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Understanding Your Learning Style

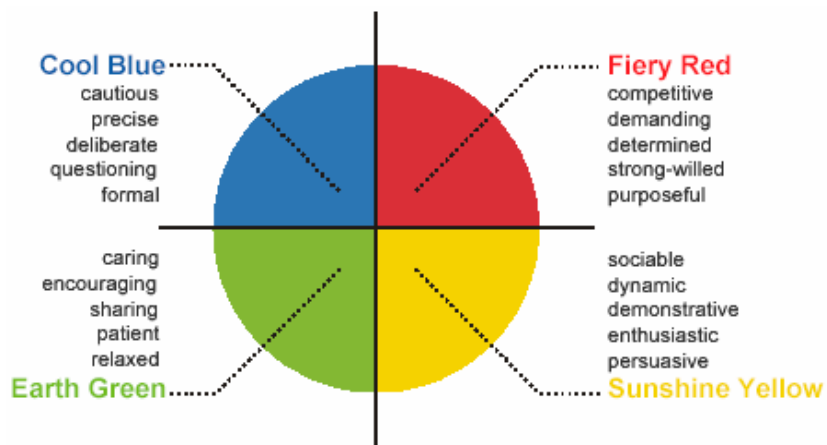
*by Colin Campbell, Learning Solutions Architect Global,
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Experts in the field of learning such as David Kolb and Peter Senge have stated that most people don't actually know how to learn or they have a lack of awareness of the learning process. Traditional educational institutions have often only catered to certain learning styles. The recent awareness of learning styles in education and training, combined with today's expanding technology, is making many new and varied formats of learning experience possible. Which one is right for you?

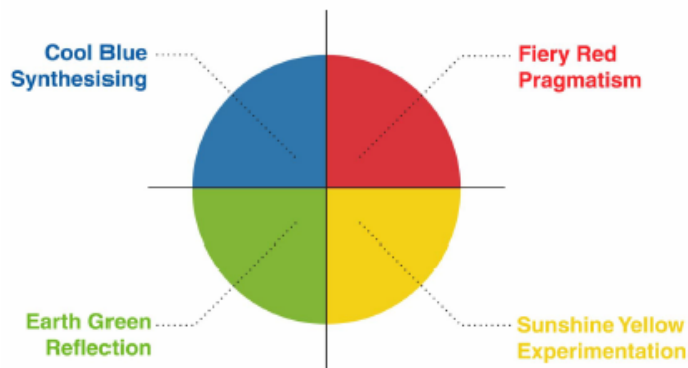
An individual's preferred learning style and the environments or media they find most comfortable for learning is a function of their personality type. The Insights® model is built on the extensive body of psychological research that culminates in the seminal work on personality devised by the Swiss psychologist Carl G Jung. As a result of this research, Insights has developed a support system or map, which can be used to enhance a person's self-awareness and self-understanding, including 'understanding their learning style'.

Which colour energy are you?

Consider the Insights® model depicted here. Do all these descriptors sound more like you, or are you particularly like one or two of the colour energies? Perhaps having read these adjectives you really can identify a mix of one or two that give a better understanding of you.



Now let's have a look at the learning preferences associated with each of these colour energies.



Cool Blue Synthesising is learning through abstract conceptualization, thoughtful observation, and analysis. It is a preference to learn through use of one's inductive reasoning and through the creation of theoretical models.

Earth Green Reflection is learning through gathering information

through experiences, and then processing it reflectively. It includes preferring to uncover insights through investigating, pondering, and reflecting.

Sunshine Yellow Experimentation is having a "hands on" approach and enjoying participating in learning with others. It is a preference to learn through concrete experiences that allow for active experimentation.

Fiery Red Pragmatism is learning through the practical application of concepts and theories. It involves learning by experimenting with new ideas and finding ways to make those new ideas work in the "real world".

What is 'Learning Style'?

'Learning style' is an umbrella term referring to a variety of models and research on how people learn most effectively. When a person understands their learning style, they can then focus their time and energy on learning experiences that fit their style and needs. This increases the effectiveness of the learning and decreases the amount of time spent on the learning experience. It can also increase the enjoyment of the learning experience.

A **Synthesising** learning style involves thinking about things in detail before taking action. Here the learner takes a thoughtful and detached approach to their learning. They will observe intently and prefer to keep a low profile in group learning situations. They will prepare well for a learning experience and maybe be the only people to read pre-course material before an event or later read in full the text they are given at the end of a learning experience!

