Reflection as a Process From Theory to Practice

Sonia Bharwani
Indian School of Management and Entrepreneurship, India

Durgamohan Musunuri
Bhavan's Usha and Lakshmi Mittal Institute of Management, India

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).

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."

Reflection, as such, refers to the practice of examining and analysing an experience, in the form of thought, feeling, or action, and ascribing meaning to it to glean its cognitive essence while it is happening or subsequently. Mezirow (1998) considered critical reflection as key instrument by which one could question the validity of one's world views. He suggested three types of reflection based on their roles in transforming meaning schemes and perspectives: content reflection, process reflection, and premise reflection. The role of reflection in the students' learning cycle in transitioning from theory to practice and back to theory cannot be over-emphasized. Several researchers and academics have through their expositions clarified the meaning and utility of reflection in going beyond the surface approach to learning. Equally interesting is how practitioners i.e. teachers and teacher educators use the process of reflection to foster deep learning or life-long learning and improve teaching (Fry, Ketteridge & Marshall, 2009).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Over the years, the education system in India has been following the surface approach to learning (Manikutty, 2010) which is typified by lecture-based classroom teaching, rote learning and an intention to merely complete the task at hand, with limited emphasis on critical thinking, active learning and collaborative learning. Cross-cultural studies comparing learning styles of students across countries show that in India, reflective practices and structured reflection are not widely prevalent concepts in mainstream professional education (Jaju, Kwak and Zinkhan, 2002) which could be attributed to the country's collectivist culture with a high degree of power distance and authority acceptance (Manikutty, Anuradha & Hansen, 2007). Hence, there is almost no research about the use and the efficacy of reflection as a learning tool in the context of Indian management education. This research paper endeavours to bridge this research gap by mapping the Indian management students' perception of reflection and the value they place on reflection as an instrument of learning and continuous development in their professional and personal pursuits.

Related Content

I-Rough Topological Spaces
Boby P. Mathewand Sunil Jacob John (2016). *International Journal of Rough Sets and Data Analysis (pp. 98-113).*
www.irma-international.org/article/i-rough-topological-spaces/144708

Ethics and Engagement in Communication Scholarship: Analyzing Public Online Support Groups as Researcher/Participant-Experiencer
Mary K. Walstrom (2004). *Readings in Virtual Research Ethics: Issues and Controversies (pp. 174-202).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/ethics-engagement-communication-scholarship/28299

An Efficient Image Retrieval Based on Fusion of Fast Features and Query Image Classification
Vibhav Prakash Singh, Subodh Srivastavaand Rajeev Srivastava (2017). *International Journal of Rough Sets and Data Analysis (pp. 19-37).*
www.irma-international.org/article/an-efficient-image-retrieval-based-on-fusion-of-fast-features-and-query-image-classification/169172

A Sentiment Analysis Model Based on Attention Map Convolutional Network
Wanjun Changand Shaohui Ma (2024). *International Journal of Information Technologies and Systems Approach (pp. 1-16).*
www.irma-international.org/article/a-sentiment-analysis-model-based-on-attention-map-convolutional-network/348658

Usability Evaluation of Tourism Icons in India
Rajshree Tushar Akolkarand Ganesh D. Bhutkar (2018). *Encyclopedia of Information Science and Technology, Fourth Edition (pp. 4099-4112).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/usability-evaluation-of-tourism-icons-in-india/184117