

## **BRINGING LEADERSHIP HOME - THE VALUE OF REFLECTION AND OBSERVATION IN DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP**

by Dan Archer

*'We are fragmented into so many different aspects. We don't know who we really are, or what aspects of ourselves we should identify or believe in. So many contradictory voices, dictates, and feelings fight for control over our inner lives that we find ourselves scattered everywhere, in all directions, leaving nobody at home. Reflection then helps to bring the mind home ... yet, how hard it can be to turn our attention within! How easily we allow our old habits and set patterns to dominate us! Even though they bring us suffering, we accept them with almost fatalistic resignation, for we are so used to giving in to them.'*

*(Rinpoche (1992))<sup>1</sup>*

Emotional intelligence is firmly on the leadership agenda. Whether it is a new development or just a reworking of the study of groups and human relations is debatable<sup>2</sup>. What is undeniable is that the work of Daniel Goleman, a leading writer on the subject has led to the emergence of a number of ongoing studies that, with some degree of success, seek to link the elements of emotional leadership with the qualities of leadership identified by prominent writers in leadership over the past 18 years<sup>3</sup>. His work also highlights links between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership<sup>4</sup>. Goleman links self-awareness (emotional self-awareness and self-confidence), self-management (self-control, transparency, adaptability, achievement, initiative and optimism), social awareness (empathy, organizational awareness and service), with relationship management (the ability to inspire, influence, develop others, initiate change manager conflict and be a teamworker and collaborator)<sup>5</sup>.

Also firmly on the leadership agenda is a radical swing away from placing the emphasis on the leader at the top of the organization, to 'leaderful organizations'<sup>6</sup> that develop concurrent, collective, collaborative and

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<sup>1</sup> Rinpoche (1992) quoted by Johns, C. (2002). *Guided Reflection – Advancing Practice*. Blackwell Science.

<sup>2</sup> Archer, T. D. (2003). *Emotional Intelligence: Group Relations by Another Name?* Service Fellowship Paper.

<sup>3</sup> Higgs, M. J. *Leadership and Emotional Intelligence: Heathrow Hype or a Valid Contribution to Understanding Leadership Today*. EIASM Conference Paper 16/17 December 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Kupers, W., and Weibler, J. (2002). *The Relevance of Emotions and Emotional Intelligence for Effective Transformational Leadership – A Critical Analysis*. EIASM Conference Paper 16/17 December 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Goleman, D. (2002). *The New Leaders: Transforming the Art of Leadership into the Science of Results*. London, Little, Brown

<sup>6</sup> Raelin, J. A. (2003). *Creating Leaderful Organisations – How to Bring out Leadership in Everyone*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

compassionate leaders at every level; and 'quiet' leaders<sup>7</sup>, the people who are not high profile champions of causes but individuals who care deeply about what they do and move patiently, carefully and incrementally seeking out what is right for their organizations, for the people around them and also themselves. 'Successful leaders' are not discreet individuals; independent of any system of social relations, but the success of 'leadership' is thus a consequence and not a cause of collective action<sup>8</sup>.

At the centre of leadership development is recursive learning, where the steps of learning do not unfold in a smooth orderly way, but rather follow a sequence, with each step requiring a different amount of effort and time. In taking the first of those steps, understanding the self, the ability to learn through reflection, is critical. It is like looking in a mirror to know what you actually are now, how you act, how others view you, and what your deep beliefs comprise, and then acting accordingly by realising strengths, identifying gaps, building the strengths whilst reducing the gaps by experimenting, practising and continually repeating the process.

### SCOPE

In this paper I intend to track the emergence of reflective practices in the development of leadership, outlining examples of reflection in leadership development. Next, I will look at how reflection fits with the theory of learning and outline the role of self-awareness in reflective practice. I will subsequently emphasise the importance of observation, and psychoanalytic observation in particular in order to increase self-awareness before outlining how reflection can be assessed and evaluated. Finally, I will develop a model of reflection for leadership development based on a model used for structured reflection used in training medical professionals.

### THE EMERGENCE OF REFLECTION PRACTICES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF LEADERSHIP

At the 1<sup>st</sup> International Conference on leadership research, the use of reflection, in one form or another, was a common theme that underpinned many of the papers in the workstreams that comprised leadership development, business and management, and emotional and transformational leadership. Similarly, references to the use of story telling<sup>9</sup> in leadership development were common. Facilitators draw out why students feel the way they do about the stories (stories that are usually very recent ie that day, and relevant) and use debates to draw out how experiences shape understanding. Other methods of reflection include the use of video, personal exercises and role playing, discussion of past experiences and critical events, leadership case studies (eg Shackleton's 1914-16 Arctic expedition) and invite visiting speakers, who,

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<sup>7</sup> Badaracco, J. L. (2002). *Leading Quietly – An Unorthodox Guide to Doing the Right Thing*. Boston Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press.

<sup>8</sup> Wood, M., & Gosling, J. (2003). Unpublished Paper.

