



Reflecting

Scholars engaged in a cycle of action and reflection. This cycle was a significant factor in the LCDF and its associated activities. Reflective practice is integral for the development of an understanding of the social and cultural context of leadership and of oneself as a leader.

Project Findings

In reviewing and evaluating the activities and experiences that comprise this domain, scholars reported that:

- Personal informal reflection informed their practice the most.
- External commitments and obligations and a perceived lack of time hindered engagement in formal reflective journaling.
- Formal and informal meetings provided an impetus and opportunity for reflection.
- Effective mentoring relationships promoted reflection.

- Reflective dialogue with like minded peers and scholars who had or were encountering similar experiences was highly beneficial.
- Formal reflection occurred more commonly in a group setting (e.g. meeting) than individually.
- The impetus of having to prepare a report or presentation required a degree of reflection.

“Reporting and updating in the various forums on the status of the project requires some degree of reflection that might not other wise have occurred.” (2007 Scholar)

Underpinning Theories and their Practical Application in the Project

Theories of social constructivism and communities of practice underpin this domain. The mentoring and coaching relationships enabled a social context in which scholars could learn about leadership. The practice of reflection was a learning tool utilised in these interactions. The social contexts that were instigated throughout the project included:

- peer mentoring in institutional and cross-institutional meetings and as a consequence of professional development activities;
- mentoring by senior institutional leaders; and
- coaching by senior executive.

The scholars’ evaluations of these relationships reported a range of perceived value. These value perceptions were significantly aligned to the apparent quality of the mentoring and coaching interactions.

Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002), define communities of practice as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise... by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p.4). The scholars who shared a common interest in leadership development engaged in reflective activities to promote their collective learning in the area. The scholars engaged in reflection that focused on exploring and understanding dimensions of leadership practice (Schön, 1983).

In this project scholars engaged in formal and informal, individual and collective reflective activities. Some scholars recorded their reflective thoughts in journals while others were satisfied to just mentally engage in the practice. Strategies for reflecting were incorporated into the formal meetings (i.e. face to face, online, video and tele-conferences) and various other program activities such as mentoring and coaching.

The preparation of presentations and reports were also perceived by scholars as activities that facilitated reflection. Overall the scholars engaged in reflection to some degree and were highly positive in their perception of its value.

Domain 2

Characteristics of Good Practice Drawn from the Interviews with Scholars

1. The overall structure of the project (e.g. ongoing communication, formal meetings, mentoring and coaching) compelled scholars to engage in reflection.
2. Incorporating activities into the formal and informal meetings such as project updates and reports on the successes and challenges encountered by scholars in the implementation of their projects, required engagement in reflection. These activities also provided a springboard for dialogue that fostered deeper reflection.

Key Challenges

Getting engagement from all scholars in the cross-institutional communication particularly in relation to sharing personal reflections.

Problems with online and telecommunication modes (i.e. there were significant problems encountered with the online services used throughout the project to support communication and collaboration across institutions. There were also a number of issues encountered in both stages of the project with the videoconference and teleconference services).

Finding the time to engage in reflective journaling or share personal reflections and musings with the other scholars.

Establishing a network of individuals willing and able to discuss the faculty-based projects and provide feedback to scholars.

Future Considerations

Communication could be enhanced and reflective practices promoted through the use of effective online networking, communication and collaboration tools.

Scholars suggested the need for a range of strategies for reflective practice. It was further recommended that demonstrating multiple ways that reflective practice could transpire (e.g. written, audio, video) would be useful.

Resources developed to enhance reflective practices and activities are available at:
www.uow.edu.au/cedir/DistributiveLeadership

Associated Project Activities

Activity 5: Mentoring and Coaching

Activity 6: Reflective Practice

Activity 7: Cross-Faculty, Institutional and Cross-Institutional Communication and Collaboration

Activity 8: Cascading

References

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Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner*, Basic Books, New York.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press, New York.

Wenger, E., McDermott, R., & Snyder, W. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, MA.

Additional information about social constructivism and communities of practice incorporated in an annotated bibliography is available from the GREEN Website at:
www.uow.edu.au/cedir/DistributiveLeadership