

Learning Styles and VoicePrint

Research Insight

Peter Honey and Alan Mumford's model of learning styles, although no longer regarded as a reliable means to alter the effectiveness of a learning process, continues to provide a useful way to identify personal preferences for 4 particular types of learning.

- The Activist likes to learn from first hand experience and by 'having a go' at new challenges.
- The Reflector likes to learn by observation, watching, listening and reviewing thoroughly.
- The Theorist like to learn by applying logical reasoning to extract rules and principles.
- The Pragmatist likes to learn by promptly testing things in practice to see what works.

Inevitably, the prospective benefit of each style comes with an associated cost.

- The Activist tends to rush in without sufficient thought or preparation, taking too much upon themselves or poorly calculated risks.
- The Reflector tends to hold back from direct participation, being slow to make up their minds and often quiet and unassertive.
- The Theorist tends to ignore or discount subjective or intuitive input, having low tolerance for uncertainty, disorder, ambiguity and even lateral thinking.
- The Pragmatist tends to seize on the first expedient solution to a problem, trusting proven techniques and experience, and being impatient with abstract theories and principles.

Findings

Our cross-correlational analysis of Honey & Mumford with VoicePrint self-perception results has yielded some useful insights. Certain voices (or patterns in the use of the nine voices) are associated with each of the 4 learning styles, as follows.

- The Activist style is positively associated with the use of the Advocate* and Challenge voices, perhaps reflecting this style's tendency towards decisiveness and actively taking the lead.
- The Reflector style is positively associated with use of the Diagnose* voice and negatively associated with the Advise voice, perhaps reflecting this style's tendency to prefer exploring, framing and sense-making rather than putting forward suggestions.
- The Theorist style is positively associated with use of the Evaluate* and Articulate voices and negatively associated with the Advise voice, perhaps reflecting this style's emphasis on logic and objectivity rather than past experience or know-how, to deliver clarity.
- The Pragmatist style is positively associated with the Diagnose voice generally, but with Criticising under pressure, perhaps reflecting this style's liking for techniques/frameworks and its impatience.

The associations noted above were all statistically significant. The correlations marked * were all significant at $p < 0.001$, where the probability of the result occurring by chance is less than 1 in 1,000. The other correlations were all significant at either $p < 0.05$, or $p < 0.10$, in other words in the range of 90-95% probability.

Surprises

The surprise in this study was the absence of any significant correlation for any of the four learning styles with either the Inquire or Probe voices, the most open-ended of the exploring voices. This in itself might be an indication of why the learning styles model is not a sound representation of the learning process. For further thoughts on this point, see our Related Ideas piece, The Learning Process and VoicePrint.