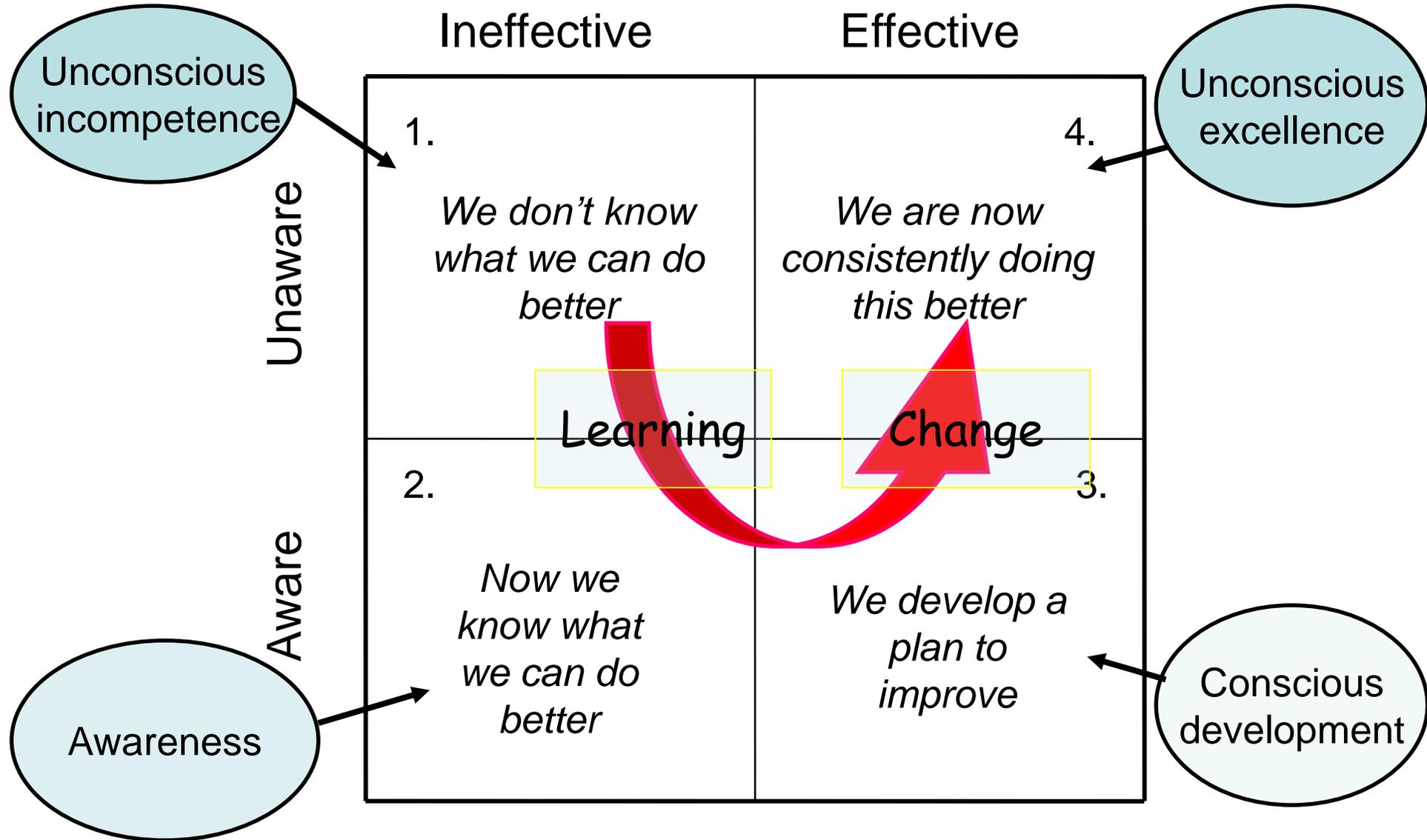


Applying Kolb to Coaching



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learning

The four phases of excellence through learning



Kolb McIntyre Learning Style

- Measures the ways people prefer to learn
- Why is it important?
 - Determines how we should train others and help them to change and adapt.
 - Helps us understand why "some people never learn".
 - May be linked to other dispositional variables: risk taking, being creative, emotionality.
 - Helps us see there are variable ways to determine the "truth".

