



Is Someone Actually Using Learning Preferences?

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Do people really have different learning preferences? Do they gain more if the learning opportunity is engineered to different styles? Can these various learning preferences be identified... even specified for each individual? Is anyone really trying to use learning preferences?

AmeriCredit has an answer to each of these questions. It is a resounding, Yes. In fact, this company of nearly 4,000 employees is concurrently utilizing learning preferences in engineering both instructor-led sessions and e-learning applications. We also are constantly exploring understanding and uses of how people process information, and how they learn optimally through learning preferences. AmeriCredit is into its fourth year of applying the Input-Output Processing Template (I-OPT), developed by Professional Communications Incorporated, a research and development firm. With every application, the company finds benefits to learners, to our various operations, to our customers, and to AmeriCredit's award-winning Learning & Performance Department (*Training* magazine named AmeriCredit as one of its top five training functions in the United States for 2002 and 2003). Participants are engaging in e-learning sessions with over 70%

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completion rates, while instructor-led learning opportunities find participants rating the sessions higher than ever before.

The approach for identifying individual learning preferences includes a one-page survey of 24 multiple-choice questions that examine our team members' preferences for learning. Connecting through AmeriCredit's web-based learning management system, anyone in our more than 90 locations can submit the survey in approximately five minutes. The results are processed instantaneously and are immediately available in a back-end database.

The I-OPT provides each person with an information template that identifies four information processing and learning preferences. These four primary styles are:

- ⌘ *Reactive Stimulators (RS)*: Highly task/action-oriented; preference for trying a new idea rather than hearing about it.
- ⌘ *Logical Processors (LP)*: Process/task-oriented; prefer structure, sequence, and context.
- ⌘ *Hypothetical Analyzers (HA)*: Prefer to think in great detail about the learning; like macro understanding to mentally process how information fits.
- ⌘ *Relational Innovators (RI)*: Enjoy making relationship connections; creative and like to relate new things to something familiar.

Almost everyone has a primary style, or preference. Team members whose preference is RS learn best when they are engaged with an activity on the topic, while LPs gain the most when they can follow an orderly sequence to their learning. At AmeriCredit, this primary style is called someone's "sweet spot." Most people have the ability to also *connect* to varying degrees with any of the other three preferences. AmeriCredit's instructional designers are utilizing this information to better engineer learning opportunities.

One of the areas where this is most evident is in developing e-learning. In order to engage all learners, online courses are now developed to continually cycle participants through all four styles. Online courses, in every 8 to 10 minutes of attention time, cycle AmeriCredit team members through something that hits their "sweet spot" for learning. They feel comfortable with their style being addressed at a frequency that keeps them engaged. This is AmeriCredit's "Action e-Learning." Learning & Performance instructional designers apply an experiential learning process based on the work of David A. Kolb, in which learning is achieved by progressing through four phases or processes:

- ⌘ *Stimulate*: "Doing" something; reinforces the Reactive Stimulators' style
- ⌘ *Process*: Logically reflect on what was done and its possible impact; preferred by Logical Processors

- ✍ *Analyze:* Think conceptually about how this fits; appeals to Hypothetical Analyzers
- ✍ *Innovate:* Apply to new ways of acting, thinking, and being; engages Relational Innovators

AmeriCredit is also pursuing the development of e-learning courses that allow participants to experience a learning module tailored to their primary learning style.

Our web-based learning management system links to individual learning preferences, allowing learners to be presented with online courses engineered to their style. In this next phase of our application of learning preferences, courses being designed to individual preferences will become our “I-Styled Learning” modules.

Instructor-led classroom sessions are currently being designed using Kolb’s learning cycle and team member learning preferences. We now ask team members, prior to attending a course or workshop, about factors concerning their readiness and motivation. This information is processed and provided to facilitators. Based on the percentage of participants with each style, facilitators can then modify the way the session is conducted to maximize connection with attendee “sweet spots.” Pre-reading may be sent to Hypothetical Analyzers (who actually may read it), more “do” activities may be inserted into the session to reinforce Reactive Stimulators, time may be taken for “connecting the dots” for Logical Processors, or conceptual, fun application time may be added for the Relational Innovators. Of course, AmeriCredit sees instructor-led sessions that are specifically engineered for each primary learning preference as another step the company will be pursuing in the near future.

AmeriCredit is on the leading edge of understanding and applying learning preferences. We are gaining much from our applications in such areas as knowledge management, enhanced learning, increased return on investment, and improved operational results. From what we have experienced thus far, the future is going to be both exciting and highly rewarding for those exploring and effectively utilizing human learning preferences.

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