Kolb (1984), one of the early developers of learning style theory, suggests that learning is the creation of knowledge through the transformation of experience. Figure 1 shows how two continuums, abstract ↔ concrete and doing ↔ reflecting, lead to four different learning styles.

**Learning Style 1. Creative Discussion** - Combines the learning preferences of feeling and observing. People with this learning style are best at viewing concrete situations from many different points of view. Their approach to situations is to observe rather than take action. They enjoy situations that call for generating a wide range of ideas, as in a brainstorming session. They usually have broad cultural interests and like to gather information. This imaginative ability and sensitivity to feelings is needed for effectiveness in the arts, entertainment and service careers.

**Learning Style 2. Information Gathering** - Combines the learning preferences of thinking and observing. People with this learning style are best at understanding a wide range of information and putting it into concise, logical form. They are usually less focused on people and more interested in abstract ideas and concepts. Generally, they find it more important that a theory has logical soundness than practical value. This learning style is important for effectiveness in information and science careers.

**Learning Style 3. Practical Instruction** - Combines the learning preferences of thinking and doing. People with this learning style are best at finding practical uses for ideas and theories. They have the ability to solve problems and make decisions. They’d rather deal with technical tasks and problems than with social and interpersonal issues. These learning skills are important to be effective in specialist and technology careers.

**Learning Style 4. Self-Discovery** - Combines the learning preferences of feeling and doing. People with this learning style have the ability to learn primarily from “hands-on” experience. They enjoy carrying out plans and involving themselves in new and challenging experiences. Their tendency may be to act on “gut” feelings rather than on logical analysis. In solving problems, they usually rely more heavily on people for information than on their own technical analysis. This learning style is important for effectiveness in action-oriented careers such as marketing and sales.

Lowen (1982) developed a system science model of brain preferences which has the same abstract ↔ concrete continuum as Kolb’s model. However, rather that the doing ↔ reflecting continuum, Lowen uses a people ↔ things continuum as shown in Figure 2.
According to Lowen, people who have a preference for spending time with people and engaging in intellectual pursuits will mostly rely on the intuitive (N) capacity of their brain. They will dialogue with the world around them primarily through gathering information about the world through what appears as some form of sixth sense (i.e. they often cannot explain how they know what they know to be so). They like talking to people (verbal) and producing models/plans (intellect) to explain things.

Those who have a preference for spending time with people and engaging in concrete pursuits, such as team sports, rely on the "gut-feel" (F) capacity of their brain. They will dialogue with the world around them, gathering information through listening to others. They like talking to people and engaging in whole-body activities.

People who have a preference for spending their time tinkering with things (such as motor mechanics) and engaging in whole-body concrete activities, rely mostly on learning about the world around them through their tactile senses (S). They like to create things or do things with their hands (potter or brain-surgeons) and like a lot of structure (concrete) in their world.

People who have a preference for creating things with their hands and developing models/plans using their intellect (eg. architects, programmers) rely mostly on discovering things about the world through thinking (T) about it and intellectually analysing it. They like to gather information visually, and to create things with their hands and intellect.
Combining the Kolb and Lowen models, we see that three continuums can be used to describe how people prefer to engage with the world around them:

- Abstract ↔ Concrete,
- Doing ↔ Reflecting, and
- People ↔ Things.

To engage with the world is to learn about it. Clearly, different people using different ways to engage with the world will develop different world-views – different perceptual models of what the world is all about.

Because our values (that which we hold to be important in life) come from our world-view (our beliefs and what we “know” to be so), it is logical to expect that taking an inventory of a people’s values will indicate where each person lies on each continuum. Twenty years of research confirms that this is indeed the case (Colins & Chippendale, 2002).

Why would anyone want to take an inventory of their values (i.e. determine the relative priority of their values, the relationships between them and surface the unconscious beliefs that lie behind them)? Quite simply, until we are consciously aware of our values, have a language to express them, and know why we hold certain values as important and not others, we are susceptible to living other people’s values. “You should do this.” “You should do that.” Just because we can… doesn’t mean we should!

We are most effective in living our life when we really know who we are, our values and our preferred way of relating to the world (our learning style). There are plenty of people in the world who have preferences for things which are of no interest to us. This fact is at the core of creating effective teams and is what creating synergy is all about. Nothing destroys collaboration more quickly that everyone having the same preferences at the same time. Sameness leads to competition, while diversity leads to cooperation and collaboration.

References

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