Kolb's model therefore works on two levels - a four-stage cycle:

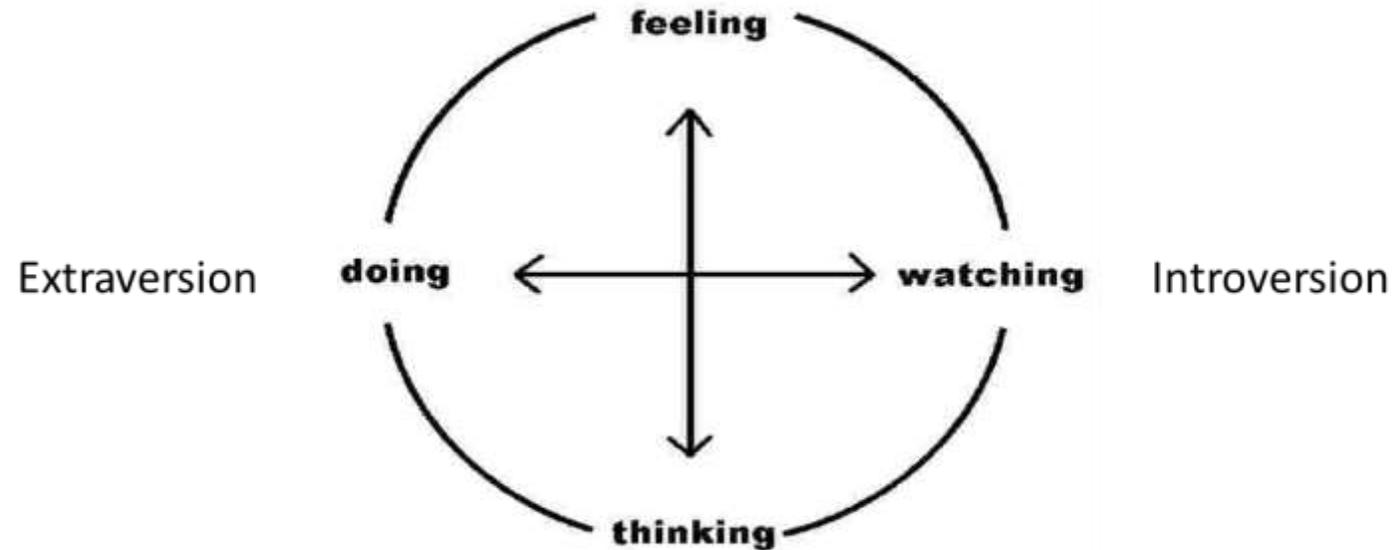
1. **Concrete Experience - (CE)**
2. **Reflective Observation - (RO)**
3. **Abstract Conceptualization - (AC)**
4. **Active Experimentation - (AE)**

and a **four-type definition of learning styles**, (each representing the combination of two preferred styles, rather like a two-by-two matrix of the four-stage cycle styles, as illustrated below), for which Kolb used the terms:

- **Diverging (CE/RO)**
- **Assimilating (AC/RO)**
- **Converging (AC/AE)**
- **Accommodating (CE/AE)**

Kolb

- Whatever influences the choice of style, the learning style preference itself is actually the product of two pairs of variables, or two separate 'choices' that we make, which Kolb presented as lines of axis, each with 'conflicting' modes at either end:
 - **Concrete Experience - CE** (feeling) -----**V**-----**Abstract Conceptualization - AC** (thinking)
 - **Active Experimentation - AE** (doing)-----**V**----- **Reflective Observation - RO** (watching)
- A typical presentation of Kolb's two continuums is that the east-west axis is called the Processing Continuum (how we approach a task), and the north-south axis is called the Perception Continuum (our emotional response, or how we think or feel about it).
- These learning styles are the combination of two lines of axis (continuums) each formed between what Kolb calls '*dialectically related modes*' of 'grasping experience' (doing or watching), and 'transforming experience' (feeling or thinking):



