Understanding Learning Styles Differences in the Learning and Work Environment

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Introduction

Value of Understanding Your Learning Style

The 4MAT® model for understanding learning styles was created in 1979 by Dr. Bernice McCarthy. Over 1 million people have since discovered their learning style using the 4MAT Learning Type Measure®. Your learning style refers to the way that you prefer to perceive (take in) and process (make meaning of) new information. Your learning style preferences influence how you communicate, learn, interact, plan, coach, lead and manage. Knowing your learning style strengths will help you maximize your ability to learn new information and to produce results in the work environment. Being aware of your learning style preferences also helps you interact more effectively with others including your fellow team members, immediate supervisor and customers.

Value of Understanding The Learning Style of Others

Understanding the learning styles of others is important to anyone who wants to communicate effectively. Your ability to get your message across to others can be greatly enhanced by understanding that there are significant differences in the way that people take in and process new information. The Learning Type Measure describes four primary learning styles. In figure 1.1, you will find an overview of the four learning styles.

4 / 1
Open minded, intuitive and flexible

STYLE 4:
Holistic
Risk-oriented
Intuitive
Entrepreneurial
Results-oriented

STYLE 1:
Caring
Interactive
Intuitive
People-oriented

3 / 4
Creative approach

1 / 2
Combines caring with structured approach

STYLE 3:
Practical
Direct
Command
Process-oriented

STYLE 2:
Conservative
Systematic
Structured
Risk-avoidant

3 / 2
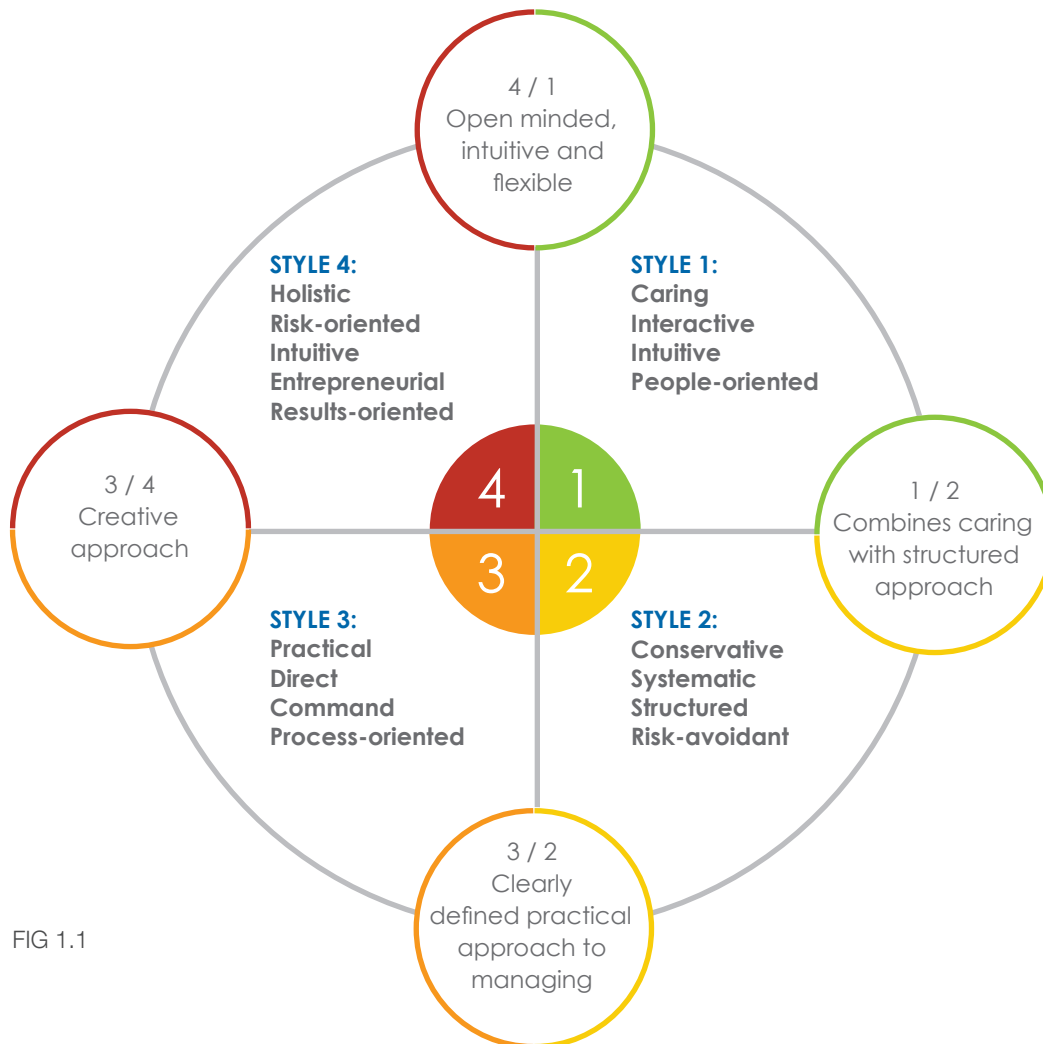Clearly defined practical approach to managing

