Reflective Practice and Organizational Culture: The Perspective of Learning and Development Practitioners

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Agenda

- Scope & Rationale
- Research Questions
- Conclusions and Implications
- Results
- Research Method
## Scope of L&D

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<th>Focus</th>
<th>Key Elements</th>
<th>Organizational Process</th>
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| • How individuals acquire/enhance KSAs for workplace performance improvement | • Organizational efforts  
• Manager guidance, coaching  
• Self-directed learning activities | • Collaborative, expert, ethical stimulation & facilitation of learning & knowledge  
• Support business goals  
• Develop individual potential  
• Respect & build on diversity |
| • Growth toward future occupational roles                              |                                                                              |                                                                                        |
| • Generally subsumed in HRD                                              |                                                                              |                                                                                        |
| • Recognized by SHRM, CIPD                                              |                                                                              |                                                                                        |

(Harrison, 2009; McGuire, 2011; Nolan & Garavan, 2016; Sadler-Smith, 2009)
Anyone whose primary role in an organization is creating opportunities for employee professional growth and development through learning.

Armstrong & Taylor, 2014; Harrison, 2009
Study Rationale

• IF* reflective practice in the workplace is ...
  • integral part of career growth and development;
  • taught in formal academic settings or structured learning settings for novice practitioners; and
  • Dependent upon workplace context for operationalization

• THEN reflective practices of L&D professionals should be studied in actual places of work

*Handout #1: Highlights of the reflective practice knowledge base
But ...

Reflective Practice Research Criticisms
• Inconsistency of definitions
• Focus on Western cultural heritage
• Weak comparability between empirical studies
• Not usable to practitioners
• Impact of organizational culture overlooked**
• Little research on L&D profession

**Handout #2: Supporting a Culture of Learning-Key Constructs
Research Questions

RQ1: What behaviors do L&D practitioners in non-academic workplace settings attribute to their reflective practices?

RQ2: What are the critical factors that support L&D practitioner engagement in reflective practices?

RQ3: Are there any differences between managers and non-managers in their perceptions of reflective practice in the workplace?

RQ4: In what ways do L&D professionals demonstrate the impact of reflective practice on their workplace performance?
Method

Exploratory with Mixed Methods Techniques

**QUANT (RQ 1, 2 & RQ3)**
- Who: 73 L&D professionals
- When: December 2018
- Statistical treatment: Principal Axis Factor Analysis

**QUAL (RQ 1 & RQ 4)**
- Who: 12 survey respondents
- When: January 2018
- How: One-on-one telephone interviews addressing ..
  - Participant’s own understanding of the term reflective practice
  - Reasons for own reflective behaviors
  - Tools and technologies used
  - Perceived impact on job performance
### Survey Respondent Demographics (n=73)

#### Gender
- **Female**: 62%
- **Male**: 38%

#### Industry Sector
- **Private, for Profit**: 21%
- **Healthcare**: 63%
- **Non-profit**: 15%

#### Education
- **Less than 4-yr degree**: 52%
- **Bachelor’s**: 24%
- **Masters**: 13%
- **Terminal**: 11%

#### Employment Status
- **Full-time for an organization**: 75%
- **Independent contractor/consultant**: 18%
- **Part-time for an organization**: 7%

#### Function Level
- **Manager, supervisory responsibilities**: 41%
- **Manager, no supervisory responsibilities**: 43%
- **Non-manager**: 16%

#### Size of Current Organization
- **< 250 employees**: 36%
- **250-999 employees**: 32%
- **1,000 or more**: 32%

#### Highest Degree Major
- **Humanities/liberal arts/social sciences**: 45%
- **General management/business administration**: 39%
- **HR/HRD**: 11%
- **ID/ISD/InstTech/EdTech**: 5%

#### Median # Years in L&D: 11.0

#### Ratio of US Residents to Non-US Residents
- **51:22**
Interview Participant Demographics (n=12)

• Gender
  • Nine females
  • Three males

• Function level
  • Seven managers
  • Five nine managers

• Median yrs in L&D: 9

• Country of residence
  • 11 USA
  • One Canada

• Industry sector
  • Eight professional services
  • Four healthcare, manufacturing, insurance, real estate respectively

• Education
  • Ten with advanced or terminal degrees
  • Two with Bachelor’s degrees

• Highest degree major
  • Eight I(S)D/EdTech
  • Three HRD
  • One social sciences
Survey Results: RQ 1 & RQ 3 – Reflective Practice Behaviors, Managers vs Non-managers

- Nearly all respondents attribute value to critical reflection & extract lessons from challenging workplace experiences’
- Three in four respondents engage in pro-active behaviors
- Managers slightly more pro-active than non-managers
Survey Results: RQ 3 – Perceptions of Organizational Culture, Managers vs Non-managers

