

Understanding and Working with Learning Styles

Course # 05963

Final Assignment

**Choice 4 Examine Yourself as a Learner**

By

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## **Final Project Choice 4 - Examining Myself as a Learner**

The purpose of this paper is to share what I have learned about learning styles. To satisfy that purpose I will write about the learning cycle. The assignment choice I have written on is Choice 4 where I examine myself as a learner using my learning profile and how my learning orientations relate to the learning cycle model.

The learning cycle is a model designed by Marilyn Herasymowych and Henry Senko in their course design guide *Revvig Up Thinking and Learning*. Its purpose is to help to understand the different behaviours used by people to solve problems. It was originally based on the work of David Kolb and his *Experiential Learning Cycle* and other researchers such as Peter Senge, Bernice McCarthy, Reg Revans, Kristina Weinstein, John C. Redding and Ralph F. Catalanello. There are four types of behaviour and each is exhibited from a certain learning orientation. The learning orientations are reflective, theoretical, practical and active and going through the behaviours associated with each orientation leads into the behaviours of the next orientation. The reflective learning orientation consists of the person gathering data on an action and critically analyzing the data. This leads into the theoretical learning orientation where the person makes sense of the data by finding patterns and drawing conclusions. Next is the practical learning orientation where the person makes decisions that produce desired results and plans the next steps. The fourth learning orientation is then active where the person takes action on a plan. Learning can start at any one of the learning orientations. Each person will have a tendency to prefer to learn using one to three of the learning orientations but ends up using all four when learning - thus the learning cycle. A learning style profile is a measurement of someone's preference for each of the learning orientations and it

reveals a person's preferred learning style. Because there are four learning orientations there are four corresponding learning styles.

The four learning styles are also subdivided into two parts: action and reflection. In the reflecting state, people are thinking as opposed to acting. The reflection and theoretical learning orientations are thinking orientations. In the action state, people are acting as opposed to thinking. The practical and action learning orientations are action orientations.

Using the learning styles questionnaire designed by Peter Honey and Alan Mumford and, after my second validation (designed by Marilyn Herasymowych and Henry Senko), my learning style profile scored me at a 10 for activist, a 17 for reflector, a 10 for theorist and an 18 for pragmatist (practical). Thus, using the normed graph, I have a double dominant profile which is very strong in the practical orientation and is strong in the reflector orientation. My active orientation scored moderate and my theoretical orientation scored low. My learning style is pretty much both a reflection and an action based learning style with a slight preference to action. My strong reflector side likes to gather up lots of information before making up my path forward on projects and learning activities. I enjoy planning how to implement my ideas and I like logical solutions to problems, this caters to my practical side. Also, deadlines stress me out because I have a hard time feeling that I've "perfected" my work or thought of all the best solutions. Being of a moderate active orientation I am careful to make sure I've thought everything out before committing to an action. My learning style profile indicates that having a low theoretical orientation means I may not spend much time considering options and that I may draw conclusions quickly. I struggled with believing this at first until seeing my

"under stress" profile where my theoretical orientation is very strong (score of 17). When I think of situations where I have had to come up with conclusions it is probably past scenarios of stress that stand out in my mind and thus skew my recollection towards how I draw conclusions.

An activity during the course that I felt was significant or that gave me a learning high was when I did my learning styles inventory and, after the second validation, I began to see and feel that the profile really did match my learning style preferences. I found it exciting that I could use a tool to identify my weaknesses as a learner and then strategically work on improving myself. I feel that seeing my learning profile has pushed me ahead in my life path to self improvement by years, if not decades. Understanding learning profiles, seeing my own profile and recognizing how my past learning experiences match my profile has been a transformational learning experience for me. I believe it was a high point because I have seen a definitive way to improve myself not only as a learner but as a more understanding, patient human being.

