

What kind of trainer are you?



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Key learning points

- What kind of trainer are you?
- Working out your natural training style.
- Mixing and matching styles.
- Five steps to becoming a better trainer.
- Pitfalls to avoid.
- Top tips.

What kind of trainer are you?

This article builds on my earlier one, *Thinking through co-training*, in Issue 25. To help you to work out what kind of trainer you are, I have reviewed a variety of psychometric instruments and selected those psychological dimensions which are most relevant to trainers and which are, therefore, the most useful to include in a trainer's profile. Knowing what kind of trainer you are will help you make the most of your organisation's competency framework (if you have one), and will also feed in to your Personal Development Plan (PDP) and your Continuing Professional Development (CPD) portfolio.

Working out your natural training style using the trainer's profile

This article is effectively a self-diagnostic tool which you and your colleagues can use once as a measure of where you are now, or more than once if you want to track the development of your flexibility as a trainer over time.

Scoring your trainer's profile

Read the descriptions of the 20 dimensions and score yourself marks out of 10 for the degree to which the description is true of you. Be realistic in your scoring. An 8 is not necessarily a better score than a 6 and, if you generate an inaccurate profile, you will only be kidding yourself. Once you have read and scored all of the dimension descriptions, translate your scores onto the chart on the back page. Those of you who particularly like feedback should ask a colleague or your line manager to score their perception of you, and compare the two profiles.

Mixing and matching styles

You will probably find that you score quite highly for some of the dimensions and much lower for some of the others. Unsurprisingly, you are likely to find that those

colleagues who are most like you in their training style and approach will be those colleagues you most enjoy working with. This is because they naturally 'speak your language' and, therefore, between you there will be less confusion and disagreement about the training approach and content of the various training events you are both involved with. The one exception to this will be if you have both scored highly on the Internally referenced and Challenging scales. In practice, this means that there will be times when you both think that you are right about something and you are both prepared to argue about it. If this situation ever occurs and you want to avoid fireworks, remember to focus first on areas of agreement between you, and be prepared to negotiate and compromise if necessary.

Tip

Use this exercise as an opportunity to have a useful discussion with your colleague or line manager, rather than trying to get them to give you scores of 10 out of 10. Remember that this is not a competency framework, it is a trainer's profile.

So, what kind of a trainer are you? Fill in your score for each of these dimensions.

Sensory focused			Sensory focused
Visual			Energy
Auditory			Analytical and data rational
People focused			People focused
Internally referenced			Externally referenced
Challenging			Conforming
Competitive			Collaborative
Task focused			Task focused
Proactive and progressive			Reactive and reticent
Strategic and global			Detailed and precise
Creative and innovative			Logical and process driven
Optimistic and outcomes focused			Anxious and problems focused
Simplicity filter			Complexity filter
	10	5	1
			1
			5
			10

You may photocopy this page so you don't have to write on your original copy. You may want to redo your profile in the future to compare your training style, and colleagues may also like to complete their profile so you can have a meaningful conversation about your different preferences for training. This will be particularly useful if you are co-training.

Further reading

Fiona Beddoes-Jones, 'Thinking through co-training', *Train the Trainer*, Issue 25.
Fiona Beddoes-Jones, *Thinking Styles – Relationship Strategies that Work!*, The Cognitive Fitness Consultancy, 1999.

Author

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The very best trainers have an ability to flex their natural training style so that they can fulfil all the roles of a trainer without any major weaknesses in the areas of the training cycle. This means that they are as good at Training Needs Analysis (TNA) as they are at training design, and just as good at training delivery as they are at training assessment and evaluation. Believe me, it's a tall order – and one that even the most experienced trainers often struggle to achieve. Eventually, after many years, the whole training cycle becomes almost second nature but, even then, there will be some elements of it that you will tend to enjoy more than others.

The five steps to becoming a better trainer

- **Step 1 Know what kind of trainer you are**

You cannot become a better trainer without first working out what kind of trainer you are. Use the exercise contained within this article to identify your preferred training styles, your strengths and possible weaknesses, the kind of thinking and behaviours you really enjoy when you are training, and what you would prefer another colleague, instead of you, to bring to the party.

- **Step 2 Know what kind of trainers your colleagues are**

By consciously understanding what kind of trainers your colleagues are, you will be better able to support each other. Something which is a stretch for you may be easier for one of them and vice versa. Collaborative teamwork always makes the process and experience of training more enjoyable – not just for trainers but also for delegates, who can see the dynamics between trainers to a greater extent than we sometimes realise.

- **Step 3 Conscious development and modelling colleagues**

This is where you deliberately begin to notice your own, and other people's, training strategies, taking responsibility for the development of your training styles profile by beginning to practise and develop your weaker training skills. This can be a very frustrating stage, and there is no right or wrong length of time for Step 3 to take.

