

## **Why we don't reflect and why we should**

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### **A serious problem with a difficult solution**

I knew a senior manager who said to his team 'don't just do something – sit there'. His point was that decisions and actions made after insufficient or typically in business, no reflection or planning at all, often meant problems to follow, and the continual recurrence of costly mistakes. So, sit, think, reflect, plan and improve.

***“All truly great thoughts are conceived while walking” Friedrich Nietzsche.***

This blog ironically will not be read by those it would benefit most, as they are too busy rushing about making poor decisions, stressing people up with their poorly considered directives, and generally behaving as British business likes managers to be – that worryingly confuses activity with productivity, and reflection with doing nothing.

Unless and until we start to value reflection, and become truly reflective professionals, we will blunder on in the way we have done, learning little or nothing from the rich and fertile experiences in which we are immersed, and be only as good as we have been – which isn't saying much.

### **The problem: Imperfect workplaces – discouraging reflection and paying the price**

This country's management classes are largely populated by poorly read (in business terms), 'hurry up' type managers, who have in many ways become like the people they criticised when they had such managers themselves.

***“Follow effective action with quiet reflection. From the quiet reflection will come even more effective action”. James Levin***

Despite the MA and MBA explosion in some sectors I see no real shift towards a truly talent managed workplace where people have an appetite to reflect, to read, to learn. On the contrary, I see a risk averse preoccupation with short term targets, and the devaluing of development, learning and the critical contribution to better practice that would result from reflection in the workplace.

As a result, we tend not to reflect on the things we need most.

We don't like to reflect upon:

- Things we did poorly and must improve upon next time.
- Things that make us feel uncomfortable that highlight inadequacies or weaknesses.
- Things others feel about us of real value, but that would cause anxiety.
- Things we have unconsciously deleted altogether...too much pain.

Trouble is, the hurry up workplace not only discourages reflection, it positively ridicules and thoroughly inhibits this. To get on it seems you must be like others, and join the rush around through making poor decisions and showing no indication of learning from previous bad practice.

Add to that the preponderance of Learning 'professionals' who are by personality and behaviour not models of best reflective practice, nor do they have any real empathy for those with that capability, and problems are compounded. Too many people hide behind profiling or testing to become lazy learners...happily pigeon holing themselves as an excuse for not making efforts to reflect and work on areas in need of strengthening, preferring to stay only with what they do best and most easily.

By the way, thinking and forgetting, or at best remembering fragments of a powerful thought is not reflecting. Reflection need not be deep and meditative but it does require more time and commitment than most are prepared to find – leave the radio off when back in the car after an intense work experience and just think a while...

### **The solution? Well, that's down to you if you can be bothered...**

If we call ourselves professionals we should be recording our reflections as Continuous Professional Development. Being a professional means more than passing an exam many years ago, and recording our learning is the key to maintaining our competence – 'though professional bodies with a few laudable exceptions make this far too easy.

***"In times of change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists." Eric Hoffer***

So, what do we do? Well probably you'll do nothing. What would you gain from conscious reflection, from carefully considered thinking, and of all things the dreaded recording of our thoughts? Well I will tell you as a writer of 1206 A4 learning logs, you would gain a hell of a lot. As for time, we can find the twenty minutes this takes if we are really bothered.

Here is the learning log sheet I have used to hand write my reflections since February 1987. It's not the only or 'best' way, it works for me.

## **Insert learning log template here**

By the way when I first did the Honey and Mumford Learning Styles Questionnaire I was a 19 of 20 activist – so I *know* if you are motivated, you *can* develop a habit of reflection...trouble is most of us *don't* care and *can't* be bothered.

If you don't get in the habit of reflecting on professional practice you will only maintain your current competence and readiness for greater challenges for as long as you are surrounded by equally complacent peers.

So why not do what they will never be bothered to do? Why not get into a habit that will enhance and strengthen your developmental experiences and record your learning from experience?