

# LEARNING SKILLS

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# 1 THE OBJECTIVE – WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

In this session, you will learn:

- About the importance of learning;
- How you learn and when you learn best - what is your personal learning style;
- How you can effectively teach and train others based on their learning styles.

# 2 WHAT IS LEARNING AND THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING

Learning is the relatively permanent change in our knowledge or behaviour due to experience. We learn our whole life. Learning can be intentional, but it is also happening unintentionally when we interact with the world. When we learn, new knowledge and skills are readily available from memory so we can make sense of future problems and opportunities.

Our world is rapidly changing and according to the changes, so do occupations and career opportunities. We need to learn constantly to adjust to the changes. When our learning is self-motivated, ongoing and voluntary, we talk about **lifelong learning**, and when we learn from direct experiences outside a traditional academic setting, we talk about **experiential learning**.

**Ongoing learning will enable you to:**

- **Grow your income and status** – Learning helps you acquire knowledge and skills that can enhance your potential in the job market, thus improve your standard of life.
- **Get access to new opportunities** – Learning gives you a chance to participate in new experiences that can lead to new opportunities.
- **Increase self-confidence** – New knowledge and skills increase your sense of pride and accomplishment, which gives you the necessary self-confidence when interacting with other people.
- **Grow as an individual** – You can implement learning to achieve positive change in daily life, personally and professionally.

- **Achieve your goals** – Through learning you acquire the necessary skills and knowledge that will help you reach your personal or professional goals.
- **To be happy** – Learning enables personal and professional growth, which increases and sustains your happiness.
- **Develop professionally** – With new skills and knowledge, you increase your competitiveness and employability.

### EXERCISE

Reflect on what is your main motivation for learning. Is your learning driven by internal motives (for example to increase self-confidence, happiness, personal growth) or external factors (for example employment, career, higher income)?

## 2.1 Learning and the workplace

Technologies and processes in companies are changing constantly and to stay competitive in the workplace, you need to learn continuously. Your employability depends on your willingness to stay up to date and to constantly broaden your skills and knowledge. Besides official learning programs in the company, there are many opportunities to gain new skills and knowledge:

- **Making a commitment** – You make learning a habit by committing to learn new things every day. Most habits can be learned in six weeks.
- **Reading** – Successful people read every day. You can, for example, read or listen to audio books while commuting to and from work.
- **Participating in training programs** – Find out what learning opportunities there are in your organization. Maybe the company is willing to cover tuition costs of your studies as well.
- **Joining a discussion** – Look for discussion groups or training seminars in your industry that will provide new knowledge and experiences.
- **Upgrading your existing skills** – Building on your existing skills will not only increase your confidence but also make you more efficient at your job.
- **Taking on a challenge** – You can step out of the comfort zone by learning something completely different from what your job requires. What can you bring to your

workplace with, for example, completely new accounting or project management skills, new language?

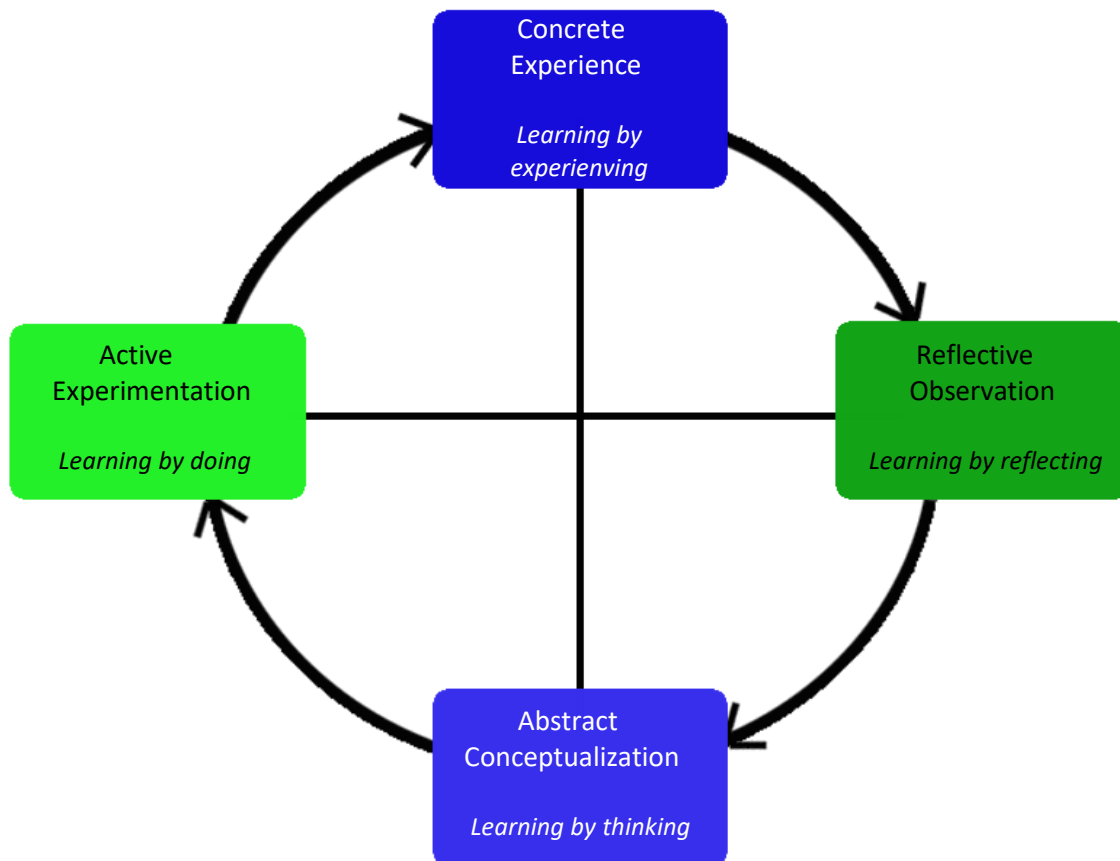
Besides the obvious benefits of staying competitive in a job market, there are other reasons for you to continue learning in the workplace:

