Learning Styles in eLearning
In this white paper we explore the Honey & Mumford’s 4 learning styles and how to accommodate them in your eLearning.

Learning design is all about designing the right learning for the right audience, catering for different learning styles and maximising the opportunities for effective learning.

Effective learning design helps create engagement, and leads to emotional and intellectual connection with content to build practical, valuable skills which can be immediately applied in relevant situations.

A learning style describes the way that you, as an individual, prefer to learn. There are many models that claim to analyse individual learning preferences. Some take into account your personality, others your emotions. A popular one, the Honey and Mumford Learning styles inventory, is based on the way you approach new learning experiences.

Peter Honey and Alan Mumford developed their learning styles system as a variation on the Kolb Learning Cycle model. For example, when buying a new gadget do you?

- read the manual
- try pushing all the buttons to see what happens
- find someone to explain to you how it works
- watch others using it.

To learn more about Kolb and Honey & Mumfords Learning Styles visit this website.

Although many people exhibit clear preferences for one of these styles most have a combination of two or more. The benefit for those supporting learning of knowing learners’ preferred styles is that learning experiences can be tailored to maximise their impact.
Activists

Their philosophy is: 'I'll try anything once'.

People who prefer the Experience stage of Kolb’s cycle, ‘Activists’, enjoy involving themselves fully and without bias in new experiences. 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.

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<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Warnings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• flexible and open minded</td>
<td>• tendency to take the immediately obvious action without thinking</td>
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<tr>
<td>• happy to have a go</td>
<td>• often take unnecessary risks</td>
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<tr>
<td>• happy to be exposed to new situations</td>
<td>• rush into action without sufficient preparation</td>
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<tr>
<td>• optimistic about anything new and therefore unlikely to resist change</td>
<td>• get bored with implementation/consolidation</td>
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Accommodating Activists in eLearning

There needs to be plenty to look at and with video and audio segments as well as animation, activists won’t get bored. The experience isn’t passive, activist learners will be clicking around exploring conversations and taking quizzes and exercises as the work through the material, giving them the opportunities they need to discover new experiences and place themselves at the centre of their learning.

eLearning also helps activists to guard against their weaknesses. By trying out new ideas in the safe environment offered by a well designed eLearning framework they can learn about the risks inherent in situations, and discover the benefits of planning and preparation.

Reflectors

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.

People who prefer the ‘Review’ stage of Kolb’s cycle, Reflectors, like to sit back to ponder experiences and observe them from many different perspectives. 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 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.

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<th>Strengths</th>
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<tr>
<td>• thorough and methodical</td>
<td>• tendency to hold back from direct participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>• thoughtful</td>
<td>• slow to make up their minds and reach a decision</td>
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<td>• good at listening to others assimilating</td>
<td>• tendency to be too cautious and not take</td>
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<tr>
<td>information</td>
<td>enough risks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• rarely jump to conclusions</td>
<td>• not-assertive, they are not particularly</td>
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<td></td>
<td>forthcoming and lack 'small talk'</td>
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Reflectors can take information on board in bite-sized chunks or work through larger sections before taking a break. This allows learners to think about what they’ve discovered, looking for examples in their own lives, and forming their own views before returning to the Module. There’s no rush, and the system remembers how far the learner has got so they can return directly to the last topic they studied. A Learning Journal facility allows learners to jot down notes as they go along, which they can return to later.

eLearning can help reflectors to make the most of their learning style, building confidence in their skills and knowledge at their own pace, allowing them to take more informed decisions independently.

**Theorists**

People who prefer the ‘Conclude’ stage of Kolb’s cycle, 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 are keen on basic assumptions, principles, theories, models and systems thinking. Their philosophy prizes rationality and logic. This is their ‘mental set’ and they rigidly reject anything that doesn't fit with it.

Strengths
- logical 'vertical' thinking
- rational and objective
good at asking probing questions
disciplined approach

Warnings
restricted in lateral thinking
low tolerance for uncertainty, disorder and ambiguity
intolerant of anything subjective or intuitive
full of 'shoulds, oughts and musts'

eLearning needs to have modules with clear concepts and theories which can be tested and remembered. Where additional research may help theorists to gain additional knowledge reading lists are been included to assist theorists to explore concepts in greater detail. Key thinkers on each topic can be identified so that learners can anchor their knowledge to academic research. By including models, acronyms, and clear logical concepts well designed eLearning gives theorists the structure and clarity they need. Warnings can be included to identify the limitations of theories and their application in the real world, helping theorists to build their knowledge whilst maintaining their ability to take a contingency approach.

Pragmatists

Their philosophy is: 'There is always a better way' and 'If it works it's good'.

People who prefer the ‘Apply’ stage of Kolb’s cycle, Pragmatists, are keen on trying 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 applications. They are the sort of people who return from management 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'.

Strengths
keen to test things in practice
practical, down to earth, realistic
business-like get straight to the point
technique oriented

Warnings
tendency to reject anything without an obvious application
not very interested in theory or basic principles

For pragmatists, the content should be arranged in clear, easily identifiable modules designed to deal with everyday challenges. Within each module the material can be accessed at an
element level, allowing pragmatists to access the sections they need to address the issues they are facing now. Practical examples of how to apply new knowledge are included, along with handy downloadable forms and checklists to enable easy application.

Exercises allow pragmatists to take the concepts and profile themselves and their teams against them, and strategies for dealing with individual situations are included to keep the learning real. By including case studies and anecdotes well designed eLearning enables pragmatists to better retain and apply information about concepts.