The Discipline of Reflection

‘Reflective approaches to management learning focus on the process of self discovery and questioning that leads managers to develop a comprehensive view of managerial practice’

Kayes 2002
What is Reflection?

- Reflection is an indispensable part of every learning cycle.
- Matters even if you are only trying to grasp a topic by making mental connections between information and experience.
- Is crucial if you are working with the meaning of learning because you are trying to change behaviours and assumptions about how you tackle activities and problems.

Involves:

- Critical thinking about how goals, methods, knowledge and experience affect interpretation, meaning and outcomes.
- Critical evaluation of the limits of concepts and knowledge when applied to specific contexts.

The complete learning cycle

*Kolb and Fry 1975*
Where in the cycle do I start?

- There are four places you can start. It depends whether you are trying to

1. Become more self aware by imagining events to see possible new meanings
2. Make sense of events and assess the suitability of actions in the current context
3. Think back on events, review knowledge and experience to better understand their meaning for you,
4. Stand outside the situation to work with the meaning of your personal practice and style with a view to transforming it in the future

It depends on what you are trying to achieve. *Kolb and Fry 1975*
What do you want to achieve?

1. Become more self-aware by
   - Defining for yourself the outcomes you want to achieve given your specific context and needs
   - Considering what you know already and how your current practice will fit with the demands of the situation

-The reflecting forward phase

Kolb and Fry 1975
What do you want to achieve?

A process of becoming more self aware

2. Make sense of what is going on by

- Checking the relevance of your understanding to the current situation
- Questioning your own role and contribution
- Finding better ways to achieve your goal

The reflecting during phase
Kolb and Fry 1975
What do you want to achieve?

A process of becoming more self-aware
A process of making sense of events and action

3. Thinking back on events and input and what they mean
- How they fit with other knowledge
- Who the key stakeholders were
- Why did something happen as it did

The reflecting backwards phase
Kolb and Fry 1975
What do you want to achieve?

A process of becoming more self-aware
A process of making sense of events and action
A process of thinking back on events and what they mean

4. Stand outside the situation to review your managerial practice and style with a view to changing it.
What are you reflecting on?

External knowledge input and how it fits with your context
Your own feelings and assumptions
Your behaviours and attitudes
Your beliefs and values

Your experience has layers like an onion
What are you reflecting on?

- External knowledge input and how it fits with your context
- Your own feelings and assumptions
- Your behaviours and attitudes
- Your beliefs and values

How do they shape your learning, before during and after an event?

Your experience has layers like an onion

Reflection is about analysing and questioning how each layer shapes the way you are and what you might become in the business context.
What are you reflecting on?

External knowledge input and how it fits with your context
Your own feelings and assumptions
Your behaviours and attitudes
Your beliefs and values

How do they shape your learning, before during and after an event?

And how does your experience intersect with the beliefs and values of others
the behaviour and attitudes of others
the feelings and assumptions of others
the way others receive knowledge

Your experience has layers like an onion

Reflection is about analysing and questioning how each layer shapes the way you are and what you might become in the business context.

Reflection is also about considering how the way your meaning making creates ripples that intersect with the meaning that others make to affect the collective outcome.
Reflecting forward?

- Do a mental audit of what you already know about a situation, and who is involved – *we often know more than we realise*
- Ask yourself
  - What does the situation mean for me
  - How are your emotions (e.g. fear, excitement, boredom, etc.) likely to affect what you notice?
  - How will all these things affect how I make sense of the situation?
- Skim any materials you have and create a mind map of the major concepts
- Consider who in the group you may learn from, and how you might react to their style
- Identify what you want to focus on, where you have knowledge gaps and what elements may be difficult for you to get to grips with
- Plan a strategy for learning
Reflecting during learning?

- Watch your thoughts and actions, listen to your own conversations, and notice what you are feeling.
- Evaluate these sensory inputs as you are experiencing them.
- Think critically about how they are affecting your learning plan.
- Ask yourself:
  - What are the connections between events, experiences and what you know?
  - What are the risks of actions and what can be done about them?
- Adapt your approach to make sense of the changing needs of the situation, by using alternative strategies either from your knowledge base, past experience or by negotiating new understanding in dialogue with others.
Reflecting after learning?

- Ask yourself
  - How does what you have learned relate to what you knew before?
  - How does it change how you interpret things?
  - Does it feel emotionally right?
  - How can you integrate these new ideas into your reasoning for the future?
  - What difference will that make?
‘Meta’ Reflecting?

- Stand back from the whole experience and ask yourself
  - Where was experience similar to my original plan; where was it different?
  - What did I find easiest to learn and why?
  - What did I find most difficult to learn and why?
  - What does this tell me about my approach to learning?
  - What must I change to improve for the future?
  - How can you change your biases?
  - What will I do differently?
What is the value of reflection?

• It increases what you notice
• It helps you make better sense of information and events
• It makes material more meaningful
• It builds real expertise
• It can change your view of the world

• Moon 2010

Reflection is the means through which people develop relationships between what they know and value and the learning in which they currently engage
Thorpe 2000

Reflection should enable learners to express doubt, uncertainty and awareness of contradictions
Boud and Walker 1985

Reflection is a means of monitoring our own learning, both what we know, how we know it, and the process through which we learn
Thorpe 2000
Now is a good time to start practising

- What are the three most important things that struck you during this session?
- Relating them to your business context, how might you make best use of them in changing the way you approach decisions?