<sup>9</sup> Buhanist, P., & Seppanen, L. (2002). *Transformational Teachership in Leadership Training*. EIASM Conference Paper 16/17 December 2002.

interestingly, are rarely taken from business but have included choir leaders, film producers and theatre directors. Additionally, the importance of rhetoric in leadership has been highlighted<sup>10</sup> as being an important component of being able to produce a compelling vision of a future desired state of affairs.

The significant link between leadership and learning is highlighted by Kempster,<sup>11</sup> who, drawing from the work of Yukl, Bennis, Kotter and McCall, outlines the significance of experience and critical incidents to the development of leadership; the key features of which are assignments, hardships and notable people rather than formal training. Kempster suggests that there are 3 fundamental categories of leadership skill: knowledge, social judgement and creative problem solving and that significant episodes can create insights into a watershed between the cumulative perspective and new transformational learning.

Reflection is also at the core of the International Masters Programme for Practicing Managers (IMPM), the brainchild of Henry Mintzberg and Jonathan Gosling and run on a modular basis at 5 universities, all in different countries, and spanning 3 continents. In *Educating Managers Beyond Borders*,<sup>12</sup> they highlight how learning occurs where concepts meet experience through reflection, and the whole programme, from the classroom layout, the use of leadership exchanges between modules and the adoption of the reflective mindset throughout, embraces the concept of reflection in leadership development. Out of the IMPM the concept of leadership exchanges has been developed<sup>13</sup>, which uses the concept of pairing people in leadership positions to observe each other and in so doing reflect on how they feel about the others actions. I will highlight some of the models of reflective learning later in this paper, and I have also undertaken an extensive review<sup>14</sup> on the potential of leadership exchanges in the Ministry of Defence.

Other examples of reflection in leadership development includes the use of storytelling in transforming motivational speakers<sup>15</sup>, describing one's own

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<sup>10</sup> Gahmberg, V. Narrative (2002). *Leadership-A Semi-narrative Research Approach*. EIASM Conference Paper 16/17 December 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Kempster, S. (2002). *How Leaders Believe they Have Learned to Lead: An Examination of the Lived Experience of Leadership Development*. EIASM Conference Paper 16/17 December 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Mintzberg, H., & Gosling, J. (2002). *Educating managers Beyond Borders*. Academy of Management Learning and Education; Vol 1 **1** 64-76.

<sup>13</sup> Western, S., & Gosling, J. (2002). *Pairing for Leadership: Leadership Exchanges and the Hope for Learning*. EIASM Conference Paper 16/17 December 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Archer, T. D. (2003). *Leadership Exchanges in the Ministry of Defence*. Service Fellowship Paper.

<sup>15</sup> Sadowsky, J., & McLoughlin, I. (2002). *The Power of Storytelling in Leadership: The Case of Tim Bilodeau and Medicines for Humanity*. EIASM Conference Paper 16/17 December 2002.

experiences in becoming a manager<sup>16</sup> and studying other leader's lives<sup>17</sup> by reflecting on the leaders' self-concepts, values, traits and behaviours and thus creating stories that enable leaders to lead and exert influence on followers, and to discover events and circumstances that contribute to the development of leadership traits and skills. Such approaches stress that learners can become engaged within the classroom by acknowledging that students can learn as much from each other as from their professors, and that reflection is not an individual experience but, as Mintzberg and Gosling describe 'has to be collective, to expose prejudices and blind spots, and to provide a platform for articulating ideas and aspirations'.

The use of reflection within leadership development, however, should come as little surprise given its adoption as a learning tool in many other areas of development. Indeed, a new generation is emerging from our education system that has adopted reflection as an integral part of its secondary reporting system through reflective personal statements. Further, reflective practice through the review of critical incidents has become the cornerstone of the training in the medical profession and for nurses and paramedics in particular. Additionally, it is also being used in some areas of police training.

The predominance of the use of reflection in the training of nurses has brought with it a number of studies on the role of reflection in learning from experience. Described as 'a process of reviewing an experience of practice in order to describe, analyse and evaluate and so inform learning from practice'<sup>18</sup>, reflective practice underpins the training of not only the nurses themselves, but also the learning of those involved in the training process including dedicated teachers, mentors, coaches and even managers. From the outset, however, I think that it is important to clarify the different meanings ascribed to reflection. Burns and Bulman<sup>19</sup> draw the distinction between reflection used by asking nurses to recount their experiences by researchers to uncover the concepts of expert nursing (a phenomenological approach used to enable the researcher to gain new understandings), and reflection used as a learning medium. Reflection is a simple idea used in ordinary and educational life. On the one hand, it can be a loosely used concept, easily assimilated into spontaneous everyday action. On the other hand, it can be a complex, difficult to explain and perplexing phenomena.

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<sup>16</sup> Parker, M. (2002). *Becoming Manager, or, The Werewolf Looks Anxiously in the Mirror, Checking for Unusual Facial Hair*. EIASM Conference Paper 16/17 December 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Parker, M. (2002). *Becoming Manager, or, The Werewolf Looks Anxiously in the Mirror, Checking for Unusual Facial Hair*. EIASM Conference Paper 16/17 December 2002.

