Learning Styles

Denne værktøjskasse indeholder følgende værktøjer:

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1

Introduction:
Do you learn enough?

To manage learning, you as a manager must be able to understand differences in learning styles, and use this knowledge to enhance all learning related activities including training, development, competency management, etc. The key objective of this product package is to:
- Explain, in straightforward terms, the concept of learning styles
- To show the different types of learning styles that exist
- To show the different learning types that exist
- To explain how insights into learning styles can improve your management of learning
- To reveal the practical application of learning styles to managing learning – especially in designing teaching and training methods so that your training budget will be used most effectively to train different employees.

Article

Recommended Reading
Stuart, Peggy (September 1992): New Directions in Training Individuals, Personnel Journal, Santa Monica

If you want to read more learning styles, there is only one place to go after using this product package and that is straight to David Kolb, who pioneered insights into learning styles, the learning cycle, and experiential learning. The next time you have some spare time, consider reading:

Kolb, David (1984): Experiential Learning, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.

For those really interested in reading more on learning organizations:
If you want to read more about the leadership tasks in a Learning Organisation, the following reading by learning guru Peter Senge is a highly insightful and concise piece:
Christopher Mabey & Paul Iles (eds) (1994): *The Leader's New Work: Building Learning Organizations* in Managing Learning, Routledge, England

Author

This Tool-kit is written by **Anne Keegan**
Leiden, Holland, February 2001

These packages may inspire you in other ways:

Appraisal Interviews - How does your staff perform?
Appraisal is the cornerstone of an organisation's approach to managing people and supports the achievement of corporate objectives. In the appraisal interview you review the performance of your staff, identify strengths and areas for development, evaluate performance against corporate objectives, and set mutual performance objectives for the future.
Find it on www.henrikwbendix.dk

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2

Competency Development - How do we develop people and company?
You manage competencies every single day. Some competencies are work based others are behavioural. But the question is, do you manage these well? This Tool-kit takes you through the main areas of competency management and explains how to use different tools to analyse current competencies, identify future competencies, and bridge the gap between them.
Find it on www.henrikwbendix.dk

User Guide

Many managers fail to see the importance of their role in promoting individual and organisational learning. For them, it isn't "real work," not like managing inventory or running marketing campaigns. Other managers see the importance, but are not really sure how they can most effectively help their employees to learn.

Managing employees in a way that helps them to learn is perhaps the most "real work" of all. For organisations to survive, they simply must be able to learn. Learning facilitates adaptability in the face of pressures that almost all organisations face today to a greater extent than at any time in the past. Pressures to adapt and learn derive from increased competition, compressed product life cycles, increased speed in the introduction of new technologies, IT induced speeding up of communications, just to name a few.

In order to effectively manage learning, managers must be able to motivate their staff to learn. All organisational learning begins and ends with the individual learner. Even when lessons can be codified, it is people that learn from these lessons. For this reason, the role of individual learning styles is vital in efforts to become a learning organisation. Individual learning styles have an effect on how successful the training methods are. There are many different kinds of training, and many training methodologies.

Managers sometimes tend to fall back on the old alternative of training courses (most often classroom based) when they think of developing their employees. However, there are many types of training, and the learning styles of employees will in part determine which are effective, for whom, and why. This product package will help you to figure out why some training methods work for some people, and are at the same time a dismal failure for other people. It will also help you to cooperate with your employees in figuring out what the best training methods are for them as individuals, with individual learning styles.

Who will benefit from this product package?
- Managers responsible for learning in their organisations
- Managers wishing to optimise their own learning potential

Why will you benefit from this product package?
- It will tell you about learning styles
- It will tell you where to go to test an individual' learning style
- It will inform you of the existence of different learning styles
- It will summarise those learning styles
- It will point out the strengths and weaknesses of each learning style
- It will connect learning styles to teaching and training methods

This product package contains the following tools to inform you about learning styles and how this knowledge can be used to enhance the performance of your company, and to improve your skills in managing all kinds of learning.