- Learning will **reduce boredom** and keep your interest level high. Work can become monotonous, but learning new skills can help breaking that day-to-day monotony.
- Learning will make you **more adaptable** to change in your profession and workplace, making you willing to take on new ways of working.
- Learning will make you **more versatile** and able to transition into different roles at the workplace or even create a new career for you.
- Learning will **benefit your health**, because of keeping your mind and body engaged by pursuing new knowledge and experiences. Keeping an active brain is as important as keeping an active body.
- With continuous learning, you will make sure that your **knowledge stays relevant** and you are not left behind as the economy evolves and technology improves.

We established the importance of learning every day as well as at the workplace. To be able to maximize your learning, you need to know a bit more about learning itself – in the next chapters you will find out how we learn and what is your preferred style of learning.

### 3 THE LEARNING CYCLE

This concept of learning cycle was first developed by **David Kolb**. The learning process can be broken down into 4 stages:



Based on your preference, learning can start at any stage, but it is the most effective, when you fully complete the cycle:

**(1) CONCRETE EXPERIENCE** – You take action and get concrete experience – key to learning is active involvement and not just watching or reading about it.

**(2) REFLECTIVE OBSERVATION** – You stand back and reflect on what has been done. At this stage, you ask questions and discuss with others about the experience.

**(3) ABSTRACT CONCEPTUALIZATION** – You analyse these observations and make sense of what has happened. You compare experience and observation with what you already know from before.

**(4) ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION** – You apply gathered information from the analysis in a practical situation.

## **4 HONEY AND MUMFORD'S LEARNING STYLES**

Everybody has their preferred way of learning and by knowing what way you learn best, you can better manage your own learning and personal development.

Honey and Mumford described 4 learning styles that help you identify your own preferred way of learning:

- **ACTIVIST**

- You learn best by doing (and not by seeing, reading or listening). You like practical, hands-on activities and problem solving, when the activity is finished, you do not take the time to reflect on what you have done, but rather rush to the next activity. You do not like repetition or planning.
- Strengths: flexible and open-minded, enjoy new situations, highly sociable, like small group discussions.
- Weaknesses: take unnecessary risks, action without proper preparation, want to do everything by themselves, get bored with implementation.
- Skills developed: problem solving, experimenting, predicting, enquiring, and exploring.

- **REFLECTOR**

- You learn best when you can observe the situation from different perspectives, collecting as much information as possible before making conclusions. You take time to reflect what you have learned before putting it into practice.
- Strengths: careful, thorough and methodical, good listener, never jump to conclusions.
- Weaknesses: hold back from direct participation, slow to make a decision, not assertive.
- Skills developed: observing, imagining, visualising, brainstorming, listening, and speaking/questioning.

- **THEORIST**

- You build upon models, theories, concepts and facts to learn. You like to be challenged intellectually, questioning and exploring the logic behind the concepts. You like order and are uncomfortable with ambiguity and confusion.
- Strengths: thinking things through, objective, rational approach, analytical.
- Weaknesses: not creative, too much time planning, problem with applying theoretical aspects in real situations.
- Skills developed: organizing, analysing, classifying, comparing, and prioritising.

