

TECHNIQUE CRITICAL REFLECTION

- Critical reflection, or capacity to ponder, is an important part of Ingredient 1
- **Both technology and the pace of our lives have reduced the time for critical reflection or thinking time** and, paradoxically and simultaneously increased the need for critical reflection. Furthermore, work has invaded our private life as technology makes us available 24/7. Critical reflection requires deep, concentrated thinking in an environment of peace and quiet. This environment is not found in most workplaces.
- An important part of critical reflection involves asking the following types of questions
 - i) **What mistakes have I made?**
 - ii) **What did I do well?**
 - iii) **In what areas can I improve my performance?**
 - iv) **What lessons have I learned from the experience?**

Alternatively, to review and reflect on what has happened in the last 12 months, the following questions need to be asked

- i) **What have we achieved?**
- ii) **What has hindered our progress?**
- iii) **What areas need improving?**
- iv) **What have we learnt**
- v) **What have we implemented as a result of our learnings?**
- vi) **What behaviours are desirable and need reinforcing?**
- vii) **What behaviours need to be changed and/or controlled?**
- viii) **What new behaviours need to be learnt?**

Well-respected leaders have used a similar technique. For example, Nelson Mandela would ask his PAs what he had done wrong that day, so that he would not make the same mistake the next day!!!

Or

Use the reaction, learning, results and return framework on an activity, such as training, workshop, project, assignment, etc

- **Reaction**
How do you feel about the activity?
- **Learning**
What did you learn from the activity about
 - **yourself?**
 - **others?**

- your organisation?
- **Results**
What resulted from the activity for
 - you?
 - others?
 - your organisation?

- **Return**

What was the impact on the effectiveness/efficiency of the organisation? Did it add value?

7 Levels of Critical Reflection

- There are **7 levels of critical reflection** and each relates to a particular area of the thinking processes or modes of behaviour:
 - i) Reflectivity** (this demands a high degree of honesty)
 - what perception do you have?
 - what meaning do you give it?
 - what behaviour is involved?
 - ii) Affective reflectivity**
 - are you aware of how you feel about what is perceived or acted upon?
 - iii) Discriminating reflectivity**
 - have you evaluated some of the things that may have determined your perception?
 - have you identified immediate causes?
 - do you recognise the degree of reality and can you identify your true relationship to the situation?
 - iv) Judgmental reflectivity**
 - are you aware of your value judgments: are those well founded or simply prejudices or fears?
 - v) Conceptual reflectivity**
 - are the concepts employed adequate for the judgment?
 - vi) Psychic reflectivity**
 - do you have a tendency to make hasty judgments based on limited information?
 - do you acknowledge the self-interests, self-limitations and worries that influence what you can perceive, think or do?
 - vii) Theoretical reflectivity**

- are you aware that behind any habit of hasty judgment is a set of implicit cultural or psychological assumptions? (Often we need more explicit criteria for effective seeing, thinking and acting.)

Managers need to be aware of what type of reflection is needed at any given stage of a process. They can then give clear guidance to help people know what is expected and what factors are involved. Importantly, they must understand the difference between what is needed to learn a new skill and what is needed to help people understand and integrate new and sometimes confusing personal demands.

This type of reflection can help people understand better what they need to do and how to go about achieving necessary or desired change. It also involves questioning norms and codes in order to ensure a valid interpretation.

Elements of validation include

- Being aware of the beliefs or rules that influence you
- Accepting an interpretation as valid,
- Being aware of whether there is an appeal to authority, tradition or some other outside influence
- Conducting a rational discussion which results in a consensus that your opinion or belief is justified

Reflections can be distorted epistemically, socio-culturally or psychically

- **Epistemic distortions** relate to how we understand the nature and the use of knowledge and prompt the following questions:
 - do you think that every problem has a correct solution, if only we can find the right expert?
 - do you think that most things that have happened are inevitable or unchangeable?
 - do you think these things are beyond your control, because others determine things; eg, the law, government or fate?
 - have you presumed something is true for apparently well-founded reasons, then applied it to a particular situation or person too hastily?
 - do you know the difference between a mental abstract and an existing object? (We can all think of a pink elephant, but that does not make it exist!)
 - do you treat fears or imaginings as facts?
 - is the only proof you will accept an empirically-verifiable one?
 - do you rely on deductive reasoning for most things? Is that the only appropriate approach?
- **Socio-cultural factors relate to assumptions** we make as a result of background. Many of these distortions have been unconsciously absorbed:
 - do you take for granted that the prevailing structures of power and social relationships in society are how things should be?
 - do you have preconceptions about people of particular nationalities that you know influence you when you meet them?

- have you ever asked yourself if these assumptions are valid, or do you know how or why you formed them?
 - do you assume that a particular interest of a sub-group is shared by all members of the group?
 - what is your attitude to unjust social practices, relationships of exploitation, exclusion and domination?
 - do you believe that some of the attitudes and existing power relationships in society are there simply to support the status quo?
- **Psychic distortions** refer to personal beliefs or attitudes that limit our freedom:
 - do you recognise attitudes or phobias in yourself that create unwarranted anxiety and impede action?
 - do you recall certain dramatic events from your childhood that now create fears and aversion to particular people or attitudes?
 - do you still tend to react in ways that your parents taught you without re-evaluating them in contemporary contexts?
 - do you feel anxiety when doing something that is at odds with what your parents taught you, even though you know that your choice is more appropriate?

Any reasonable change in perspective requires a process of informed and honest reflection and involves changing attitudes as much as behaviour.

Obviously behavioural models of change are grossly inadequate, as is undue reliance on instrumental or technical reasoning for the whole process.

Changes in the workplace or educational environment today have to take into account the fact that participants' concerns are not just technical: they are social and personal, and people need to be reassured that their concerns are being heard.

By consciously adopting such procedures, managers can indicate that they are aware of the disruption that is happening in peoples' lives in the midst of the rapid change that often unsettles them.

(sources: Ivan Nurick, 1998; Dale Carnegie, 2003; Lawry Scandar, 1999; Leo D'Angelo Fisher, 2007; Fiona Smith, 2000m)