Working, Thinking, Learning Styles describe the different way we each absorb and process information. This knowledge is important as we all try to work together. WTL Styles are taught to help people understand themselves better as well as to understand others – whether it is family members, those we work with, or people with whom we work in the community. Our goal is always to build effective groups – to help people work well together to accomplish, achieve. Working/Thinking/Learning Styles is an interactive process that begins with participants completing an inventory to determine their preferred style. Through the inventory and discussion, participants gain an understanding of their own style, the styles of others and how these styles influence their effectiveness in working with others.

The Descriptive Tool This is not a test! This tool does not evaluate or judge. It simply describes you – the way you handle information. Specifically this tool describes how we take in information and how we process information to make it useful to us. David Kolb, well respected psychologist, created this instrument in the early 70’s. It is considered to be one of the most reliable descriptors of our learning process.

Introducing the Tool As you ask people to take the tool, remember to emphasize the need for immediate reaction – “for gut response.” You might introduce the tool by saying “Determine your gut response, not the way you wish you would respond or the way you try to respond when you calm down. Complete the tool with your gut response to any situation. Do the test quickly. It should take only about 5 minutes.”

Scoring the Tool The instructions for scoring are on the tool itself. Remind people that they do not add every line (if they do so they will end up with a huge diamond) – they add only those numbers indicated at the bottom of each column. Ask your participants to then transfer their scores to the bulls-eye and using bright markers connect their dots.
“Different Learners, Different Gifts.”
-Bernice McCarthy, ABOUT LEARNING

The Quadrants

When placed on the bulls-eye, scores from the learning styles tool create a three or four sided figure. This figure usually falls within one quadrant of the bulls-eye. Most of us have a predominant quadrant. For many there is another quadrant that also reflects – to a lesser degree – the way we work and think and learn.

As you look at the bulls-eye, consider the two halves created by a line drawn horizontally. This reflects the different ways humans perceive, take it in, absorb information. The upper half of the bulls-eye indicates that the learner takes in information through concrete experiences. Their reality is what they have experienced – through their senses, through real life. They experience information through sensing and feeling. The lower half of the bulls-eye represents those learners who perceive through abstract concepts, through the books and research. They absorb information in a conceptual format.

Consider then the two halves of the bulls-eye created by a line drawn vertically. This describes the different ways humans process the information once it is perceived. People whose figures fall on the right side of the bulls-eye reflect and observe. They step back to gain perspective, they think through things. People on the left side are active experimenters. They immediately use whatever information they have gained. They apply the learning right away. [The egg on the back page portrays the characteristics of each quadrant.]

**Upper Right Quadrant** perceives concretely, through sensing and feeling and processes reflectively. These sympathetic people take in information through people and feelings; they make the information useful through reflection. They are good listeners and they value people. They lead by generating trust and ensuring that everyone participates.

**Lower Right Quadrant** perceives abstractly, through theories and concepts and processes reflectively. These analytical people take in information through books, research and experts – the scientific method reflects their way of thinking. People in this quadrant lead by principles and procedures and are very concerned about fairness and justice. They are organized and concerned about all of the details.

**Lower Left Quadrant** perceives abstractly, through theories and concepts and processes actively. They experiment with the theories and so are very practical. They are doers. They create strategies for getting the work done and are out in front leading the charge. Creating plans and timelines are their forte. They look at how things work. They are very literal and precise.

**Upper Left Quadrant** perceives concretely, through sensing and feeling, and processes actively. Change is very comfortable for these intuitive people. Their reality is what they experience, but they want to experiment and enhance it. They are risk takers. They are very enthusiastic and inventive-seeing many possibilities for how something can be done. They lead by energizing people and by holding up the vision. They always ask “what if?”

A special note: 1 – 2 % of the population is represented by a diamond in the middle of the egg – falling equally in all quadrants. As we explain this figure, people are often concerned. It represents the ability of the person to respond in all ways.

The way we absorb and process information determines the way we work, think, solve problems, communicate, lead. Once we understand this about ourselves, we know why and how we react. We can use this knowledge to help groups work better because this helps us understand others and why they do what they do. It Reduces Blaming!! To accomplish work and create the best group result each style is needed, we can involve all in the effort.

“We achieve because of our differences.”
-Stephen R. Covey
Applying Working, Thinking Learning Styles...

1. Allow people to sit with like quadrants. Ask them to talk about and report back what it is like to live and lead from this quadrant; what would they like others to know about them.

2. Plan a party or some type of activity.
   - divide people based on their quadrant
   - give them 5 – 7 minutes to plan a party
   - call them back together and ask them to tell about their party
   - call attention to the characteristics of the party as described by each quadrant – they will usually emphasize that quadrant’s characteristics.
   - this activity demonstrates how a better, more complete party is planned when all quadrants are represented.

3. Productive/Painful Meeting Exercise
   - divide people based on quadrant
   - ask them to discuss, for their quadrant, what would constitute a productive meeting? what would constitute a painful meeting?
   - compile the lists and then use this as a way to plan meetings that serve all.

4. As a work group/committee/team discuss:
   - What insights about your group surfaced as you learned about working/thinking/learning styles?
   - How do you see using these insights in your future work together?
   - Beyond the insights of styles, what else do you need to work effectively together?

5. To help people understand their opposites, divide the group into their quadrants and have them design something for the opposite quadrant. Think of the group with whom you are working and use their needs to create this application exercise.

6. Divide your group into four-person small groups. Each person in the group will respond from the point of view of a different quadrant. The purpose of this exercise is to demonstrate how our first response comes from our quadrant’s characteristics and that every response is correct just different. The summary discussion should note that the best solution needs all first steps. Assign the group a topic determined by the needs of the organization, for example:
   a. You have been named chairperson of a committee whose mission is to raise funds to construct a community park. What is the first thing you would do?
   b. You have an employee who is not working out and may need to be terminated. What is the first thing you would do?

7. Using Working/Thinking/Learning styles to recruit volunteers. The most difficult part of many non-profit organizations is to recruit and keep volunteers. We usually plug anyone we can find into the empty holes. What if we matched the volunteer’s strengths with the volunteer opportunity? Looking at a person’s strengths through this tool will give us a different perspective. Practice identifying what characteristics are needed for the volunteer tasks you have available.

8. Personal Application: Take a moment to reflect on past work situations. Think about your strengths and weaknesses, think about what you liked to do and not do – jot some notes about your experiences. What insights have you gained from the styles discussion about your career history? What strengths of my quadrant do I use? Which strengths do I not use and need to develop?

“As long as we think of differences as that which divides us, we shall dislike it; when we think of it as that which unites us, we shall cherish it.”

-Mary Parker Follett