ORGANIZING REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores reflective practice from an organizational perspective, in order to shift the focus in management and organization studies from the individual reflective practitioner towards the organization of reflection. A framework for understanding the organization of reflection is presented, built from four existing theories: critical reflection, public reflection, productive reflection and organizing reflection. The paper argues that reflection is an essential part of the day-to-day life of managers, not a disconnected, separate activity but central, supported by structures and the culture of the workplace, affecting decisions and choices, policies and activities and the politics and emotion associated with them. In this way, being reflective will not be understood as a technique, learned and sometimes applied, but an integral part of what it means to lead and to manage.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we explore reflective practice from an organizational rather than an individual perspective. We are doing this for a number of reasons. We want to shift the focus in management and organization studies from the individual reflective practitioner towards the organization of reflection (Vince, 2002; Reynolds and Vince, 2004b). Specifically, we want to shift attention from reflection as looking 'back' into something past. Earliest interpretations emphasised the importance of reflection in learning, and in particular in learning from experience, as a means of preparation for living and working in a society characterised by democratic values. Later developments placed more emphasis on the role of history and context in influencing an individual's growing sense of identity – including the assumptions and perspectives which they used to make sense of experience and to plan future action. Theoretically and practically therefore, these developments reflect the transition from a purely psychological perspective on reflection and learning, to one in which context and history are seen as factors which shape and influence learning, to the thinking represented in this paper which is of the individual inseparable from history and context, shaping and being shaped by the discursive practices which comprise life and work within communities and the workplace.

The study of reflective practice from an organizational perspective allows us to focus on some key organizational issues. For example, reflection that is undertaken 'in public' with others, inevitably makes authority relationships an integral aspect of the reflective process. This means that accountability within leadership roles is given more emphasis as an integral aspect of reflections in practice. In the context of organizations, reflection in its

different but related aspects should be an essential part of the day-to-day life of managers, not a disconnected, separate activity but integral, supported by structures and the culture of the workplace, affecting decisions and choices, policies and activities and the politics and emotion associated with them. In this way to be reflective is not a technique, learned and sometimes applied, but part of what it means to be a leader or a manager. We believe that organizing reflective practice represents both a critique and a development of reflection in elaborating the practical ways it can be applied.

REFLECTIONS ON THE WORD REFLECTION

The word reflection is a representation of human consciousness, both individual and collective. From a philosophical point of view, reflection refers to 'the process or faculty by which the mind has knowledge of itself and its workings' (OED, 1993: 2521). This process or faculty is bound up in an inevitable and continuous relationship between reflection and action. Therefore, reflection is also defined as 'the action of turning (back) or fixing the thoughts on some subject…' in order to learn (OED, 1993: 2521). Reflection is one of the key building blocks of human learning; it has become established at the core of management and organizational learning; and the relationship between reflection and action has inspired the two most well-known conceptual models in management learning and management education (Kolb's Learning Cycle and Schön's 'Reflective Practitioner').

The philosopher John Dewey is arguably the founding father of our modern conceptualisation of reflection in management learning. For Dewey, thought and action were, or ideally should be, inextricably connected:

> 'Thinking includes all of these steps, - the sense of a problem, the observation of conditions, the formation and rational elaboration of a suggested conclusion, and the active experimental testing' (1916: 151)

Anticipating something of the spirit of the developments we describe in this paper, Dewey conceived of this perspective on learning as of greater significance than a process of problem-solving. His vision was of an educational process which had reflection and action linked at its core, and was the means by which individuals gained 'a personal interest in social relationships and control' - a platform for social change to a more democratic social order and preparation for membership of it (p.99).

Drawing on Dewey's ideas, Lindeman (1947) later developed a concept of learning which recast education as a process of 'utilising knowledge, feelings and experience in problem-solving' (p. 53). For Lindeman, learning though experience complemented other educational methods because it involved the application of ideas and theories at the point where they become necessary in making sense of particular situations, problems or events. As such it provided the basis for subsequent action.