They like to:

- listen, analyse and conceptualise in a learning situation
- be comfortable that the learning material is supported by quality research and is intellectually sound
- draw their conclusions and make decisions in their own time
- use the motto "think first, then speak" – they do not naturally share their thinking process out loud, at least not initially
- prepare well for learning experiences

Best conditions for learning: Being presented with sound theories to consider. People with a **Cool Blue Synthesising** learning style tend to prefer to learn at their own pace and sometimes prefer to learn on their own. An open workshop may not meet their needs, but perhaps a self-paced online tutorial would.

A **Reflective** learning style involves having experiences and taking time to discern all the learning points. Here the learner likes to use processes to support their learning and do not need to leap into action or to “the answer”. They will take their learning one step at a time in a systematic way.

They like to:

- take time to reflect on what they have learnt from their experiences
- process their learning in a step by step and systematic way
- have a thought through learning framework in place

Best conditions for learning: When they are allowed to observe, gather a wide range of information through concrete experiences and then reflect. People with an **Earth Green Reflection** learning style tends to prefer the more traditional workshop agenda of learning with an introduction, content, and review.

An **Experimental** learning style involves direct participation and action. The learner with this preferred style is enthusiastic about participation and welcomes new experiences with relish. They have little concern for analyzing how things have worked in the past. Instead, they see how they can move from the here and now towards a future vision. They are willing to risk and have a go. They very much prefer to participate with others in the learning experience.

They like to:

- have a wide variety of different experiences
- learn in group situations
- think on their feet and share their process with the group as it unfolds
- engage in lively, but short learning experiences
- initiate exercises and learning them selves
- be involved and “enjoy the journey”

Best conditions for learning: When allowed to gain “hands on” experience and learn with others. People with a **Sunshine Yellow Experimentation** learning style love to learn in collaborative, social settings where they can talk to the other learners, their instructor and work together with everyone. The type of experience that would best meet their needs might be an open workshop with a high degree of collaborative exercises and experiences.

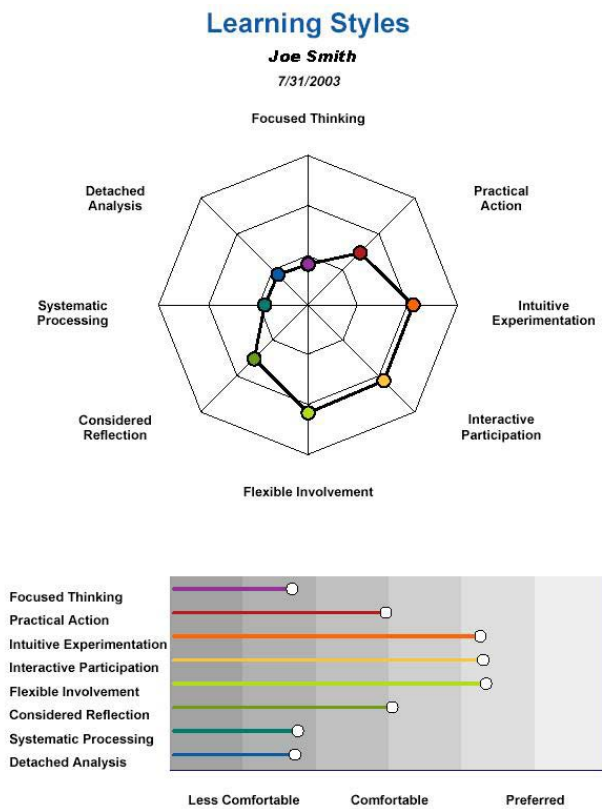
A **Pragmatic** learning style involves taking action and seeing how things work in practice. The learner with this preferred style will experiment with new ideas as long as they can see a practical and down to earth application. They like to organise things in the external world and solve

logistical problems. Learning using Fiery Red Pragmatism involves trying out what has been learnt and seeing if it gets the desired result.

They like to:

- engage in “real activities” – not role plays or fantasies
- be able to connect the learning points and activities directly to their work
- focus on the practical in the external world
- use processes and tools that are proven to work in the real world