<sup>18</sup> Reid, B. (1993). 'But we're doing it already!' Exploring a response to the concept of reflective practice in order to prove its facilitation. *Nurse Education Today*. **13** 305-9.

<sup>19</sup> Burns, S., & Bulman, C. (2000). *Reflective Practice in Nursing*. Oxford: Blackwell Science.

## THE THEORY KNOWLEDGE AND REFLECTION

A grasp of the epistemological (human knowledge) perspective taken personally, collectively as a profession, or adopted by others is important because these perspectives show how knowledge is sought, developed, appreciated and indeed, why one view of knowledge might deviate from another view. People's way of pursuing the truth affects how and why they reflect, what the outcomes of the process of reflection might be and the language they use to portray it. For example, the person who believes in absolute truth pursued through deductive reasoning will reflect in a logical analytical way in order to make a correct decision using words like 'reliability' and 'generalisability'. This logical reason is a form of reflection we appreciate as a perception held by many but, it could be argued, is limited by its nature. For example, Schon<sup>20</sup> argues, acknowledges and accepts uncertainty and subjective experiences as valid. Indeed, his thinking is suited to solving simple problems in contrived situations, rather than the complex, urgent and often surprising problems that practitioners deal with in practice. Furthermore, people taking the technical rational view do not give credit to the practitioners' demonstrated intellectual agility in practice. Schon<sup>21</sup> also suggests that knowledge is embedded in every day artistry and practice, in clever things done 'on the job' and yet is typically so difficult to describe in normal language and, to the frustration of positivist scientists, impossible to control.

The benefit of moving away from a positivist approach to a more constructivist approach is ably demonstrated in Western and Gosling's<sup>22</sup> work in the development of leadership exchanges. In constructing the model below, they describe how some participants use the exchange to learn from practice in a non-linear way. They chose (or found themselves) in a new and different or turbulent environment. From facing turbulence and a starting point of 'not knowing' and being bewildered, the observer is immediately confronted with the opportunity of learning something new. Some participants when confronted with this experience were able to engage and use it, whilst others retreated to a safer place that put them back into safety and control. They likened it to a group of tourists visiting a very different culture on a foreign holiday. Some would stay in the tour group and observe the culture from a safe place, never venturing out alone. Others would go out alone after building up some confidence and then would experience something culturally richer. A minority of others would leave the tour group immediately, taking a backpacking approach and throw themselves into chaotic and new experiences, revelling in the excitement of discovery. It is from being immersed in the difference that they learn and reflect.

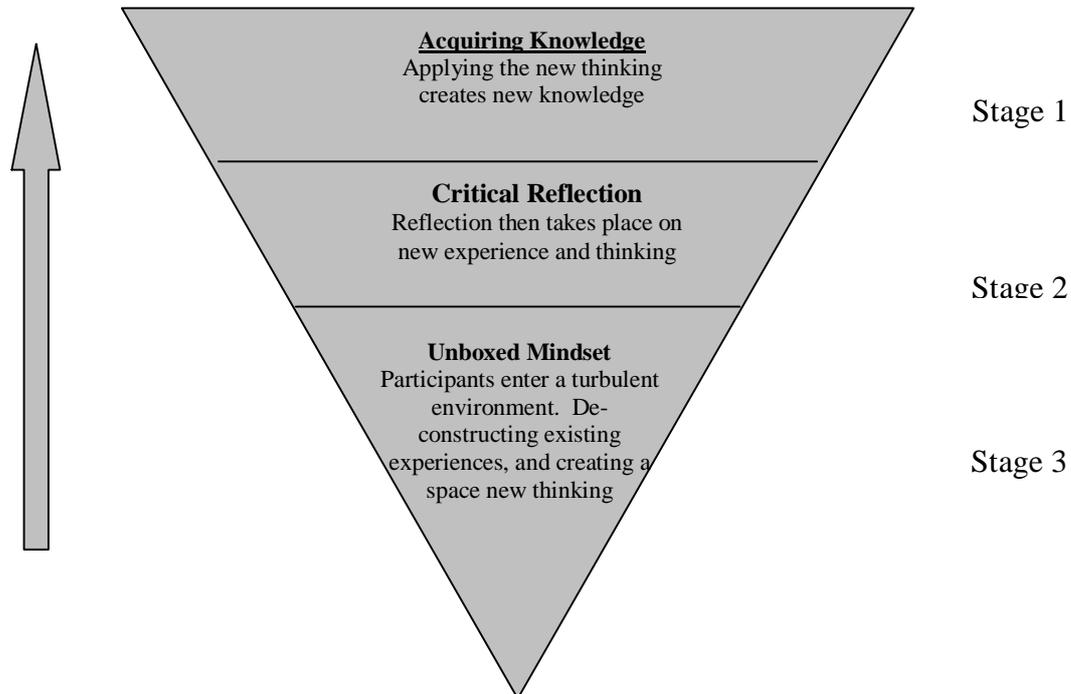
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<sup>20</sup> Schon, D. (1987). *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass

<sup>21</sup> Schon, D. (1983). *The Reflective Practitioner*. San Francisco: Basic Books Harper Collins.