The Learning Styles Report

The Learning Styles Report is a comprehensive report covering everything you need to know about types of learning styles, learning types, and how to use this information to improve learning in your company. The Report contains a Learning Styles Grid to summarise the different styles and types. The report also contains valuable information on the strengths and weaknesses of the different learning types and how you can use this information to enhance the potential of all those you manage, and also your own potential as a learning oriented manager. The Report contains a Learning Styles Grid linked to Teaching and Training Methods to summarize what methods are best suited to what learning types.

The Learning Styles Inventory Test

This is a simple self-scoring test that will reveal your own learning style and the Learning Type category to which you belong. The test page includes full instructions and takes you step-by-step through the test to arrive at your score.

You can perform the test connecting to http://trgmcber.haygroup.com, where you can buy an online testing at the price of 10£. It is not necessary to perform the test to get full benefit from this Tool-kit.
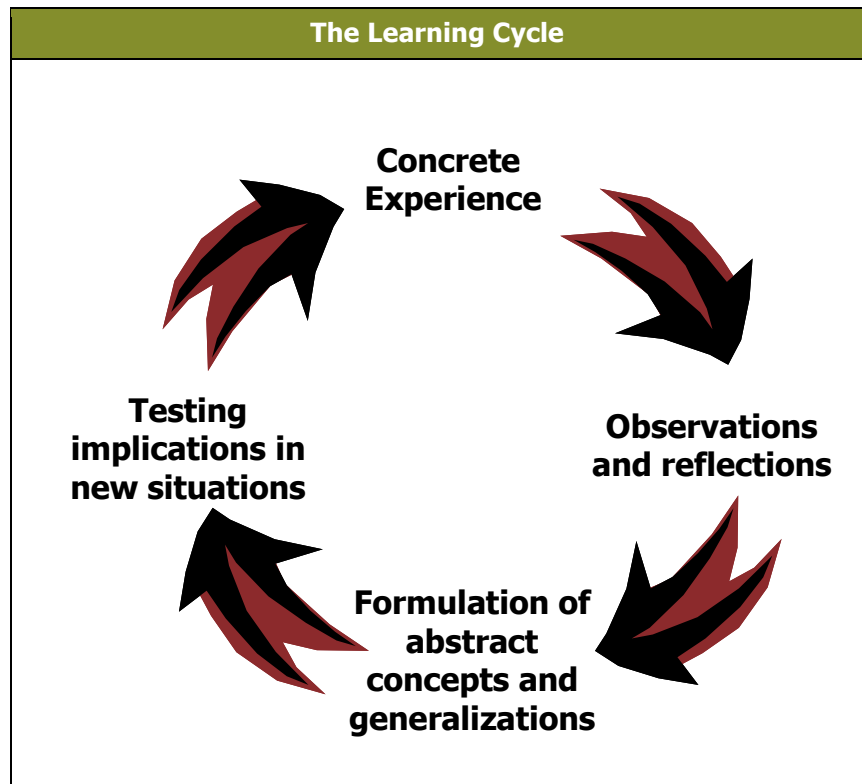
Learning Styles Report

This report contains the following sections:

- Introduction
- The Learning Cycle
- What are learning styles?
- Learning types and the Learning Style Grid
- Strengths, weaknesses, and how to maximise learning potential
- The practical importance of learning styles

Introduction

In the past, it was common to associate learning with classroom learning. When we left school or university, we left learning behind and started our lives as 'doers'. Thanks to the pioneering work of experts, such as Professor Peter Senge of M.I.T., best-selling author of "The Fifth Discipline" and the Society for Organizational Learning we know that the 'doer not learner' philosophy has been outgrown. We now know that organisations learn through people and that work teams are a prime source of learning. We also know that learning is essential for organisational survival and success. Organisations that do not learn will gradually decline in the face of increased market pressure, the speeding up of technological developments and the necessity for continual innovation in the face of consumer demands.

