

Course Assignment

Understanding and Working with Learning Styles

Adult and Continuing Education

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Introduction

The rationale of this paper is to explore some of the aspects that contribute to the Design System Model, as outlined by Herasymowych and Senko. This paper will look at the philosophy of learning styles, including what contributes to them and what they influence. By doing so, the material discussed herein is provided in order to enhance one's appreciation of, and put into context some of the interconnectivities associated with the subject matter. The intention is to better enable one to understand and apply the Design System Model. Later, this assignment will specifically review and examine the author's experiences and practices as a facilitator.

Part 1: Recognizing Learning Styles

An integral part of Herasymowych and Senko's Design System Model is the concept of the Learning Cycle (a variation of David Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle), which revolves around the application of learning styles, derived from the Learning Styles Questionnaire (LSQ), as presented by Peter Honey and Alan Mumford. According to Honey and Mumford, there exists four learning orientations (or styles) that are present to varying degrees in individuals. These learning orientations are referred to as Active (or Activist), Reflective (or Reflector), Theoretical (or Theorist) and Practical (or Pragmatist). Each orientation/style has associated predominant behaviour characteristics:

- the Active orientation is characterized by action-based behaviours, which are typically based on an overriding belief that everything will work out fine, instead of on thoughtful deliberation
- the Reflective orientation is characterized by information-collecting associated behaviours, typically based on a belief of a need to gather and analyze

information in a deliberate manner, to be able to see the whole picture in relation to the information

- the Theoretical orientation is characterized by critically assessing information to confirm its validity, typically based on a need for things to make sense, so as to be able to connect the information in able to ascertain ‘why’/draw conclusions
- the Practical orientation is characterized by decision-making behaviours, typically based on a practical plan, predicated on a need for practical, relevant solutions and decisions to be actioned.

Each orientation has its associated attributes (Active - ‘doer’, Reflective – tolerance of others, Theoretical – synthesizer of information, Practical – planful action) as well as drawbacks (Active – impulsive/act without thought, Reflective – reluctant to act/procrastination, Theoretical – arrogance/questions/intolerance towards unproven information, Practical – opinionated/not accepting of non relevant information). To identify how these learning orientations work in combination with each other from an individual learner’s perspective, the information from the LSQ is plotted on a 4-point axis, yielding the individual’s Learning Style Profile. This Learning Style Profile illustrates (in a kite-like shape) the degree to which each learning orientation is represented in the individual’s learning style composition, including their preferred style(s)/orientation(s) as well as their non preferred one(s). As indicted previously, the Learning Cycle revolves around the application of the learning styles. It does this by continuously moving in an out of the learning styles in a deliberate manner, moving between orientations/styles involving taking action and thinking about/reflecting on the outcome of an action. From the learner’s perspective, the Learning Cycle’s movement

characteristics enables the facilitator to provide opportunities for each learner to engage in their preferred learning style (with associated feelings of comfort), but more importantly, it also provides for each learner to experience non-preferred learning style situations (with associated feelings of uncertainty), which, according to Herasymowych and Senko, is the Learning Zone, where the opportunities for the learner to enhance their learning capability resides.

In examining my own Learning Style Profile in reference to the LSQ and its associated information, the questionnaire's raw orientation scores come out as Active = 3, Reflective = 16, Theoretical = 16 and Practical = 13. When plotted on the Learning Style Profile, these scores represent a dual Reflective/Theoretical preferred style, or possibly even a triple Reflective/Theoretical/Practical preferred style. Regardless of the preferred style, the Learning styles Profile clearly indicates the Active as the non-preferred style. The message here is that there is a reluctance (and discomfort) in regards to taking action freely, spontaneously. This is re-enforced when examining my personal correlation with some of the common blockages indicated in Honey and Mumford's *Capitalizing on Your Working Style* workbook (e.g. fear of failure; anxiety about trying our new or unfamiliar things; taking life very seriously/very earnestly; strong wish to have things well-thought-out in advance).

Part 2: Option Selection (Choice 1: Examine your own practice)

Continuing on, let's review the preceding and associated information in regards to examining my own practice, experiences as a facilitator. My facilitation experiences in a learning environment typically pertain to health and safety content training sessions, typically using a one or two day training program developed by the corporate entity. The

purpose of the training is generally two fold, being a combination of providing information regarding health and safety program reference material (e.g. policies, standards), along with some skills-based learning (e.g. how to complete and document a process such as hazard analysis/control or incident investigation). The outcomes sought are primarily performance-based one (learners can transfer outcomes to the workplace). The format of the session is comprised of a large lecture component, interspersed with a video or some individual casework activity in combination with discussion incorporating all present in the training session.

