

The art of reflective practice

Christine K. Champion

Purpose

This exercise aims to develop independence and resilience. As the 21st century kicks in, we live in a frenetic, action-oriented society, where there are continuous interruptions, and little opportunity for standing back and thinking, or indeed for effective listening – the counterpart of thinking. We are bombarded with information and data from all sides and the challenge is how to make sense of this proliferation of information in order to identify and drive forward the changes that may be required. Often, quick, decisive fire-fighting actions can be taken to the detriment of the longer-term situation. So, it appears that there is little opportunity or indeed encouragement for the activity of reflective practice in business settings. But how can individuals change their behaviours and begin to take time to engage in reflective practice in order to learn from experiences and to take more effective actions for the future?

Description

Reflective practice can be defined as the practice of stepping back to contemplate the meaning of events for ourselves and others. The process illuminates experiences and can provide insights into the basis for considered future actions. Reflective learning is a journey that challenges and questions practice and the established ways of thinking within individuals and organizations. The process encourages frank and

open discussions and debate which surface the social, political and emotional aspects of organizational interactions, some of which may be blocking operating effectiveness.

This strategy is especially useful in high testosterone environments where action counts and there is no time to think.

Process

The coach takes the client through a four-stage process to reflect in a structured manner on a recent event or a key issue.

1 Subjective recall of the event – or issue

The first stage is to ask the client to provide an account from their personal perspective as to what happened:

- What was the event?
- Tell me more about it.
- What did you think/feel?
- How did you react?
- What was it like for you?

2 Objective description

The second stage is to challenge and ask the client to describe the facts, hard data and other information and to view the event from a third-party perspective:

- What is really going on here?
- What are the facts?
- Really?
- How might you reframe your earlier statements?
- What does this look like from other key people's perspectives?
- How else might you view this with all this further hard information?

3 Critical analysis and evaluation of the event to support the critical thinking part of the process

- So what is the key meaning in this for you?
- What are the social, political, emotional aspects?

- What stands out for you?
- How do you make sense of all this?

Pitfalls

None.

Bibliography

Schön, D. (1987) *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.