

### ***PRAGMATISTS tend to like...***

- Learning techniques with practical results: how to save time, how to handle difficult people etc
- Opportunity to try things out under the tutelage of an expert practitioner (coaching)
- Learning activities based on real problems, case studies, realistic simulation exercises
- Practical application exercises like drawing up an action plan, setting aims and objectives, giving advice
- Input directly applicable to their current role or task

### ***PRAGMATISTS may not like...***

- Sessions that seem distant from the practical task, all theory and general principles, 'ivory tower'
- Open-ended activities with no clear guidelines about what exactly is being taught / learnt
- Learning that is not related to an immediate recognisable practical benefit or pressing need
- Teachers or tutors who seem not to be 'doers' themselves

Having said all this...Remember that it is good for all learners sometimes to be exposed to learning styles other than our preferred one...just as, if we are the tutor, it does us good to *use* styles other than our preferred one!

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# Wakefield Ministry Scheme



GR K3

## PEOPLE LEARN IN DIFFERENT WAYS...

Here are the descriptions of the four 'preferred learning styles' identified by P. Honey and A. Mumford

### **Activists**

Activists involve 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. Their philosophy is: 'I'll try anything once'. They tend to act first and consider the consequences afterwards. Their days are filled with activity. They tackle problems by brainstorming. As soon as the excitement from one activity has died down they are busy looking for the next. They tend to thrive on the challenge of new experiences but are bored with implementation and longer term consolidation. They are gregarious people constantly involving themselves with others but, in doing so, they seek to centre all activities around themselves.

### **Reflectors**

Reflectors like to stand back to ponder experiences and observe them from many different perspectives. They collect data, both first hand and from others, and prefer to think about it thoroughly before coming to any conclusion. The thorough collection and analysis of data about experiences and events is what counts so they tend to postpone reaching definitive conclusions for as long as possible. Their philosophy is to be cautious. 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 other people in 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. When they act it is part of a wide picture which includes the past as well as the present and observations as well as their own.

### **REFLECTORS may not like...**

- Being forced into the limelight- acting as leader or chair, role-playing in front of onlookers
- Being pitched into something without warning, or expected to produce an instant reaction
- Cut and dried instructions about how to do something or what to think
- Having to cut corners or do a task superficially or with insufficient time

### **THEORISTS tend to like...**

- Presentations that explain things as part of a system, model, concept or theory
- Opportunities to question and probe- question and answer sessions, checking and commenting on papers
- Intellectual testing, being stretched, engaging with searching questions and tough-minded people
- Listening to or reading about ideas and concepts that are well-argued, elegant and watertight
- Analysing what is going on in the session

### **THEORISTS may not like...**

- Participating in situations emphasising the emotions
- Unstructured activities where ambiguity and uncertainty are high and problems are open-ended
- Sessions that use a lot of different methods and techniques without exploring any of them in depth
- Being expected to act or decide without knowing what the basis is in policy or principle

### ***ACTIVISTS tend to like...***

- 'Here and now' activities like simulation games, competitive teamwork tasks, role-play exercises
- Opportunity to be 'up front', chairing meetings, leading discussions, giving presentations
- Being thrown in at the deep end, being given a challenge, doing something 'against the odds'
- Involvement with other people, bouncing ideas off them, solving problems together
- 'having a go'!

### ***ACTIVISTS may not like...***

- Listening to lectures, monologues, explanations, statements of how things should be done
- Watching without being involved
- Being expected to assimilate, analyse and interpret lots of data and attend to detail
- Working, reading, writing, thinking on their own

### ***REFLECTORS tend to like...***

- Observational activities, watching a film or video, taking a back seat and observing others at work
- Carrying out painstaking research, investigating, assembling information, analysing and reporting
- Discussion and exchange of views with others when this is known in advance and in a structured way
- Opportunities to review the course of the event and what they have learned
- Time to work through what they think, without pressure of tight deadlines

### ***Theorists***

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 synthesise. They are keen on basic assumptions, principles, theories, models and systems thinking. Their philosophy prizes rationality and logic. 'If it's logical it's good'. Questions they frequently ask are 'Does it make sense?' 'How does this fit with that?' 'What are the basic assumptions?' They tend to be detached, analytical and dedicated to rational objectivity rather than anything subjective or ambiguous. Their approach to problems is consistently logical. This is their 'mental set' and they rigidly reject anything that doesn't fit with it. They prefer to maximise certainty and feel uncomfortable with subjective judgements, lateral thinking and anything flippant.

### ***Pragmatists***

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

## **Taking Learning Styles into Account in Planning Sessions For Adult Learners**

Everyone has a preferred learning style, and therefore as a teacher or tutor we all tend to plan sessions with our own preferred style in mind. In thinking about a session, we need to try to put ourselves into the shoes of the person with a different preferred style, to make sure that we cater for their needs and help them to learn. To begin with, here are some questions that people may have in mind before attending a session.

### **Questions Activists tend to ask**

Shall I learn something new, i.e. that I didn't know / couldn't do before?  
Will there be a wide variety of different activities? (I don't want to sit and listen for more than an hour at a stretch!)  
Will it be OK to have a go/let my hair down/make mistakes/have fun? Shall I encounter some tough problems and challenges?  
Will there be other like-minded people to mix with?  
Will things be kept moving so that I don't get bored?

### **Questions Reflectors tend to ask**

Shall I be given adequate time to consider, assimilate and prepare?  
Will there be opportunities/facilities to assemble relevant information?  
Will there be opportunities to listen to other people's points of view - preferably a wide cross-section of people with a variety of views?  
Will I be thrown in at the deep end or put under pressure to extemporise? (*implying 'I hope not!'*)

## **Questions Theorists tend to ask**

Will there be lots of opportunities to question?  
Do the objectives and programme of events indicate a clear structure and purpose?  
Shall I encounter complex ideas and concepts that are likely to stretch me?  
Are the approaches to be used and concepts to be explored 'respectable' i.e. sound and valid?  
Will there be some people of similar aptitudes and interests to myself?

## **Questions Pragmatists tend to ask**

Will there be ample opportunity to practise and experiment?  
Will there be lots of practical tips and techniques?  
Shall we be addressing real problems and will it result in action plans to tackle some of my current problems?  
Will the teachers be experts who know how to/can do it themselves?

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Imagining people asking these questions beforehand will help us to plan a session taking account of these different needs. From all this it should be clear that people like learning from certain sorts of activities, and dislike others, depending on their preferred learning style!

Over the page are some lists of the kinds of activities that appeal- and don't- to the different styles.