

Using and Understanding Learning Styles in a Training Event is Vital

By Andy Taylor

The Identification of Learning Styles has been around since the mid-80s and are used in conjunction with *Kolb's Learning Cycle* that was developed in 1974. Since then many more theories have been developed to identify learning styles and how people learn.

A number of people use the VAK model taken from *Neuro Linguistic Programming* or NLP that was developed by Richard Bandler and others in the early 1970s. NLP is a tool used to understand how people communicate VAK being Visual, Auditory and kinaesthetic meaning that if you are a visual person you communicate with pictures or prefer information in diagrammatic form, Auditory people communicate with sounds and would rather receive information audibly and Kinaesthetic people go mainly with their feelings and would like a 'hands on' approach to receiving information. I do not believe that this model directly helps us understand how people learn. It does tell us how they like to communicate but not how they like to learn.

Kolb's learning cycle is still in use today as it is the basics of how learning is completed. Without completing the cycle learning cannot happen. The learning Styles show how different people start in different places on the cycle but, they still have to progress through each of the styles to complete it.

The different learning styles are based on Kolb's Learning cycle and were developed by Honey and Mumford. This is where this model is different to many others out there as it takes an existing model and adds to it to explain how it works and how they fit.

The first thing to remember is that everyone has a preferred learning style, which is a style they will stick to when something is new or unfamiliar. Everyone must pass through each learning style in order for learning to occur. This is where many trainers fail to explain this model correctly.

The different learning styles are

Activist. An Activist style involves themselves fully and without bias in anything new. Their philosophy is 'I'll try anything once' and tend to act first and consider the consequences afterwards. They thrive on new challenges but, are bored with implementation and longer term consolidation.

Reflectors, however, like to stand back to ponder experiences and observe them from many different perspectives. They like to collect data both first hand and from many different sources and prefer to think about it thoroughly before coming to any conclusion. They are thoughtful people who like to consider all possible angles and implications before making a move. They enjoy watching people in action.

Theorists adapt and integrate observations into complex but logically sound theories. They think problems through in a vertical, step by step logical way. 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 synthesise. Questions they frequently ask are 'Does it make sense?' 'How does it fit with this?'

Pragmatists are keen to try out ideas, theories and techniques to see if they work in practice. They positively search out new ideas and take the first opportunity to experiment with its application. They are the sort of people who return from courses brimming with new ideas and wanting to try them out. They act quickly and confidently on ideas that attract them. Their philosophy is 'There is always a better way' and 'if it works it is good'.

This will help you identify them in your training events and they fall into two other categories 'Doers' (Activists and Pragmatists) and 'Thinkers' (Reflectors and Theorists). So your training needs to get people involved in an activity and to get them thinking this way you hit all the learning styles. Don't worry too much about not hitting each one equally as some training events will lean heavily to 'doing' or 'thinking' but, if you can get them both into your training every time then you have them all.

When writing a Training Event you need to be mindful of the learning styles and design sessions around each learning style so that you cover them all. You **do not** need to know your delegates learning style before you deliver the training, in an ideal world you could but, you just do not have time to do the admin involved and then change the programme to meet the needs of each and every group. This is done in the classroom.

Each delegate will have a preferred style but, this will change due to

- The subject
- The level of interest in subject
- The Knowledge of subject
- Issues at work
- Issues at home

And many more influences can affect how people learn on a particular day.

AiTraining Consultancy runs a 3 day Designing and Delivering Training course that covers Learning Styles, how to use them and how people learn. For more information visit www.aitraining.net/Training%20Courses/train_the_trainer.htm or email andy@aitraining.net or call +44 (0) 20 328 65165.