The Learning Cycle

- Concrete Experience
- Observations and reflections
- Formulation of abstract concepts and generalizations
- Testing implications in new situations

The Learning Cycle

The process of learning involves different stages. David Kolb, professor of Organizational Behavior at the Weatherhead School of Management and author of the best-selling books "Experiential Learning"

Derived from The Learning Cycle, Kolb, 1995, pp. 49

"Organizational Behavior: An Experiential Approach" 6th Ed.

Prentice-Hall International.

(1984) and "Organizational Behavior: An Experimental Approach to Human Behavior in Organisations"(1995) depicts these stages in his 'Learning Cycle'. The Learning Cycle is a simple concept, where the learning process is broken into four separate stages.

The cycle shows how we learn through a process that is active and passive, concrete and abstract. The cycle repeats over and over again, with new experiences resulting in new material for reflection, abstraction and generalisation. You as a manager, and those you manage, will be confronted with finding out what learning abilities should be applied in every learning situation. You will have to resolve the conflicts that arise between:

- being active OR being reflective
- being concrete OR being analytical

It is also clear that people might favour some stages in the learning process over others. It won't surprise many managers that academic researchers probably concentrate on the formation of abstractions and generalisations, sometimes not progressing to action until far too late if indeed they ever do. Managers, on the other hand, are often busy applying concepts in action, but spend less time and energy in reflecting on those actions.

Effective learning relies on moving through all four stages of the learning cycle. It demands that we have concrete experiences, that we observe and reflect, that we form abstract concepts and conceptualisations, and then that we test out these concepts and theories in through active experimentation. Effective learning requires us to seek balance in our learning styles. Sometimes it is easy to lose this balance because we prefer some parts of the learning cycle to others. This is because we have different ways of learning – learning styles. Research has shown that learning styles can be measured and described. But how do you do that? Fortunately, there are some easy steps, which will be outlined in the next section.
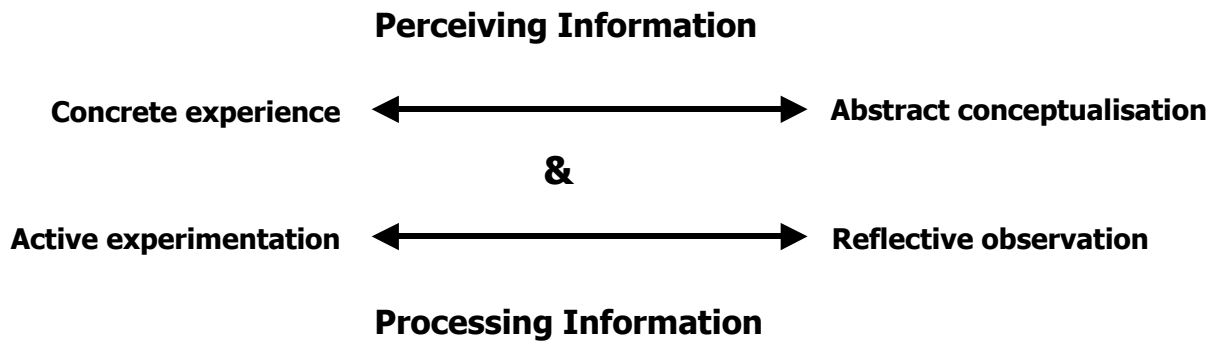
What are learning styles?

Managing learning in your own organisation is a difficult and challenging task. To increase your effectiveness, it is vital to consider the dynamics of learning. One of the things you need to consider is that everyone learns differently. Everyone has a different – and preferred – learning style. Professor David Kolb has described learning styles most comprehensively, thus, we will refer primarily to him and his work throughout this section. Learning styles describe the way we relate to information, how we prefer to receive it and how we prefer to give it to others.

How do I measure my own learning styles?

Kolb has developed an instrument for measuring learning styles called the Learning Styles Inventory.

By completing a simple test, you can plot your own learning style according to how you score on two dimensions: **the way you perceive information** and **the way you process information**.

