

Reflective Practice *in management practice*: a systematic review

**Dr Rick Holden; Liverpool John Moores University
Vivienne Griggs; Leeds Beckett University
Dr Aileen Lawless; Liverpool John Moores University
Dr Jan Rae; London South Bank University**

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Contact Details:
Dr Rick Holden
R.J.Holden@ljmu.ac.uk

There can be few business schools in Britain that have not been influenced by a discourse holding that reflective practice on behalf of managers provides real value to the organisation in which they operate. Influenced by high profile cases of management failings (both ethically and organisationally) the impact on the management curriculum has been significant. Reflection is now enshrined in most professional and postgraduate management programmes. Anderson (2003), for example, argues that critical reflection is a 'hallmark' of Masters level management education, whilst authors such as Gray (2007) and Reynolds (1998) see a management curriculum embracing reflection as indicative of a more critical curriculum, challenging the traditional, functionalist orientation, with its emphasis on the transmission of knowledge. That reflective practice should feature prominently within the management education curriculum is a position supported by bodies such as the British Academy of Management, the Association of Business Schools, the Association of Management Education and Development as well as many of the quasi professional bodies who purport to promote the education and continuing professional development (cpd) of their member managers (e.g. Chartered Management Institute, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, Chartered Institute of Management Accountants etc.).

However, whilst its significance within the curriculum is not in doubt, the extent to which we have an evidence base upon which educators can draw remains more questionable. Within healthcare, research Mann et al, 2007, suggests that the evidence to support curriculum interventions remains largely theoretical. Helpful models exist but there is "surprisingly little to guide educators in their work to in understanding and developing a reflective capability in their learners" (page 596). To what extent is this the case within management and management education? To what extent, without consideration and understanding of the context of practice, is the rationale for seeking to impart skills of reflection within professional and postgraduate management education, based largely on an act of faith?

In pursuit of answers to these questions and to explore just what relationship does exist between the teaching of reflective practice and the realities of management practice a research enquiry focussing upon a systematic review of the literature has been designed. Put simply we are focusing attention on finding and reviewing research which:

- describes/discusses reflective practice *in practice*
- addresses specifically any link between, and impact of, professional management education and which is located within the management literature. We aim to assess the existing evidence about reflection and reflective practice, its utility in the professional practice of management and the nature and extent of any relationship with professional / postgraduate management education. We anticipate outcomes of value for the reflective management curriculum and its principal advocates within both the higher education teaching profession and more broadly the professional and quasi professional bodies associated with promoting 'good' management practice and cpd.

The review is not without challenge. Mann et al (2007) focused their efforts within healthcare; their focus was doctors, nurses etc. Two of their main sources of data were the Journal of Advanced Nursing and Medical Education. Managers work in all types of organisations, including of course in healthcare. But this makes the search strategy more problematic, requiring more researcher decision making as regards inclusion / exclusion. Whilst we wish to exclude material addressing reflective practice in relation to, for example, nurses, we do not want to exclude data that might relate to hospital managers. A further complication appears in the form of part-time students. Should research addressing reflective practice amongst students studying part-time for their management qualification be excluded?

They are both 'in education' and 'in work'. To what extent is it legitimate to make inferences on the practice of reflective practice and any impact of reflective practice tuition whilst still registered on the programme where reflective practice may be a central curriculum component ?

The enquiry is positioned in the context of a brief review of the conceptual underpinning for reflective practice (for example: Argyris, 1982; Schon, 1983; Kolb, 1984; Reynolds, 1998; Bain et al, 1999; Moon, 2004; Gray, 2007; Boud, 2010). This has informed our search strategy in terms of seeking evidence of theory in practice, what may trigger reflection and the varying levels of reflective practice which might be evident within the day-day, week by week practice of management. Initial forays into published research work, using the likes of ABI/INFORM, Business Source Complete and Emerald, suggests a paucity of material which clearly meets our criteria for selection, suggesting the need to be reasonably inclusive in terms of selection decisions for example in relation to the above issue of part-time students. The research thus far suggests a limited basis of evidence in practice. We might tentatively suggest that even the most conscientious (and critically reflective) of faculty are running partially blind in terms of their decision making on the design and delivery of reflection within the business and management curriculum. The paper will report on the findings in detail. It will rigorously re-visit this initial conclusion. Importantly it will highlight what can be drawn from extant research and in this way inform both existing teaching and the nature of the research which may be required to ensure a more two way research-practice dialogue.

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