Kolb meant by this that we cannot do both at the same time, and to an extent our urge to want to do both creates conflict, which we resolve through choice when confronted with a new learning situation. We internally decide whether we wish to **do** or **watch**, and **at the same time** we decide whether to **think** or **feel**.

The result of these two decisions produces (and helps to form throughout our lives) the preferred learning style, hence the two-by-two matrix below. We choose a way of 'grasping the experience', which defines our approach to it, and we choose a way to 'transform the experience' into something meaningful and usable, which defines our emotional response to the experience.

Learning Style

- Our learning style is a product of these two choice decisions:
 - how to approach a task - ie., 'grasping experience' - preferring to (a) watch or (b) do , and
 - our emotional response to the experience - ie., 'transforming experience' - preferring to (a) think or (b) feel.
- In other words we choose our approach to the task or experience ('grasping the experience') by opting for 1(a) or 1(b):
 - 1(a) - through watching others involved in the experience and reflecting on what happens ('reflective observation' - 'watching') or
 - 1(b) - through 'jumping straight in' and just doing it ('active experimentation' - 'doing')
- And at the same time we choose how to emotionally transform the experience into something meaningful and useful by opting for 2(a) or 2(b):
 - 2(a) - through gaining new information by thinking, analyzing, or planning ('abstract conceptualization' - 'thinking') or
 - 2(b) - through experiencing the 'concrete, tangible, felt qualities of the world' ('concrete experience' - 'feeling')

	doing (Active Experimentation - AE)	watching (Reflective Observation - RO)
feeling (Concrete Experience - CE)	accommodating (CE/AE)	diverging (CE/RO)
thinking (Abstract Conceptualization - AC)	converging (AC/AE)	assimilating (AC/RO)

Extraversion and Introversion

Extraversion (E)

- I like getting my energy from active involvement in events and having a lot of different activities. I'm excited when I'm around people and I like to energize other people. I like moving into action and making things happen. I generally feel at home in the world. I often understand a problem better when I can talk out loud about it and hear what others have to say.
- The following statements generally apply to me:
 - I am seen as "outgoing" or as a "people person."
 - I feel comfortable in groups and like working in them.
 - I have a wide range of friends and know lots of people.
 - I sometimes jump too quickly into an activity and don't allow enough time to think it over.
 - Before I start a project, I sometimes forget to stop and get clear on what I want to do and why.