> 'True learning, that is learning which is associated with the problems of life, is a twofold process which consists of knowledge on the one hand, and the use of knowledge on the other' (Lindeman, 1935, p. 44)

Through these authors the meaning of reflection has been refined to signify a process through which we distance ourselves from an event in order to make sense of it, providing a

conscious and thoughtful connection between ideas and experience, past experience and future action. Applied but not limited to problem solving, reflection has been established at the core of learning as a process both of drawing on ideas and developing new ones. To reflect is to make thoughtful and productive use of otherwise un-coded experience (Usher, 1985), a process 'whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience' (Kolb, 1984: 38). Other authors have elaborated different modes of reflection on the experience of events and of and individuals response to them such as recognizing what seems to work and what doesn't; being aware of associated feelings; of judgements made and on what basis; of the ideas, values and assumptions which influence the interpretations made of the experience (see for example Vince, 1998)

The appeal of these ideas in a professional context therefore is in linking learning with action and experience – in contrast with the academic tradition where these can seem disconnected or at least delayed until the benefits of the educational process might be realised in later work experience. This sense of immediacy, of the connection with the practicalities, problems and challenges of work and of the possibilities of learning in and from the experience of work has resulted in the current prominence of reflection-based experiential learning, especially in management development and more recently in organizational learning[2]. The influence of these ideas has become widespread and can be seen in 'structured' activities, where reflection on contrived experience is used to underpin attempts to improve managers' practice, including for example simulations, 'outdoor' management development, group conferences and action learning.

Reflective approaches have proved appealing to professional practitioners because they raise the likelihood of the learning being 'relevant', particularly if they are situated in day to day work experience. Exactly how relevant is open to question. Dehler (1998) argues that the demand for relevance, however understandable, is one way in which the practice of management is rationalised through the insistence on practical solutions to felt problems (p. 85). Dehler's point is that such a response is only of short term value compared with one which embraces the tensions inherent in the complexity of organizations. He argues that ready 'solutions' tend to deny such tensions, and through this they deny access to the emotions and politics that both promote and limit learning in organizations.

The challenge for the academy is the assumption that learning based on experience might be regarded with an authority traditionally granted to institutionally legitimized theory and research. This represents a fundamental change in emphasis in thinking about how people learn, one which would appear to respond directly to the perceived shortcomings of the academic tradition. Personal and professional experience assumes validity as a source of learning and of ideas. Such a perspective has provided the basis for the concept of 'self-directed learning' (Knowles, 1984) and for an even more radical possibility, of ideas as co-authored between managers and academics, as well as or even instead of, the more usually assumed hierarchical arrangement between them (Cunliffe, 2001; Elliott and Reynolds, 2002).

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[2] For recent developments in experiential learning in management education see Reynolds and Vince, (2007)

THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Schön's work on reflective practice (1983; 1987) epitomises the characteristics of a theory and practice of learning which is based on re-connecting ideas and experience through reflection. His elaboration of the concept of the 'reflective practitioner' brings to the fore the tacit element involved in learning and in particular the idea that reflection is not only retrospective, but becomes an element of the experience. Schön described this as:

> 'on-the-spot surfacing, criticizing, restructuring, and testing of intuitive understanding of experienced phenomena; often it takes the form of a reflective conversation with the situation' (1983: 241-242).

Schön's early research was influenced by the writing of John Dewey. His subsequent ideas were the result of his study of professionals - which goes some way to explaining why they have greatly influenced the practice of professional education and development. Experience is connected to evaluation during a 'conversation' with the situation in which the person draws on previous understandings, some of which are tacit, which is to say mysterious to both themselves and to others. Schön's concept of the reflective practitioner underpins the development of theory and practice of reflection in ways which emphasise the importance of the organizational context as well as of personal psychology. Schön was critical of the technical rationality which he saw as characterizing organizational problem solving, and which paid insufficient attention to ends as well as means. He wrote of the significance of interrogating the assumptions on which professional practice was based through reflecting on the 'norms' and 'appreciations' which underpin judgments and actions. Thus the practitioner should reflect:

> .... on the feeling for a situation which has led him to adopt a particular course of action, on the way he has framed the problem he is trying to solve, or on the role he has constructed for himself within a larger institutional 'context'. (op.cit. p.62,)

In practical terms this involved both 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action'. The former has been described as 'thinking on our feet'. It involves reviewing experiences, feelings and assumptions in order to create new ways of understanding and acting within a situation as it unfolds. The reflective practitioner uses rather than excludes things that often seem irrelevant to rational processes of problem solving, for example the surprise, puzzlement, or confusion inherent within a situation. Reflection on experience therefore implies a critique of situations, which provides the opportunity to experiment in ways that might produce new understanding or action (Schön 1983). 'Reflection-on-action' is an inquiry process that comes later and involves, for example, the writing up of recordings, reviews of group sense-making, and the formation of themes and/or questions. The expectation placed on the reflective practitioner is to make sense of a situation in different ways. Human actors often take refuge in practiced and habitual ways of thinking and working; in established procedures and familiar approaches. Efforts to see the unfamiliar within the everyday, allows the individual to confront habits and attachments and to change those aspects of working thought and practice that are taken-for-granted. The ability to (e.g.): draw upon a range of metaphors, images and emotions; to engage aesthetically as well as rationally; and to see relational dynamics within situations, allows for the generation of different ways of thinking and acting within practice.

