Reflective Learning Practice in Leadership Development Program

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Abstract

The main aim of this research is to examine the role and importance of reflective learning in leadership with the help of an empirical study at a manufacturing firm in India. The study analyzed the data collected from executives in leadership roles with work experience ranging from 10-25 years to determine their learning points and action points from their previous learning experience. Learning points include what they are aware of their learning and action points include their application of learning. For the effective use of reflective learning, it should be practiced across various platforms of learning in real life, both personally and professionally, to craft solutions creatively for effective problem-solving.

Keywords
Self-reflection, Reflective thinking, Reflective learning, Leadership Development Program

1. Introduction
Reflection: The process of self-reflection and reflective learning is an art which requires creativity to craft solutions and understandings for the future. This creativity is beyond any measure, very much personal and unique. It is good to learn from other's experiences but always better to experiment with our own thought process and bring in our own creativity to the existing and available experiences.

Importance of Reflective Learning in Problem Solving: Leaders are at a position of high responsibility and often challenging. A good leader, effective leadership skills were becoming very rare in this era of high competence and low compassion. Undoubtedly, there is a huge crisis of leadership and problem solving is present at every corner of the management. Organizations, Nations excel not just because of bleeding edge technology, intellect, and hard work but the vision behind all these. Even after providing with several leadership skill development coaching classes, still the improvement remains as a question mark. The barrier is limiting individual to just have the coaching confined to theory but not in practice. A good leader is famous for not only his people skills, but greatly for his problem solving skills effectively.

Reflective Learning in Leadership: Leadership is being criticized severely in most of the organizations today, due to poor skills of leaders in people management. This is resulting in a toxic work environment where toxic work culture is normalized. In such environment, lack of empathy is glorified, lack of compassion is justified, resulting in most unhappy work space. Organizations are struggling hard to train their leaders in leadership to get rid of such serious problems, but as long as the leaders are not introspecting, mirroring, reflecting on their own experiences, it is impossible to see a brighter tomorrow. Where ever the problem occurs, it was addressed at very peripheral level but not from the root cause. Recently we have seen the Great Resignation across the world and realized the urgency for change. Hence, we found the need for putting theories of self-reflection into practice is very essential in leaders.

1.1 Objectives

The main objective of this research is to understand how experienced working executives comprehend their learning and it's application in the work. This understanding will help in improving the job performance of executives, and provides adequate cover in the event of development by extending the frontiers of the knowledge in management.

2. Literature Review

The father of Reflective thinking, great American Philosopher John Dewey (1910) highlighted the importance of reflection in thinking and learning. The beauty of self-reflection is helping individuals to look inwards within themself and pay attention to their feelings, thoughts, actions, experiences, energies, and emotions. One can learn from his or others life experiences in order to avoid the repeated pattern of mistakes. Self-reflection is very essential in humans, and the only process which can differentiate from aware vs unaware people. Experiences can help people to reflect and introspect within and can provide solutions to complex problems. There will be lot of difference between the solutions which were taken consciously with awareness and just addressing peripheral level issues.

Kolb(1984) has classified the learning from experience into three categories, they are non-learning, non-reflective learning and reflective learning. Every experience is unique and depending upon the outcome it turns favorable or unfavorable. But, unfavorable experiences can be avoided if one practices reflective learning. According to Schon(1984) reflection in action requires delving deep into the action and reaction which can provide critical analysis and understanding of the experience.

3. Methods

This research study is an empirical research, designed to analyze the reflective learning in executives. A conceptual frame work (figure 1) was developed to understand two important parameters of learning experience. For this, two main pillars, my learning points and my action points were considered to be parameters to analyze their reflection in learning. In this process, as a first parameter, learning points of each individual is collected to understand how much they are aware and remember their learning. In the second parameter, we have designed this to get clear idea of their application of their knowledge from learning. This assessment was performed very soon after completing each component of learning.
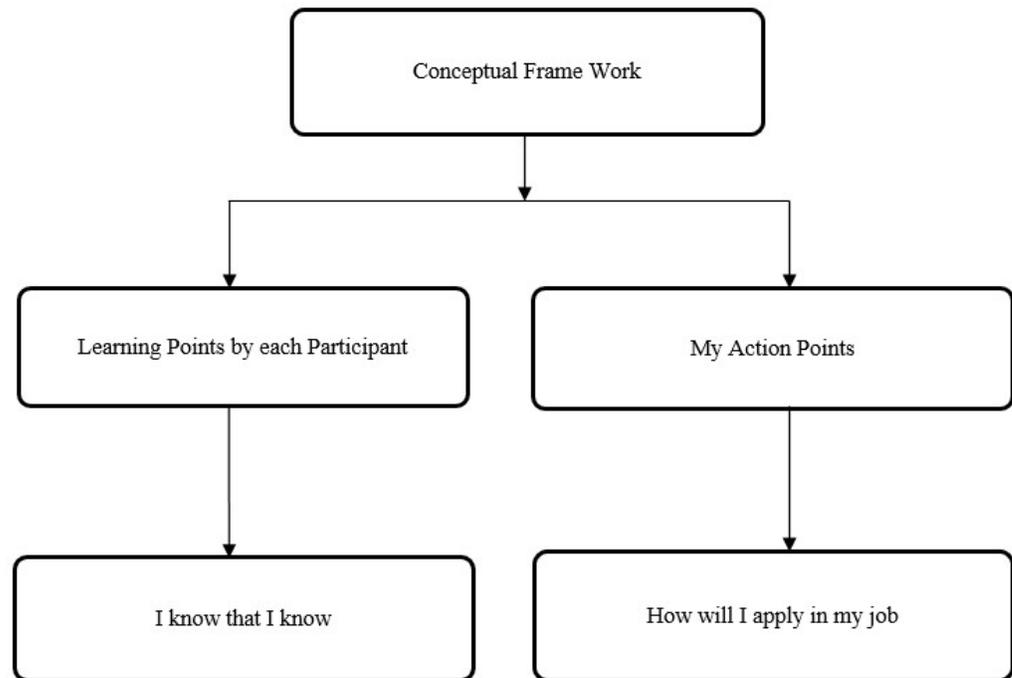
Figure 1. Conceptual Frame Work