<sup>22</sup> Western, S., & Gosling, J. (2000). *Learning from Practice*. British Academy of Management.

## Non-linear Learning



*Learning from practice* Western and Gosling 2000

Argyris and Schon<sup>23 24</sup> have developed the idea of 'theory in use' and the notion of the student '*extraordinarily re-experiencing the ordinary*'. They propose that practitioners choose their actions with due consideration for the particular situation and use theories generated from their repertoire which is made up of experience, education, values, beliefs and past strategies. Often these theories are implicit in spontaneous behaviour and surface only upon reflection on performance, or when the person is confronted with a problem in practice, and has to think deliberately which course of action to take. Their theory suggests that, with practise and experience, action learning can take place instantaneously. Specifically, they believe that it is possible to encourage reflection in action and improve the practitioner's ability to identify problems in the social milieu (enframe problems) and attend to the relevant surrounding stimuli in order to deal with these problems immediately. While problems are not usually the same as on previous occasions, the skilled practitioner is able to select, remix or recast responses from previous experiences, when deciding to solve the problem in practice. Thus, the reflective process affords flexibility and realism when compared to many technical rational approaches in which espoused theories, those talked about away from the

<sup>23</sup> Argyris, C., & Schon, D. (1974). *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

<sup>24</sup> Argyris, C., & Schon, D. (1978). *Organisational Learning*. Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley.

arena of practise, are expected, but cannot hope to accommodate all the complications that arise in practical situations.

Schon's techniques for learning from reflection incorporate a healthily sceptical view (so necessary for critical thinking) of phenomena encountered in the educational process and encourage consideration of other options. It is a broader perspective that incorporates the student's search for a broader understanding of the social world and the way that this broader context affects them. Learning through reflection can be a laborious and deliberate process that does not just occur or come into ones head on the way home. The thoughts on action or observations need to be carefully articulated, either verbally or, preferably, in writing, which needs to be built into the training programme or learning experience (such as managerial exchange). Significantly, there is a view<sup>25</sup> that, as the learning is linked to past experience and an intellectual ability to cope with autonomy, reflection is a learning technique that is particularly suited to those who have a rich and diverse background and have held a number of different positions in organisations. It is a process of gradual self-awareness, critical appraisal of the social world and transformation and, thus, can be an uncomfortable process for some and, therefore, in the training of nurses<sup>26</sup> it is considered essential that professional support is required in reflective practice, and most work with trainers and mentors who should not only understand the process of reflective leaning, but also be trained accordingly. This is a particularly important point because, as I will discuss later, it is critical in preparing managers for exchange, shadowing or placement and also in subsequently making sense of their learning and transferring it back to the workplace.

While there has been limited research into the effectiveness of reflection, its use in the training of nurses has given some insight into its worth. Durgahee<sup>27</sup> surveyed 110 nurses of whom 50 were interviewed to elicit whether the students valued the reflective process, and what the impact of reflective practice was in their learning. The researchers conclude that 'the educational experience has enhanced powers of clinical reasoning ... through narrative framing of critical incidents, questioning and interacting, students accumulated cues and patterns which facilitated cognitive reasoning'. Of particular note when comparing the training of nurses with managers undertaking exchange, is the findings of Smith<sup>28</sup>, who believes that the process of critical reflection reveals power relationships, particular interests and distortions that compound the particular practical situation under scrutiny. He argues, that individuals who use critical reflection on their actions, as a method of understanding their work, are akin to

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<sup>25</sup> Garrison, D. (1991). Critical Thinking and Adult Education: a concept model for developing critical thinking in adult learners. *International Journal of Lifelong Learning*, **10** (4), 287-303.

<sup>26</sup> Burns, S., & Bulman, C. (2000). *Reflective Practice in Nursing*. Oxford: Blackwell Science.

<sup>27</sup> Durgahee, T. (1996). Facilitating reflection: from a sage on stage to a guide on the side. *Nurse Education Today*, **18**, 419-426.

<sup>28</sup> Smith, B. (1990). The critical approach. In Smith, B., Connole, H., Speedy, S. & Wiseman, R. *Issues and Methods in Research Study Guide*, South Australian College of Advanced Education, Adelaide.

researchers generating theories. The process of learning to learn from experience is as important as the end product of the learning, namely an ability to view a phenomenon from a new perspective and translate that knowledge into action. Additionally, my own research into exchanges suggests that the reflective and comparative nature of exchange is an exceptionally powerful learning experience that more than backs up Westerns and Gosling's model of learning from practice.