There is little doubt that the idea of the reflective practitioner has made a profound contribution to the ways the theory and practice of reflection has been developed. It often

speaks very clearly to individuals' experience, and particularly in terms of the generative possibilities of making change at work. However, the notion of the reflective practitioner has also been used in unreflective ways by trainers and facilitators in management education and development. The concept has been very widely applied, often in uncritical ways. It is perhaps the critical intent at the heart of the original challenge to technical rationality made by Schön that gets most easily lost. This is not only about the continued dominance of rational approaches to management, but also about the focus of reflection in organizations on individuals' responsibility for their own improvement through reflecting back on situations (Vince, 2002).

In the past decade, through research and increasingly through application, the concept of reflection has been elaborated in recognizably different ways. These developments demonstrate a shift in perspective which re-emphasises the critical and collective dimensions of thought and action in both educational and organizational contexts. In the following section of the paper, we highlight four perspectives that have helped to shift our understanding of reflection beyond the reflective practitioner. These are: critical reflection, public reflection, productive reflection, and organizing reflection. We discuss these both in terms of their implications for theory and for practice.

BEYOND THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Critical Reflection

Although there have always been dissident, if peripheral voices questioning the accepted curriculum within management education, it was not until the 1990s that these gained recognition as a clearly defined movement. Exemplified in the collection of papers published by Alvesson and Willmott (1992) there was a significant shift in emphasis as the dominant theme exercising business school academics of 'what is the best way to do this?' was countered with the question 'but is this what we should be doing?'. The reasons for the growth of this movement, conveniently described as 'Critical Management Studies' (CMS), and the reason why it came to prominence at this time are complex, and as Fournier and Grey (2000) point out, the movement is far from homogenous, both in its theoretical positions and its propositions for practice.

A key element of CMS is the consciousness of the crucial role which managers exercise within society and that, simply refining solutions to technical problems – a 'narrow, instrumental form of rationality' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992: 1) - is not a sufficient objective for management educators. Their role should also be to raise questions about purpose and intent and about the assumptions which underpin organizational structures and practices. Consequently, the practice of reflection is involved with examining organizational aims and processes through ideas and analytical perspectives which are capable of such inquiry. CMS, while still not the dominant discourse in management education, has become an established alternative through writing, research and increasingly practice, and its specific focus on pedagogy is also represented in a growing body of theory and practice as 'Critical Management Education'. Early projects in CME can be seen in the collection of papers by French and Grey (1996) and since then in contributions to *Management Learning* and the *Journal of Management Education*. Perriton (2007) has summarized and critiqued this movement, its origins and influences.

Central to these developments is the concept of 'critical reflection', a perspective through which events, actions and intentions are evaluated and influenced. Critical reflection owes much to previous explanations of the reflective process, but is an approach to questioning which is informed by conceptual frameworks which are social and political. What critical reflection adds is *outward* questioning of discourses inherent in the structures and practices in which professional practice is embedded. For 'critical' management educators, instrumental approaches are seen as providing inadequate support for managers wishing to understand and engage with - materially, morally and socially - an increasingly complex environment.

Critical perspectives which have been applied within management education show a range of influences which include poststructuralist, feminist, Marxist and postcolonial frameworks. Our account in this paper summarises an interpretation which has been shaped more by Critical Theory (Habermas, 1973) as reflected in the fields of management education (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992) and of continuing education (Hindmarsh, 1993). The goal of Critical Theory can be summarised as:

> The emancipatory potential of reason to reflect critically on how the reality of the social world, including the construction of the self, is socially produced and, therefore, open to transformation (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992: 435).

A key element of this perspective, critical reflection entails an examination of social and political 'taken-for-granteds', and of historical and contextual factors. It is emancipatory in that it advocates the examination of purposes, motives and vested interests so as to construct the basis of a more just society in which people have more control over decisions and practices which affect them.

From this position, all generalised observations and prescriptions on social structures and practices are regarded as 'interested' rather than neutral and attempts 'to pass off sectional viewpoints as universal, natural, classless, timeless' are to be questioned (Gibson 1986:172). The theory and practice of reflection is thereby developed in order to examine processes of power and control which may be implicit in taken-for-granted aspects of policy and practice – whether in an organizational or an educational context. In management education, this has implications for both the ideas presented in the curriculum and for other aspects of pedagogy such as educational methods and teacher-student relations (Reynolds, 1998).

The characteristics of critical reflection which distinguish it from other versions of reflection can be summarised as follows:

- The fundamental task of critical reflection is to identify and question taken-for-granted beliefs and values, particularly those which have become unquestioned or 'majority' positions. It is a process of making evaluations, often moral ones, and not simply exercising judgements of a practical, technical nature.