Perceiving Information

Concrete experience ⟷ **Abstract conceptualisation**

&

Active experimentation ⟷ **Reflective observation**

Processing Information

Think about the last time you learned something new, either in the workplace or in your personal life. Have you recently learned to drive? Fly? Use a software package? Play a musical instrument? Play a new sport?

> **TIPS FOR MANAGERS:**
> Find out what your OWN learning style is

What did you like about this experience? What did you dislike? How did you first approach the new challenge? Did you read several books to gain some background information, or did you jump straight in? Did you discuss the challenge with others who were perhaps also learning, or did you go to a quiet place and try to work through the different aspects yourself?

Take the Learning Style Inventory test. By taking the test, you can discover your own learning style. Read the descriptions of the learning styles very carefully. Do you recognise and associate with the learning style you have based on your score? Does this coincide with your own experience when you are learning to master something new?

Do the descriptions of all four learning types remind you of people with whom you work? Or live?

Learning types and the Learning Style Grid

The four learning types are created when we place people in the grid above by assessing where they lie on two interlocking continua. The first continuum - between the extremes of concrete experience and abstract conceptualisation - is a guide to how people perceive information. The second continuum - between the extremes of active experimentation and reflective observation - allows us to place people according to how they process information.

Strengths, weaknes-ses, and how to maximise learning potential

Each of the four learning types has strengths and weaknesses. We discuss these as follows, giving tips on how to use this information to your advantage when managing people, when working with people, and when trying to give or receive information in general. This information is therefore of the most practical importance.

The score you receive on the LSI is not a completely accurate score of your learning style. It is a broad indication of how you yourself see yourself as a learner, and

Learning style grid
Concrete experience
Accomodator — Diverger
Active experimentation — Reflective observation
Converger — Assimilator
Abstract conceptualisation

indicates the aspects of learning (concrete experience / active experimentation/reflective observation/abstract conceptualisation) that you emphasise. Learning is complex, and other things should always be considered. You can get hints from many sources as to your own or another persons learning style. Look around! Consider indicators including:

TIPS FOR MANAGERS
Gather information from as many sources as you can

- The opinions of team members, colleagues, friends, superiors
- The problems and dilemmas you are clearly best at solving
- The types of tasks at which you always do your best
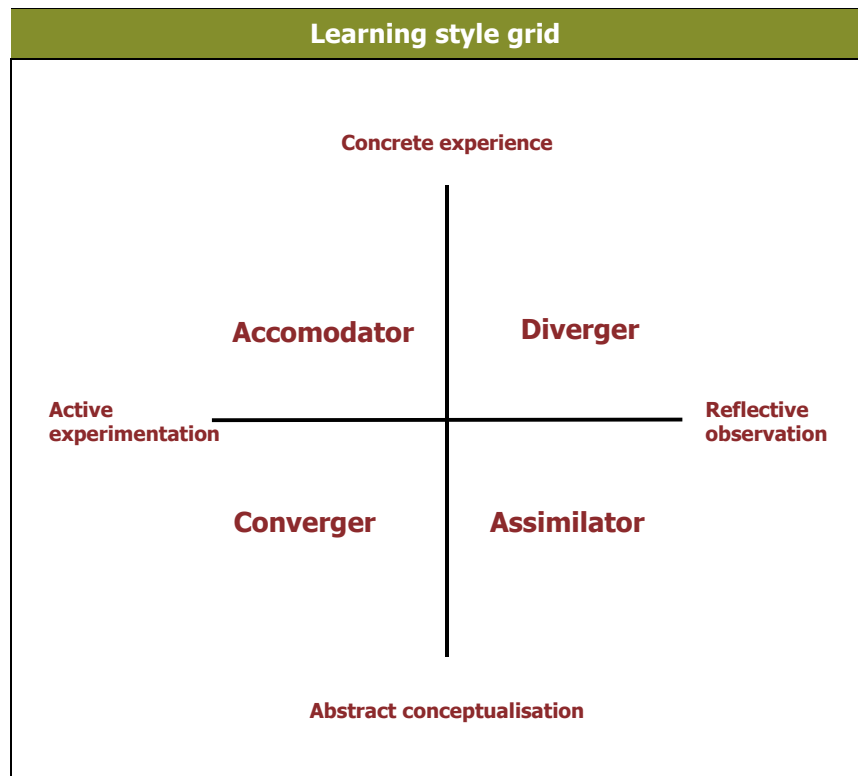- The work at which you continuously excel