- Different perceptions of managers vs non-managers on …
  - Social awareness
  - Collaboration
  - Leaders modeling behaviors
  - Rewards for critical thinking & creativity
  - Supportive infrastructure
- Overall perceptions of culture modest

% Choosing strongly agree or agree (6-point scale)

- Work with outside community: Managers 42%, Non-managers 60%
- Trust building: Managers 51%, Non-managers 50%
- Top management support for L&D: Managers 49%, Non-managers 47%
- Initiative is recognized: Managers 44%, Non-managers 43%
- Collaborative thinking: Managers 46%, Non-managers 37%
- Tools/technologies to share lessons learned: Managers 37%, Non-managers 37%
- People rewarded for learning: Managers 32%, Non-managers 37%
- Leaders seek learning opportunities: Managers 33%, Non-managers 46%
- Rewarded for thinking critically, creatively: Managers 32%, Non-managers 27%
- Systems to measure performance gaps: Managers 23%, Non-managers 42%

Managers (n=43) vs Non-managers (n=30)
Interview Insights on RQs 1 & 3

• Project-based retrospective
  • Schon’s (1983) “reflection-about-action”
  • “Better to reflect with others”
• Character/personality trait: “Thinkers vs talkers”
• Requires “personal/me time”
• Manager perspectives (n=7)
  • Evolves over career lifespan
  • Reflective writing should be “learned early in professional education” to become integral part of professional practice
Survey Results: RQ 2-Critical Factors Supporting Engagement in Reflective Practice

- Affirms the criticality of organizational context, culture
- **Surprise: Separation of personal reflective practices**
  - Factor 2: Solo behaviors
  - Factor 3: Collaborative behaviors, risk-taking
Interview Insights on RQ 2

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<th>Established Culture of Learning</th>
<th>Nascent Culture of Learning</th>
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<td>• I think that everyone that I'm around does the things that I've described, ranging from the personal, taking your own time to think about, to reflect and then also just a very tactical debrief deck and brainstorming sessions. We do an annual meeting with our team auditor, our corporate learning university and much of that time is focused on reflection. We bring in external speakers to talk about what's new in learning or maybe they are talking about generational differences and how people learn and sort of like, how that impacts our business and that kind of thing and we are definitely encouraged to all reflect in those types of settings. Yes, I think our organization is pretty tuned. Most of us come from being consultants and I think as consultants, you're always trying to find the problem to solve, and always trying to fix things and make things better. So I think that is sort of a natural thing that for a lot of people in our business.</td>
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<td>• People need to be reminded. They need to reflect on it. By you saying it again, it will embed that in their brain. They just don't get that. You know what I mean? They don't understand how people learn. So, that was my feedback. He's the vice president so I had to frame it very appropriately. I haven't heard back from him. But I still have a job</td>
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• Perception of reflective practice as two-dimensional
  • Project-based retrospective
  • Personal, introspective – “personal growth, personal to you”

• Bounded by established vs nascent culture of learning

• More “high touch” than “high tech” regardless of organizational technology infrastructure
Interview Insights: RQ 4-
Demonstrating Impact of Reflective Practice on Performance

• Resounding “no”
• Narrow definition of impact as what worked/did not work for a particular project
  • Manager perspectives: Limits of team member experience with/training in reflection
• Rarely integrated into employee performance review process
• Reflective practice not top-of-mind

Manager’s Perspective
• I did a tremendous amount of mentoring, but I didn’t necessarily talk to them about the importance of reflective practice, only because a lot of them didn’t have any kind of instructional design background, so we were kind of starting from scratch. It would have been a good tool though, now that I think about it.

Non-manager’s Perspective
• I don’t think I’ve made an effort to demonstrate that. If I were to explain it to someone or make a case for it, I would probably leverage some of those materials that have been used. So like, okay, we had a brainstorming session, we reflected on how the program went and decided - that allowed us to come up with ways to enhance it at and then compare that to the next program that comes along or the next in narration of it. Maybe there’s a value that we can measure to say like, "There was an improvement so therefore, our reflection and our thinking about how to improve this program was valuable." That is how I would go about it. I don’t—it’s not overt.
Before We Go

- Limited sample
- US-centric
- Grounded in “Western” indicators of organizational culture
- Skewed toward the professional services sector
Conclusions

• “Reflection-about-action” still prevails
• Managers more likely to reflect than non-managers due to roles/responsibilities
• Reflective practice bounded by organizational culture’s support of learning
• Reflection not top-of-mind, conscious
  • No effort to demonstrate impact on performance

Implications

• For teaching/learning
  • Infusion of reflection activities across the curriculum/multidisciplinary
  • Workforce preparation to include reinforcement of reflection as tool for building awareness of organizational context

• For organizations
  • Learning opportunities for managers to coach and mentor using reflection
  • Allow time for reflection in own learning opportunities (employee training, onboarding programs, etc.)