- Critical reflection pays particular attention to the analysis of power relations and relations between power and knowledge. Regardless of the particular perspective a critical approach is based on, it will emphasise the value of questioning and challenging

existing structures and practices – including whether the function of management education is to reinforce existing power relations in organizations or to transform them.

- From a reflexive position, questioning our own practice is important too, entertaining the possibility that research data or established theory are not the only or necessarily the most significant bases for learning. Managers' collective experience has equal validity - particularly if understood critically in ways that highlight its political, emotional and ethical components as well as its conceptual or technical aspects.

- It has been a long-standing criticism of management education that it has been overly influenced by individualistic – chiefly psychological – perspectives. Working, managing and learning involve social and cultural processes as well as their personal and psychological counterparts[3]. A critical approach implies a focus on a collective, situated (contextually specific) process that assists inquiry into actual and current organizational projects and projections. This enables managers to question critically, organizational practices within their specific situation[4].

It has seemed for some time as though these principles were limited to the development of theory. Nor is the approach without some acknowledgment of its limitations and pitfalls (Reynolds, 1999; Perriton, 2004). But there is currently a significant body of examples where critical perspectives are applied to existing practices within management learning such as action-based approaches to learning (Willmott, 1997; Reynolds and Vince, 2004a) and to the development and application of critical pedagogies within postgraduate management programmes (see for example Trehan and Rigg, 2007; Gold et al, 2002).

We can provide an example of an encounter with critical reflection. A professional consultant who had worked in management development for a number of years based her work largely on experiential learning methods. Course participants were involved in practical activities, most of which involved working in groups. The activities, indoor and outdoor, provided the experiences from which, in subsequent reflective sessions, participants learnt about their behaviour and characteristics as group members and leaders. Taking time out in order to deepen her own understanding of her professional practice and ideas, the consultant undertook a period of postgraduate study in management learning. During this programme, which included experience based learning methods supported by critical perspectives, she developed an interest in ideas which placed more emphasis on the classroom as a political arena and on the social discourses which were implicit in her practices as tutor, course designer and facilitator of group activities. She reflected on her own role in unilaterally deciding on the designs in which she involved participants and the parallels in management style she was exemplifying. She became aware of related parallels of course 'groups' and management 'teams' and the way in which apparently participative structures looked less liberal through in the light of ideas which highlighted the potential dynamics of coercion, and the role of the facilitator in the 'surveillance' of group members.

Most significant to the consultant was her reflexive critique of the theoretical basis for her design and facilitation, as well as the restricted range of ideas she was drawing on in her development work with managers. Her initial response was to feel incapacitated by these

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[3] See Kayes (2002) for an extended discussion and critique of these positions.
[4] For a development and application of these principles see Reynolds and Vince (2004a).

insights. What had seemed – in the tradition of experiential learning – to be the natural approach in putting participants into group exercises which would mirror their work experience, now seemed fraught with the possibility that she was reinforcing the hierarchy and coercion she had seen her work as challenging. After an initial period of professional paralysis, her practice was to change as a result of these 'critical' insights as her design and facilitation would reflect a broader platform of informing ideas, ideas more likely to help herself and her participants understand the social and political complexity of groups both on her programmes and at work.

Public reflection

The second approach to reflection we highlight in our model of reflection 'beyond the reflective practitioner', emphasises the transformational potential of collective reflection. In an exemplary paper, Joe Raelin (2001) carefully and clearly outlines the argument for collective reflection. He refers to this as 'public reflection' since it is necessarily undertaken in the company of others, and as a result, creates different inter-personal dynamics of accountability, authority and learning. In this paper he explains why we need reflection in organizations that goes beyond the individual to engage with experience generated collectively, for example, in project teams, internal groups and organizational sub-systems. He gives four explanations of the need to address the relationship between reflection and learning with and through the involvement of others.

First, we are often unaware of the consequences of our behaviour. Public reflection can bring these consequences to our attention in ways that might transform behaviour. Second, there is a gap between what we say we will do and what we actually do in organizations. Public reflection is a necessary part of making this gap both visible and discussable, and in order to make change possible. Third, we are often selective or biased in the information we obtain and/ or communicate. Public reflection allows us to become aware of judgement errors that arise as a consequence of bias and to attempt to correct them. Finally, collectively reinventing the wheel is useful sometimes because prior solutions may not fit with new problems and issues. Public reflection provides an environment within which we can distinguish 'what is measured and critical from that which might be self-fulfilling and self-justificatory' (Raelin, 2001: 15).