4. Data Collection

The data collection from this study is providing strong empirical evidence and establishing the presence of reflective learning among executives. The data collection process from participants is carried out in a structured form and responses were qualitative. For this process, responses from 30 Participants were collected from an organization. The selection of the participants was done based on the experience ranging from 10-25 years in managerial roles across various functional departments like Accounting, Finance, Human Resources, and Operations.

5. Results and Discussion

The research results were clearly indicating the presence of reflective learning in the work of executives. But it is limited only to work, not in any areas of life. The learning is directly from studies and therefore it was applied to only in work. A clear connection from education to application is witnessed but even though the learning can be applied in various aspects of life creatively crafting solutions, it was nowhere seen in any other areas of life apart from the Work. The results clearly establish a connection between learning and application of learning clearly among executives.

6. Conclusion

Previous literature has highlighted the importance of reflection, introspection in individuals. However, very little research is available about reflection in leaders. This research study makes an important contribution in finding out the role of reflective learning in leaders. The findings from this study suggest that executives who are aware of their learning and it's application are able to utilize their knowledge acquired from learning effectively leading to better performance delivery.

7. Limitations

This study provides strong empirical evidence for the reflective learning in action. However the data collected from individuals was very much subjective and require in-depth analysis further to draw more insights from reflection.

8. Future Research

A recommendation for future research is explore the role of awareness and reflection in learning and analyze the assessment of performance improvement before and after incorporating reflection in the individuals.

9. References

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Biographies

Sri Dhruthi Nallani is a research assistant at "Amrita Center for Responsible Innovations and Sustainable Enterprises, "ARISE" Labs in Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Bangalore campus. Ms. Dhruthi holds a Bachelor of Technology in Electrical and Electronics Engineering from Koneru Lakshmaiah University, Master of Business Administration (MBA) in Marketing and Finance from Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, and Master of Science (MS) in Business Analytics and Systems from The State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo.

A D Balakrishnan Prof. Balakrishnan is a science graduate from Bangalore University, and holds a PG diploma in strategic management from the Muse system, Frankfurt Germany. He has attended several training programs, including the "Assessment Center Program" conducted by XLRI Jamshedpur and also an accredited brain-based coach from the Franklin group. He is professor at Amrita University, Bangalore for Self Awareness and Personal Growth, Education For Life. Mr. A D Balakrishnan is a senior profile from the pharma industry with an enviable track record of success with sales & marketing leadership positions. His leadership positions include heading sales operations for the south zone for Wockhardt and Crossland laboratories. Earlier, he had worked for nearly 10 years with Hoechst India. After a fruitful track record in sales management with major pharma names like Hoechst, Wockhardt, and Crossland Laboratories, he migrated to the marketing domain and was General Manager in marketing for Micro Labs private limited Bangalore. After an eventful career lasting more than 16 years in sales

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Shekar Babu Ph.D. is the Professor and Director of "AMRITA Center for Responsible Innovations and Sustainable Enterprises", "ARISE" Labs. He is also the Founding Head, Department of Management (DoM), Bangalore Campus, AMRITA Vishwa Vidyapeetham University, Bangalore, India. Dr. Shekar holds a Bachelor of Engineering (BE) degree in Electronics and Communications from Bangalore University and a Master of Science (MS) degree in Electrical and Computer Science from California State University, Los Angeles and a Doctoral Degree in Strategic Management from Amrita University. He is a Management Consultant with over 25 years of experience in working at Price Waterhouse, Hewlett-Packard Co and AMRITA University. His research areas are Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Corporate Governance (CG), Strategy and Social Development and Sustainable Goals (SDG). He has taught courses in Marketing, Leadership, Management Consulting and Business Ethics and Values.