Extraversion and Introversion

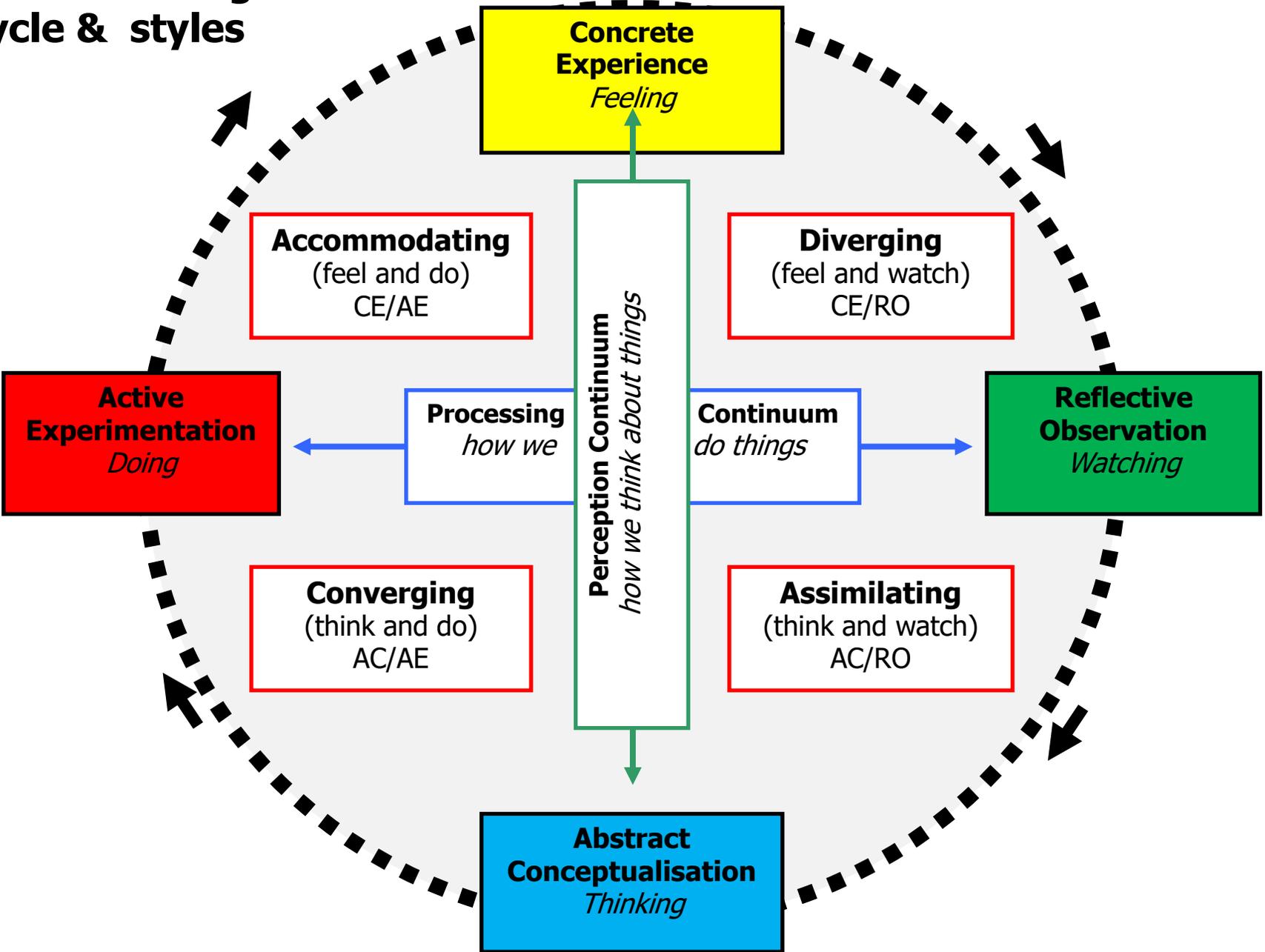
Introversion (I)

- I like getting my energy from dealing with the ideas, pictures, memories, and reactions that are inside my head, in my inner world. I often prefer doing things alone or with one or two people I feel comfortable with. I take time to reflect so that I have a clear idea of what I'll be doing when I decide to act. Ideas are almost solid things for me. Sometimes I like the idea of something better than the real thing.
- The following statements generally apply to me:
 - I am seen as "reflective" or "reserved."
 - I feel comfortable being alone and like things I can do on my own.
 - I prefer to know just a few people well.
 - I sometimes spend too much time reflecting and don't move into action quickly enough.
 - I sometimes forget to check with the outside world to see if my ideas really fit the experience.

Kolb & Personality

- Relationships between Kolb and other behavioural/personality theories
- As with many behavioural and personality models, interesting correlations exist between Kolb's theory and other concepts.
- For example, Kolb says that his experiential learning theory, and therefore the learning styles model within it, builds on Carl Jung's assertion that learning styles result from people's preferred ways of adapting in the world.
- Among many other correlations between definitions, Kolb points out that Jung's 'Extraversion/Introversion' dialectical dimension - (which features and is measured in the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator [MBTI]) correlates with the 'Active/Reflective' (doing/watching) dialectic (east-west continuum) of Kolb's model.
- Also, the MBTI 'Feeling/Thinking' dimension correlates with the Kolb model Concrete Experience/Abstract Conceptualization dimension (north-south continuum).

