

TOWARD BRAIN HARDWARE OPTIMIZATION

Understanding Six Learning and Performance Styles

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Scientists used to believe that brain cells and the connections were set early in life and did not change in adulthood. In the past decade, that assumption has been drastically disproved. Through advancement in brain imaging and other techniques, we now know that the brain as well as behavior can be trained, physically modified, and functionally transformed. The inner workings and circuitry of the brain change with new experiences.

Neuroplasticity and behavioral change occur within the context of individual styles. Some of these styles that appear more or less hard-wired need to be taken into account for optimum learning and performance.

Learning and Performance Styles

Self-management involves understanding yourself quite well: your strengths, weaknesses, learning style, working style, needs, and values.

Optimum learning and performance occur when you are in a specific state of mind matched to what you are doing. When you operate from your strengths, you optimize the potential for excellence.

In addition to recognizing strengths, knowing how you learn and perform is crucial for success. These learning and performance characteristics are styles; they can be slightly modified, but ultimately must be respected and strategically planned.

- Readers

Some people learn best by reading, and need to see a text or pictures in order to really comprehend material. President John Kennedy was a reader who assembled an outstanding group of writers on his staff. Part of Kennedy's brilliance was in using these people and what they wrote to inform his decisions.

- Listeners

President Johnson had attained his reputation and success as a listener. When Johnson kept the same

people on his staff after he succeeded Kennedy, they kept on writing. Johnson derailed his presidency by not recognizing that he was a listener, not a reader.

- Writers

Some people learn best by writing. Beethoven kept copious notes and amassed an enormous numbers of sketchbooks, yet never looked at them when he composed. When asked about this practice, he said, “If I don’t write it down immediately, I forget it right away. If I put it into a sketchbook, I never forget it and I never have to look it up again.”

- Talkers

Some people learn best by hearing themselves talk. This is a style I am quite familiar with. A significant portion of the material in my books comes from what I later jot down from teaching, presentations, and supervision of professionals— things that came to me in a different way from what I had previously thought or written out. “I don’t write because I have something to say, I write to see *what* I have to say.”

- Collaborators

Some people work best in collaboration with others. Creative pairings and the dance of ideas are common for those who perform best in conjunction with others. Some collaborators work best as team members, succeeding in a system where ideas and implementation occur as part of a group.

- Loners

Some people work best alone, preferring the purity of concentration and focus that they can achieve only in the quietness of working alone.

These predominant styles of learning—and none of them is all-or-nothing—constitute an important piece of self-knowledge and a way to facilitate performance for clients.