

**Aims:**

To introduce the idea of preferred learning styles

To consider the strengths, weaknesses and characteristics of the four main learning styles

To identify personal learning styles

To harness this knowledge of learning styles in planning and running training events

**Resources required:**

Plenary room and rooms for small groups to work together

Previously prepared 'Advertisement for Myself' and presentation (Exercise 4.2)

- 3.1 'The characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of the four learning style preferences' handouts
- 3.2 'The effects of trainer's learning style preferences' handouts
- 4.1 'Taking Stock of your Learning Strengths' participants' instruction sheets
- 4.2 'Advertisements for Myself' participants' instruction sheets

'Learning log' sheets

**1 Background notes**

Chapter 2 describes David Kolb's model of experiential learning. The four stages of this cyclical process are:

- Concrete experience
- Reviewing and reflecting on the experience
- Analysing and generalising from the experience
- Planning how the lessons learned can be applied in the future

Not everyone learns in the same way. Most people will be stronger in some aspects of experiential learning than others. For example, when given a new and unfamiliar task to do, one person may 'jump in at the deep end' and get on with the task as best he can. He may then go to a colleague and talk about his experience of undertaking the task. If he is fortunate, he may be helped to think through how he might do things better next time and thereby learn from his experience.

Given the same task, another individual may immediately turn to a book or manual for some guidance prior to launching into the new piece of work. Yet another person may look to the direct experience of a colleague before embarking on their new task. What works as a starting point for one person does not necessarily work for everyone. Each of these examples give indications of the individuals' 'preferred learning styles'. The respective

learning preferences which Peter Honey and Alan Mumford have associated with each of the four stages of the experiential learning cycle outlined above are:

- Activist
- Reflector
- Theorist
- Pragmatist

People displaying each of these preferences have their own characteristics, strengths and weaknesses. These are outlined in handout 3.1. Trainers who are interested in finding out more about learning style preferences are referred to Honey and Mumford's publications.

The important thing for trainers to remember is that none of these approaches to learning is right or wrong. What is important is that everyone goes through all four stages of Kolb's learning cycle to make the most of their learning.

Because not everyone is equally able to use all four stages of the cycle, this can create problems for them. People who miss out the reflection stage may find themselves locked into a habitual cycle of making the same mistakes over and over again. Those who become locked into theory and generalisations may become perfectionists intolerant of the 'messiness' of the real world. The 'jump in at the deep end' activists may end up taking unnecessary risks. In other words, there is more to learning from experience than we might, at first, expect!

Aldous Huxley, the visionary writer of 'Brave New World' once said that "Experience is not what happens to a man (sic); it is what a man does with what happens to him". To become better at learning from experience, the key is to :

- understand your learning style preferences (which parts of the learning cycle you are good and bad at)
- acknowledge the associated strengths and weaknesses
- identify your preferred starting point on the learning cycle
- develop your less-preferred learning styles
- ensure that you go through all four stages of the experiential learning cycle

To help others learn more effectively from *their* experience you need to:

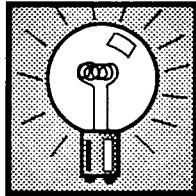
- know your own learning style preferences
- help them reach a similar understanding
- plan and adapt your training events to fit a balance of learning style preferences

Since very few trainers have a perfect balance of learning style preferences, this may involve them in taking risks by incorporating training material with which they may initially feel uncomfortable. For example, some trainers are reluctant to use techniques such as sculpting which involve physical activity and the expression of emotion even when these would be of great value to participants. It is important for the trainer to keep a balance between

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making the most of her own strengths and abilities, whilst offering opportunities for others to learn in ways which *she* may find risky or threatening. Only the trainer herself will know how much personal challenge to incorporate in planning a training event. But openly acknowledging that challenge with participants may well encourage them to take their own personal risks and benefit greatly from the experience.

## 2 Suggestions for using these materials



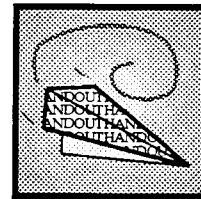
- 1 Introduce the session and its aims.
- 2 Remind participants of Kolb's learning cycle and introduce the idea of learning styles using the material in the 'Background notes'.
- 3 Distribute handout 3.1 and lead a discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of the different learning style preferences.
- 4 Introduce exercise 4.1, distribute participants' instruction sheets and organise participants into pairs.
- 5 Lead a discussion on what emerged from the exercise. Distribute handout 3.2 to focus discussion on how participants might use their understanding of learning style preferences in planning their training events.
- 6 Introduce exercise 4.2 and distribute participants' instruction sheets.
- 7 Lead discussion on what participants learned from exercise 4.2. Focus on the different strengths which participants identified in themselves.
- 8 Distribute 'Learning log' sheets for completion by participants.
- 9 Close the session with a review of its aims and an evaluation.

