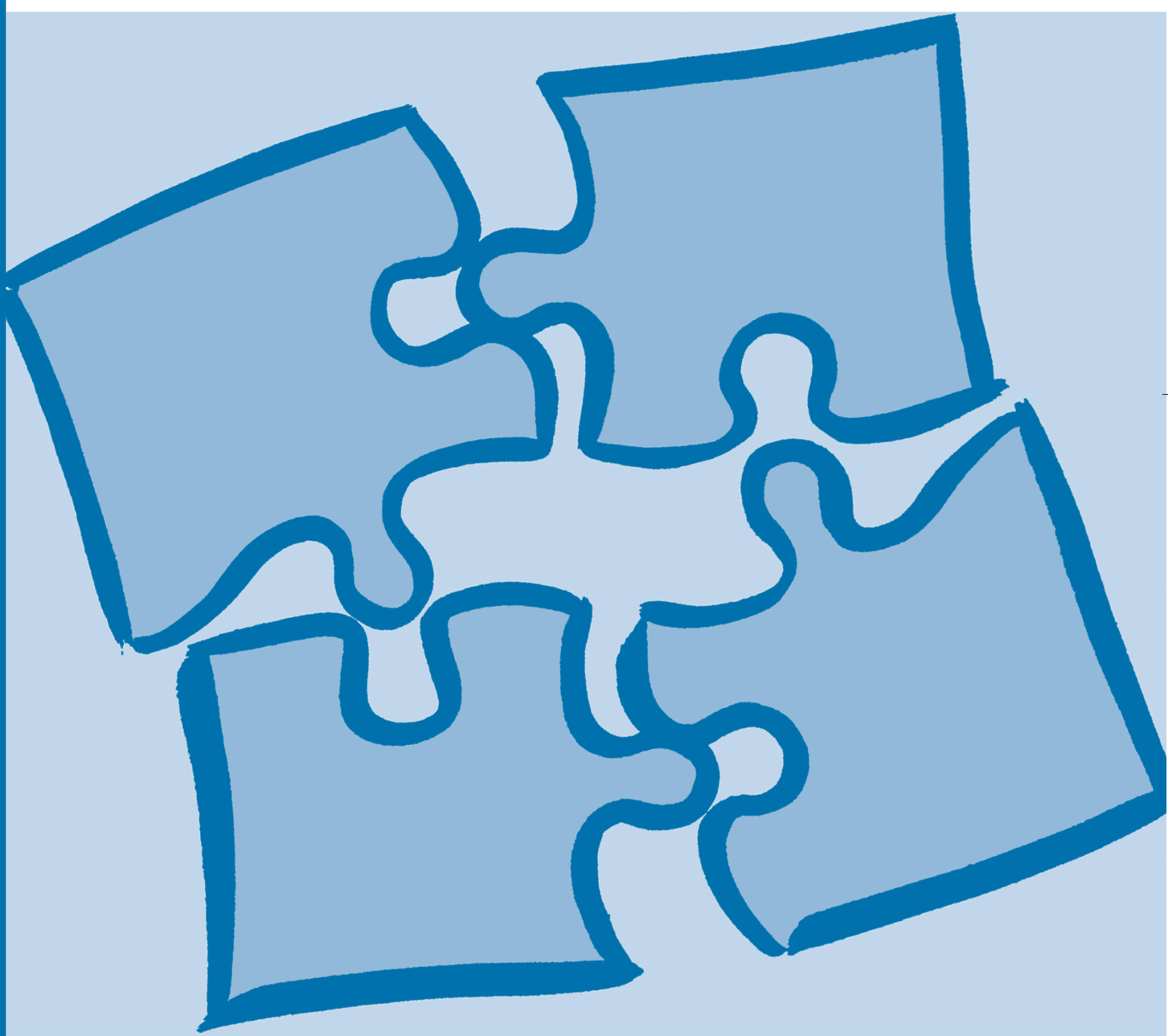
The Learning Styles Helper's Guide

Peter Honey and Alan Mumford



Peter Honey Publications

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Foreword

In the late seventies Alan Mumford and I worked on a project in the Chloride organisation to establish the learning style preferences of individual managers and tailor their personal development plans to take account of these preferences. After nearly four years of experimentation with different ways to assess someone's learning style preferences (we had started with Kolb's Learning Style Inventory but found it had low face validity with senior managers in Chloride), we published The Manual of Learning Styles in the autumn of 1982.

Now, more than twenty years later, the Learning Styles Questionnaire exists in two versions. The original 80-item LSQ continues to thrive and be widely used. In 2000 we produced a shorter 40-item version to meet the needs of people who wanted a quick route to establishing their learning style preferences. This Helper's Guide gives you all the information you need to get full benefit from either version of the questionnaire – together with some guidance on which version to use depending on your circumstances.

Interest in learning styles has never diminished and both versions of the questionnaire are now available online as well as on paper.

