

Learning Process

The Pressure Group designs its workshops to optimise the learning for all participants. The desire to maximise the amount of content has been balanced against the need to ensure that the training methodology enables effective learning.

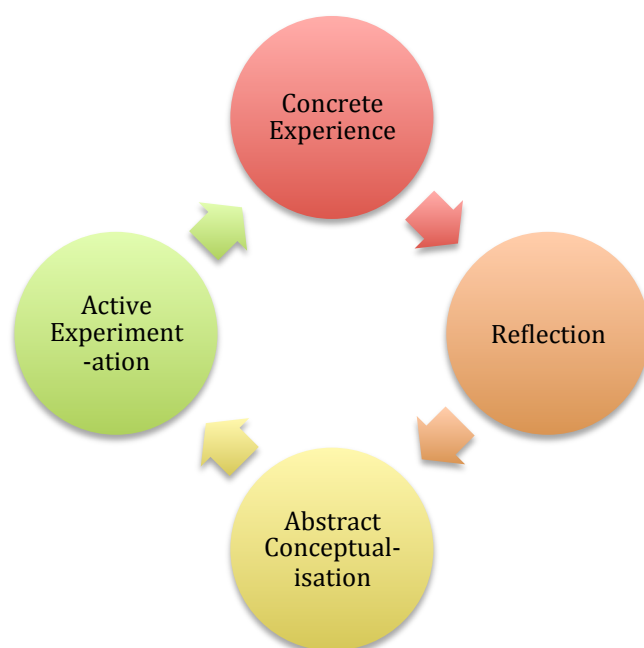
- ❖ With regard to content, the workshops try to strike an appropriate balance between the breadth and depth of coverage of issues.
- ❖ The methodology adopted is participatory, interactive and learner-orientated, taking into account the **Learning Cycle** and people's different **Learning Styles** (see below), as well as the need to maintain attention and energy levels. This means that many different techniques will be used. These may include formal presentations, plenary and group discussions, individual and group activities, role plays, drawing and individual reflection.

The Learning Cycle

This theory of learning¹ states that effective learning goes through four stages: Concrete Experience, Reflection, Abstract Conceptualisation and Active Experimentation.

These four stages follow from each other: The learner has a **Concrete Experience**, which is followed by their **Reflection** on that experience on a personal basis. This may then be followed by the learner deriving general rules describing the experience, or applying known theories to it (**Abstract Conceptualisation**), and leading them to construct ways of modifying the next occurrence of the experience (**Active Experimentation**), leading in turn to the next **Concrete Experience**.

All this may happen in a flash, or over days, weeks or months, depending on the topic, and there may be a "wheels within wheels" process at the same time. Neglect of some stages can prove to be a major obstacle to learning.



Learning Styles

Building on this theory, a typology of Learning Styles has been developed (Honey and Mumford, 1982), identifying individual preferences for each stage. The learning styles are Activist, Reflector, Theorist and Pragmatist:

- The **Activist** prefers doing and experiencing, and is therefore most comfortable at the Concrete Experience stage of the learning cycle
- The **Reflector** observes and reflects, and obviously is happiest at the Reflection stage of the learning cycle
- The **Theorist** wants to understand underlying reasons, concepts and relationships. They like the Abstract Conceptualisation stage.
- The **Pragmatist** likes to "have a go", trying things to see if they work. They are happy in the Active Experimentation stage.

In the context of a training workshop, this means that some participants will prefer listening to presentations, some will prefer plenary and group discussions, some will like practical exercises in groups, and others will enjoy activities such as role plays. As a result, everyone will be out of his or her “comfort zone” at some point in the workshop, but it is out of the comfort zone that new learning often takes place.

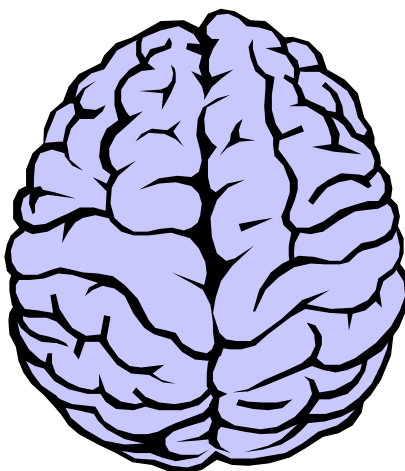
Left Brain – Right Brain

This theory of the structure and functions of the mindⁱ suggests that the two different sides of the brain control two different "modes" of thinking.

Left-brain thinking is associated with verbal expression and rational, sequential thought.

Its thinking processes can be described as

Logical, Analytical,
Quantitative, Factual, Planned,
Organised, Detailed,
Sequential



Right-brain thinking is associated with visual imagery, symbols and emotional connections.

Its thinking processes can be described as

Emotional, Integrating,
Synthesising, Intuitive,
Holistic, Interpersonal,
Feeling-based, Kinaesthetic

It is suggested that most people have developed a left or right brain dominance, or preference, which means they are more "comfortable" with one sort of thinking than the other. For example, research has shown that lawyers, engineers and accountants tend to be predominantly left brained, whereas writers, artists, musicians and entrepreneurs tend to be predominantly right brained. However, effective learning utilises both sides of the brain.

ⁱ Developed by Kolb (1984) and inspired by the work of Kurt Lewin. Kolb D A (1984) *Experiential Learning: experience as the source of learning and development* New Jersey: Prentice-Hall (0 13 295261 0)

ⁱⁱ The physical biology of this is now disputed, but it remains a useful metaphor to explore alternative modes of thinking.

This is one of a series of Advocacy & Campaigning Guides by Ian Chandler. This version was published in January 2015.

Each guide aims to clearly and concisely show how progressive non-profit groups can make greater impact in their advocacy and campaigning. They can be downloaded for free from www.thepressuregroup.org

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