

Using Reflective Practice



Key assumptions to guide practitioners and managers

Reflective practice is both a development tool and It means using our experience to draw conclusions and inform how we think and act in future. This results in personal and professional growth, more creativity and increased awareness of how and why we make decisions in our professional lives. It has been called “*an orientation to problem solving or state of mind*” and “*using intuition to inform learning.*”

Reflective practice has been widely used in nursing, teaching, counselling and social work. More recently it has been taken up by practitioners of mediation, conflict resolution and the Law, and is now being encouraged to help managers in business become better at what they do. The authors most usually associated with it are Schön and Kolb who recommend a basic principle of reflecting on experience to improve action and professional practice. However, thinking in this way – learning through questioning and feedback – is not new and can be traced back to Socrates. Some relevant reading is listed below.

Two kinds of reflection

Reflection in action refers to thinking as we do things. It requires ‘being in the present’, noticing our own behaviour, thoughts and emotional responses as we go about our business, while simultaneously being aware of them in people we are interacting with, Monitoring in this way allows us to change our conduct as required by the situation.

Reflection on action is achieved through discussion with trusted peers, supervision, journaling, writing case studies and setting time aside to critically review our work.

Developed as habits these “*nurture exploration and discoveries that leads to an increased repertoire of skills.*” (Lang and Taylor, 2000). We learn to think beyond the conventional or received ways of doing things, developing working practice by combining the procedures and methodologies we have been taught with a constant process of critical appraisal. Schön says: “*Through reflection (a practitioner) can surface and criticise the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of a specialised practice, and can make new sense of the situations of uncertainty and uniqueness which he may allow himself to experience.*” (1991, p.61).

Reflective Practice is now seen as a requirement for professional development in the social, health and welfare fields. Its value is also becoming better understood in business as a method of helping managers develop and become more effective.

Reading

Barsky, A., (2000), *Conflict Resolution for the Helping Professions*, Wadsworth/Thomson, Belmont, CA

Lang, M., Taylor, A., (2000), *The Making of a Mediator; Developing Artistry in Practice*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco

Schön, D., (1991), *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, Arena, London

Smith, P., Action Learning and Reflective Practice in Project Environments that are Related to Leadership Development, *Management Learning Quarterly*, Vol 32, NO. 1, 2001.

The keys to Reflective Practice

1. *A commitment to developing self-awareness*
2. *The ability to listen without judging, self and others*
3. *Curiosity about one’s work*
4. *Willingness to challenge the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of perceived wisdom*
5. *Openness to change in the light of experience*

Aspects of Reflective Practice

- *Growing self-awareness*
- *Sense of purpose*
- *Congruence (walk the talk)*
- *Adaptability (responsive to changing need)*
- *Commitment (to ongoing personal change)*
- *Conscious decision-making.*

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