

Introduction

Welcome to this end of financial year 'information sharing' email. A time perhaps for some reflection?

The inspiration this month comes from my experiences in supporting reflective learning and from comments by clients and colleagues. For example: "we aren't given the opportunity to reflect on ourselves", and "I value these meetings because they're the only time I get a chance to reflect and think", and "we're too busy 'doing' to have time to think".

The next time you feel guilty or concerned about sitting back, putting your feet up on your desk and staring at the ceiling, consider the importance of taking some time out to reflect.

And think about this as you plan on cooking up your end-of-financial-year celebration dinner: don't get the microwave to do it for you, take a few moments out of your day to stay in your kitchen to chop, toss, and stir peacefully and reflectively.

Reflection and leadership development

* Gosling and Mintzberg, in their article "The Five Minds of a Manager" (1) suggest that the practice of managing involves five perspectives, one being 'Managing self: the reflective mindset. Two pertinent quotes from their article: "Action without reflection is thoughtless; reflection without action is passive. Every manager has to find a way to combine these two mind-sets to function at the point where reflective thinking meets practical doing. But action and reflection about what? One obvious answer is: about collaboration, about getting things done cooperatively with other people...", and "These days, what managers desperately need is to stop and think, to step back and reflect thoughtfully on their experiences."

* Hugh Davies (2): "My own view is that competencies are best developed by understanding and reflection, observation of people good in a particular area, and practice. They are built behaviourally: by people modelling their behaviour on that of others seen to be effective."

* Dr Peter Shergold, Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (3): "Dr Shergold says that while he is not sure that leadership can be taught, he is fully convinced that leadership could be learned: 'You learn it, in part, by the process of choosing your role models and mentors and watching what they do, and partly by a process of constant self reflection.'"

Reflection and learning

* Hull and Read (4) indicate that with the bulk of learning taking place on the job, it is important to be able to find time to reflect. There needs to be less demarcation between learning and doing.

* Stever Robbins (5) comments on the nature of modern-day workplace learning. Does the following sound familiar?: "Learning doesn't just happen; it takes reflection and thought. Reflection time used to be built into the world. It took three weeks for a head-office communication to arrive via Pony Express, allowing ample time to ponder and rethink decisions. Now we have overnight letters, junk mail, e-mail, voice mail, fax, cell phones, 30-second-delayed stock quotes, and the expectation that responding *immediately* is far more important than responding thoughtfully. Organizations rarely build in time to do thoughtful learning, and when they do, that time is the first to go when emergencies beckon.". Stever also suggests some ideas to improve workplace learning.

* Kent Siebert (6) considers tools to help cultivate on-the-job learning, and notes "it has also become clear that reflection plays a key role in enabling managers to learn from experience". Siebert writes about coached reflection and reflection-in-action, and considers the five organisational conditions that can support reflection-in-action: autonomy, feedback, interactions with other people, pressure and momentary solitude.

Reflection and ideas

* A recent BRW article (7), linked the importance of taking time out to reflect with creating new ideas: "Most successful people schedule regular time to sit back and think big." The article also looked at the importance of relaxation and lowering brainwaves to help stimulate creativity. Next time you do a menial job around the house, think about this "...[he] has stopped having his lawns mowed so he can do them himself, often mowing them in different patterns. He says it gets the creativity flowing".

* John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid (8) offer up a case study on reflecting as a team: "Orr found that a quick breakfast can be worth hours of training. While eating, playing cribbage, and gossiping, the reps talked work...they posed questions, raised problems, offered solutions, constructed answers, laughed at mistakes..."

References

- (1) Gosling, J. and Mintzberg, H., "The Five Minds of a Manager", published in the Harvard Business Review and also in *The Weekend Australian Financial Review*, Dec 31, 2003 - Jan 4, 2004
- (2) Davies, H., "Moving Up The Ranks Of Management", Management Today, March 2003, Australian Institute of Management
- (3) Jones, R., "Public v. Private" Management Today, February 2004, Australian Institute of Management; <http://www.aim.com.au/DisplayStory.asp?ID=490>
- (4) Hull, D, and Read, V., 2003 "Simply the Best Workplaces in Australia" Working paper 88, University of Sydney, Dec 2003, www.acirrt.com
- (5) Robbins, S., "Organizational Learning is No Accident" , Harvard Business School Working Knowledge May 2003: <http://hbswk.hbs.edu/item.jhtml?id=3483&t=innovation&noseek=one>
- (6) Seibert, K., "Reflection-in-action: Tools for cultivating on-the-job learning conditions" Organizational Dynamics, Winter 1999
- (7) Ross, E., "Imagineers at Work", Business Review Weekly, 12-23 June, 2004
- (8) Seely Brown J. & Duguid P., "Balancing Act: How to capture knowledge without killing it" Harvard Business Review, May-June 2000

About This Article

My aim is to provide you with information to assist you at work, with your own development, and in developing your staff. The theme for 2004 is 'Building Collaborative Workplaces'. Each month I concentrate on an area based on topics raised by my clients. Material is drawn from journals, books, articles and shared experiences.

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