### SELF-AWARENESS IN REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

A common theme for those involved in reflective practice is the need, to varying degrees, for underlying skills in order to become more self-aware. The link between reflective practice and emotional intelligence is stark. The need to attend to feelings and attitudes (in particular making use of positive feelings and dealing with negative feelings) through self-awareness is highlighted in Boud's analysis<sup>29</sup> of the reflective process. Similarly, if one takes Mezirow's<sup>30</sup> concept of reflectivity, it is clear that self-awareness is integral at all levels. Moreover, the link between reflective practice and critical thinking is crucial in that the former involves an affective dimension, and that acknowledging and analysing feelings is an important and fundamental part of the process. This has been supported by the studies of Brookfield<sup>31</sup> and Wallace<sup>32</sup> that explored nurses' critical thinking processes in practice. The findings of both studies suggest that acknowledgement and analysis of feelings and attitudes (an emotional component) is important if the critical outcome of critical thinking is to have a positive effect on learning and development (and through that patient care). It is reasonable, therefore, to draw the same conclusion for managers in general, and that identifying and challenging assumptions, and imagining and exploring alternative ways of thinking and acting, are key activities undertaken during the critical analysis phase of the reflective cycle.

To be self-aware is to be conscious of one's character, including beliefs, values, qualities, strengths and limitations. Burnard<sup>33</sup> distinguishes between the inner self, how one feels inside; and the outer self, the aspects of what other people see, including verbal and non-verbal behaviour. Self-awareness is the foundation skill upon which reflective practice is built. It underpins the entire process of reflection, because it enables people to see themselves in a particular situation and honestly observe how they have affected a situation, and how the situation has affected them. It also helps them analyse their feelings, an essential

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<sup>29</sup> Boud, D., Keogh, R. & Walker, (eds) (1985). *Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning*, London: Kogan Page Ltd.

<sup>30</sup> Mezirow, J. (1981). A critical theory for adult learning and education. *Adult Learning*, **32** (1), 3-24.

<sup>31</sup> Brookfield, S. D. (1987). *Developing Critical Thinkers: Challenging Adults to Explore Alternative Ways of Thinking and Acting*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

<sup>32</sup> Wallace, D. (1996). Experiential learning and critical thinking in nursing. *Nursing Standard*, **10** (31), 43-7.

<sup>33</sup> Burnard, P. (1992). *Knowing Yourself: Self-Awareness Activities for Nurses*, Harrow: Scutari Press.

component of self-reflection. It is evident from the influential work of Mezirow and Boud outlined above that it is the use of self awareness and self or personal knowledge that differentiates reflective learning from other types of mental activity, for example logical thinking and problem solving.

In some ways, self-awareness is hard to avoid; as self-interest is part of human nature. However, developing an honest self-awareness is more complex. It is natural to want to portray ourselves in a favourable light, and its desire, together with our own prejudices and assumptions, can sometimes interfere with our ability to take a more objective look at ourselves. Being honest about one's self requires courage, confidence, a degree of maturity and, I would suggest, the support of others that makes a facilitator, coach or mentor vital in the manager exchange programmes. Moreover, to maintain an appropriate level of self-awareness in the work situation, reflective practice requires substantial effort and mental energy. One is often dealing with deeply held values and strong feelings that may be uncomfortable and anxiety provoking. While at times it may be easier to avoid the process, it is important to bear in mind that identifying and releasing one's feelings, both positive and negative, is generally better for a person, providing that the time and the place is appropriate. This latter point is absolutely critical in most work situations not least in the military. Accordingly, while a degree of personal insight and awareness is necessary to engage in reflective practice, it is also important to recognise that too much negative introspection and analysis can have an adverse effect. There is therefore the need to maintain the right balance in any situation.

### SYNTHESIS THROUGH OBSERVATION

In addition to self-awareness, other key skills include the ability to observe, describe and, subsequently, critically analyse our observations. The latter involves identifying and illuminating existing knowledge of relevance to the situation, exploring feelings about the situation and the influence of these identifying and challenging assumptions made, and imagining and exploring alternative courses of action. Core to the foregoing, and perhaps the opposite of analysis, is synthesis, the process or result of building up separate elements, especially ideas, into a connected and coherent whole. Synthesis<sup>34</sup> is about being creative and, in reflective practice is the ability to integrate new knowledge, feelings or attitudes with previous knowledge, feelings or attitudes. This is necessary in order to develop a fresh insight or a new perspective on a situation and therefore learn from it. The skill of synthesis is necessary in order to achieve a satisfactory outcome from reflection. This may include clarification of an issue, the development of a new attitude or way of thinking about something, the resolution of a problem, a change of behaviour, or a decision. Such changes may be large or small and new knowledge may potentially be generated, and original or fresh ways of approaching problems or answering questions may be developed. Synthesis involves making choices with regard to relating new ideas to

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<sup>34</sup> Burns, S., & Bulman, C. (2000). *Reflective Practice in Nursing*. Oxford: Blackwell Science.

one's past beliefs and values. This is not necessarily an easy process and may seem like trying to fit a square peg into a round hole, depending on the potential scope of the adjustment. Not choosing to incorporate new ideas is choosing to maintain the old. This is not necessarily right or wrong and changing old ideas should not be done indiscriminately. The important point is that the choice is an informed decision.

