Sea Lake Silo (2019), Drapl (Travis Vinson) & The Zookeeper (Joel Fergie)

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE: PERSPECTIVES, SILOS, RESISTANCE, AND BENEFITS
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1

By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest; Second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third, by experience, which is the bitterest.
Confucius (in Di Stefano et al., 2014, p.1)

INTRODUCTION

Reflective practice has a long history and has been reinvented many times. By its nature, it must be constantly evolving. There is also a risk in its use that it becomes misunderstood and prey to the very thing it is supposed to be – an open and continuous learning process. On the one hand, we want to learn, but the fear of learning can arouse defences that narrow and close things down. Because of this, reflective practice is prone to being defensively attacked.

The purpose of this article is to refer to thoughts and research on reflective practice gathered over many years, from many perspectives. As in a reflective approach, we believe it is the integration of these diverse perspectives that is helpful. It helps to broaden rather than narrow our thinking.

It has been shown that reflective practice is closely linked to emotional intelligence, which is linked with effectiveness in virtually any field of work. The ideas discussed here are relevant to individuals and professionals in many roles, leaders and managers, teams, and organizations in general. Hopefully, this will highlight the potential and value of reflective practice. It might also encourage a spirit of inquiry and curiosity that are vital to it.
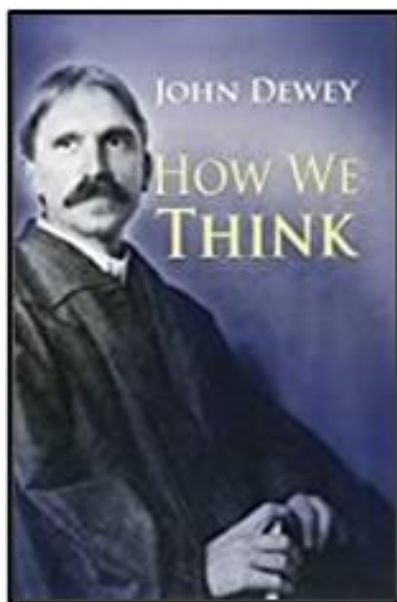
Reflective Practice – What is it? How is it used?
Reflection is how John Dewey, the philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer, said we learn from experience. In 1910, he introduced the concept of 'reflective thought' in his book, 'How We Think'. He believed that learning improves by the degree to which it arises out of a reflective process, rather than instruction. Importantly, the book pays attention to how, rather than what, we think. Dewey (p.6) defined reflective thought as,

"Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends, constitutes reflective thought."

Or, as Melanie Jasper, a Professor of Nursing in the UK (2003, p.1) said,

The way that we learn from an experience in order to understand and develop practice.

This practice has been fundamental to human learning and development, as individuals, groups, organizations, and societies for thousands of years. It is vital to our survival and evolution as a species. It is not only physical strength in numbers that has helped humans evolve, but also mental strength. Humans are meaning-making creatures. We have a fundamental need to make sense of the world around us and our part in it. Thompson (2011, p.18) explains how the study of perception derives from Phenomenon, the Greek term for 'that which is perceived'. It is therefore concerned with matters of interpretation, how we make sense of reality as it is presented to us. Thompson says (p.18), "A key part of phenomenology, then, is the notion of meaning-making. We construct both individually and collectively our sense of reality." He continues (p.20),

> Phenomenology, with its emphasis on perception and meaning making, provides an important foundation for what is, in a sense, a key part of reflective practice – finding a way forward through Schön's (1983) 'swampy lowlands' by developing a meaningful understanding of the challenging situations encountered in practice.

Throughout history, we have reflected in groups to support development and learning, solve problems, make sense of experience, and pass it on. As with other human processes of thinking related to development, such as psychotherapy, reflective practice is ancient. Freud (1905, p.258) stated,

> In the first place, let me remind you that psychotherapy is no way a modern form of treatment. On the contrary, it is the most ancient form of therapy in medicine.

Reflective practice is vital in professional and personal learning and development. It far exceeds what instruction can teach. The more complex our world, the more necessary reflective practice becomes. Instruction will always have its place, but cannot go beyond what is already known and what is achieved by simply following directions. By reflecting on experience, humans make connections, recognize patterns, and notice how their behaviour helps, hinders, or endangers. Our experience includes our perceptions, our thoughts, and our feelings. For example, we might see or think that something is not right, and/or we might feel it. By reflecting in this way, our actions are likely to be more effective and outcomes more positive. Reflecting in a group brings multiple perspectives and additional benefits. It significantly improves understanding and learning.

While Dewey was concerned with learning and education, reflective practice has been applied to many fields of work. For example, Chris Argyris, the American Business Theorist, argued (1991) that it is essential for leaders to 'look inwards' and that a reflective organizational culture must 'start at the top'. He states,

> Most people define learning too narrowly as mere 'problem-solving', so they focus on identifying and correcting errors in the external environment. Solving problems is important. But if learning is to persist, managers and employees must also look inward.