- **Step 4 Refinement, review to improve**

Like Step 3, the refinement and honing of your skills, the conscious application and practice of your less-preferred training strategies, is time consuming and can be frustrating. This is where you will see an increase in the quality of the work and the training that you do.

- **Step 5 Train the trainer**

Your training strategies become so integrated and embedded that you become naturally flexible to such an extent that you are almost not consciously aware of using them. This is the stage when you can become a role model for others, and the time when you may become involved in train the trainer programmes, mentoring and coaching, and helping colleagues develop their own training skills. Strange as it may sound, it is worth

noting that not everyone wants to become the best trainer they could possibly be. Some people are content to do a good job and do not strive for excellence (although obviously the very best trainers do; after all, that's why you're reading this article). Driving for excellence is not an easy development process, and only resilient trainers who strive constantly to better themselves will achieve it. Training excellence cannot be achieved overnight, so we need to be realistic in our expectations of ourselves.

Pitfalls to avoid

- Thinking that your preferences are fixed and that your training styles won't change slightly over time or with every new job.
- Thinking that your profile is the right one for a trainer and that everyone else should be more like you.
- Being too busy with work to build in some development time for yourself.

The useful dimensions and their implications

As an HR professional, you may recognise some of these dimensions. They are not opposites, even though you might be tempted to think that they are. This means that it's quite possible for you, as a trainer, to score equally on both sides of the page. Alternatively, you may find that you have clear preferences for certain behaviours over others. Remember that there are no right and wrong preferences for a trainer, only implications that your preferences have for your behaviours as a trainer.

“You cannot become a better trainer without first working out what kind of trainer you are”

Trainer dimensions

Sensory focused

Visual. The way training materials and the training environment look is very important. Learns by looking and watching, will always use the flipchart, incorporating diagrams and colour. Will rehearse events visually.

Auditory. Words and language are very important; likes devising training materials. Will rehearse events by talking them through, either internally in their own heads or externally with a colleague.

People focused

Internally referenced. Confident decision-maker, knows their own mind. Develops their own standards. Often convinced they are right. Ignores feedback and doesn't care what other people think.

Challenging. Often plays devil's advocate and relishes thinking outside the box. Can be difficult to manage, is often argumentative, and will frequently break the rules and push boundaries. Challenges others.

Competitive. Always tries to improve their own performance. Competes with colleagues. Driven to win and hates losing. Maintains a competitive advantage or unique selling point and may take advantage of colleagues if they can.

Task focused

Proactive and progressive. Is always busy. Becomes frustrated if progress is too slow. Initiates projects and action, so is always involved from the start. Often alters and improves training materials. Drives change.

Strategic and global. Talks and writes materials in general terms. Can find it difficult to be specific. Interested in long-term plans and takes a strategic approach. Interested in theoretical and abstract concepts.

Creative and innovative. Will often wing their training, and often goes off on a tangent. Enjoys flexibility and rarely sticks closely to the agenda. May struggle to meet deadlines. Will be creative in their training approach.

Optimistic and outcomes focused. Very laid back and relaxed about their training, always has a very positive, 'can-do' approach. Will make frequent use of goals and targets. Highly motivated to achieve their outcomes.

Simplicity filter. Wants to keep things simple and will always simplify issues for delegates. Will perceive things to be easy rather than difficult. May oversimplify their training content for some people.

Energy. Physically active, enjoys and builds in role-plays and physical activities. Will rehearse events physically by walking them through. Always moving around when training, rarely stands still.

Analytical and data rational. Numerate and focused on the numbers. Always evaluates training quantitatively. May be dispassionate and perceived as unemotional by delegates. Highly data rational and very task focused.

Externally referenced. Relies on external reference points like competencies and feedback from others to decide things. Can feel lost without feedback. May lack self-confidence. Frequently checks with others.

Conforming. Likes to fit in and will avoid confrontation, including heated debates, at all costs. Hates being challenged by colleagues or delegates and feels really uncomfortable about any kind of conflict.

Collaborative. Dislikes working alone or being isolated. Will always collaborate with others if possible. Shares information and is recognised as a team player. May dislike competitive behaviour in others.

Reactive and reticent. Will wait until they have all the information they need or until they are forced to take action. Quiet and reserved. May respond quickly, but never initiates something. Becomes involved later.

Detailed and precise. Prepares their training materials meticulously. Produces detailed work and will follow a training agenda closely. May try to fit too much in to a workshop. Will be practical and prefer concrete ideas.

Logical and process driven. Must be able to complete a task or becomes distressed. Always starts from the beginning. Logical and sequential, and happy to deliver a series of workshops. Always delivers on time.

Anxious and problems focused. Identifies problems and potential problems. Worries about what may go wrong, what has been said or not said. Generally anxious. Can be perceived as having a negative approach.

Complexity filter. Motivated by complexity and enjoys the challenge of difficult tasks and projects. Likes delivering complex training subjects, but may over-complicate their explanations of things for some delegates.