### THE ART OF OBSERVATION

Observation is a specialised or refined form of perception and, as such, it involves interpretations of the environment, selection and emphasis of relevant features, and suppression of others, according to inherited and learned patterns<sup>35</sup>. All conscientious observation (of organizations or whatever) must therefore steer a course between the over employment of existing guides (which may vary from prejudice to sophisticated hypotheses), and their over-zealous suspension (which could end in incoherence); between over attachment to the expected and over commitment to the unexpected. In practice this is often a zigzagging or tacking course between phases in which gratification of the wish for certainty, security or knowing is delayed, and ignorance is tolerated, and other phases during which rein is given to the work and play of ideas: theorising, guessing, analysis, inspiration. Movement between these phases may be consciously attempted but may also occur (or find itself inhibited from occurring) more spontaneously. It could be argued that observation, strictly, consists of the first of these phases. Observation would thus be a process, or a state of mind, waiting to be exploited, harvested or applied.

When observation is applied to human systems further features arise from the inevitable involvement of the observer in the system being observed. The paradigm of the detachment between subject and object breaks down conspicuously. The awareness of being observed often produces changes in those being observed. People behave differently when they know they are being looked at, or that an interest is being taken in them. Indeed, to be affected by awareness of oneself as the object of another may be fundamental to human existence. Lacan<sup>36</sup> speaks of the subject as being constituted by the gaze of others. This has political ramifications, amongst others, since to be 'regarded' in a certain way, due (say) to membership of a particular group, can be defining, empowering or disempowering.

In any organizational setting, the meaning of looking and being looked at will be tellingly disclosed in the observer's treatment by the system under observation. Where the role of the observer is taken up in a formal way, where the task of observation is not compounded by other tasks, and where verbal and other interactions with those being observed are therefore kept to a minimum, the system may attempt in various ways to assimilate this unfamiliar role and task to become closer to those they

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<sup>35</sup> Definition taken from *Authority, Anxiety and 'Insidership': A Psychoanalytic Observational Study of a Fire Station* Unpublished paper

<sup>36</sup> Lacan, J. (1997) *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

know. This may both be driven by, and expressed through, anxiety, to do with scrutiny itself, or the uncertainty and change of a new person and role. Naturally, what form this takes is a rich source of subtle information about a particular systems 'repertoire' of roles, which may be unspoken and unconscious, and the emotional values associated with them. Information of this kind may be detectable by any other means than unstructured observation, whether formal or exercised within a consultancy or research role.

There is a further aspect of the treatment of an observer by the observed that requires mention and which also takes us closer towards considering what psychoanalytical observation is. It can be seen that in displaying an interest in what unfolds around them, observers are inviting communication about the experiences of those whom they observe. Lawrence<sup>37</sup> and Moylan<sup>38</sup> considered that an important part of this communication takes place unconsciously in the form of projective identification which, depending on the emotional climate and (for instance) the level of emotional deprivation within the system, may consist of unwanted experiences which are made to be felt by the observer instead of those within the system on a more permanent basis. The observer who wishes to be able to make use of this kind of information must clearly attend to their own experiences as to that which surrounds them. There is therefore the need to 'calibrate' the subsequent assessment of this data, a need that can be met through a combination of accumulated experience, detailed and open discussion with colleagues, and personal therapy.

### PSYCHOANALYTIC OBSERVATION

All psychoanalytic work is grounded in observation. Moreover, through the work of Miller et al<sup>39</sup> outside the clinical situation, a genre of psychoanalytic observation has grown up in the work of infant observation. This has given experience and data, which form part of the background of psychoanalytic observation of organizations.

A psychoanalytic orientation can inform both of the 'phases' of observation described above. The suspension of the wish for understanding and the toleration of ignorance are not confined to psychoanalytical technique but are nevertheless one of its hallmarks, especially in a situation that can lead to high anxiety. Attention to the observer's own involvement in the system being observed always follows naturally (if not easily) when such a technique is applied. However, as in the clinical psychoanalytic setting, boundaries of time and role are made clear and are adhered to.

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<sup>37</sup> Lawrence, J. (1989) 'Looking' at work', in F.Gabelnick and A.W.Carr (Eds), *Contributions to social and political science: Proceedings of the first International Symposium on Group Relations, Keble College Oxford, Jul 15-18 1988*, Washington D.C.: A. K. Rice Institute, 1989, pp 99-104.

<sup>38</sup> Moylan, D. (1994) 'The Dangers of Contagion: Projective identification processes in organisations', in A.Obholzer and V. Roberts (Eds), *The Unconscious at Work*, London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 51-59.

<sup>39</sup> Miller, L., Rustin, M. and Shuttleworth, J. (1989) *Closely Observed Infants*, London: Duckworth.

When it is underpinned by a psychoanalytic orientation, the subsequent 'work and play of ideas' is governed by an assumption that human behaviour and experience are inherently meaningful and communicative, including where this might not at first appear to be so. Everything that is observed and felt, is therefore, open to interpretation. The 'play' of ideas may resemble the analyst's free associations and the attention of the analyst. The selection and emphasis which are characteristic of this 'phase' of observation are nevertheless not absent, for theoretical models which have proved useful elsewhere in disclosing unconscious meaning and processes are also held in mind (indispensable ones might include transference and counter transference, project identification and defences against anxiety or conflict). When applied to an organizational setting these might be related to a repertoire of organizational variables such as task, leadership, followership and authority.