FIG 1.1

The Four Learning Styles

Your preference for one style and avoidance of another are of equal importance. For example, knowing that you are attracted to learning and work situations that require intuitive and abstract thinking (Type 4) and avoidant of learning and work situations that are highly structured and require concrete thinking (Type 2) will enable you to make choices that align with your strengths.

Let's take a look at how a high preference for each approach and low preference for each approach would influence the observable behaviors of an individual in different roles.

The Type One Learner

Type One Learning Approach is highly participative and people-oriented. The Type One learning approach emphasizes exploring the relevance of the information being received. With this approach, a learner reflects on their own experience and engages in interaction with others to compare and contrast their own experience with those of others.

As a learner

High 1 ——————————————————————— **Low 1**

The learner that is high in the Type One Learning approach will spend more time reflecting on their own experiences and the experiences of others. They will enjoy interactive partner or group exercises that allow for dialogue and personal sharing.

The learner with a low level preference for the Type One learning approach will prefer to spend less time in interactive activities. They may be uncomfortable or impatient with too much emphasis on group sharing. They can quickly become frustrated with a "touchy-feely" approach to learning.

As a team member

High 1 ——————————————————————— **Low 1**

The Type One learner needs to understand the purpose of the work. They seek to uncover personal relevance. They perform best when they begin a project with a clear idea of the intended outcome. They rely on intuition and peer feedback when making decisions.

The team member with a low level of preference for the Type One learning approach will tend to emphasize objectivity. They will rely on outside sources, such as data, to guide decision making. They may be unaware of the impact of personal actions on others.

As a leader

High 1 ——————————————————————— **Low 1**

A leader that is high in the Type One learning approach will emphasize people as central to the success of the organization. They will use values and culture to guide behaviors.

A leader with a low level of preference for the Type One learning approach will tend to emphasize external sources such as data and results to guide decision making. Their objectivity may result in being perceived as aloof or uncaring.

The Type Two Learner

The Type Two learning approach is analytical and fact-oriented. With this approach, a learner will place emphasis on exploring ideas and details.

As a learner

High 2 ——— **Low 2**

All learners look for relevant information that will help them understand. The learner that is high in the Type Two learning approach will spend more time analyzing the information. They will have a higher need to understand the big ideas and details completely before moving into action.

The learner that has a low level of preference for the Type Two learning approach may become bored with too much time spent in information delivery or on the details. They can often miss important information or finer distinctions in their impatience to get to action.

As a team member

High 2 ——— **Low 2**

The Type Two learners want to understand all the facts before developing an action plan. They will appreciate time for reflection before being asked for feedback or results. In a meeting, a Type Two learner will prefer to know the agenda before the meeting to allow for adequate preparation.

The team member that has a low level of preference for the Type Two learning approach may rely more on intuition than data. They may suggest strategies or ideas with no tangible "proof" to back it up. They will tend to invest less time in the details and are less likely to be exact in their work approach.

As a leader

High 2 ——— **Low 2**

The Type Two leader will rely on data to guide decision making. They will use structure such as policies and procedures to guide behavior.

A leader that has a low level of preference for the Type Two learning approach may rely on gut instinct or intuition for decision making. They may have a bias for action over reflection.

The Type Three Learner

The Type Three learning approach is objective and action-oriented. With this approach, the learner will focus on how things work in the real world.

As a learner

High 3	Low 3
The learners with a high preference for the Type Three learning approach prefer hands-on activities that focus on real-world issues. They value a practical approach to learning.	The learner that has a low level of preference for the Type Three learning approach may have a higher need for reflection which will result in a tendency to move slowly into action. They may be uncomfortable being "rushed" into practice.