Added to information on learning style, these indicators will help you to refine your understanding of how you and others can best be encouraged and motivated to learn. Do not forget that the emphasis you, or another person, put on the learning modes can change from time to time and from learning situation to learning situation.

Learning Type 1: The Accommodator

Accommodators emphasise concrete experience over abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation over reflective observation.

Accommodators have many strengths, for example:

- Getting things done
- Leadership

- Taking risks
- Engaging in trial and error to develop new information
- Adapting to change
- Coping with crises

Accommodators perceive reality through concrete experiences and process reality through active experimentation. They rely on concrete information, they learn by using their senses, and then they go about their tasks. They learn exceptionally well by trying new things, by taking risks, by envisioning new possibilities and adapting old information to new situations. They are accommodators because they are continually adapting to a new world and new challenges. A characteristic of the accommodator is that they tend to ignore theory when it doesn't fit with their idea of the facts.

And the downside...
You might already have guessed at some of the common weaknesses that accommodators show in learning. With their 'GO GO GO' attitude, they often develop impractical plans with impossible deadlines, are unable to complete work on time and ignore or overlook ideas, theories or approaches that conflict with their own view of the situation. Their preference for unstructured settings with minimal deadlines leads to , and sometimes, chaos. In short, accommodators don't give enough time to reflection, which is an essential aspect of learning.

Learning Type 2: The Converger
Convergers emphasise abstract conceptualisation over concrete experience and active experimentation over reflective observation.

Convergers have many strengths including:

- Problem solving
- Efficient problem analysis and definition
- Rapid decision making
- Practicality, productivity, efficiency

Convergers perceive reality through abstract conceptualisation and process reality through active experimentation. They think, and then they do. Punctuality and efficiency are important to convergers. They are called convergers because they are always moving towards (converging on) the correct solution and as quickly as they can, they pounce on the 'right' answer. Thus, they take in information and then converge on a solution. When faced with many alternatives, people with this learning style make decisions fast.

It is obvious from their strengths that convergers dislike tardiness, ambiguity and those they perceive to be dragging their feet when making decisions. They like working alone, and are not famous for their 'people' skills. They prefer working hands-on and they hate wasting time.

And the downside...
The downside of this learning style is however that convergers might make decisions before they have considered the alternatives sufficiently, before they have consulted people who might be able to offer valuable insights, and before they have considered the facts as thoroughly as is sometimes necessary. Convergers also fail to take the time to test their ideas and theories.

Learning Type 3: The Diverger

Divergers emphasise reflective observation over active experimentation and concrete experience over abstract conceptualisation.

Divergers have many strengths including:

- Powerful imaginations
- A good feel for people
- Problem recognition
- Creating harmony
- Approaching their problems with a search for meaning

Divergers perceive information concretely and process it reflectively. They rely on information delivered through their senses, concrete information, and by observing the world around them. They are excellent brainstormers, capable of considering multiple alternatives, and feel comfortable holding them all open as options without the urgency of choosing one.

And the downside........

The downside of being a diverger is that one can become paralysed by all the alternatives created and indecisive when the time arrives to find a solution. Divergers are also weak on development of well- formed ideas. They are also prone to consider many alternatives without clearly identifying the accompanying problems and opportunities.

Learning Type 4: The Assimilator

Assimilators emphasise reflective observation over active experimentation and abstract conceptualisation over concrete experience.