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## 3.1 Handout

## The characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of the four learning style preferences

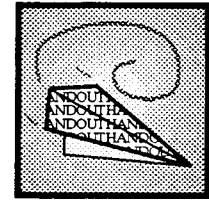


Learning Style Preference	Characteristics	Strengths	Weaknesses
<b>Activist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absorb themselves fully in new experiences</li> <li>• A 'jump in at the deep end' approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open-minded</li> <li>• Enthusiastic</li> <li>• Gregarious</li> <li>• Thrive on challenge</li> <li>• Flexible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Act first and consider the consequences later</li> <li>• Tend to centre activity around themselves</li> <li>• Get bored quickly and move on to new activities</li> </ul>
<b>Reflector</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Like to stand back and view their experience from different perspectives</li> <li>• Tend to adopt a low profile in discussions but assimilate other people's ideas readily</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thoughtful</li> <li>• Methodical</li> <li>• Good at listening</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reluctant participators</li> <li>• Overly cautious</li> <li>• Un-assertive</li> <li>• Tend to endlessly rehearse the past</li> </ul>
<b>Theorist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate observations into theories, models and organised systems</li> <li>• Analyse experience to find out underlying assumptions and principles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Logical thinkers</li> <li>• Rational &amp; objective</li> <li>• Disciplined</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low tolerance of disorder</li> <li>• Tendency to perfectionism</li> <li>• Intolerance of intuition &amp; subjectivity</li> </ul>
<b>Pragmatist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Like to apply ideas and theories in practice</li> <li>• Enthusiastically gather and assimilate new ideas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practical &amp; realistic</li> <li>• Businesslike</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task-oriented</li> <li>• Intolerant of reflective discussion</li> <li>• Like to get on with things without always testing options</li> </ul>

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**3.2 Handout**

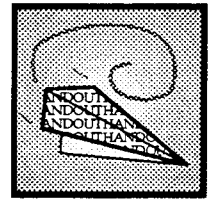
**The effects of trainers' learning style preferences**



Trainer's learning style preference	If you have a high preference for this style, you will tend to feel comfortable with:	But you may tend to overlook:	If you have a low preference for this learning style, remember to:
<b>Activist</b>	<p>Practical exercises such as games, simulations, role plays.</p> <p>Creating opportunities for interaction between participants.</p> <p>Being open about your own emotions and experiences.</p> <p>Changes to the planned training programme.</p>	<p>That some participants find practical exercises a 'high risk' activity.</p> <p>The importance of creating an atmosphere which allows participants to take risks.</p> <p>The value of theoretical inputs and reflection on practical exercises.</p>	<p>Offer a wide range of opportunities for participants to try out their practical skills.</p> <p>Set challenges for participants which will stretch their abilities.</p>
<b>Reflector</b>	<p>Exercises with 'second hand' experiences such as video triggers or case studies.</p> <p>Pencil and paper exercises which require low levels of personal disclosure.</p> <p>Highly structured training programmes.</p>	<p>The need for pace in training events.</p> <p>The need to share control with the participants.</p> <p>The need to encourage participation.</p>	<p>Include observers in exercises and give them time to report their findings.</p> <p>Include enough time to fully review and evaluate the lessons learned in exercises.</p>
<b>Theorist</b>	<p>Lecturing approaches or other well-researched inputs such as case studies.</p> <p>Tutorial or discussion group approaches which encourage questioning.</p> <p>Handouts.</p>	<p>Including clear explanations about the purpose and structure of your training event.</p> <p>Pitching the inputs at the correct level for the participants.</p> <p>Acknowledging participants' feelings.</p>	<p>Relate practice to theory whenever possible.</p> <p>Help participants draw conclusions and generalisations from their experience.</p>

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## 3.2 Handout cont...

**Pragmatist**

Practical exercises generated from real experience.

Techniques and practical tips.

Action planning and other ways of translating learning at the event into changed practice back at work.

Using participants as a resource for learning.

That not everything can be reduced to techniques, guidelines and 'golden rules'.

The importance of a theoretical base.

Include opportunities for participants to relate the learning to their own workplace.

Ensure that participants have time to develop their own personal action plans.

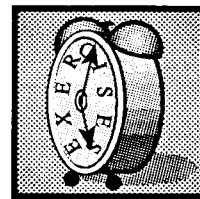
Incorporate 'real life' experiences into your exercises and theoretical inputs.