### SELF OBSERVATION AND IDENTITY

Traditionally, identity has been understood as something deeply entrenched in the individual, as the core dispositions marking out the singularity of an individual, as the innermost attitudes and feelings, which can only be exposed by freeing the individual of all social forces. To acquire an identity thus, meant not to construct but to find one's true self. Put differently, identity resembles more the territory than the map<sup>40</sup> and the construction process from the inside out as well as the other way around, from the individual to the social and from the social to the individual. Identity can therefore be seen as the outcome of a self-referential process of self-observation<sup>41</sup> in which individuals try to determine who they are by continually fixing certain characteristics onto themselves and thereby draw a distinction to the environment. But individuals never come to see themselves directly, but only through reactions of others to their behaviour. Accordingly, it is important to see identity as an outcome of self-reflexive and social processes at the same time. As much as identity is constructed through self-observation, it is social construction, derived from repeated interactions with others. This has led to the introduction of the terms 'leader identification' and 'follower identification'<sup>42</sup> which refer to the interactive processes involved in creating the leaders or followers situated identities and agreed the process of interaction. Significantly, however, to be effective, these identities cannot be fixed and thus the continued process of self-observation and reflection ensures a continual awareness of that interaction and while there may be stabilisation for periods, it is only a temporary balance between leader and follower, which alternates between phases of commitment and modification.

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<sup>40</sup> Luhrmann, T. (2002). *Identity in the Leadership Process: Reframing the Leader-Follower Interaction from an Identity Theory Perspective*. EIASM Conference Paper 16/17 December 2002.

<sup>41</sup> Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and self-identity*. Cambridge.

<sup>42</sup> Gardener, W. L., & Avolio, B. J. The Charismatic Relationship: a dramaturgical perspective. *Academy of Management Review*, 23(1): 32-58.

## ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION OF REFLECTION

If a manager is going to learn effectively from any form of interaction in forms of leadership, then it is important that he or she is able to make sense of the experience and thus assessment and evaluation techniques are required to aid that process. Assessment strategies include verbal assessment strategies where another person who stimulates reflective learning through questioning on a one to one basis. Equally, this approach can be taken within a group and has the advantage of broadening the degree of experience. However, it can have a constraining effect, particularly when it comes to sharing feelings and emotions. The use of reflective diaries is increasing as keeping a diary preserves space for reflexive activity and enables individuals to more readily articulate the subtleties of what we do. Durnahee<sup>43</sup> notes a variety of benefits including promoting the instigation of purposeful observation, scrutiny of role, progression of focusing on professional issues, more questioning and increased confidence development of critical thinking. However, diaries are usually individual and private and the idea of assessing them is problematical. Reflective essays and case studies, which enable individuals to make the connection between 'real' practice and available theory are relatively simple methods that can also be used. Finally, the use of critical incident analysis, where an individual utilizes an incident (positive or negative in its impact), reflects upon it and subsequently analyses it, is a widely used method. A good example of the use of the critical incident technique is given by Smith and Russell<sup>44</sup> who outline a framework as follows:

- Give a concise description of the incident (which relates to the learning outcome). Outline the rationale for choice of incident and its significance and relevance to you.
  
- Identify pertinent issues related to the incident.
  
- Reflect on and analyse the key issues focusing on:
  - Your own involvement, feelings and decision-making.
  - The involvement and roles of others.
  - Identification of any dilemmas or ethical elements.
  - The rationale for action, drawing on relevant theory.
  - Evaluation of the situation and the implications for practice and personal learning.
  
- Conclusion

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<sup>43</sup> Durnahee, T. (1997) Reflective practice: nursing ethics through story telling. *Nursing Ethics*, **4** (2) 135-146.

<sup>44</sup> Smith, A. & Russell, J. (1991) Using critical incidents in nursing education. *Nurse Education Today*, **11** (4), 284-91.

To evaluate the use of reflection effectively, the focus must be on the learner's own development in practice and the impact this has on their role. The key question is how this can be measured. A first step that is valuable is to consider potential outcomes of reflection, as this helps to illuminate potential evaluation criteria. Again, I turn to work that has been used in developing reflection as the basis for nurse education and the work of Boud et al<sup>45</sup>. They suggest that the outcomes of reflection may be both cognitive and affective (pertaining to emotions) and summarise their comprehensive list of outcomes as follows:

- New perspectives on experience.
- Changes in behaviour.
- Readiness for application.
- Commitment to action.

It is acknowledged<sup>46</sup>, however, that the work in this area is, at best, tentative, and that collaborative, large-scale research is needed to evaluate the benefit of reflection. Nevertheless, it is clear that reflection can lead to changes in attitudes, values and behaviour with a deepening understanding of an individual's own learning style and needs, and a positive attitude towards further learning.

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<sup>45</sup> Boud, D., Keogh, R. & Walker, (eds) (1985) *Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning*, London: Kogan Page Ltd.