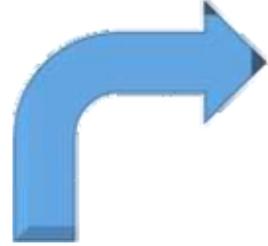
Kolb's learning Cycle & styles



The coaching conversation

- The coaching conversation is essentially reflecting on experience.
- Coach and client reflect the client's experience and behaviours, devising new thinking, feeling, behaviours and actions.
- Kolb says that learning is not just an active, self-directed process, but also a process where knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984:42).
- Sometimes you just cannot get the learning on your own, which is where the role of a coach or mentor comes in.
- The coaching conversation helps to transform their experience into workable knowledge; learning then becomes an "emergent experience" within a cycle of continuous learning.

Coaching application of Kolb



Concrete Experience

Feeling/ Having the experience

What went well?
What will you do differently next time?
What options exist?
What other resources for options should be considered?



Active Experimentation

Planning / trying out what was learnt

Where are there opportunities to use & develop this skill?
How can I ensure success? What can we change or do?

Reflective Observation

Reviewing/ Reflecting on the experience

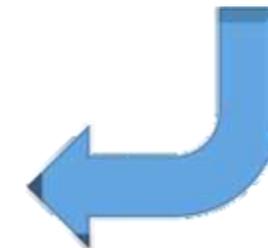
What are the underlying principles?
What happened and Why?
What are the key actions?
What action will I take?



Abstract Conceptualisation

Plan for new ways, Concluding, Learning from the experience

What if . . . ?
What contingencies need I plan for?



Kolb as a coaching Model

- This is a very useful coaching model, as all clients come into the coaching conversation with their concrete experiences.
- Coach and client reflect and observe, think and theorise based on the client's observations, and agree what new thinking, feeling and behaviour need to take place back in the working environment.
- If the client stays in doing, action and concrete experiencing (e.g. if we coach continuously without reflection, observation and evaluation) it would not be possible to gain new learning (for both coach and client).
- Many businesses get stuck because they create business plans, put them into action and complete them, but do not take enough time out to review and evaluate.
- The integration of the quadrants into learning styles is explored **in depth in Chapter 6** on diversity, personality and culture.

The basis of the learning process

- The basis of this learning process in coaching is to integrate the four adaptive modes of Kolb's learning model (concrete, abstract, reflective and conceptual). Kolb (1984:41) insists that knowledge is the result of "grasping of experience and transforming it into divergent, assimilative, convergent and accommodative knowledge".
- A further definition of the coaching conversation could be "an integration of reflection and thinking on action and experience". Kolb's definition of each of his experiential learning quadrants is particularly helpful:
 - CE (concrete experience) is about feeling and experiencing;
 - RO (reflective observation) is about observing and watching;
 - AC (abstract conceptualisation) is about thinking and conceptualising; and
 - AE (active experimentation) is about doing and being in action.

Kolb and the coaching conversation

- Kolb's model can be used to structure the coaching conversation and the coaching journey overall.
- We gain knowledge through our own experience; each individual filters their worldview through their own experience.
- In reflecting on our concrete experiences, we can transform experience into some kind of useable knowledge.
- Some people prefer to **step into the experience itself**; others prefer to watch, reflect and review; some like to conceptualise, hypothesise and theorise; others like to experiment with doing something new.
- All four work in conjunction with each other.
- Essentially, each one of us integrates all four learning modes, but we tend to have a preference for one or two.

