HOW TO CHOOSE LEARNING ACTIVITIES TO SUIT YOUR LEARNING STYLE

Just as some individuals have a preference for one learning style, so some learning activities are strongly geared to one style of learning. Where individual preferences and activities match, learning is more likely. If there is a mismatch individuals are much less likely to learn effectively.

The following pages contain four checklists to show you how you can choose activities that are likely to dovetail with your style. They also indicate the activities it may pay you to avoid, unless you are given special help in coping with them. They will also help you identify the kind of work experiences from which you are most likely to learn and benefit.

Each checklist is followed by key questions you should ask before engaging in any learning activity. Whenever the answer to some (or all) the questions in each batch is 'No', the activity is not a good fit with your preferred learning style.

You do not have to study the detail on all of the checklists. Just concentrate on the parts that are relevant to you in the light of your Learning Styles Questionnaire result.

If you have a preference for the **Activist** style:

you will learn most easily from activities where

- there are new experiences/problems/ opportunities from which to learn
- you can engross yourself in short 'here and now' activities
- there is excitement/drama/crisis
- things chop and change and there are diverse activities to tackle
- you have a lot of the limelight
- you are allowed to generate lots of ideas
- you are thrown in at the deep end with a task you think is difficult/challenging
- you are involved with other people, eg bouncing ideas off them, solving problems as part of a team
- it is appropriate to 'have a go'.

you will find it more difficult to learn from activities where

- learning involves a passive role, eg listening to lectures, monologues, explanations, statements of how things should be done, reading, watching
- you are asked to stand back and not be involved
- you are required to engage in solitary work, ie reading, writing or thinking on your own
- you are asked to repeat essentially the same activity over and over again, eg when practising
- you have precise instructions to follow with little room for manoeuvre
- you are asked to do a thorough job, eg attend to detail, tie up loose ends, dot i's and cross t's.

Key Questions for You to Bear in Mind

- Will I be likely to learn something new, ie 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?
- Will I encounter tough problems and challenges?
- Will there be other like-minded people to mix with/have fun with?
- Will there be lots to do/lots of opportunities to participate?

If you have a preference for the **Reflector** style:

you will learn most easily from activities where

- you are allowed or encouraged to watch/think/chew over activities
- you are able to stand back from events and listen/observe, eg take a back seat in a group activity, watch a film or video
- you are allowed to think before acting, eg time to prepare, a chance to read background information in advance
- you can carry out some painstaking research, eg investigate, gather information, probe to get to the bottom of things
- you have the opportunity to think about what has happened, what you have learned
- you are asked to produce carefully considered analyses and reports
- you can reach a decision in your own time without pressure and tight deadlines.

you will find it more difficult to learn from activities where

- you are 'forced' into the limelight, eg to act as leader, to role-play in front of onlookers
- you are involved in situations that require action without planning
- you are pitched into doing something without warning, eg to produce an instant reaction, to produce an off-the-top-of-the-head idea
- you are given insufficient information on which to base a conclusion
- you are given cut and dried instructions of how things should be done
- you are worried by time pressures or rushed from one activity to another
- you are not given time to do a thorough job.

Key Questions for You to Bear in Mind

- Will I be given adequate time to consider, assimilate and prepare?
- Will there be opportunities/facilities to gather 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 have adequate time to prepare and not be under pressure to be slap-dash or to think on my feet?
- Will there be useful opportunities to watch other people in action?

If you have a preference for the **Theorist** style:

you will learn most easily from activities where

- you have time to be methodical and to explore the associations and inter-relationships between ideas, events and situations
- you have the chance to question and probe the basic methodology, assumptions or logic behind something, eg by taking part in a question and answer session, by checking a newspaper for inconsistencies
- you are intellectually stretched, eg by analysing a complex situation, being tested in a tutorial session, by working with people who ask searching questions
- you are in structured situations with a clear purpose
- you can listen to, or read about, ideas and concepts that emphasise rationality or logic and are well argued/watertight
- you are offered interesting ideas and concepts, even though they may not be immediately relevant
- you are required to understand and participate in complex situations.

you will find it more difficult to learn from activities where

- you are pitchforked into doing something without enough background information or an apparent purpose
- you have to participate in situations emphasising emotions and feelings
- you are involved in unstructured activities where uncertainty is high
- you are asked to act, or decide, without proper guidelines
- you are faced with a hotchpotch of alternative/contradictory techniques/ methods
- you doubt that the subject matter is methodologically sound, eg where questionnaires haven't been validated, where there aren't any statistics to support the argument
- you find the subject matter banal, shallow or gimmicky
- you feel yourself out of tune with other participants, eg when with lots of Activists or people of lower intellectual calibre.

Key Questions for You to Bear in Mind

- Will there be lots of opportunities to ask questions?
- Will there be clear objectives and a plan/structure to achieve them?
- Will I encounter complex ideas and concepts that are likely to stretch me?
- Will the approaches used and concepts explored be 'respectable', ie sound and valid?
- Will I be with people of similar calibre to myself?

- Will this experience give me the chance to develop a general view or model?

If you have a preference for the **Pragmatist** style:

you will learn most easily from activities where

- there is an obvious link between the subject matter and a current problem or opportunity at work
- you are shown techniques for doing things with obvious practical advantages, eg how to save time, how to make a good first impression, how to deal with awkward people
- you have the chance to try out and practise techniques with coaching from someone you trust, who is successful and can do the techniques themselves
- you have the opportunity to learn from a demonstration by someone with a proven track record or a film showing how it is done
- you are shown techniques that apply to what you are trying to achieve
- you are given immediate opportunities to implement what you have learned
- you can concentrate on practical issues, eg by drawing up action plans with an obvious end product, suggesting short cuts, giving tips.

you will find it more difficult to learn from activities where

- the learning is not related to an immediate need you recognise/see or an immediate relevance/practical benefit
- organisers of the learning or the event itself seem distanced from reality, ie 'ivory towered', all theory and general principles, pure 'chalk and talk'
- there is no practice or clear guidelines on how to do it
- you feel that people are going round in circles and not getting anywhere fast enough
- there are political, managerial or personal obstacles to implementation
- you can't see sufficient reward from the learning activity.

Key Questions for You to Bear in Mind

- Will there be ample opportunities to practise and experiment?
- Will there be lots of practical tips and techniques?
- Will we be addressing real problems and will it result in action plans to tackle some of my current problems?
- Will we be exposed to experts who know how to/can do it themselves?
- Will this really improve my immediate performance?