Public reflection captures the personal and political complexities of organizational life and asks that they be considered as crucial components in the improvement or even the transformation of policy and practice. For example, while public reflection can bring the consequences of behaviour to our attention in ways that might transform it, there is also the possibility of reinforcing behaviour, of retrenched positions and highly defended individuals. This paradox, that attempts to learn and change can paralyse as well as produce learning and change, is at the heart of an understanding of authority and leadership in context. Public reflection encourages engagement with those others who are similarly caught up in the distinctive political processes that organizations and organizing create, and that continuously shape 'the way we do things here' (Vince, 2004).

The two key components of public reflection are: the willingness of people to confront themselves and to create alternative interpretations of their own constructed reality). Such willingness is the basis of an understanding and practice of authority that is free from individual defensiveness and the regressive political consequences of this defensiveness in

action. This revised notion of authority then provides an emotional base for people to distinguish themselves when necessary from their social context. It provides the necessary political environment for individuals to risk putting forward ideas and suggestions that might not be accepted by their community; to risk isolating themselves in the service of transformation. Public reflection invites the consideration of data 'beyond our personal, interpersonal, and organizational taken-for-granted assumptions'. Reflection 'in public' makes the questioning of assumptions more likely because it acknowledges the role of difference and dissent in improvement.

Public reflection is important because it creates both individual and collective momentum. 'It influences both the environment and also the speaker him or herself' (Kets de Vries and Balazs, 1998: 614), by creating external accountability at the same time as giving public voice to personal intent. It is an approach that explicitly links the impact of organizational politics on the individual – for example, the tendency towards caution and blame (Vince and Saleem, 2004) with the impact individuals can make (collectively) on organizational politics. Thus, public reflection as a learning process 'can help us review and alter any misconstrued meanings arising out of uncritical half-truths found in unconventional wisdom or in power relationships' (Raelin, 2001: 12-13).

An example of reflection 'in public' can be found in Reynolds and Vince (2004a), where we discuss the case of an international utilities company that wanted to revise the way they reflected on organizational bids for contracts because they realised that the knowledge and expertise generated in Bid Teams was poorly linked to improvements in practice. Where bids had failed, reflection was ignored because organizational members did not want to dwell on their failure. Where bids had been a success, organizational members wanted to enjoy their success rather than reflect on it. This was not seen as a failure of the groups themselves to reflect, rather as a failure in the ability of the organization to support reflection as an integral part of the process of bidding for contracts. This raised the question of how the knowledge (about the procedures and dynamics of the bidding process) that was being lost could be recaptured. The company used an action-based approach that was integrated into each Bid Team. All Bid Teams started to include an 'action researcher' (a role taken up by one of the existing members, who received training and support) whose job it was to record the process from beginning to end, to initiate discussions at each meeting on the group's processes and behaviour, and to pay attention to the politics that were having an impact on the team both from outside and from within. It was clear that this approach was not always easy or welcome within teams. Some team leaders thought that the action researchers were being critical of them; it took time for team members to understand that there was more happening in the team than the task at hand; and the action researchers often found it difficult to say what their inquiry had raised, as well as being believed when they did. However, despite these difficulties, the knowledge from both successful and unsuccessful bids was given public voice in the organization. The public expression of this knowledge could assist in the practical task of evaluating the bidding process. It was also a method to surface and examine the assumptions, emotions and politics that shaped both the bidding process and the review of bids.

Productive reflection

The third approach to reflection emphasises the dual goals of productivity and quality of working life. 'Reflection is far from being an isolating act of solely personal benefit, it is a

key to learning to improve production and to making life at work more satisfying' (Boud, Cressey and Docherty, 2006: 2). The aim of productive reflection is to balance the needs and ambitions of customers, investors and personnel through learning, competence development, creativity and innovation. In this sense, the focus for reflection is the learning potential of work itself, and the development and implementation of collective learning activities that change work practices to enhance productivity and to underpin improvements in personal engagement and meaning in work. Such changes include reflective practices that underpin the decentralisation of management, the flattening if hierarchies, broadening employee capacity, and critical engagement in quality enhancement.

Productive reflection has similar goals to public reflection. Both public reflection and productive reflection signify a shift from the individual to the collective level of reflection and they are concerned with building on and embedding critical reflection in organizations. However, while public reflection is concerned with situating reflection in the political complexities of organizations and transforming authority relations, productive reflection focuses on how competence is distributed inside companies and the processes of monitoring and intervention that are constructed to link competence to productivity and work satisfaction (Cressey, Boud and Docherty, 2006). Productive reflection asks for the creation of collective links into the production process in any given workplace. It seeks to be generative, both in relation to work outcomes and personnel, recognising that people within organizations can be active in both work and learning.

