

Learning Styles and the Learning Cycle

Each learning style or preference for learning relates to a different aspect of Kolb's Learning Cycle. Do / Review / Learn / Apply; and is illustrated in the Action/Reflection Learning Cycle diagram.

A person whose preferred style of learning is activism will find experiences themselves playing an important part in learning. The reflector will find that part of the learning cycle particularly congenial; though s/he may not find it so easy to move to the next stage of drawing conclusions through conceptualisation! The theorist will be most at home with the part of the cycle in which conceptualisation takes place. The pragmatist learner on the other hand, will be keen to get onto the application of what is learned.

This does not mean that people can only participate in one element of the cycle. All learning must involve all elements, but because people may have a preference for one aspect of the learning cycle above the others, this may actually hinder their learning because of a tendency to get stuck at that point rather than completing the journey through the cycle. Managers need to know where their learning style preference lies and understand the learning preferences of the people they manage in order to facilitate good learning in every situation.

Activist Learning Style

A person with a preference for the activist learning style will often learn best from activities and experiences in which:

- There are new experiences / problems / opportunities
- They get closely involved with experiential activities
- There is an element of drama / excitement/ crisis
- There is a wide range of activities to get involved with
- They get a good deal of attention focussed on their role in the learning
- There is freedom to generate ideas without them being shaped by external constraints
- They get thrown in at the deep end with a difficult task and limited or inadequate resources
- The learning involves working with others in a team where ideas can be bounced around.

The activist may have trouble where:

- Learning involves a passive role, listening to lectures, watching without being able to participate
- They are asked to stand back and not be involved
- They are expected to assimilate, analyse or interpret detailed data
- They have to work on their own



Developing people
of identity, vision
and purpose

© 3D Coaching Ltd. 2004

0845 458 0154/6

www.3dcoaching.com

- They are asked to assess before hand what they hope to learn and evaluate what they have learnt afterwards
- They are expected to understand theoretical statements
- They are expected to perform the same activity over and over again
- They are expected to give close attention to minor details

The Reflector Learning Style

People who prefer to learn by reflection will be most at ease in situations where:

- They are observing
- They have time to think and prepare before acting
- Painstaking research is possible
- There is an opportunity to review and evaluate what is being learnt
- They are asked to produce a careful, analytical response to an activity
- Exchange of views takes place within a well structured situation which minimises the risk of personal disagreement or confrontation
- There is time to reach a decision without deadlines

Reflectors are less likely to learn well where:

- They are forced into the limelight
- Expected to act without planning
- They are asked for off the cuff ideas
- There is insufficient data on which to base a conclusion
- They are given inflexible instructions about how things should be done
- They are under pressure of time
- It is necessary to take short cuts

The Theorist Learning Style

The person with a preference for a theorist learning style will learn best from activities in which:

- The theoretical basis is clear
- There is a methodical exploration of the links between ideas, events and situations
- They are intellectually stretched
- There is a clear structure and purpose
- Ideas and concepts emphasise logic and rationality, are elegantly expressed and supported by water tight arguments
- They can analyse and then generalise the reasons for success or failure
- There are interesting ideas on offer
- Participation in and understanding of complex situations is required

The theorist may experience difficulty where:

- The context or purpose is unclear
- There is an emphasis on emotions or feelings
- Activities are unstructured and open ended
- Decisions are taken without a contextual basis being established
- Doubt exists about the methodological soundness of data
- There is little opportunity for an in depth exploration of the subject
- There is a high proportion of activist participants.

The Pragmatist Learning Style

A person who prefers the pragmatist learning style will learn most effectively when:

- There is an obvious link between the subject matter and some practical aspect of the work
- The learning emphasises advantages techniques of performance
- There is someone who can offer coaching as they try out and practice new techniques
- They are presented with a model for emulation
- They are taught techniques which are relevant to their work
- There is an immediate opportunity to practice what is being learnt
- They feel they are grappling with real problems
- They can concentrate on the action plan

Pragmatist learners will learn less well in situations where:

- They cannot see the point in what they are learning
- The teacher seems to be remote from reality
- There is no opportunity to practice anything
- The learning seems to be going round in circles
- There are barriers to implementing what is being learnt
- The learning activity does not have an adequate reward

What Learning Style do I Prefer?

How would I learn how to hit a golf ball?

The Activist might do so by going out onto the course and hitting balls until they learn to hit straight.

The Pragmatist will take lessons from the Professional

The Theorist will teach him/herself from a book which starts by examining the effect of the face of the club as it strikes the back of the ball.

The Reflector will watch other golfers and try to copy the swings that work the best – but may well end up as caddie because that gives him/her more time to observe what the others are doing! S/he may turn out to be a better instructor than player, because the tendency to reflection makes it easier to see what others need to do to improve their game.

To find out more about learning styles call Diane Clutterbuck on 0845 458 0156 or email

diane@3dcoaching.com

www.3dcoaching.com