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Innovative Reflection Tools for Management Development and Education (Professional Development Workshop)

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Innovative Reflection Tools for Management Development and Education

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Abstract (250-words)

Research continues to support the finding that critical reflection is a foundational aspect in developing management and leadership skills and competencies for individuals of all ages. The purpose of this engaging, innovative workshop is to offer participants a variety of innovative reflection tools that can be used by management educators with college students and other adult learners in various settings. These tools can help learners enhance and develop knowledge, competencies, and skills through enhanced reflective experiences. This workshop will also provide attendees the opportunity to challenge behaviors and practices commonly seen and held within management education. This conversation uses important adult learning theory and demonstrates its vital utility in academics and practice. The PDW will begin with introductions and a session overview, which will outline the session objectives and then explore the following two questions: What is reflection? Why do reflection? Participants will learn about reflection tools, practice using them, and then share their experiences with others in small groups. Hence, a host of tools will be taught, practiced, and discussed. It will conclude with the opportunity for others to share tools, along with a debrief discussion and summary. This workshop can assist educators and practitioners in being aware of the variety of techniques available and give them practice to enhance these skills. Most importantly, they can immediately begin to implement what they have learned into their own settings.

Innovative Reflection Tools for Management Development and Education

Individuals cannot *develop* leadership and management knowledge and skills unless they are receptive to *learning*, and learning is the basis of effective development. Kolb (1984) defined learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 38), and emphasized that learning takes place through reflection on experience. Since developing leadership is a transforming process, transformational learning theory provides a meaningful theoretical lens to direct this workshop. Merriam and Caffarella (1995) suggested that “transformational learning theory is about change—dramatic, fundamental change in the way we see ourselves and the world in which we live” (p. 318). They proposed that this kind of learning is more than merely adding to what we already know. It changes, alters and shapes people. According to Clark (1993, p. 47), “they are different afterward, in ways both they and others can recognize.”

Both Mezirow (1991) and Merriam and Caffarella (1995) contended that transformational learning theory highlights three main components: mental construction of experience, critical reflection, and development and action. First, mental construction of experience is facilitated through engaging with each life experience to make meaning. Through this there is an opportunity for a change in perspective and behavior. Second, effective learning follows effective reflection (critical reflection); learning does not necessarily come from the experience itself as many would argue. To be transformed from learning individuals must not only think about their experiences, but they must also examine the underlying beliefs and assumptions that influence how they make sense of their experiences. Bennis (1989) explained,

There are lessons in everything, and if you are fully deployed, you will learn most of them. Experiences aren't truly yours until you think about them, analyze them, examine

them, question them, reflect on them, and finally understand them. The point, once again, is to use your experiences rather than being used by them, to be the designer, not the design, so that experiences empower rather than imprison.

Third, to truly transform, they need to try out their new knowledge, skills, or roles and then build new competence and self-confidence (development and action). In this transformational learning process, critical reflection (the topic of this workshop) is one of these three core components, and we would argue that it is also a critical component of the human development process as well.

The English word reflection is derived from *reflectere*, “to bend back” – as a mirror bends back the light, making apparent what is otherwise hidden or mysterious (Johnson, 2006). Reflection bends the light of our experiences back into our minds, to consider what the experience was about and what it meant. Reflection is also a critical element in transformational learning opportunities that should be part of effective training, development, and educational experiences. In fact, we argue that effective critical reflection is an important component of all long-term learning, and more specifically management and leadership training, development, and education programs, courses, and initiatives.

Additional frameworks are helpful as educators and practitioners work to help their students and clients effectively reflect toward increased learning. First, the goal of guided reflection toward management and leadership development should be to help individuals make connections between concepts they are learning and their related experiences; they should be able to have concept connections, personal connections, and social/community connections. Research is clear regarding the benefits of reflection particularly in academic service-learning, problem-based learning, and other innovative pedagogies. Reflection can take any number of forms, as long as individuals are required to organize and construct their own understanding of

concepts and related experiences. Questions that help facilitate person reflections can fall into three primary categories (UVU Service-Learning Reflection Guide, 2008):

- 1) Affective – What did you see and how do you feel about the experience?
- 2) Cognitive – How does this connect to the concepts we are learning and the broader social issues or past experiences?
- 3) Behavior – What will you do differently because of the experience?

Second, Eyler, Giles, and Schmiede (1996) argued that there are four key characteristics of high-quality reflection throughout service-learning courses. These can be applied, however, to facilitating reflection in all types of management development and education environments.