The key elements in productive reflection are an organizational rather than individual intent and a collective rather than individual orientation. Reflection is necessarily contextualised in work and therefore reflective practices should not be considered separately from the situation and organizational purposes for which they are used. This means that actual practices will vary greatly from organization to organization and that companies will create distinctive reflective practices that emerge from and further inform their own knowledge about what they do and how to improve both knowledge and production. Productive reflection is an organizing process, and reflection is not confined to any one group in an organization (e.g. the HR Department), but rather makes use of the distributed expertise within the organization, a form of expertise that is too often ignored or undervalued. Reflection is not seen as something that can be operationalized in the service of management approaches or techniques, nor is it seen as a process that can be controlled in order to lead towards pre-directed outcomes. Rather, productive reflection has a developmental character with an intention to build agency among participants; to promote confidence that they can act together in meaningful ways; and that they can develop their own repertoire of approaches to meet future challenges. Productive reflection sees reflection as an open, unpredictable process, it is dynamic (it is likely to change over time) and it is unlikely that it can be turned into 'formal interventions to improve learning at work' (Boud, 2006: 167).

However, an example of productive reflection that is based on intervention can be found in Gherardi and Poggio (2006). The authors worked with a large local authority organization in Northern Italy. The organization had invited them to design their in-house training for women managers to improve female leadership. The training was delivered as four, five-day workshops, addressing themes that represented the core of leadership (rationality, control, decision-making, strategic thinking) '*and their opposite*'. These 'opposite' themes included: 'leadership's relationship with power, recognition of its conflictual dimensions,

the importance of learning to recognise and understand emotions connected with the exercise of authority' (page no.). The authors used narratives to stimulate memory of experiences; they asked participants to develop their own narratives of their experience as women leaders; and then to engage with these narratives collectively. They used this narrative process as critical reflection on the politics of knowledge. Therefore,

> 'reflection and group analysis of situations in which the participants wielded authority in organizations furnish occasions for self-knowledge which involves not only the cognitive, cultural and affective dimensions of the individuals concerned but also the strategic and structural ones of the organization. The main assumption within productive reflection is that the group is a crucial learning resource because it enables different experiences to be shared and compared'.

In this process, narrative encouraged the development of 'retrospective glance' at what might have been created in previous experience, but not yet noticed. They found that this process of reflection was productive for the individuals involved because it provided the reflective space for remembering within the context of the collective experience of women leaders within organizational power relations. They also identify an organizational process relating to knowledge productivity; that it is necessary for organizations to support a style of intervention that is by its nature critical of the status quo.

Organizing reflection

The final approach to reflection we highlight is 'organizing reflection' (Vince, 2002; Reynolds and Vince, 2004b). The notion of organizing reflection emerged from a critique of the current theory and practice of reflection. It is similar to the other approaches we have mentioned, based on critical and collective reflection rather than individual reflective practice. Organizing reflection supports a shift from a view of reflection as a key element of individual learning and the application of learning, and towards a view of reflection as an organizing process, one that takes account of social and political processes at work in the organization of reflection in the workplace. In particular, this approach argues for the transformation of implicit approaches to reflection in organizations, where the responsibility for reflection is often located with the individual, either to do it for her/himself (when there's time), or to be responsible for the review of other individuals' performance, mostly in relation to people within subordinate roles. Therefore, less emphasis would be placed on reflection as the task of individuals, and more emphasis on creating collective and organizationally focused processes for reflection. The question that organizations face therefore is not only how the collective knowledge generated through organizing can be captured and utilised through reflection, but also, what are the emotional and political processes in the organization that prevent or severely limit processes of reflection?

An example of an attempt at 'organizing reflection' can be found in Nicolini et al (2004). The authors' intervention linked action learning sets and whole-system change conferences. It was designed in order to explore how reflection might be understood as a stable and self-sustaining feature of organizing, and they focused particularly on the problem of addressing 'the power conditions that would allow the result of reflection to be implemented to produce organizational effects' (page no.). Their project, with middle managers in a UK Health Authority, emphasised two levels on which reflection can be organized and

addressed. First, in addition to creating several Reflection Action Learning Sets (RALS) for individual managers, they also built in the ability to mobilise dialogue between sets. They call this interaction between sets 'the structure that reflects'. Second, this organizing structure of reflection provided the agenda from which to engage with key decision makers within three 'whole-system change conferences'. They refer to this as 'the structure that connects', a space where the outputs of reflective practices could be communicated and aired (publicly) in the presence of senior managers, and thereby linked to power conditions that might support the implementation of the results of reflection.