Concrete experiencers: (Yellow)

- Adopt a receptive, experience-based approach to learning that relies heavily on feeling-based judgments.
- CE individuals tend to be empathetic and "people-oriented".
- They generally find theoretical approaches to be unhelpful and prefer to treat each situation as a unique case.
- They learn best from specific examples in which they can become involved.
- Individuals who emphasise concrete experience tend to be oriented more toward peers and less toward authority in their approach to learning.
- They benefit most from feedback and discussion with their coach and peers.

Reflective observers: (Green)

- Adopt a tentative, impartial and reflective approach to learning.
- RO individuals rely heavily on careful observation in making judgments and prefer learning situations such as lectures that allow them to take the role of impartial objective observers.
- These individuals tend to be introverts and require a typically greater reflective approach to the coaching session.
- Coaching needs to be very reflective for them to access the learning needed to move forward.

Abstract Conceptualisers: (Blue)

- Adopt an analytical, conceptual approach to learning that relies heavily on logical thinking and rational evaluation.
- AC individuals tend to be oriented more toward things and symbols and less toward other people.
- They learn in impersonal, authority-directed learning situations that emphasise theory and systematic analysis.
- They are often frustrated by, and benefit little from, unstructured "discovery" learning approaches, such as activities and role plays.
- The coach needs to be able to provide a structured thinking approach to the session, and could use the Kolb model to help the client to access the other learning modes.

Active experimenters: (Red)

- Adopt an active, “doing” orientation to learning that relies heavily on experimentation.
- AE individuals learn best when they can engage in such things as projects, homework, developing new techniques inside the coaching conversation that they can take back out to the workplace, and in group discussions.
- They dislike passive learning situations such as lectures and tend to be extraverts.
- AE clients can be active and noisy and may require focused energy in the coaching environment.

Concrete Experiencers Preference

Gets home, throws the instructions away and starts making it at once

Likes

- New experiences
- Engross in short term activities
- Like to generate ideas
- Loves limelight
- To be thrown in at the deep end
- To be involved with other people
- To have a go

Dislikes

- Passive learning
- Standing back
- Too much data
- Working alone
- To be asked what has been learnt
- Theory
- Repetition
- Precise instructions
- Detail

Active Experimenter Preference

Reads the instructions, works out how to do it and then sleeps on it

Likes

- Link with problem and subject
- To be shown techniques
- Practice with feedback
- Role model
- Application to own role
- Action
- Immediate transferability
- Reality
- Practical issues

Dislikes

- Learning that is not related to needs
- Unrealistic trainers
- Lack of clarity
- Inertia
- Bureaucracy
- No real benefit to training

Abstract Conceptualiser Preference

Reads the instructions and works out how to do it before starting, checks it out occasionally perhaps involving others

Likes

- Theory
- To be methodical
- To question
- To be stretched
- Structure and clarity
- Analysis & Logic
- Ideas and concepts
- Participate in complex situations

Dislikes

- To be thrown into something
- Emotions and feelings
- Unstructured activities
- Lack of policy
- Lack of depth
- Lack of validity
- Mixing

Reflective Observer Preference

Methodically works through the instructions with little discussion

Likes

- Observing
- Thinking about it
- Investigation
- Reviewing
- Reports
- Safe environment to share ideas
- Not to be rushed

Dislikes

- Limelight
- Action without planning
- Short notice
- Lack of information
- Rigid rules
- Time pressure
- Short Cuts

What question do you ask?

- What if? You ask different questions of people with different learning styles.
- Why?
- What?
- How?

Concrete experiencers: What if?

- Evaluator / mediator needed
- Let them teach themselves and others

Self discovery

Likes variety, things that are new, challenging, (competitive, in the limelight)

Reflective Observer – Why?

- Need a motivator
- Create a reason

Simulation / discussion

Preparation and discussion time, time to think, assimilate

Abstract Conceptualiser – What?

- Need a teacher
- Give facts

Structured information, challenging

Opportunities for questions to probe and explore logic and assumptions

Active Experimenter – How?

- Need a coach
- Let them try it

Facilitation

Make links between subject matter and problem area, practice techniques with feedback



Thank You!