

Experiential Learning

General

Experiential learning is a **cycle learning theory** introduced by [David Kolb^{1\)}](#) in 1971²⁾ 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**:

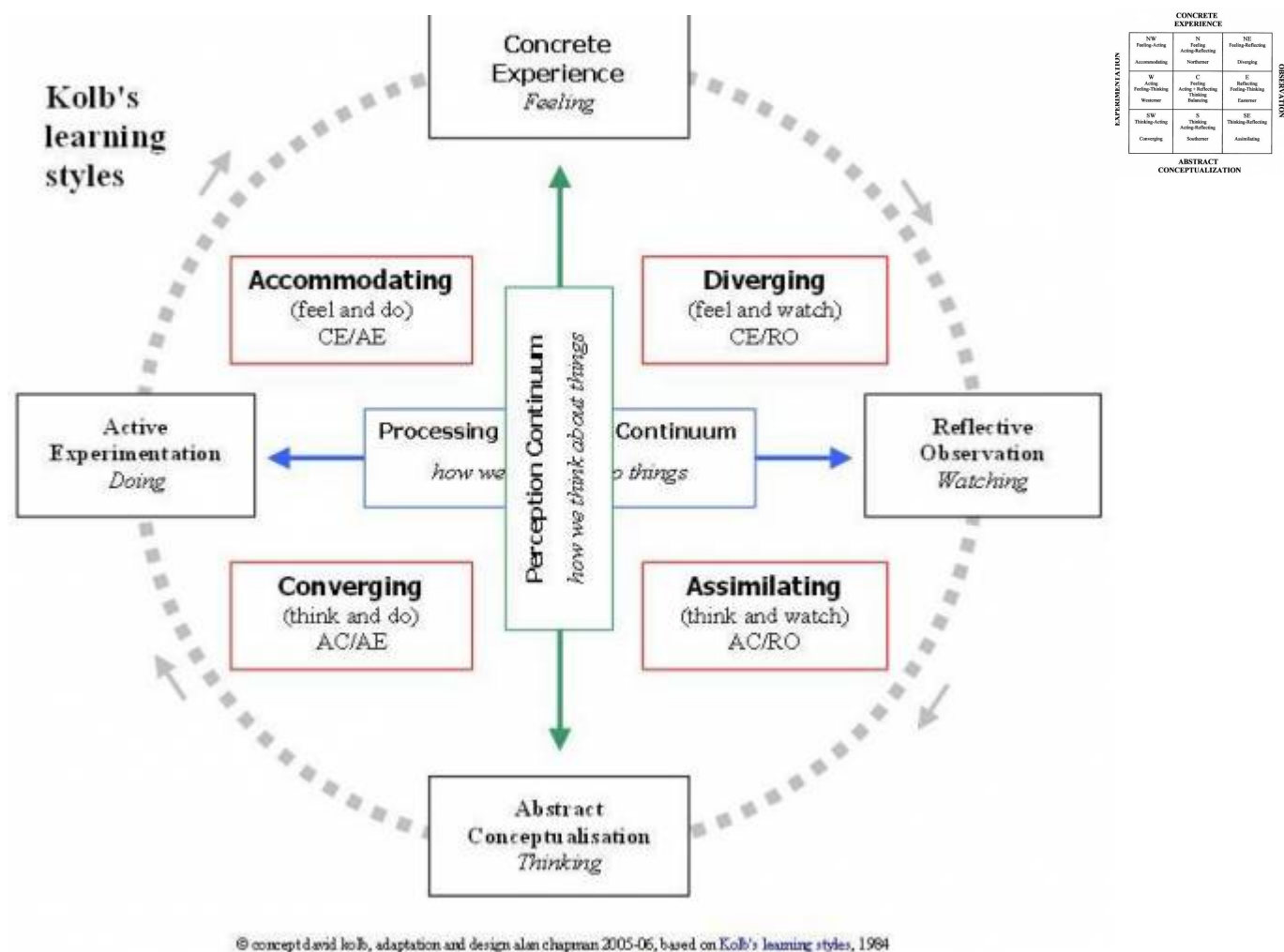
- Concrete experience (CE) - practical experiencing through doing
- Reflective observation (RO) - actively **observing** experience and its outcomes
- Abstract conceptualization (AC) - concluding and **thinking** about the experience
- Active experimentation (AE) - planing on how to test a new model 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, requires time to think through. Values **logical validity** more than practical applications.
- **Converger** - Prefers **practical applications** of concepts and theories he learns and like experimenting. They are often good problem solvers and like dealing with technical issues.
- **Accommodator** - Prefers **practical experiences** and acting more according to the feeling than based on logical analysis.
- **Diverger** - Prefers **learning through observing** and **collecting information**, good at viewing concrete situations from different points of view. According to Kolb et al.³⁾ research has shown this kind of people are often **imaginative** and emotional, and often specialize in **arts**.