In this example, the authors tried to situate reflective practice overtly in the context of work-based power relations. They did this initially by recognising that there is an impact on organizational dynamics when action learning sets are brought together into 'a structure that reflects'. They then sought to air these collective reflections in the organization as a whole. The importance of this structure in terms of the relationship between reflection and power was emphasised when most of the key decision makers in the organization did not turn up to the large change conference. The authors realised that their intervention was itself a mirror of the organizational dynamics that they were attempting to challenge. It was built on an assumption that all organizational members (not directly involved in RALS) were part of a reflective process. They conclude:
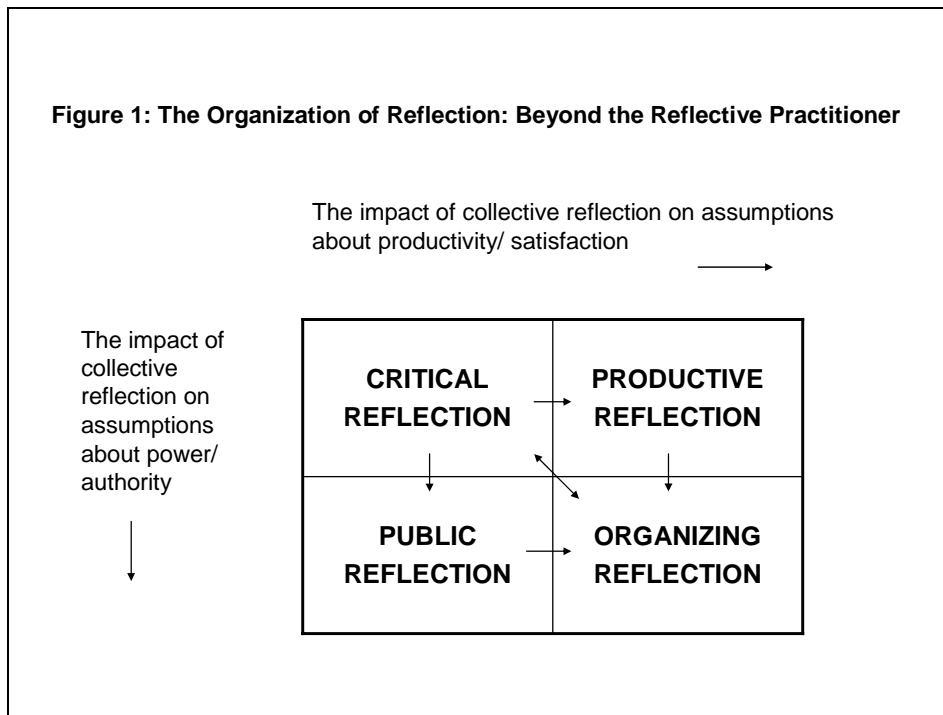
> 'herein, lies a powerful practical lesson. Designing organizational reflection activities and promoting them in such a way that exempts the sponsors from being part of the reflective practices, deprives them of the experience of learning, and exposes a paradox of reflection being promoted at one level and denied at another. Inevitably, this will have practical repercussions and will be played out by the participants as they pick up and enact this inner contradiction'.

Therefore, the authors integrate action learning and critical reflection and provide an example of how action learning, as an organizing process, can reveal, engage with *and* reproduce the various power relations that surround attempts to learn.

Organizational groups and sub-systems can be seen as a part of the process of making reflection 'public' and 'productive'. However, they are also environments where unexpressed and unconscious organizational dynamics are enacted to protect organizational members from the consequences of reflection. Reflection and the production of new knowledge and actions necessarily confront established ways of working, as well as habitual authority relations and leadership approaches. Complex emotional, social and political relations are mobilised when organizational members meet. Making at least some of these relations overt is one way to reflect on and to change the organizational dynamics that undermine rather than support reflection. One phrase which has been used of this approach to reflection is that it attempts to 'unsettle conventional practices' (Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004), through a reflexive perspective on the interplay between learning and organizing. Organizing reflection is linked explicitly to notions of reflexivity (see Cunliffe, forthcoming).

CONCLUSION: THE CRITIQUE AND DEVELOPMENT OF REFLECTION

In this final section of the paper we summarise and present the four approaches we have outlined as a combined response to the future development of the theory and practice of reflection. In the previous section of the paper we addressed what is distinctive about these approaches to reflection. However, we also think of them as a complementary set of ideas, which together comprise a new perspective on reflection, one that we expect to make an impact both in theory and in practice (Figure 1, below).