Assimilators, our last learning type, have the following strengths:

- Good at planning
- Development of theories
- Problem definition
- Model generation
- Development of procedures

Assimilators perceive information abstractly and process it reflectively. They watch and think. They are able to assimilate multitudes of data from different sources and then organise it into categories, themes and patterns. They are logical, well-ordered people who place a premium on stability, expertise and detail. They are comfortable in certain, stable environments. They thrive to create that certainty and stability. They are strong on the development of rules, procedures and models.

And the downside...

Unfortunately, assimilators are often more concerned with the elegance of solutions than with their practicality. They are cautious and risk averse, and they prefer to work alone. Their need to fully understand things before they act implies that they can annoy those who need decisions fast. Their abstract learning style insinuates that they fail to learn from their mistakes, which occurs through application of ideas and models in practice.

The practical importance of learning styles

It is useful know about learning styles (concrete, abstract, active, reflective) and learning types. We all have strengths and weaknesses as learners. As a manager, you can improve how you manage learning, training and development by being aware of the differences, and knowing the strengths and weakness of each style. It is useful to recognise when people are emphasising one learning style over another. By being aware of their preferences, you can encourage them to utilize the benefits of all four styles, even though they are drawn to one or a combination of two. You can also combine people with different styles, and thus different strengths, in teams that are designed to maximize learning.

It is useful to know about the differences between people's learning styles, and also about the necessity for balance in learning styles. You can use the information on learning styles in order to:

- Understand why employees are drawn to some types of training
- Communicate better with employees about the way they learn
- Encourage employees to achieve balance in their learning styles
- Decide what styles are being emphasised, and what styles are neglected

When you decide to send an employee on a training course to balance their learning styles – i.e. to help them exercise learning modes that they do not currently employ, then be sure to explain to them your reasoning behind sending them. If you do not, they may perceive the training as irrelevant to them, or may become frustrated at being sent on training courses that do not seem very interesting for them, given their learning style preferences.

Optimising the training and development of different types of learning

How does this information on learning styles help you to become a better manager, and how can you use it in your everyday task of developing your employees? In practical terms, it is important to remember that learning styles

> **TIPS FOR MANAGERS**
> When designing your training plans and writing your training budget, think of learning styles

affect the degree to which different training and teaching methods facilitate learning. We can overlay the Learning Styles Grid with a summary of the teaching and training types suitable for those with different learning styles. Using this Grid, you can see at a glance what teaching and training techniques are likely to work best for which learning types.
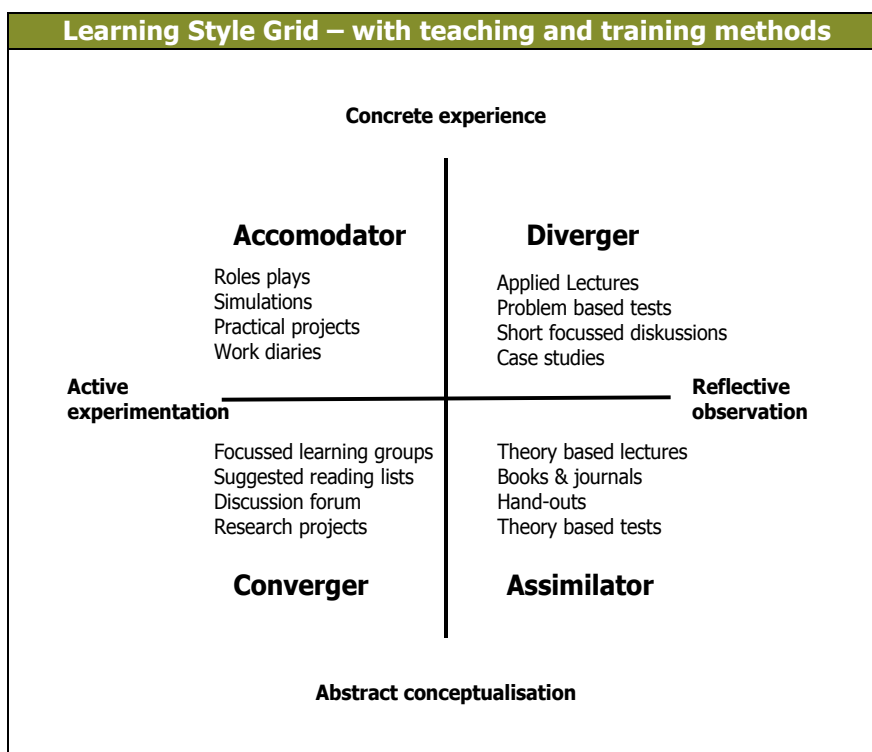
We already know that different people have different learning styles. When you think about training one of your employees, resist the temptation to immediately choose the old favourites, or the tried and tested techniques, such as sending them on a course or arranging on-the-job training. Instead, consider how learning styles affect the power of training. From the grid below, you can see which teaching and training types best suit which learning types. Assimilators excel at traditional university style classroom learning, using theoretical lectures and required readings. Accommodators, on the other hand, learn best from simulations, role-playing and other training methods that demand active participation and concrete experience.