Give participants an opportunity to 'try out' what they have just learned.

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## 4.1 Exercise: trainer's notes

## 'Taking Stock of Your Learning Strengths'

**Purpose:**

To identify personal learning strengths.

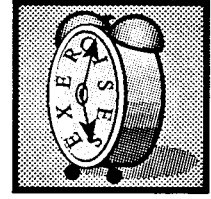
To acknowledge how these have affected learning in the past.

To identify how these strengths might be harnessed in future training events.

**Process:**

- 1 Introduce the purpose of the exercise.
- 2 Provide each participant with an instruction sheet (4.1). Ask participants to read and carry out the instructions.
- 3 Ask the participants to form pairs and discuss their responses.
- 4 Bring all the participants together to discuss learning points from the exercise.

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**4.1 Exercise: trainer's notes****'Taking Stock of Your Learning Strengths'****Purpose:**

To identify personal learning strengths.

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**Process:**

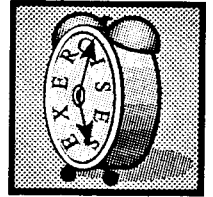
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## 4.1 Exercise: participants' instruction sheet

## 'Taking Stock of Your Learning Strengths'

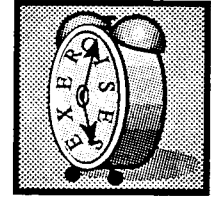


1. Imagine yourself asking six friends to list one quality each which they like or admire in you. List those qualities in the first column of the table below.
2. Against each of those qualities, list two activities where the qualities have helped you to learn from your experience in the past.
3. Next, list one way in which each of the qualities could be useful to you *as a trainer* in the future.
4. Discuss your responses with a partner.
5. Identify what you see as your preferred learning style using handout 3.1

Personal Quality	Activities when the quality has helped you to learn from your experience in the past	Ways in which the quality could be useful to you, as a trainer in the future
1.	1. 2.	
2.	1. 2.	
3.	1. 2.	
4.	1. 2.	
5.	1. 2.	
6.	1. 2.	

## 4.2 Exercise: trainer's notes

## 'Advertisements for Myself'



Before using this exercise with a group, you should prepare your own 'advertisement' in advance of the session, using the instructions below. This will enable you to make your own presentation as described in point four below.

**Purpose:**

To reinforce an understanding of preferred learning styles.

To gain experience in making a personal presentation.

**Process:**

- 1 Give each participant a sheet of flipchart paper and a number of marker pens.
- 2 Ask each person to draw an advertisement which is designed to 'sell' themselves as a trainer. The advertisement should include:
  - A picture of themselves in the middle of the sheet (emphasise that it does not matter if they feel they cannot draw, they can use a 'stick' figure or any other way they like of representing themselves)
  - Very brief statements about their learning style preferences
  - What they see as their strengths as a trainer (taken from exercise 4.1)
- 3 When each person has devised their advertisement, each should devise a two minute presentation using this. You should encourage participants to exaggerate their 'selling points' as trainers.
- 4 Gather participants together and give a presentation about yourself as a trainer. This should be as dramatic and light-hearted as you can make it. The purpose of this part of the exercise is to reduce participants' anxiety about performing in front of others and to set a light-hearted tone for their own presentations.
- 5 Divide participants into groups of about four and send them off to the small group rooms with the instruction that they are to give a two minute presentation about themselves to the other group members. Group members should not interrupt in any way during the presentations. Comments should be saved until all the participants in the small group have completed their presentations.

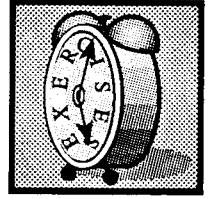
- 6 The small groups should be given a further five minutes to discuss the presentations before returning for a plenary session.

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## 4.2 Exercise: participants' instruction sheet

## 'Advertisements for Myself'



Using the flipchart sheet and pens supplied, draw an 'advertisement' which is designed to 'sell' yourself as a trainer. The advertisement should include:

- A picture of yourself in the middle of the sheet (don't worry if you feel you can't draw, use a 'stick' figure or any way you like of representing yourself)
- Very brief statements about your learning style preferences
- What you see as your strengths as a trainer (taken from exercise 4.1)

When you have finished your advertisement, you should devise a two minute presentation using this. You should exaggerate your 'selling points' as a trainer and make the presentation as light-hearted as you wish!

In small groups you should each take turns in giving your presentation to the others. Remember to keep your presentation to two minutes. When you are part of the 'audience', do not interrupt the presenter. You will have about five minutes at the end of the presentations to discuss the exercise before returning for a plenary session.

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