Figure 1: The Organization of Reflection: Beyond the Reflective Practitioner

The impact of collective reflection on assumptions about productivity/ satisfaction

The impact of collective reflection on assumptions about power/ authority

CRITICAL REFLECTION	PRODUCTIVE REFLECTION
PUBLIC REFLECTION	ORGANIZING REFLECTION

Theories and approaches to critical reflection provide a conceptual base from which to develop reflection beyond the reflective practitioner. Critical reflection involves the (outward) questioning of discourses implicit in the procedures, practices and structures which make up professional and organizational work. The key shift implied in critical reflection is from a concern with individuals' ability or responsibility to reflect within an organizational context, towards collective responsibility for reflective practice on organizing assumptions and practices. In addition to their physical and rational structures, organizations are built and maintained (emotionally, politically and relationally) from, for example: habits and attachments, established ways of working, rules and routines, political imperatives, techniques for compliance and demands for consensus. A critical perspective emphasizes the importance of collective reflection on emotional, moral, social and political as well as material considerations. The function of such reflection is to improve reflexive capabilities within organizations, to ensure that organization can create 'structures that reflect' (Nicolini et al, 2004) and to create the possibility of 'unsettling' established ways of working in support of change (Cunliffe, forthcoming).

Critical reflection implies a collective orientation towards the questioning of assumptions. However, the idea of continuously questioning the assumptions that underpin organizing/ organization is an impractical notion unless it is targeted at key aspects of organizing. Two of these have been identified in the literature as 'public reflection' (questioning assumptions about power/ authority relations) and 'productive reflection' (questioning assumptions about the relationship between productivity and work satisfaction). Public reflection encourages engagement with those others who are similarly caught up in the distinctive political processes that organizing creates, thereby seeking to make such processes both visible and subject to change. Reflection 'in public' makes the questioning of assumptions more likely because the act of giving voice to underlying assumptions can make them contestable. However, the extent to which organizational power relations allow assumptions to be contested varies considerably within different organizational contexts. Public reflection explicitly acknowledges the role of difference and dissent in improvement, and thereby seeks to offer an expanded view of authority relations. Authority is not a feature of individual behaviour or character, nor is it contained within the role that the individual occupies. Instead, it arises from the public testing, implementation and negotiation of individuals' authority; the negotiation of authority within groups; and the ways in which authority and legitimacy combine within specific organizational contexts. Making authority public suggests a willingness to test the boundaries of authority, making it easier (but not easy) to share and to distribute. Public reflection also mobilises a wider accountability for those in positions of authority

While public reflection is concerned with situating reflection in the political complexities of organizations and transforming authority relations, productive reflection focuses on how knowledge/ competence is distributed inside companies and the processes of monitoring and intervention that are constructed to link competence to productivity and work satisfaction. Productive reflection is generated from some key questions. For example: how does an organization make use of the existing knowledge produced through established ways of working when 'we don't have time to reflect'? How can expertise be distributed throughout an organization when organizational members have to compete for resources? What collective practices for reflection can be developed to promote collaboration between organizational members and confidence in the legitimacy of individual and collective voice? Productive reflection has a general aim, which is to maximise the learning potential of work by asking such questions. Learning might be available to individuals as part of collective activity, but also may be organizational in nature, having an impact on established learning mechanisms as well as creating new ones. In addition, the aim of productive reflection is to tie together collective processes of reflection on what and how productivity is achieved, with the search for ways of improving peoples' work satisfaction.

Organizing reflection adds another dimension, which is that organizations are often environments where reflection is ignored or unwanted; where unexpressed and unconscious organizational dynamics are enacted to remove opportunities to reflect or to protect organizational members from the consequences of reflection. In other words reflection in organizations is not only poorly developed because organizational members don't have time, don't know how, or don't see the point of it. It is poorly developed because reflection and the production of new knowledge and actions necessarily confront established ways of thinking and working, as well as authority relations, strategic decisions and approaches to leadership. Emotional, social and political relations are mobilised whenever organizational members meet. Making at least some of these relations overt is one way to reflect on and to

change the organizational dynamics that undermine rather than support reflection. Organizing reflection is an attempt to link collective reflection with thinking about the impact of reflexivity in organizations. In Figure 1, 'organizing reflection' is shown as feeding back into critical reflection because it has helped both to critique and elaborate the concept in the organizational context.

Reflection in its different but related aspects should be an essential part of the day-to-day life of managers, not a disconnected, separate activity but integral, supported by structures and the culture of the workplace, affecting decisions and choices, policies and activities and the politics and emotion associated with them. In this way to be reflective is not a technique, learned and sometimes applied, but part of what it means to be a manager. We believe that in this way our ideas about organizing reflective practice represent both a critique and a development of reflection in elaborating the practical ways it can be applied within organizations.

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