After experiencing such a high when learning about the learning cycle model and learning orientations I was forewarned by the instructor and then experienced - a learning low point. We began to build upon the learning cycle model from three points of view: from types of learning orientations, from types of thinking and from types of facilitating orientations. During that part of the class, I found it difficult to distinguish from what point of view we were talking about when referencing the learning cycle model. Everything seemed the same but I knew it was different and I couldn't easily recognize the subtle differences. What I found aggravated the situation was that we were using terminology that is well known but the specific definitions in this context were not yet

memorized. Thus I struggled to understand when we used terms such as "critical analysis", "critical thinking", "systems thinking", and "strategic thinking". I needed more time to fully understand each point of view and all the terms. I didn't want to move on until I did have a full understanding. I was craving more examples and scenarios to help me understand the differences. But, because we had to keep moving in order to cover all of the material in the course that was not possible. Even though I found this my negative and low point of learning in the course I now find it interesting because it ties into what I've discovered about myself as a learner.

Using the learning cycle profile, what I've learned about myself as a learner is that I need to have "all the information" and I need to understand it in order to comfortably move forward. I like to learn in a controlled, organized fashion that allows me to master a subject before taking on a new one. It was interesting to me to understand that my learning low point was directly related to having only a moderate activist preference - I didn't want to keep learning new subjects and moving on until I satisfied my reflector and practical preferences.

My most important insight is that I am now aware of the importance of increasing my reflective intelligence (see references - Perkins) to ultimately increase my learnable intelligence. Learnable intelligence is the result of experiential intelligence (gained through experiences) and reflective intelligence (gained by being aware of our thinking patterns) working together in a cycle of learning. A specific example of myself now being aware of my reflective experience is understanding my learning style profile. I have learned that I am a little low on the active side of the learning cycle and higher on the practical and reflector side. This is why I have been struggling with change in the

workplace. I like to have all the facts and make a finely tuned plan before moving into action. In a world of change I am struggling to get all the facts because all the information I want to get isn't readily available. Once I do get enough information and start to make my plans; either things change or I get late information that affects my planning. I end up being stuck, going back and forth between planning and gathering information, and have a hard time being comfortable enough to move into action. My insight is that I now recognize my weakness more clearly and I can begin the journey to overcoming my weakness. I need to now learn how to recognize when it's okay for me to move to action.

I enjoyed and thought the experience of keeping a journal was an important learning tool. To me the benefits of taking a journal became apparent, not during the day but later when I reread and reflected upon them. By taking the time to write my thoughts and questions down I prevented them from being lost by the end of the day. Then, by reading over the journal that evening and even later on I was able to reflect on those thoughts and learn from them. I also found that the entire process of writing thoughts down, reading them later and finally reflecting on them; helped me to remember them and understand them better. Journal keeping is a good tool for storing information into the long term memory. Also, I think my understanding of topics was improved by rethinking about my notes later.

I did not really see any drawbacks to keeping a journal except that occasionally, I would miss a small portion of class discussion while I was writing notes down. But I do believe the benefits of journal keeping outweighed that one drawback. I believe that the

more I practice journal keeping, the more efficient I will be and in the future I will miss less class discussion.

Other situations where journal keeping would be worthwhile would be any situation that a person may want to learn from. I don't believe a journal necessarily has to be written down as events happen. As long as writing the journal happens quickly enough that memories haven't faded, it will be beneficial. An example of a situation could be as simple as writing notes at the end of a very busy work day. By reflecting on the day and thinking events through a person may think of ways that they could have improved the workplace. Quite often it is through reflection, away from the heat of the moment, when people can step back and tie things together that they experience an epiphany.

In conclusion, this assignment helped me to reflect upon what I have learned and how I can apply what I've learned to become a better educator. Learning about the different learning styles will help me to become much more patient with people when they cannot understand how I teach. I will apply the concepts I've learned at work when I deal with learners one on one and I will use the course design guide when I make new courses. When dealing with people of different learning styles one on one I hope to be better at recognizing their learning style and thus be able to effectively challenge them to learn and not just measure if they are competent. When designing my courses I will employ the design system to also help everyone to learn, not just cater to one learning style, and to ensure everyone's equally challenged from their preferred to their non-preferred learning orientations.

## **References**

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### **Guide**

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