As a team member

High 3	Low 3
The Type Three learner will focus on their personal productivity. They thrive on clear accountability and deadlines. In a meeting, they will emphasize action over dialogue.	The team member that has a low level of preference for the Type Three learning approach may easily get off-track and lose sight of the desired outcomes of the meeting. They may put little emphasis on defining action items and following up.

As a leader

High 3	Low 3
The Type Three leaders will use results to guide decision making. They will use clear direction and personal accountability to guide behavior.	The leader with a low level of preference for the Type Three learning approach may focus more on the overall strategy, rather than the "how to" in executing the strategy.

4 | 1
3 | 2

The Type Four Learner

The Type Four learning approach is intuitive and innovation-oriented. With this approach, the learner will look for patterns, connections and new adaptations.

As a learner

High 4 ——————————————————————— **Low 4**

All learners need to be able to assess their own performance and adapt for real-world application. The learner that is high in the Type Four learning approach will prefer to have flexibility in the learning environment. They will enjoy open-ended assignments and variety in the delivery approach.

The learner that has a low level of preference for the Type Four learning approach will demonstrate a preference for structure. They may have a hard time "making it up" and will benefit from clear direction, guidelines and structure in learning activities.

As a team member

High 4 ——————————————————————— **Low 4**

A learner with high strength in Type Four will bring creative thinking to the team. They will generate enthusiasm for new ideas. In a meeting, they will emphasize the need for a clear vision on where the team is headed.

The team member that has a low level of preference for the Type Four learning approach will prefer a structured work environment with clear accountabilities.

As a leader

High 4 ——————————————————————— **Low 4**

The Type Four leader will use strategic competitiveness to guide decision making. They will use a shared vision of the future to guide behavior and inspire the team.

The leader that has a low level of preference for the Type Four learning approach will lead through clear policies and procedures. The leader that has a low level of preference for the Type Four learning approach may place more value on objective data versus subjective opinions.

Your Learning Style in the Formal Learning Environment

In a formal learning environment, a learner with a strong understanding of their own learning preferences is much more likely to be able to perceive and process information efficiently and effectively. Armed with an awareness of their personal needs in a learning environment, the learner can apply personalized strategies to enhance their learning, regardless of the delivery approach of the trainer. During lecture, a Type One learner can imagine how the information might be relevant to their interests or the interests of friends or colleagues. The Type Two learner can visually outline the information, paying attention to how the details and bigger ideas fit together. The Type Three learner can generate examples of how they might use the information being presented. And, the Type Four learner can identify ways that they might adapt the information to create new possibilities.

Here are some tips for honoring your learning style needs in a formal learning experience:

Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4
Because you typically enjoy learning in relationship with others, create opportunities to share with other learners. If social interaction is not part of the teacher or trainer's delivery style, invite other learners to connect over lunch or to form a post-training "study group".	Because you need to understand the organization of the information, pay attention to how the content is connected by visualizing how the details and larger concepts being shared fit together. Think about creating diagrams or maps of the content being delivered.	Because you value practical application, focus on identifying ways that you might be able to use the information.	Because you value the broader view, notice how what is being shared connects to other areas of interest.
Reflect on your own experiences, related to the content being shared.	Focus on understanding the reasoning behind what is being shared. Ask questions that encourage the trainer to explain the framework, model or structure underlying what is being presented	Encourage presenters to provide practical examples by asking questions such as, "Can you give us an example of how this might be useful in our daily work?"	Ask yourself how you might adapt the information to create new possibilities.
Invite other learners to share their experiences and perceptions of the content.		Balance your need for action with reflection by taking notes, journaling or sharing insights with others.	Use visual note-taking techniques such as mind-mapping to help you uncover the hidden connections in the content being shared.
Stretch from reflection into action and challenge yourself to apply the information being learned.	Be aware of your tendency to linger in reflection. Challenge yourself to apply the information.		Balance your need for adaptation by first trying it the "right" way, as suggested by the presenter.

