Experiential Learning Styles

What are the experiential learning styles and why are they important?

Have you ever been part of a group project where everyone else got easily off topic and you just wanted to get down to business and stick to timelines? Developed by David Kolb in 1984, the Experiential Learning Model helps explain one possible way (the experiential learning cycle) people learn through experience, and how their preferences within this cycle can dictate how they learn. Depending on your learning style, you may have a wide range experiences in classes, especially in group projects.

The Learning Cycle and Experiential Learning Styles

The learning cycle is a four-step process that involves experiencing new information (Concrete Experience), reflecting on that information (Reflective Observation), thinking about that information in new ways and reconciling the information with what you already know (Abstract Conceptualization), and applying it to their studies and world around them (Active Experimentation). From this cycle, the four Experiential Learning Style are derived:

**Divergent**

These people are able to look at things from different perspectives. They are sensitive. They prefer to watch rather than do, tending to gather information and use imagination to solve problems. They are best at viewing concrete situations at several different viewpoints. They are interested in people, tend to be imaginative and emotional, and tends to be strong in the arts. People with the diverging style prefer to work in groups, to listen with an open mind and to receive personal feedback.

**Assimilators**

The Assimilating learning preference is for a concise, logical approach. Ideas and concepts are more important than people. These people require good clear explanation rather than practical opportunity. They excel at understanding wide-ranging information and organizing it in a clear logical format. This learning style is important for effectiveness in information and science careers. In formal learning situations, people with this style prefer readings, lectures, exploring analytical models, and having time to think things through.

**Converging**

People with a converging learning style can solve problems and will use their learning to find solutions to practical issues. They prefer technical tasks, and are less concerned with people and interpersonal aspects. People with a converging learning style are best at finding practical uses for ideas and theories. A converging learning style enables specialist and technology abilities. People with a converging style like to experiment with new ideas, to simulate, and to work with practical applications.

Tip for Success

Still not sure what type of interpersonal learner you are? Take this inventory to find out:

http://www.personal.psu.edu/bxb11/LSI/LSI.htm
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Accommodating

The Accommodating learning style is ‘hands-on’, and relies on intuition rather than logic. These people use other people’s analysis, and prefer to take a practical, experiential approach. They are attracted to new challenges and experiences, and to carrying out plans. They commonly act on ‘gut’ instinct rather than logical analysis. People with an accommodating learning style will tend to rely on others for information than carry out their own analysis. This learning style is prevalent within the general population.

Being a Well-Rounded Learner

If you want to succeed in all of your classes, being a well-rounded learning is key. You will encounter situations where you will work with other learning styles or need to expand into a style you may not be accustomed to. Use the following tips to become a well-rounded learner.

If you want to improve your Diverging learning skills, try:

• Being sensitive to people’s feelings
• Being sensitive to values
• Listening with an open mind
• Gathering information
• Imagining the implications of ambiguous situations

If you want to improve your Assimilating learning skills, try:

• Organizing information
• Testing theories and ideas
• Building conceptual models
• Designing experiments
• Analyzing quantitative data

If you want to improve your Converging learning skills, try:

• Creating new ways of thinking and doing
• Experimenting with new ideas
• Choosing the best solution
• Setting goals
• Making decisions

If you want to improve your Accommodating learning skills, try:

• Committing yourself to objectives
• Seeking new opportunities
• Influencing and leading others
• Becoming personally involved
• Dealing with people

Resources

University Counseling Service
3223 Westlawn South
319-335-7294
ucs@uiowa.edu
http://counseling.studentlife.uiowa.edu/

Academic Support & Retention
310 Calvin Hall
319-353-2747
uc-swatprogram@uiowa.edu
http://uc.uiowa.edu/student-success/swat

Works Cited:
http://www.simplypsychology.org/learning-kolb.html
http://psychology.about.com/od/educationalpsychology/a/kolbs-learning-styles.htm