

## Teamwork skills

There are many positives (and some negatives) to working on a team to get things done. In engineering and other professions, almost all the work is done on teams so learning better teamwork skills in school will be very beneficial.

The major benefit to working on teams is developing a better product. If everyone on the team has a different perspective, then different ideas will come together to design or create a solution that is better than one developed by a single individual. Along with these different perspectives will also be the potential for different personalities and approaches to problems. As a result, team members need to understand these differences and work together to capitalize on them instead of letting them cause conflict and problems.

The Herrmann test is a quick way to determine the preferred learning styles of your team members. Your preferred learning style is not something that you are born with but something that develops as you grow (so you can change and will change as you get older). A “preferred learning style” is basically the approach that comes naturally to you when faced with a problem or something new to learn. It doesn’t mean that you will always react in a specific way, but these are ways that are most comfortable to you and will help you learn or solve the problem most quickly. To determine your preferred learning style, calculate the percentage of items you circled in each block of the test.

For example:

Jane Doe circled 7 activities in quadrant A, 11 in quadrant B, 8 in quadrant C, and 6 in quadrant D for a total of 32 items. This works out to:

$$A=7/32=22\%$$

$$B=11/32=34\%$$

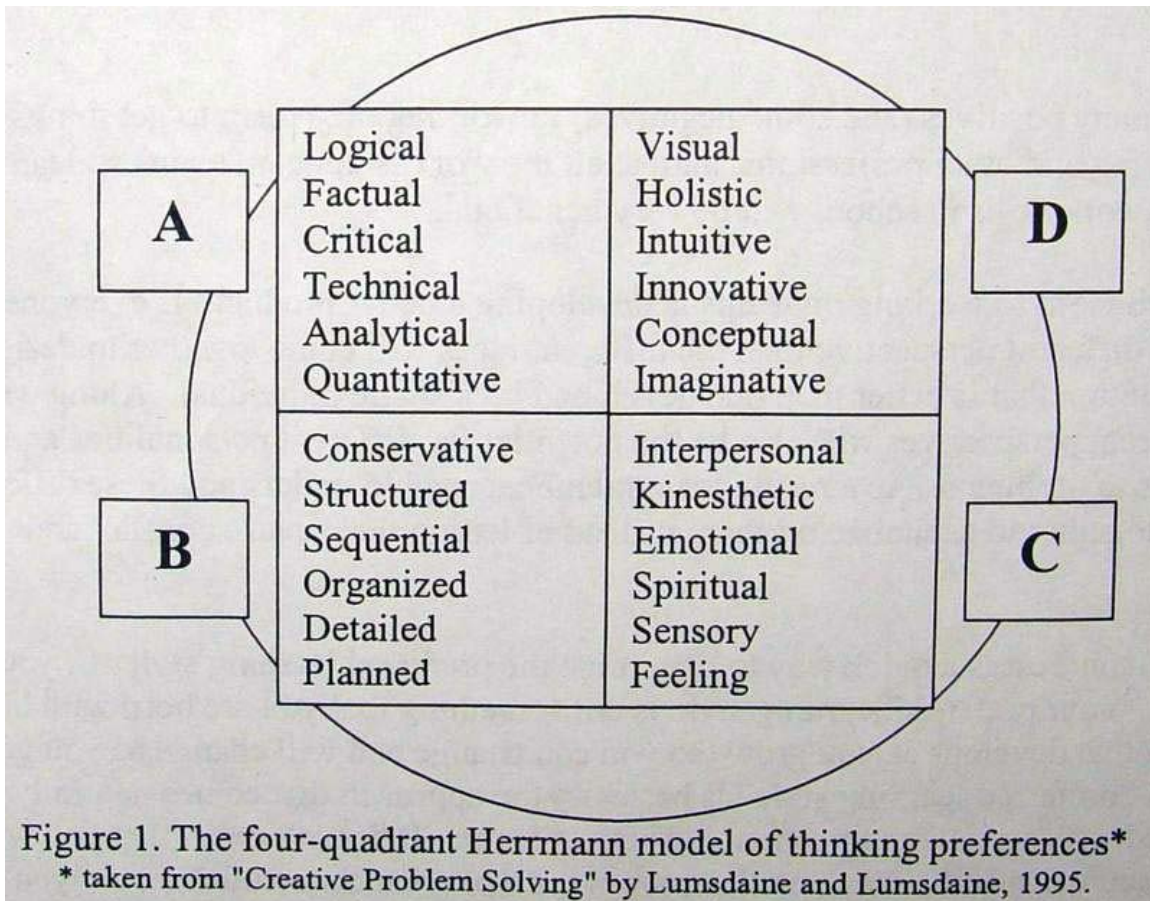
$$C=8/32=25\%$$

$$D=6/32=19\%$$

Jane’s learning style would be approximately a “BC” since those were the greatest percentages. Some people may be a single preferred learning style, for example, a “D”, if there is one percentage that is much greater than others. Other people may be a double, like Jane, or even a triple. A very small percentage of population is all four.

Once you know your learning style, what do you do to make your teamwork skills better? Everyone is different so the test will give you an indicator of how you think and how your team members do things. Some characteristics for the different learning styles are shown in Figure 1 in the next page.

Once you know these characteristics about yourself and your teammates, you can change the way you communicate and interact with each other. No one preferred learning style is better than another.



For example, you may think someone is “bossy” on your team. In reality, they may be a “B” preferred learner and really like organization and planning. As a result, you can change your language and methods to accommodate more planning, and this should alleviate the problem.

Another example is that you may think someone is a “slacker”. In reality, they may be a quadrant “D” thinker, and do a lot of thinking in their head before they write things down or discuss ideas. Whereas some people might describe an idea before it is fully thought-out and continually work on the process, others might do everything in their head and describe a final well thought-out idea. One way is not better than another. You need to understand the difference. So a way to deal with this person may be to ask him what he is thinking about or what ideas he has, and you will see very quickly that he is working on the project, but just in a different way.

Finally, when working with team members, avoid stereotyping. Instead of using this tool to help understand each other, keep an open mind. Use talking and listening to facilitate all the team interactions. As a result, you should find yourself in a better way of communication and get a final better product!