Reaching All Styles in the Work Environment

You can appeal to all four learning styles when communicating by simply focusing on answering the favorite question for each style: why, what, how and if. The 4MAT® communication approach is applied by organizations across the globe to instructional design, instructional delivery, sales, customer service, coaching, teambuilding and leadership.
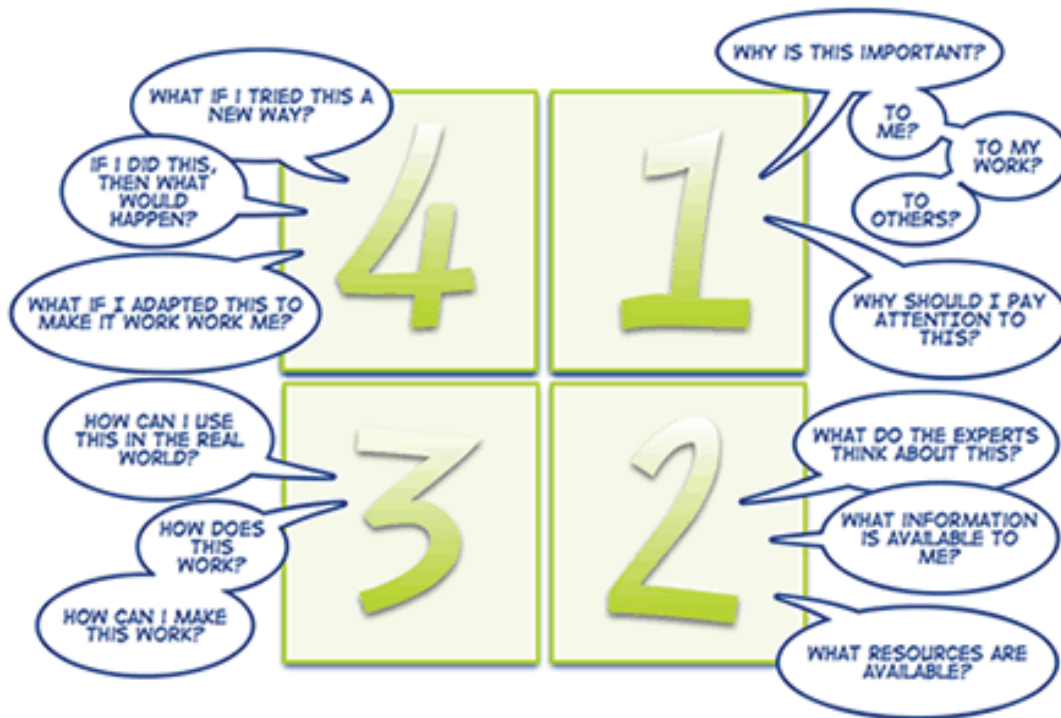
Felicia Jourdan, Director of Education for the Aveda Institutes, shares how their Guest Care team members appeal to all four learning styles when sharing product recommendations.

"All of our team members take the Learning Type Measure® their first week of new-hire orientation. They learn quickly how they need to stretch past their own learning style delivery approach to reach all the other learning styles. We train all of our Guest Care team members to answer the four questions (Why, What, How and If?) when recommending hair care and skincare products to our guests using a 4MAT-based recommendation framework. All of our curriculum and internal communications are 4-matted."

By intentionally addressing the primary question of each learning style, you will dramatically improve the impact of your message.

Leading Effective Meetings

To appeal to all learning styles in a meeting and to gain the benefit of the thinking of each style, there are actions you can take to address the preferences of each style:

4

Anticipate challenges and brainstorm how to overcome them.

Encourage creative thinking.

Measure and monitor results.

Celebrate and acknowledge achievement.

1

Take the time to answer the question, Why?

When introducing new systems, create an opportunity for each team member to understand why this will benefit them.

Take time to create personal connections.

Get everyone involved in the dialogue. Get others talking and sharing.

Handle conflicts and disagreements with respect.

3

Make sure you move to action in your meetings.

Define action items and follow-up.

Hold others accountable.

Focus on getting a few, vital things accomplished.

2

Share the agenda for the meeting, in advance.

Follow-up on agenda items from previous meetings.

Start and end on time.

Learning Styles: Meeting Tips

Type One Learner

Painful Meetings for Type One Learners are meetings where:
- Material under discussion is not personally meaningful
- There is lack of trust or unresolved conflicts among members
- Individual opinions are not valued and/or there is no opportunity to discuss feelings
- The group is too large for authentic interaction
- Unprepared members are singled out
- The meeting doesn't have sufficient time for reflection
- There is a sense of serious deadlines and time pressure
- The leader has no give and take, is unable to paraphrase and reflect back on the contributions of group members, or is insensitive to feelings

Successful Meetings for Type One Learners are meetings where:
- Connections are made and honesty is encouraged
- Interests are elicited and time is allowed for discussion about feelings
- The group leader provides an opportunity for consensus building
- Time is made for hearing and honoring personal points of view

