

# Chapter 11

## Reflection as a Process From Theory to Practice

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Over the years, the education system in India has been following a surface approach to learning that is characterised by lecture-based classroom teaching and rote learning. However, there is a growing clamor for intersection of theory and practice in the field of management education. A shift in focus from a teacher-centric approach to a student-centric, learning-focused approach is required. There are many learning models that enable students to develop their cognitive abilities and to learn from experience. Several of these models are based on the practice of reflection. Reflection as a process is meant to facilitate self-awareness in the context of practice. This chapter aims at understanding the significance of reflection. It also proposes to throw light on the practice of reflection as understood by students and the role of the instructor in creating a learning environment in which reflective learning is facilitated.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Global boundaries, markets, customer demands, technologies, products, processes – all seem to be in a constant state of flux in today's dynamic business environment. There is considerable debate about the efficacy of the pedagogy used in developing and training management students to take on the mantle of being effective managers in this challenging and ever-changing business milieu (Boyatzis, Cowen & Kolb, 1995; Mintzberg, 2004; Raelin, 2009). Several researchers have critiqued that management education has become chain-bound by narrow vocationalism where functional and technical competencies are overemphasized at the cost of experiential learning which is an integral ingredient for the holistic development of a business manager (Reed & Anthony, 1992; Albert & Grzeda, 2015). It has been observed that management graduates often display analytical detachment and methodological elegance to the detriment of insight that comes from hands-on experience (Hayes & Abernathy, 1980; Inamdar & Roldan, 2013).

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Researchers in the field of pedagogic practices like Hill (2003) and Raelin (2009) argued that learning by doing i.e. experiential learning where “concrete experience is the basis for observation and reflection” (Kolb, 1984, p.21) is really what managers need, to be effectual in today’s dynamic business arena. There is a growing clamour for intersection of theory and practice in the field of management education and a shift in focus from a teacher-centric approach to a student-centric, learning-focused approach. It has become imperative to address this issue by engaging in a deeper approach to learning. This can be done by laying emphasis on higher order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation which allow students to achieve enhanced levels of cognitive processing through transformative learning.

Thus, students of business management need to hone their cognitive abilities, learn from experiences and develop skills to question their mental models and underlying assumptions. This would enable them to develop new models and theories which are more relevant and *au courant* in terms of their current practice and thus, undergo transformative learning. Transformative learning is a deep-rooted, structural shift in basic foundations of thought, feelings, and actions (Mezirow, 1998). The pedagogical concepts of double loop learning, experiential learning and metacognition are important building blocks for attaining these transformative learning goals.

Double loop learning involves correction of errors by questioning the framework of learning systems and accordingly changing the governing values which underlie actions (Argyris, 2002). Experiential learning is based on the notion that experiences contribute to understanding and learning (Kolb, 1984) and metacognition (Flavell, 1979) involves thinking about one’s own self and the attendant assumptions and mental images that underlie the thinking. A key aspect of transformative learning involves engaging in critical reflection of one’s experiences and the underlying assumptions which leads to a change in one’s meaning schemes and perspectives (Mezirow, 1998). Thus, at the core of all of the above mentioned pedagogic concepts is the practice of reflection.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **The Significance of Reflection**

According Dewey (1933), an early pioneer of this precept, reflection can be defined as “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends” (p.9). Reflection as a process is meant to facilitate self-awareness in context of practice and encourage students to think critically. Further, reflection facilitates self-actualization and encourages the development of new knowledge and theory. In a dynamic environment where behaviour has to change on a continuous basis to adapt to the challenges of the situation at hand, reflection is “fodder for self-regulation” (Scott, 2010, p.432).

Daudelin (1996) defined reflection as “the process of stepping back from an experience to ponder, carefully and persistently, its meaning to the self through the development of inferences.” Reflection is directly connected to learning since it aids students in drawing inferences from events and experiences which form the basis of future actions. Page & Meerabeau (2000) elaborated on this idea when they advocated for reflection because “various taken-for-granted elements of every day practice can be unearthed, made visible and considered for professional scrutiny.”

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