Kolb and other researchers⁴⁾ later improved the resolution of the learning styles grid from 2x2 to 3x3 by introducing five new learning styles, that offered a refinement of the four Kolb's styles:

- Northerner
- Westerner
- Easterner
- Southerner
- Balancing



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 tests⁵⁾.

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.
- **Accommodators** - 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.

Kolb's theory was applied in a number of studies on topics that include education, computer and information science, psychology, management, medicine, nursing, accounting and law⁶⁾.

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 criticisms⁷⁾ referring to Kolb's theory include⁸⁾:

- 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](#)

Bibliography

[Kolb, D. A, R. E Boyatzis, and C. Mainemelis. Experiential learning theory: Previous research and new directions. Perspectives on thinking, learning, and cognitive styles. The educational psychology series: 227-247. 2001.](#)

[Experiential Learning \(Kolb\) at Learning Theories.](#) Retrieved February 9, 2011.

[TIP: Theories. Experiential Learning.](#) Retrieved February 8, 2011.

[Greenaway, R. Experiential Learning articles and critiques of David Kolb's theory.](#) Retrieved March 21, 2011.

[Lowy, Alex, and Phil Hood. The power of the 2x2 matrix: using 2x2 thinking to solve business problems and make better decisions. John Wiley and Sons, 2004.](#)

[Big Dog and Little Dog's Performance Juxtaposition: Honey and Mumford's Learning Styles Questionnaire.](#) Retrieved February 8, 2011.

Read more

Kolb, David A. *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1984.

Kolb, David A. *Learning style inventory*. Boston, MA: McBer and Company. 1985.

Kolb, D. A, R. E Boyatzis, and Mainemelis, C. *Experiential learning theory: Previous research and new directions. Perspectives on thinking, learning, and cognitive styles*: p227-247. 2001.

1)
Some sources like [Cooper, S. Theories of Learning in Educational Psychology](#) or [Kearsley G. Explorations in Learning & Instruction: The Theory Into Practice Database](#) associate experiential learning with [Carl Rogers](#).

2)
Kolb, D. A. *Individual learning styles and the learning process*. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1971.

3) , 6)
Kolb, D. A, R. E Boyatzis, and C. Mainemelis. *Experiential learning theory: Previous research and new directions. Perspectives on thinking, learning, and cognitive styles. The educational psychology series*: 227-247. 2001.

4)
Kolb, D A. *Learning Styles and Learning Spaces : Enhancing Experiential Learning in Higher Education*. *Academy of Management Learning Education* 4, no. 2: 193-212. 2005.

5)
For example: [Duncan, D. Kolb Learning Style Inventory](#). University of Colorado at Boulder.

7)
[Greenaway, R. Experiential Learning articles and critiques of David Kolb's theory](#)

8)
Forrest, C. *Kolb's Learning Cycle*. *Train the Trainer*. Issue 12, 2004.

From:
<https://learning-theories.org/> - **Learning Theories**

Permanent link:
https://learning-theories.org/doku.php?id=learning_theories:experiential_learning&rev=1301658965

Last update: **2023/06/19 15:49**