There is no doubt that learning styles have some major implications for trainers and this booklet recommends ways to use information about people's learning preferences before, during and after courses as well as on many other occasions where effective learning needs to be promoted.

SECTION 1

An introduction to this guide and to the two Learning Styles Questionnaire booklets

1.1 Introduction to this guide

This guide is for trainers, educators, facilitators, coaches and development advisers – in fact, for anyone who has an interest in helping people learn (for convenience we will use the term helper). It gives you all the background you need to help people use and understand either the 40-item or the 80-item versions of the learning styles questionnaire.

The relevant questionnaires are to be found in the following two booklets for learners:

- Learning Styles Questionnaire (80-item version)
- Learning Styles Questionnaire (40-item version)

Both booklets provide, in addition to the questionnaire, all the information an individual learner needs to interpret, understand and act on the results.

This guide, covering both versions of the LSQ, is practical rather than theoretical. It shows how learning activities can be designed to encompass the full cycle. It also confirms that people are more effective learners once they are aware of their learning style preferences. The questionnaire results provide a starting point, not a finishing point, because knowledge of learning styles is only useful if it is applied rather than merely recorded. In the sections that follow, we describe how this can be done. The most significant uses explored in this guide are:

- Increased awareness of the match between learning activities and different styles
- A better choice by helpers and learners of those activities, leading to more effective and more economical learning provision. Avoidance of inappropriate learning experiences is both good in itself and less likely to lead to the 'Shakespeare effect', where unfortunate early experiences put young people off for life
- Identification of ways in which a person's less effective learning processes and skills can be improved
- Advice on how your different learning styles as a helper influence the way you help others to learn.

1.2 The two versions of the Learning Styles Questionnaire

Both versions of the questionnaire have been designed to explore people's learning style preferences. One questionnaire does this by inviting people to respond to 80-items and the other to exactly half that number of items.

The two versions each have advantages depending on your circumstances and the needs of your learners.

Advantages of the 40-item questionnaire

- Ideal as an initial introduction for people who have not previously given much consideration to how they learn
- Useful if time is at a premium - the questionnaire takes less time to complete and score
- Helps people stay focused - there are fewer suggestions for action to choose between
- The wording is concise and better suited to a more diverse audience.

Advantages of the 80-item questionnaire

- Ideal for people who want a more comprehensive questionnaire (i.e. 20 items per style instead of 10)
- Better for a longer session where there is time to explore learning styles and the suggestions for action in more depth
- More appropriate for people who can relate to the business references
- More likely to appeal to traditionalists who want to use the original Honey & Mumford questionnaire.

1.3 A swift guide to the contents of the two booklets

As a helper, it is essential to familiarise yourself with the contents of whichever version of the booklet you are using with your learners. Both booklets follow the same sequence:

1 There is an upbeat introduction to the world of learning. The aim is to convince the learner that learning is an essential life skill that, like any other skill, is capable of development.

2 The learning style preferences are explained by linking them to the stages in the Learning Cycle. This puts the preferences into context and helps people to see the advantages of becoming an all-round learner.

3 Having set the scene, the learner is invited to complete the Learning Styles Questionnaire – either the 80-item or the 40-item depending which version of the booklet you are using. The introduction to the questionnaire stresses that there are no right or wrong answers – only personal preferences – and urges people to respond honestly.

4 The questionnaire is followed by brief descriptions of the four learning styles. It is important that the preferences are understood before the questionnaire is scored and interpreted.

5 Next, the learner is shown how to score their responses. This has deliberately been made as straightforward as possible so that people can quickly move to interpreting their result by allocating their scores to one of five bands. This helps people to understand the relative strengths of their four preferences.

6 Having completed their self-diagnosis, the learner is given guidance on how to choose learning activities that will suit their current preferences. This is done by providing lists showing the sorts of activities that are likely to match with a given preference (and therefore be relatively 'easy' to learn from) and those where there is likely to be a mismatch (making learning from that activity more difficult).

7 Next in the sequence come suggestions to help the learner expand their repertoire of preferences. This is done by inviting the learner to commit to some actions that will strengthen an under-utilised style.

8 The penultimate section offers guidance on how the learner can get help and support from other people - such as a trainer, coach or manager. It emphasises that managers have learning style preferences too and, depending on their preferences, lists the ways they are likely to help/not help.

9 Finally, advice is given on how to firm up a personal development plan and keep a learning log.

10 An appendix gives answers to frequently asked questions about learning styles and the questionnaires.

As you can see from this brief summary, each of the booklets follows a logical sequence; an introduction is followed by self-diagnosis and this, in turn, is followed by a self-prescription.

The emphasis on 'self' is, of course, deliberate. Both booklets make it clear that the questionnaires are offered as self-development tools. Hopefully, the learner is left in no doubt that they, and they alone, need to take responsibility for their own learning and development. No one else, however well-intentioned, can do it for them.