- **PRAGMATIST**

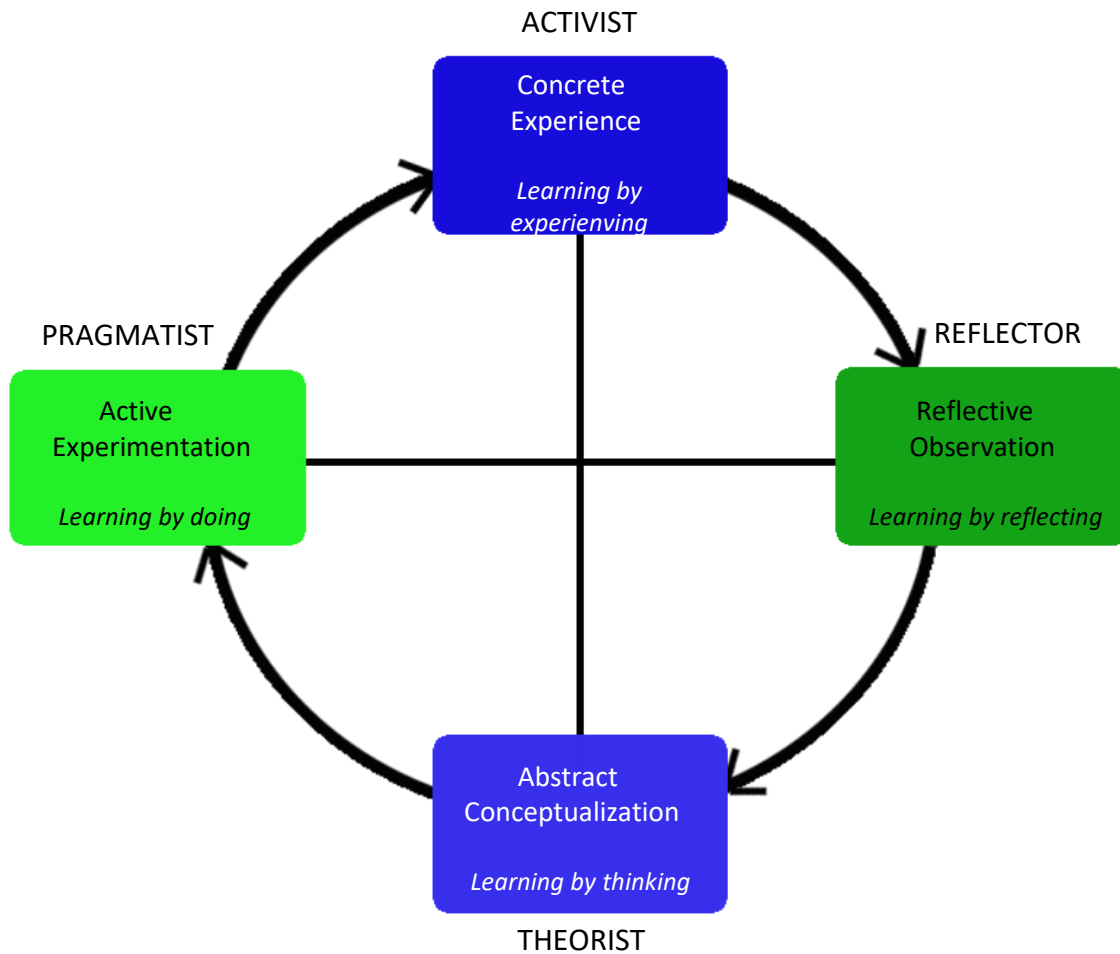
- Unlike theorists, pragmatists have little use for theory and abstract ideas unless they have practical use. You need to see the link between the learning and its practical application. You enjoy experimenting with theory, information and ideas to see if they work in practice.
- Strengths: practical, applying ideas into practice, down-to-earth.
- Weaknesses: lack of conceptual thinking, jumping into practical solutions too soon.
- Skills developed: explaining, summarising, verifying, evaluating, and integrating.

### EXERCISE

At the following link, you will find different statements about learning. Check the boxes next to the statements that appeal to you. When you finish, submit the answers to find out your preferred learning style. The link: <https://www.mint-hr.com/mumford.html>

You can link the stages of the learning cycle and the learning styles. Knowing your preferred learning style will help you to understand where in the learning cycle your learning is the most effective:





#### 4.1 The Role of the teacher/trainer for each learning style

You can learn the most efficient when the delivery method supports your learning preference and when you complete all four stages of the learning cycle. If you find yourself in a role of a trainer, you need to tailor activities for learners based on their individual preferences and ensure to guide them through all stages of the learning cycle.