Within this context, my most successful experiences as a facilitator were those instances when the behaviours and responses of the majority of the learning group was that they were participating in the session's activities, they appeared to be positively engaged in the session material (i.e. in 'flow') and were expressing their responses in a way that indicated a transfer of new information to them. The specific situations when this was most apparent involved experiences when the learning group was involved in a case study discussion (either from training session materials or participants' own experiences) and I could see the participants transition from a state of unfamiliarity to one of knowledge regarding the subject material (i.e. they 'got it').

Personally speaking, what I like most about being a facilitator is that I:

- am able to transfer to the participants what I believe to be valuable, pertinent information for them
- am able to influence others in what I believe to be a positive (proper) direction
- am viewed as a person of knowledge, esteem (my ego is boosted)

- am in a position to provide a positive emotional experience (participants experience enjoyment) during the session

What I find most difficult in the training sessions is:

- individuals who are disruptive as well as negative (both verbally/overtly and through their demeanor)
- situations when I believe that the participants don't 'get it'
- when it appears to me that I am unable to meet someone's learning needs
- when, in my opinion, I am unable to meet the course's objectives
- when the session goes off onto an essentially unrelated tangent for an extended period of time

In examining my selections on pages 96-97 of the Training Type Inventory handout authored by Mardy Wheeler and Jeanie Marshall, my recorded top five strengths as a facilitator are:

- integrates theories and events
- acknowledges others interpretations as well as own
- involves trainees in activities discussions
- uses trainees as resources
- uses activities, projects and problems based on real life

In answering the question "how can these strengths become weaknesses?", initial thoughts pertain to the facilitator orientation reflected in these strengths and who these orientations would be appealing and non appealing to . The first two recorded strengths are associated with the Interpreter facilitation style. According to Herasymowych and Senko, this style is the preferred style for individuals having the Theoretical learning

orientation, in that it serves to attend to their need for theory. The next three recorded strengths are associated with the Coach facilitation style, which Herasymowych and Senko indicate is the preferred style for individuals having the Practical learning orientation, in that it serves to attend to their need to apply concepts to real situations. In view of the preceding, one of the ways the recorded strengths become weaknesses is that there is likely a bias towards their use, so that there is too much time spent on them, therefore, in referring to Herasymowych and Senko, the learning environment does not address the needs of those with the Active and Reflective preferred learning styles; it does not provide Active preferred learning style individuals with people to listen to their stories and it does not provide Reflective preferred learning style individuals with sufficient indicators of facilitator preparation and direction. Stated alternately, the recorded strengths only pertain to a portion of, instead of all aspects of the Learning Cycle, so the learning process is incomplete in its design and outcome. Therefore, a way to avoid these strengths becoming weaknesses is to not utilize them to excess, but to design the learning experience so that these training style characteristics are supplemented with other Design System model learning style related applications.

In reviewing the selections I did not record as my strengths as a facilitator, the ones most abundant are those in the Listener training style. Therefore, this is the area where the most potential for me to increase my training style competence and be a more effective learning facilitator. The specific characteristic in this training style that I am interested in working on is the one ‘feels comfortable with all types of expression (words, gestures, hugs, music, art, etc.)’. I believe this will make a difference in my facilitation practice in that it will not only provide a viable option within the confines of the course’s program

development context for the Active learning orientation individuals to experience the comfort of operating within their preferred learning orientation (and for the other learning orientations to potentially enhance their learning and knowledge inventory through engaging in the Learning Zone as a learner), it also provides an opportunity for me to engage in the Learning Zone regarding my facilitation style, thereby increasing my facilitation skills as well as the associated aspect of the Learning Cycle for the training session participants.

Of note is the situation that although the characteristics of the Director training style was not recorded in my top five strengths as a facilitator, my view is that I apply many of these characteristics in training sessions, not because they are my strengths, but because they are incorporated in the methodology and program development of the course itself. In other words, they are provided by the course design, so that they do not necessarily need to be within the personal attributes of the facilitator.

Conclusion

In this assignment I have discussed learning orientations/styles and their profiles, the Learning Cycle, training styles and the Design System model. In relation to my search to become an effective adult educator, this assignment has helped clarify for me the interconnections and relationships between the items mentioned above. It has helped me identify my characteristics, strengths, and areas for development, both as a learner and as a facilitator. I believe the concepts in this course will provide me with valuable references to understand the orientations of my work colleagues and associates as much as participants in my learning sessions. I will use this additional understanding to provide increased balance and opportunities for learning by participants in not only my

training sessions, but also in meetings, conferences and other business gatherings. I realize it will take an extended time for me to assimilate the information provided, but I will continue to have the course materials personally available to refer to as needed. The information provided has the potential to be invaluable in the effect it will have on myself and others. I look forward to the opportunities it presents.

References

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