

## LEARNING STYLE AND THE PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Gary L. Karns, School of Business & Economics, Seattle Pacific University, 3307 Third Ave. W., Seattle, WA 98119, (206.281.2948; gkarns@spu.edu)

### ABSTRACT

Recently it was suggested that learning opportunities should be targeted to different types of student learning styles (Morris, Sweeney, and Heffernan, 2003). Marketing educators were also encouraged to develop students' facility in learning through various modalities by systematically exposing them to various types of learning activities.

The relationship between learning style preferences and learning effectiveness is a crucial link in the argument that marketing educators should be mindful of students' learning styles when designing courses. Whether this presumption that differences in preference equate with differences in effectiveness of learning activities is valid is explored in this study.

### BACKGROUND

The concept of learning styles grows out of Jungian personality typologies based on individual differences in decision-making and perceiving. Individual differences in learning are cast in terms of a person's preferred perceptual mode and information attributes (intuition vs. sensing - visual, auditory, and touch; abstraction vs. concrete-realism), and their preferred information processing modalities (active vs. reflective; sequential vs. random ordering of information) (Frontczak, 1990).

Kolb (1984) depicts learning style types using a four-quadrant model: Accommodators (active-concrete) who prefer trial-and-error experiences and people; Convergers (active-abstract) who prefer problem-solving; Divergers (reflective-concrete) who prefer people, feelings, and harmony, and; Assimilators (reflective-abstract) who prefer ideas and theories (Frontczak, 1990).

Solomon and Felder's Learning Style Index (2004) adds verbal-visual and sequential-global dimensions to the active-reflective dimension, and replaces the concrete-abstract dimension with intuitive-sensing. This four-dimensional approach provides a richer conceptualization of individual learning differences. Both models propose that matching learning activities with student learning styles improves learning outcomes.

Diverse learning styles have been found among marketing students, but active, sensing, visual, and sequential dimensions (Kolb's Accommodators and Assimilators) appear to be somewhat more prevalent (Frontczak and Rivale,

1991). Morris, Sweeney, and Heffernan (2003) found three learning style types: active-intuitive-visual; reflective-verbal; and sensate-visual-sequential.

### METHODOLOGY

As part of a broader cross-sectional survey, a convenience sample of 227 students in ten advanced marketing courses at eight universities indicated their perceived effectiveness of 21 learning activities and their learning style preferences. The hypothesized effects of learning style on the perceived effectiveness of the activities were extrapolated from learning style preferences noted in prior research.

### RESULTS

Relatively few significant differences in perceived effectiveness were found across each of the learning style dimensions. Learning style clusters were also examined. The clusters were: Cluster 1- Visual Accommodators (80.44% of the sample); Cluster 2-Verbal Accommodators (2.69% of the sample); Cluster 3- Divergers; and Cluster 4- Assimilators. There was no analog for Kolb's Converger learning style among these clusters. Very few significant differences in perceived effectiveness ratings across these more nuanced learning style clusters were found

### CONCLUSION

This study leads to a potentially controversial conclusion. The paucity of effects and some reversed effects generally do not support the prevailing presumption that student learning style based preferences correspond to learning more effectively from those preferred learning activities. Therefore, marketing educators may not expect greater payoff for the added investment required to customize course design in response to learning style preferences. Marketing educators would do just as well to employ a variety of learning activities in classes drawing on multiple learning modalities.

**References & Exhibits Available on Request**