<sup>46</sup>Burns, S. & Bulman, C. (2000) *Reflective Practice in Nursing*. Oxford: Blackwell Science.

## DEVELOPING A MODEL OF REFLECTION FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

We have seen therefore, the importance of putting some sort of structure around the reflection process. Further, in my paper on the role of the sense maker in leadership development<sup>47</sup>, I stressed the role of a suitably competent facilitator to assist the process by accelerating and deepening the learning experience and the critical role of questioning. In order to develop a model for leadership training I offer the following that is an adaptation of Johns' Model for Structured Reflection<sup>48</sup> used in the training of nurses:

- Write a description of an experience that you associate with leadership that involved you taking action of some kind.
- What issues seem significant to pay attention to?
- How was I feeling and what made me feel that way?
- What was I trying to achieve?
- Did I respond effectively and in tune with my values?
- What were the consequences of my actions on those I was directly interacting with, others indirectly linked and myself?
- How were others feeling?
- What made them feel that way?
- What factors influenced the way I was feeling, thinking and responding?
- What knowledge did or might have informed me?
- To what extent did I act for the best?
- How does this experience connect with previous experiences?
- How might I respond more effectively given the situation again?
- What would be the consequences of alternate actions on those I was directly interacting with, others indirectly linked and myself?
- How do I now feel about this experience?
- Am I now more able to support myself and others better as a consequence?
- Am I more available as a leader and better prepared to respond to the needs of those whom I interact?

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<sup>47</sup> Archer, T D (2003). *The Role of the Sensemaker in Leadership Development* .Service Fellowship Paper.

<sup>48</sup> Johns, C. (2002). *Guided Reflection – Advancing Practice*. Oxford: Blackwell Science.

There is a clear and significant link between reflection, emotional intelligence and leadership, not least through self-awareness and self-control in order to interact with others and manage relationships accordingly. Self-awareness does not come easily and naturally, and leadership development programmes are increasingly adopting a reflective approach through story telling, debate, discussion of critical past experiences and case studies. Equally, taking leaders and managers out of their comfort zone and preparing them to learn from not only those others that they observe, but also from observing themselves, is a powerful medium for learning. Critical to the process, however, is the role of an experienced and appropriately trained facilitator, to guide and deepen the learning.

Learning through reflection can be a long and laborious process and individuals' thoughts on action need to be carefully articulated, either in words or, better still, in writing. However, reflection based on observation and subsequent feelings is often personal by nature and, therefore, can make it difficult to assess and evaluate. Accordingly, research is limited although what little there is very positive about taking a reflective approach and the method has been widely adopted in the training of medical professionals and nurses in particular. The importance of understanding observation and the effect that it can have on the observed is key to the understanding of the reflective process in that everything that is observed and felt is open to interpretation. Accordingly, identity is both an outcome of self-reflexive and social processes at the same time and thus the result of repeated interactions with others.

From a leadership perspective, this has led to the term 'leader identification' and 'follower identification' that refer to the interactive processes involved in creating the leaders or followers situated identities. These identities cannot be fixed and thus the continued process of self-observation and reflection ensures a continual awareness of that interaction with the balance between leader and follower continually shifting. Successful leaders are therefore not discreet individuals, independent of any system of social relations, but the success of 'leadership' is thus a consequence and not a cause of collective action.

Finally, it is considered important to put some sort of structure around the reflective process in order to provide some direction in leadership development, but at the same time allowing individuals to find their own way.

## REFLECTION

We have seen how reflection is a state of mind, 'like a quiet eddy in a fast stream, a place to pause in order to consider the fast moving stream and the way self moves within it'<sup>49</sup>. It is clearly a challenge for most to be able to pin down the theory as to why it is such a powerful tool in the development of leadership, or indeed, any activity that involves human relations. It is clearly easier for some to concentrate on the self, particularly if the self is well defended or strongly bounded by years of set patterns or organizational conditioning. Creating some space for reflection in order to move forward is therefore critical and allows the individual to reconstitute the wholeness of experience, a place to bring the heart home, what the Objway Native Americans call Ain-dah-ing:

*'The gifts waiting for you are many. In the silent place between the (heart) beats, you discover intuitions. Here is where knowledge freely flows. Peace abides in the place of nothing. And insights occur while being quiet. Ain-dah-ing is the place where your heart rests, where your heart connects to the drum of life. Here is where you learn to be capable and self-sufficient. In the home within your heart you will survive.'*

*Blackwolf, & Jones G. (1995).<sup>50</sup>*

### **Author**

This paper was written by Dan Archer, a former officer in the Royal Air Force and was written when he undertook a Service Fellowship at the Centre for Leadership Studies. It is one of a series of papers written in support of a report he produced on the concept of Leadership Exchanges and the critical role that reflection has in the exchange process.

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<sup>49</sup> Johns, C. (2002). *Guided Reflection – Advancing Practice*. Oxford: Blackwell Science.

<sup>50</sup> Blackwolf, & Jones, G. (1995). Quoted in Johns, C. (2002). *Guided Reflection – Advancing Practice*. Oxford: Blackwell Science.

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