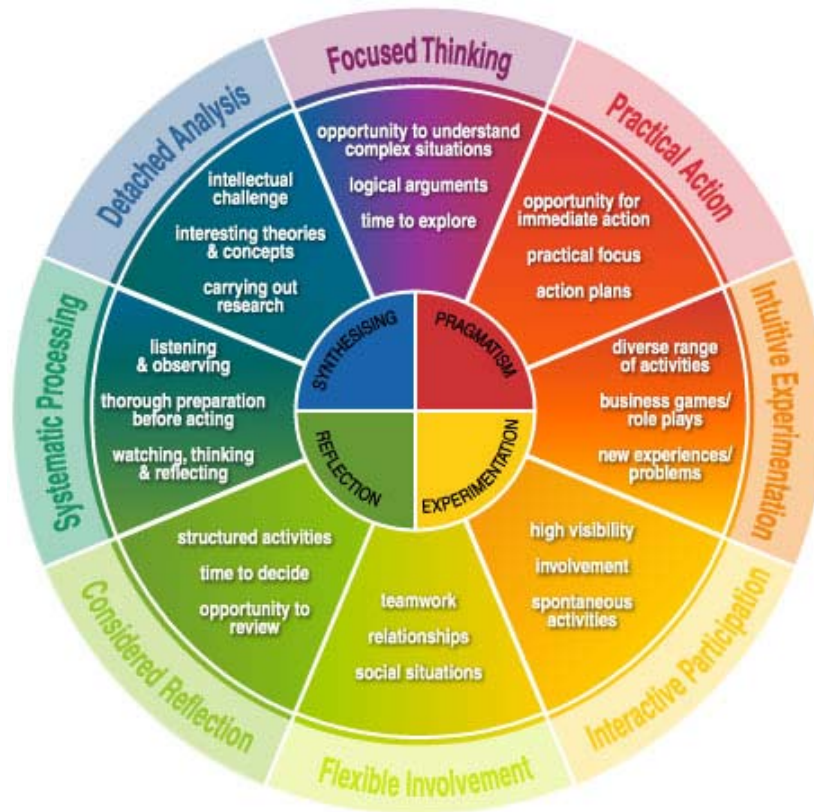
Best conditions for learning: When provided with practical applications of concepts and theories that can be put to immediate use. People with a **Fiery Red Pragmatism** learning style like to be in control of their learning, and hate to be slowed down by what they perceive as irrelevant information. e-Learning with an option to overview the material at a high level and then go deeper in areas that peak their interest can be an effective learning experience for individuals with this preferred learning style.



The Insights Discovery® evaluator and learning styles model helps clarify learning style preferences so the individual being profiled can broaden their scope by both fully using their natural learning gifts, while simultaneously strengthening their under-utilised styles. The model expands from the four primary styles we have discussed to a more detailed perspective with eight learning styles identified and measured.

As is illustrated to the left, the four-quadrant colour preference model is in fact expanded to detail eight different learning styles. All learners have a unique combination of preferences for each of these eight learning styles.

As is illustrated in the diagram below, the Insights Discovery® learning styles model is also underpinned by David Kolb's Learning Cycle model¹. David Kolb's model is based on the idea that, at an individual or group level, in order to learn and change the way we do something, we must first reflect the task or experience, then conceptualise or theorise on the experience and finally implement and make changes to how we do things.



¹ Kolb, David A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice Hall



Kolb's Learning Cycle and the Insights Learning Styles

1. **Have a Concrete Experience** – immerse yourself in it...
2. **Reflective Observation** – what did you notice?
3. **Abstract Conceptualisation** – what does it mean?
4. **Active Implementation** – what will you do differently/change and when?

What happens if we indulge in our learning style preferences?

Many of us have a strong preference for using one particular learning style, and others that we systematically use less.

Over using the **Cool Blue Synthesising** learning style results in a need to conceptualise and draw intellectual conclusions without adequate reflection. Conclusions are often drawn too quickly and from a theoretical standpoint (not drawn from the real learning experiences).

Over using the **Earth Green Reflection** learning style can result in avoiding new experiences and avoiding synthesizing conclusions until more information is gathered and pondered. At best this results in very slow learning and at worst it stifles potential change.

Over using the **Sunshine Yellow Experimentation** learning style may create a “workshop junkies” and result in continually seeking out new experiences. However, having experiences without reflection or taking action to change means the learning is never consolidated.

Over using the **Fiery Red Pragmatism** learning style results in “quick wins” and “expediciencies” that may prove to be poor solutions in the long run. The most likely stage to bypass here is the review or reflection stage.

Learning has occurred if an individual or group has internalised both new insights and factual data, and is able to apply this new knowledge to do something they could not do before. The key is to not only satisfy your own preferences, but to employ all the appropriate learning styles required, to meet the learning needs necessary to accomplish what you could not accomplish before.

Sometimes satisfying your **learning style preference** is not enough to meet **your learning needs**. There are times when trying out a learning style different than your preferred one is what is needed to meet your immediate needs and those of the learning situation..

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