

Self reflection is like looking into a mirror and describing what we see. It is a way of assessing oneself, my own ways of working and how I study. To put it simply ‘reflection’ means to think about something. In experiential learning and internships, the real learning comes after the work term when I have an opportunity to think about what I saw and experienced. Reflecting back about the experience is a key to learning and it is definitely not a new idea. In fact, a famous lesson from Confucius around 450 B.C. illuminates the importance of active engagement and real time experiences in learning:

**“TELL ME, AND I WILL FORGET.
SHOW ME, AND I MAY REMEMBER.
INVOLVE ME, AND I WILL UNDERSTAND.”**

It is through reflecting about the actions at work and the concrete experiences that will lead me to recognize the experience has forged a new way of thinking about the classroom theory. An abstract concept worked through in a real situation, as an immediate need, will change the participants. Reflecting and composing a piece of self reflective writing is becoming an increasingly important element to any form of study or learning.

Why is self reflection important?

Reflecting helps me to develop my skills and review their effectiveness, rather than just carry on doing things as I have always done them. It is about questioning, in a positive way, what do I do and why do I do it and then deciding whether there is a better, or more efficient, way of doing it in the future.

In any role, whether at home or at work, reflection is an important part of learning. We wouldn’t use a recipe a second time around if the dish didn’t work the first time would we? We would either adjust the recipe or find a new and, hopefully, better one. When I learn, I can become stuck in a routine that may not be working effectively. Thinking about my own skills can help me to identify changes that I might need to make in future.

Reflective questions to ask myself:

- **Strengths** – What are my strengths? For example, am I well organised? Do I remember things?
- **Weaknesses** – What are my weaknesses? For example, am I easily distracted? Do I need more practise with a particular skill?
- **Skills** – What skills do I have and what am I good at?
- **Problems** – What problems are there at work/home that may affect me? For example, responsibilities or distractions that may impact on study or work.
- **Achievements** – What have I achieved?
- **Happiness** – Are there things that I am unhappy with or disappointed about? What makes me happy?
- **Solutions** – What could I do to improve in these areas?

Although self reflection can seem difficult at first, or even selfish or embarrassing, as it does not come naturally. When I will find it, it will become easier with practise and the end result could be a happier and more efficient.

Kolb's Model

Kolb's experiential learning theory works on two levels: a four-stage cycle of learning and four separate learning styles. Much of Kolb's theory is concerned with the learner's internal cognitive processes.

Kolb states that learning involves the acquisition of abstract concepts that can be applied flexibly in a range of situations. In Kolb's theory, the impetus for the development of new concepts is provided by new experiences.

Kolb's experiential learning style theory is typically represented by a four-stage learning cycle in which the learner 'touches all the bases':

1. Concrete Experience - (a new experience or situation is encountered, or a reinterpretation of existing experience).
2. Reflective Observation of the new experience (of particular importance are any inconsistencies between experience and understanding).
3. Abstract Conceptualization (reflection gives rise to a new idea, or a modification of an existing abstract concept).
4. Active Experimentation (the learner applies them to the world around them to see what results).

Effective learning is seen when a person progresses through a cycle of four stages: of (1) having a concrete experience followed by (2) observation of and reflection on that experience which leads to (3) the formation of abstract concepts (analysis) and generalizations (conclusions) which are then (4) used to test hypothesis in future situations, resulting in new experiences.

Team work and group

Effective communication and teamwork will help a business maintain a positive work environment. Effective communication also permeates throughout all areas of business operations, because a positive workplace means happier employees are interacting with the public and with consumers. Effective communication among business teams begins with leadership that sets clear methods and standards. A key component of communication is listening to what others say. Provide the team with ways to speak to leaders. This includes having open-door policies to address issues. It also includes having tip boxes, debriefings on projects and having team-member surveys. Don't allow these to be superficial or symbolic communication opportunities. Include all feedback into consideration, and take action, as required. Effective communication starts with top leadership, and then it trickles down to every level of the team. Executives and managers need to hold themselves to the same standards. This includes seeking feedback, celebrating successes and addressing obstacles

and establishing personal action plans. Team members often mimic behavior -- good or bad -- of leadership.

A group is a collection of individuals who coordinate their individual efforts. On the other hand, a team is a group of people who share a common team purpose and a number of challenging goals. Members of the team are mutually committed to the goals and to each other. This mutual commitment also creates joint accountability which creates a strong bond and a strong motivation to perform.

Without purpose and goals you cannot build a team. The purpose must be worthwhile and create a sense of doing something important together. The goals must be challenging and specific so that each member can understand how they contribute to the success of the team. A well-defined strategic plan outlining the purpose, values, goals and objectives of the team becomes the glue that binds the group together and helps transform them into a team. Participation in developing that plan helps to build understanding, consensus, and commitment. As a leader, you use the plan to set expectations for individuals and the team as a whole.

