**LEARNING STYLES**

People learn in different ways and the more we understand our learning style, and that of others, the better able we are to seek out positive learning experiences for ourselves, and to understand the dynamics between ourselves and others when we are attempting to improve or challenge their learning and development. There are many learning styles questionnaires, and one of these was developed by Honey and Mumford, who identified four basic styles of learning.

Their questionnaire is part of a deeper and more complex assessment process, but their four styles are recognisable as having parallels with the 4 stages of learning in Kolb’s learning cycle, and therefore provide a helpful link into supervisory dynamics and skills. The 4 styles are:

***ACTIVISTS*** - these people enjoy the ‘here and now’ and are dominated by immediate experiences – they like short term crises as they thrive on challenge and new experiences and are relatively bored with implementation and longer term consolidation. They are gregarious, sociable people and constantly involve themselves with others. They are busy and usually on the go, telephone in hand.. They learn best when they have problems to work out, and they can engross themselves in simulations and role play. They like to take an active lead and generate ideas, and thrive when they are given a challenge and thrown in at the deep end.

They may have difficulty with passive learning, reflecting, analysing and interpreting, assessing learning needs and theoretical explanations. They may become quickly impatient and want to move onto the next challenge or problem. They may resent a manager who tries to tie them down to completing mundane tasks or written reports, and may struggle with finishing things off, as they are onto the next action.

***REFLECTORS*** - like to stand back, think and observe experiences from different perspectives, considering all possible angles and implications before deciding on action. They tend to be quite cautious in either putting forward their ideas, or taking definitive action. They like observing others and often take a back seat. They learn best when they think and observe, review what has happened and analyse, prepare, research and investigate. They can appear to be rather introverted and quiet, but can also be a huge resource in terms of their accumulated observation and knowledge

They may have difficulty with being rushed, producing instant reactions or responses and not having sufficient information. They may struggle with a manager who expects them to lead interventions or actions.

***THEORISTS*** - are keen on basic assumption, principles, theories, models and systems thinking. They like logic and tend to be detached, analytical and unhappy with subjective experiences or being asked to focus on feelings. They learn best when they are intellectually stretched, working with concepts, models and theories, participating in complex situations, questioning and probing, and working to a clear and logical purpose. They can be good and determined investigators within a theoretical framework or testing out a practice model, but may not demonstrate empathy or have regard for the emotional elements or impact of their work.

They may have difficulty with working with emotion and feelings, unstructured activities, reflection and having to make decisions without clear concepts or principles. They will struggle with a manager who is indecisive or who is focused on feelings.

***PRAGMATISTS*** - search out new ideas and take the first opportunity to experiment with them. They tend to respond to problems and opportunities as a challenge and are likely to leave courses with lots of new ideas they want to try out! They learn best when there is an obvious link between the subject matter and their work, when they can try things out and respond to feedback, can quickly implement what they have learnt, can develop a good model and concentrate on practical ideas to make action plans.

They may have difficulty with learning that does not seem relevant, theory and general principle, lack of opportunity to practice and aimless discussion. They can lack patience and the commitment to see things through as they pick up new ideas and want to try those out without first assimilating the learning from the previous experience. They will struggle most with a manager who is ‘set in their ways’ and who does not value up to date practice and experimentation, or who does not help the worker to relate their learning to practice.