These include:

1. Continuous – Reflection is implemented through the course, training, or workshop, not just at the end, but before, during and after.
2. Connected – Reflection activities are directly and intentionally connected to courses, training, or workshop goals and objectives.
3. Challenging – Reflection activities should create an opportunity for individuals to think critically about their experiences.
4. Contextualized – Reflection is meaningful and addresses not just the content of the course, training, or workshop, but also the context around them.

Again, these are a few frameworks that have been helpful in understanding why critical reflection is important and how to effectively increase learning through well-designed reflective experiences.

Session Purpose

The purpose of this engaging, innovative professional development workshop (PDW) is to offer participants a variety of innovative reflection tools that can be used by management educators with college students and other adult learners in various settings. These tools can help learners enhance and develop knowledge, competencies, and skills through enhanced reflective experiences. This workshop will also provide attendees the opportunity to challenge behaviors and practices commonly seen and held within management education. This conversation uses important adult learning theory and demonstrates its vital utility in academics and practice. We have facilitated versions of this session at the International Leadership Association and the Academy of Human Resource Development, and they were incredibly popular. This session would be an updated workshop, but know that educators and practitioners are “hungry” for these types of tools.

Importance to Sponsor

The session is tightly aligned with the MED division. According to the AOM website, “the primary focus of MED is the study of the organization and delivery of management education and management development.” This division seeks sessions that “address the advancement of teaching and learning” through a variety of ways. Providing management educators with tools to improve elements of their teaching is directly aligned with the goals of this division.

Session Description and Format

In this PDW, participants will learn about the reflection tools, practice using them, and then share their experiences with others in small groups. Hence, each tool presented will be taught, practiced, and discussed. Each participant will receive a packet that includes descriptions

of each tool, technique, and activity. This will include references and lists of additional resources. Here is an outline of our proposed two-hour session:

1. Welcome and introductions (5 minutes)
2. Session overview (10 minutes)
 - a. What are the session objectives?
 - b. What is reflection? (flip chart activity)
 - c. Why do reflection? (includes introduction of theoretical framework already described)
3. Reflection tools (90 minutes; each will have a short explanation, opportunity to practice the tool, and duo or trio sharing exercise, and implications to practice discussion; we will decide on a limited number, but have included many options below):
 - a. ORID Reflection Process: Objective, Reflective, Interpretive, and Decisional Data
 - b. What? So What? Now What? (exercise)
 - c. Group Activities (e.g., Concentric Circles, “Gotcha”, Stand and Declare, Fish Bowls, Frierian Fish Bowl, Building Solutions, Block Arrangement Exercise, Readings)
 - d. Journaling Reflection Process
 - e. Journal Activities (e.g., clusters, the Critical Incident, dialogue, different perspectives, and the Fly on the Wall)
 - f. Reflective activities: (e.g., Moods, Body Parts, Quotes, Ball of String, Poem/book, and Brainstorm Groups (linguistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, spatial, musical, mover, mathematical))
 - g. Other tools (ideas from participants)
4. Debrief: overall implications to research and practice (5-7 minutes)

5. Summary, next steps (2-3 minutes)

Conclusion

Through extensive work with reflection processes, we have discovered that most college and university students (particularly undergraduates) and many employees do not understand, take the time, and/or fully engage in a critical reflection process that could assist them in transformational learning experiences. Parks (2000) argues:

Many young adults, even those who are regarded as privileged, are often being cheated in a primary way. They are not being asked big-enough questions. They are not being invited to entertain the greatest questions of their own lives or their times.

Dilworth (2009) agrees:

It takes time and practice to unlock the ability to reflect. The art of critical reflection takes even longer, and some never get there. However, once the impasse is breached and reflection starts to occur naturally and routinely, the individual can feel empowered and in control of their own life. That can be a liberating experience. When the reflection pushes to the deeper levels of self, it becomes possible to jettison dysfunctional assumptions and behaviors. Deep learning can then occur. It can become transformative learning. The individual is elevated to a new plateau of self-awareness. At this point, it becomes what can be called emancipatory learning--throwing off the self-imposed, and frequently externally imposed, chains that have been constraining clear thinking and advance. Reflection in the end is a dialogue with self.

Most developmental courses and programs do not assist participants in developing the skills to learn to reflect at the breadth and depth just described. We argue that it is through a host of reflective tools and experiences that individuals can develop true critical reflective skills and

habits. This workshop can assist educators and practitioners in being aware of the variety of techniques available and give them practice to enhance these skills. Most importantly, they can immediately begin to implement what they have learned into their own settings.

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