

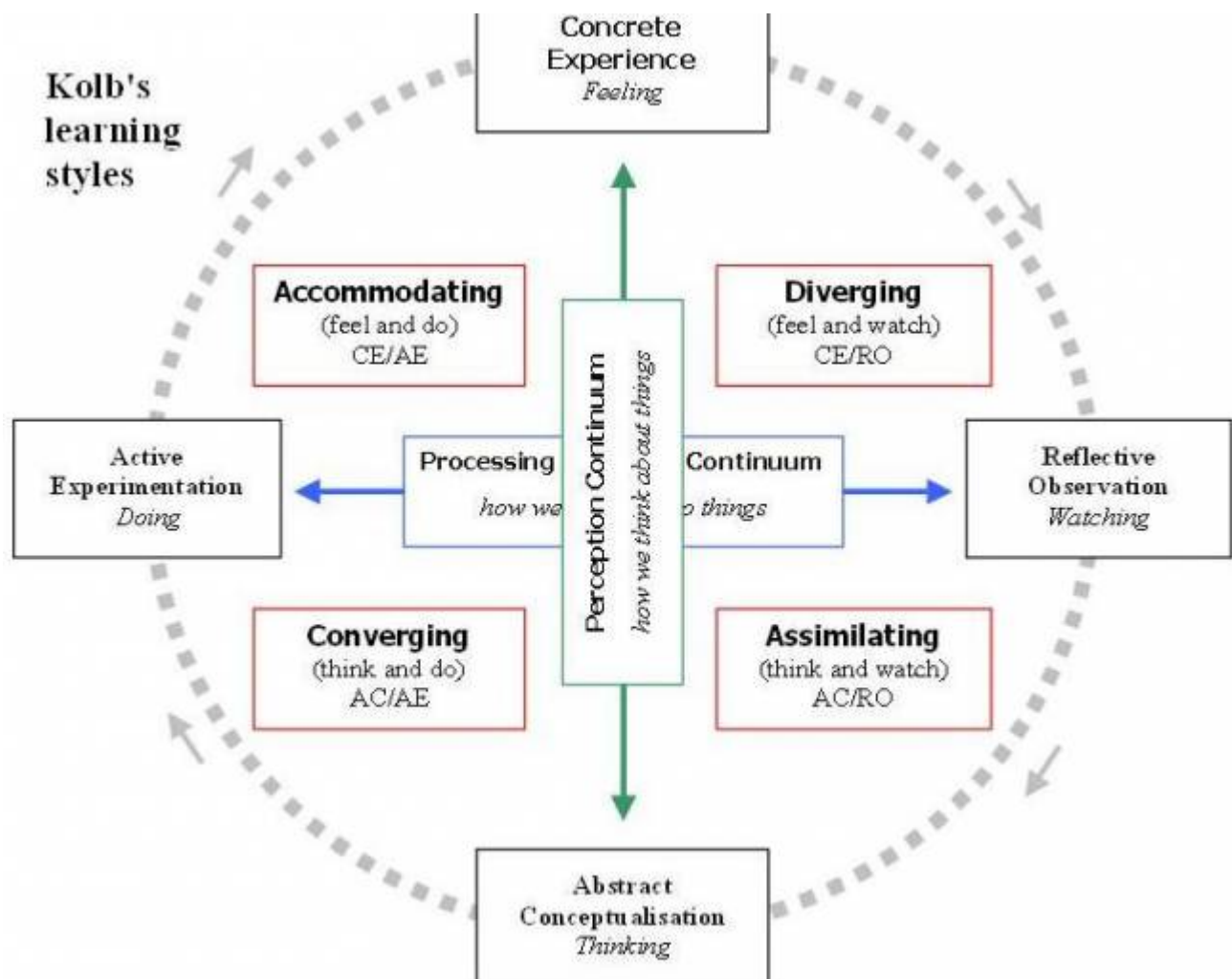
Experiential Learning

General

Experiential learning is a **cycle learning theory** developed¹⁾ by [David Kolb](#) in 1980s and was inspired by earlier works of [Kurt Lewin](#), [Jean Piaget](#) and [John Dewey](#). As it was developed within [humanist paradigm](#), experiential learning offers a **holistic perspective on learning** and is orientated mostly on adult learning. Name of this theory was intended to should emphasize the importance of experience in the learning process.

What is experiential learning?

In his influential book “[Experiential Learning: Experience As The Source Of Learning And Development](#)” (1984) Kolb describes learning as “*the process whereby **knowledge is created through the transformation of experience***”. In order to be effective, learning should therefore incorporate following **four stages**:



- **Concrete experience** (CE) - practical experiencing through doing
- **Reflective observation** (RO) - actively **observing** experience and its outcomes

- Abstract conceptualization (AC) - concluding and **thinking** about the experience
- **Active experimentation** (AE) - planing on how to test a new model or theory

Mentioned **stages follow one after another** forming a circle as they were introduced above, yet the process of **learning can begin in any of them**. Still, every learner develops strengths in some of mentioned stages more than in others and learn better in those conditions, what results in four **learning styles** identified also by Kolb:

- Assimilator (prefers **abstract conceptualizations** and theoretical models)
- Converger (prefers **practical applications** of concepts and theories he learns)
- Accommodator (prefers **practical experiences** with concepts and theories he learns)
- Diverger - Prefers **learning through observing** and **collecting information**, good at viewing concrete situations from different points of view. According to Kolb et al.²⁾ research has shown this kind of people are often **imaginative** and emotional, and often specialize in **arts**.

In order to identify preferred learning style in Kolb's model, "**learning style inventory**" method has been developed. This **method for determining an individual's optimal learning style**, strengths and weaknesses consists of a survey which explores one's perceiving (how one prefers to acquire information) and processing (how one makes sense of new things). Various variants of this method can be found in simplified free on-line tests³⁾.

What is the practical meaning of experiential learning?

Experiential learning is a model **suggested for adult learners**. General implications of this model are that **teaching/learning process should consist of all four stages of Kolb's model**, but it also suggests **individual changes** should be applied, depending on learners learning style.

- **Assimilators** - prefer **watching, thinking** and **good explanations of theories and ideas** to practical experiences. This kind of learners usually enjoy lectures and readings as well as having enough time to think about new ideas.
- **Convergers** - prefer **doing** and **thinking, finding practical solutions** to problems. This kind of learners usually like new ideas and their practical applications.
- **Accomodators** - prefer **practical experiences** and **intuitive approach** instead of reading instructions. This kind of learners also usually prefer **teamwork**.
- **Divergers** - prefer **watching, collecting information, working in groups** and brainstorm instead of having practical experience.

Criticisms

Kolb's theory has influenced other authors to create similar models for determining of preferred learning style. The critique that Kolb's learning styles inventory was difficult to apply to people who never really paid attention to how they learn more efficiently encouraged Peter Honey and Alan Mumford to create their *learning styles questionnaire* (LSQ). It was based on Kolb's theory, but instead of asking people how they learn it was probing for most common learning behaviors.

Some of the criticisms⁴⁾ referring to Kolb's theory include⁵⁾:

- doubts that not everyone's learning process has to undergo Kolb's stages and **not necessarily in that order**,
- **lack of experimental research** and too simplified learning cycle which ignores non-experiential learning, and
- not paying enough attention to the process of **reflection** and **lack of precision**.

Keywords and most important names

- **Concrete experience (CE), reflective observation (RO), abstract conceptualization (AC), active experimentation (AE), assimilator, converger, accomodator, diverger, learning style inventory, learning styles**
- [David Kolb](#)

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Read more

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1)

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2)

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3)

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