Trust

Trust forms the basis for all relationships and interactions. It is just as important in professional relationships as it is in personal ones. A company that is able to create a strong sense of trust in the workplace is better able to weather the storms thrown up by the competition and have a clearer vision of what the company stands for. Successful businesses are built on relationships that is, relationships between employers and employees, staff and customers, internal stakeholders and external stakeholders. At the foundation of all relationships is trust. When trust is broken, it is extremely hard to repair. When employees feel they can't trust leadership they feel unsafe, like no one has their back, and then spend more energy on self preservation and job hunting than performing at their job.

Lack of trust reduces transparency and communication. Reduced transparency and communication leads to low innovation and lack of agility and responsiveness to changing conditions. When employees lack trust in leadership they often avoid communicating with them out of fear of retaliation – or simply because they feel that they can't trust leadership to be transparent with them so why bother returning the favour. To achieve maximum employee performance, employees need to promptly and transparently communicate any potential problems or concerns to leadership. Without trust, this is not likely. Problems can go unaddressed and impact bottom line profits. Talent acquisition costs and employee turnover costs increase.

Without each party trusting one another the ability to come to an agreement or consensus on an issue is always going to be compromised. If a workplace is able to foster a strong sense of trust within their organisation they can see a number of benefits including:

- Increased productivity amongst staff
- Improved morale amongst employees and staff
- The ability to work more effectively as a team, rather than individuals
- Reduce the time to make and discuss key issues as each individual trusts in the judgement and expertise of their colleagues.

Trust is built through actions not words. As a Manager or Leader in an organisation one can't just say to "trust" a particular employee or team. He needs to show that your actions will earn

you on the daily basis. In addition to the trust shown to my team I must also enable trust to flow between my employees, teams and departments. Following aspects helps me to build the trust at my work place:

- ◆ Empowering staff to “own” their day to day responsibilities.
- ◆ Allowing teams to make decisions and put together their own proposals that they believe benefit the business.
- ◆ Being open and transparent on key decisions/ changes to business process or procedure.
- ◆ Refrain from treating anyone or any team more favourably than another. Call out success when it is warranted by doesn’t anyways focus. The attention on one particular person or team.

Finally I should understand expectations of my employees from me. It is easy for a lack of trust to develop when an employee feels as if an employer has unrealistic expectations of them and they don’t believe they are ever able to achieve the objectives set for them.

AN EFFECTIVE TEAM

An effective team has a number of ‘building blocks’ in place. The building blocks of an effective team are as listed below:

Clear objectives: There are mutually-agreed aims and objectives, and everyone has a clear understanding of these.

Balanced roles: There is a good balance of skills, abilities and aspirations. Team members have a clear understanding of each individual’s role in achieving overall team objectives.

Effective processes: There are good processes for making, communicating, implementing and reviewing decisions. There are effective information systems and co-ordination of resources.

Good communication: Meetings are productive and there is effective communication up, down and across the organisation.

Appropriate leadership: The team trusts the team leader and feels that it is led in an appropriate way.

Support and trust: People help each other by listening, evaluating, offering ideas, encouraging experimentation and giving support.

Openness and conflict: People express themselves openly and honestly. There is a willingness to work through difficult situations or conflict constructively.

Mutual co-operation: There is a readiness to be involved and committed. Individuals’ abilities, knowledge and experience are pooled and used by the team. There is acceptance of each others’ strengths and weaknesses.

Individual development: ‘Mistakes’ are faced openly and used as a vehicle for learning. Individuals are given opportunities to develop new skills and experience.

Sound inter-group relations: The team enjoys good relations with other teams, departments and agencies, each valuing and respecting the other.

Regular review: The team regularly reviews its performance and goals and alters its priorities and practice in the light of review.

References:

Boud, D., R. Keogh, and D. Walker, eds. 1985. *Reflection: turning experience into learning*. London: Kogan Page.

Burkill S., D. Corey, and M. Healey 2000. *Improving students' communication skills in geography*. Cheltenham: Geography Discipline Network, Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education.

Daniels, T.D. & Spiker, B.K. (1987). *Perspectives on Organizational Communication*. Dubuque, IA: W.C. Brown Publishers.

Honey, P. and A. Mumford 1992. *The manual of learning styles*. Maidenhead: Peter Honey.

Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development* (Vol. 1). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Kolb, D. A., Rubin, I. M., & McIntyre, J. M. (1984). *Organizational psychology: readings on human behaviour in organizations*. Prentice Hall.