Type Two Learner

Painful Meetings for Type Two Learners are meetings where:
- Material under discussion is not personally meaningful
- There is no reflection or prep time before the meeting
- No one makes clear the most important topics or there is no clarity as the meeting progresses
- Momentum toward agreement or a clear plan is absent
- Some group members are obviously valued more than others
- Group members do not respect the opinion of others, or there are excessive interruptions
- The leader doesn't listen or doesn't get the total picture
- The session is held late in the day

Successful Meetings for Type Two Learners are meetings where:
- Issues and tasks are clearly defined
- Information is based on fact
- There is adequate notice for preparation
- Pros and cons are weighed
- The group stays on task
- There is an objective perspective

Type Three Learner

Painful Meetings for Type Three Learners are meetings where:
- Group members are fearful to speak up or are inarticulate
- Excessive debate occurs over the agenda or time is "wasted" on chit-chat before the real meeting starts
- There is a lack of focus with forays into side issues
- Possible alternatives are not listed or given proper consideration
- Too much input that is inappropriate or off-topic
- The focus is on the personalities rather than the issues
- One person dominates, or a member tries to block closure
- The group continues to discuss an issue when discussion will not change the outcome
- There is lack of momentum toward agreed solutions
- The surroundings are too tight or cramped

Successful Meetings for Type Three Learners are meetings where:
- There is a productive, problem-solving climate
- Common sense is the norm
- Ideas are used
- Decisions are aligned with the realities of existing structure and resources
- Closure is achieved

Type Four Learner

Painful Meetings for Type Four Learners are meetings where:
- Members are tentative, cautious, or data people, who want proof of every hunch
- There is not strong, spirited interaction
- Communication is intentionally non-committal, ambiguous or dishonest
- The hierarchy of members is stressed and there is no real collegiality, just pretense
- People use excessive jargon – terminology only understood by some
- There is no opportunity for brainstorming
- Discussions are about decisions that are already made
- There is a sequenced agenda that must be adhered to
- The leader sees only the details, missing the big picture
- Humor is missing

Successful Meetings for Type Four Learners are meetings where:
- There is a flexible agenda and participants look beyond stated objectives
- Energy is generated
- Actions and ideas based on intuition are honored
- Talk of possible creative action is encouraged

About the Author

Jeanine O'Neill-Blackwell is the President/CEO of 4MAT 4Business®, an education company that provides training and tools for leaders, managers and trainers on how to effectively communicate, lead, train and coach using the award-winning 4MAT® learning styles performance model. She has worked with learning organizations such as 3M, Estee Lauder, American Family insurance, Humana, Blue Cross, Granite Construction, The Center for Creative Leadership and Johnsonville Sausage in applying the 4MAT® model to enhance performance.

Jeanine is the co-author of *Hold On, You Lost Me! Use Learning Styles to Create Training that Sticks*, published by ASTD Press.

About 4MAT 4Business®

4MAT 4Business® is an education company that provides training and tools for leaders, managers and trainers to reach all learning styles when communicating, training and leading. The 4MAT® model was created in 1979 by Dr. Bernice McCarthy. Since then, over 1 million people have discovered their learning strengths and used that knowledge to enhance personal performance. 4MAT 4Business® shares the 4MAT® model with global organizations through open-enrollment and on-site courses. 4MAT 4Business® is located in Covington, LA with international partner offices in Australia, Denmark, New Zealand, and Mexico. The 4MAT® assessment tools are available in German, Dutch, Norwegian, Danish, Korean, Chinese, Italian and Spanish (European and Latin American versions).

Summary

Understanding your learning style and the styles of others will positively impact your ability to learn, adapt, communicate and produce results. To learn more about how to assess your leadership, learning or training style using the 4MAT® assessment tools, you can visit our site at **www.4mat4business.com.**

With over thirty years of research and real-world experience involving thousands of teachers, trainers and leaders, 4MAT® is a proven framework for enhancing learning impact and performance results. Our programs include:

1. Custom On-Site Programs

We offer many live and web-based programs focused on learning style strengths, instructional design and delivery, teambuilding and leadership development. To learn more about custom programs, vist www.4mat4business.com.

2. Open Enrollment Programs

We offer live and web-based open enrollment programs. To learn about upcoming sessions, visit www.4mat4business.com.