You can also use the information presented below to tailor the training of a person with one learning style so that s/he can develop her/himself in the direction of another learning style. This means that you can take a person with a preference for active learning methods (converger/accommodator) and encourage them to undertake training geared towards strengthening their reflective abilities, for example, through theory based lectures, case studies or problem-based exams. Furthermore, those who are strongest in reflection or abstraction can be encouraged to develop their 'hands-on' skills by undertaking training through field projects, simulations and focused learning groups.

It is VITAL to remember that effective learning requires development of all four learning types. Although those with a particular learning style, for example convergers, will favour learning methods that facilitate problem solving and application of ideas, they should also be encouraged to further develop themselves by using learning methods that focus on reflective thinking.

Learning Style Grid – with teaching and training methods

Concrete experience

Accomodator
Roles plays
Simulations
Practical projects
Work diaries

Diverger
Applied Lectures
Problem based tests
Short focussed diskussions
Case studies

Active experimentation — Reflective observation

Focussed learning groups
Suggested reading lists
Discussion forum
Research projects

Theory based lectures
Books & journals
Hand-outs
Theory based tests

Converger

Assimilator

Abstract conceptualisation

When deciding on what training to provide your employees, ask them what they most like, what they are usually best at, and what they prefer to avoid. This information gives you a simple and straightforward basis for deciding what training is required. Employees know better than anyone else what training they are most likely to benefit from, but are sometimes reluctant to

TIPS FOR MANAGERS
Ask your employees what learning and training methods they prefer

make that known because in the past, they have not been asked. They may also be reluctant to share this information because they themselves are not used to thinking about how their own learning style impacts on the effectiveness of their training.

Taking individual learning styles into account does not mean that you always send employees to train in the methods they prefer. Sometimes, it is helpful to confront them with methods they normally dislike as a way of encouraging them to develop a more balanced learning style, or to enhance their learning in a style (reflection, for example) that will be useful for upcoming projects or new job assignments.

In addition to information about learning styles and information from other sources, asking employees about their preferred training alternatives can help to pinpoint those training activities most likely to be successful.

Finally, by sharing the learning styles framework with employees, you create a common language that you can use to discuss the way they learn, their strengths and weaknesses as learners, and where they need to concentrate in order to achieve a more effective balance between the learning styles. This 'common language' can also be used to improve teamwork, because team members can also consider the impact of differences in learning styles on how they approach a collective task. The way team members share information and approach tasks can be refined using information on learning styles.

Checklist: Tying it all together

Tying it all together
We finalise this report with a summary of the information

- The Learning Cycle shows us that there are different stages in the learning processes.

- Each stage draws on different skills in terms of the way we perceive and process information

- Our learning styles will orient us to different stages in the process

- A balance in learning styles is necessary for effective learning

- There are four learning types: Accommodators, Convergers, Divergers and Assimilators

- Each has various strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and training can be tailored according to learning styles and learning types

- Sharing this knowledge with employees creates a common language and facilitate communication on training

- Using this knowledge can help you to be a better manager, learner, and team-member