brainstorming thought questions rhetorical questions	lecture papers projects analogies model building	projects fieldwork homework laboratory case study simulations

TASK: Now that you know the theory behind learning, please complete the Learning Styles Questionnaire to find out what learning style you prefer.