The trainer's role and most appropriate learning methods for each learning style:

STYLE	LEARNING METHODS AND ACTIVITIES	TRAINER'S ROLE
ACTIVIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● on the job</li> <li>● fieldwork</li> <li>● secondment</li> <li>● projects</li> <li>● role-playing</li> <li>● simulations/team games</li> <li>● problem solving</li> <li>● practical exercises</li> </ul>	<p>Empowering: Allowing self-learning and the teaching of others.</p>
REFLECTOR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● discussion</li> <li>● brainstorming</li> <li>● writing learning logs and journals</li> <li>● shadowing</li> <li>● observing</li> <li>● films and videos</li> <li>● giving feedback to others</li> <li>● quiet thinking time</li> </ul>	<p>Motivating: Enabling experience by specifying learning outcomes and benefits.</p>
THEORIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● lectures</li> <li>● papers</li> <li>● reading</li> <li>● research</li> <li>● distance/e-learning</li> <li>● questions &amp; answers</li> <li>● give theories and facts</li> </ul>	<p>Teaching: Presenting the facts, facilitating debate and planning.</p>
PRAGMATIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● projects</li> <li>● fieldwork</li> <li>● home work</li> <li>● case study</li> <li>● simulations/role play</li> <li>● business visits</li> <li>● planning</li> <li>● use real problems</li> </ul>	<p>Coaching: Enabling the individual to try things out and review learning.</p>

## 5 VAK LEARNING STYLES

VAK learning styles are described based on the three main sensory receivers – visual, auditory and kinesthetic. Learners use all three modalities to receive new information and learn, but usually one or two of them are dominant.

Throughout our life, usually one of these styles is forced upon us. In kindergarten, up until third grade, teachers use mainly kinesthetic methods or physical activities for children to learn. In the rest of primary education, the prevalent method is visual; while in high school and college, as well as in business environments, most information is presented auditory, such as lectures.

Characteristics of the learners with dominant learning style:

- **VISUAL LEARNERS**

You learn best by reading and seeing pictures, usually you can visualize in your head what you learn. You like reading and writing tasks and have difficulty with spoken instructions.

- **AUDITORY LEARNERS**

You learn best by listening. You like to read aloud to understand and remember better, you also like spoken instruction better than written ones.

- **KINESTHETIC LEARNERS**

You learn best by touching and moving/doing. You learn better, when some kind of physical activity is involved. You “speak with your hands”. To learn, you like to put things apart and back together. When reading, you use colour high lighters, take notes and doodle.

## 5.1 The Role of the teacher/trainer for each learning style

How the teacher/trainer can integrate specific learning style into the learning environment:

VISUAL LEARNERS	AUDITORY LEARNERS	KINESTHETIC LEARNERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Use different visual aids: graphs, charts, illustrations;</li> <li>● Include outlines, agendas and hand-outs with available white space for note-taking;</li> <li>● Eliminate potential distractions;</li> <li>● Supplement text with illustrations when possible;</li> <li>● Invite questions for them to stay alert in an auditory environment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● At the beginning give a brief overview of the lecture/material and at the end conclude with a summary;</li> <li>● Include activities such as brainstorming, small discussion groups, debriefing;</li> <li>● Develop dialog with the learners.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Use activities to get them up and moving;</li> <li>● Play music;</li> <li>● Use coloured markers for the key learning points;</li> <li>● Give frequent stretch breaks;</li> <li>● Have them transfer information from the text to another medium such as a keyboard or a tablet;</li> <li>● Provide materials such as play-dough to keep them physically present.</li> </ul>

### EXERCISE

Based on your new knowledge about VAK styles, reflect on how did you learn best while still in school? How did you learn best at your last job position? When it was easier for you to learn (school or job) and why?

Take a short test to find out what is your preferred VAK style of learning – follow the instructions at the following link: <http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/styles/vak.html>

## 6 CONCLUSION

We are living in challenging times. Every day all around the world, people are confronting different demanding situations, personally and professionally. Education has been the key in not only overcoming the challenges but also fulfilling our personal potential. There are many opportunities to expand our knowledge and skills, formally and informally, in a traditional classroom or online, in a group or alone. It is your responsibility to commit to lifelong learning to be up-to-date in your profession or to be able to expand to new professional fields.

Knowing your preferred learning style will give you an advantage to learn more effectively. At the same time, understanding how you learn will make you more sensible when you are in the role of the teacher, the mentor or the trainer.

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