They need to reflect critically on their own behaviour, identify the ways they often inadvertently contribute to the organisation's problems, and then change how they act.

Restorative Solutions (2017)

Over the last hundreds and thousands of years, the process of reflection and the lessons learned have been captured in many fields, including,

- Anthropology
- Religion (Many scriptures and religious books are reflective)
- Philosophy
- Physics (Bohm, 1965; Heisenberg, 1971)
- Psychology/Psychoanalysis/Psychotherapy
- Education
- Business Theory and Leadership
- Military (Johnson, 2020)
- Medicine/Nursing

Reflective practice, which is sometimes perceived mainly as a therapeutic process, has been strongly advocated by experts such as Argyris. The seminal book, 'The Reflective Practitioner', was authored in 1983 by Donald Schön, who was an American philosopher and professor in urban planning. Argyris and Schön worked together (1974), and their ideas on reflective practice have made a major contribution to the theory of organizational learning. Organizational learning is a process that unfolds over time. It is linked to knowledge acquisition and improved performance.

As reflective practice is used in such diverse fields, the way it is carried out will vary according to the task it is related to. The emphasis may vary in different professions between reflecting on thoughts, experiences, and feelings. Johnson (2020, pp. 22-23) says that while "there is no generally agreed upon definition of reflection, a recent comprehensive examination of the literature highlights several themes that further describe the concept". Johnson names four themes that arise consistently in the literature (see Marshall, 2019).

1. Cognitive – At its core, reflection is a cognitive (e.g., thinking) process. This involves purposeful meaning-making. It is aimed at understanding a problem rather than trying to solve it.

2. Integrative - Reflection serves as an integrator and enables synthesis. Through reflection, we can weave together ideas, make connections among disparate information, discover interrelationships, and assess interdependencies

3. Iterative (repetitive) - Reflectively revisiting ideas and experiences generates deeper levels of learning, while also opening the door to forward-looking considerations. Thus, reflection is an iterative process that evolves and advances thinking.

4. Active - As a disciplined way of thinking, reflection requires deliberate action (Dewey, 1910). Reflection involves an active, conscious effort and is a purposeful and deliberate act.

2

PLAY, CREATIVITY, AND LEARNING

It can be argued that human reflectiveness is universal and genetically ingrained. This does not mean that it happens without a facilitating environment, but given the right conditions, it will naturally emerge. While an infant's thought process might be immature, the beginnings of reflectiveness are present. Our first experiences of development are as an infant. And, as the child psychotherapist Margot Waddell (2004) says,

> … an infant's essential learning about him or herself takes place in the encounter of one mind with another from the very moment of birth.

Play is the way a child works things out. During infancy, it is the main form of education. It has been said and often attributed to Einstein that play is the highest form of research. The crucial point here is that play is the beginning of how we learn, and if we can remain playful, it will underpin our creative abilities. To be successful, we need playful, creative, innovative cultures. This is true in all human systems. With these qualities, we can thrive; without them, we may barely survive.

As with an infant who has a secure base, adults will also be playful and creative when they feel safe enough to become absorbed in what interests them. When we are pursuing the serious matters involved in being an adult with responsibilities, we can sometimes feel that play does not belong in our world. However, the most serious things we are aiming for may not be achieved without an element of playfulness. Dewey (p.219) said,

> What is termed the interest in truth for its own sake is certainly a serious matter, yet this pure interest in truth coincides with love of the free play of thought.
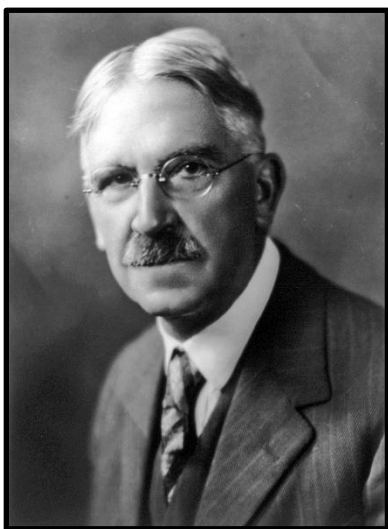
While adults might think that work is not play, an infant might think that play is a serious business (Whitwell). Play can be a serious business, and a serious business must be playful. Work and play are often about working something out and learning through experimentation. It is trial and error and taking risks. Just as an adult working on a problem becomes frustrated, an infant playing can burst into tears. In a work environment, it is playfulness that is important.

"Playfulness is a more important consideration than play. The former is an attitude of mind; the latter is a passing outward manifestation of this attitude. When things are treated simply as vehicles of suggestion, what is suggested overrides the thing. Hence, the playful attitude is one of freedom." (Dewey, p.162)

Dewey explains how the child builds an imaginary world that can live alongside the world of actual things. The child often uses the actual things imaginatively, for example, a broom becomes a horse. Dewey (p.162) argues that "… it is necessary that the play attitude should gradually pass into a work attitude". The lack of playfulness in a system, whether a family or organization, is often, as Friedman (1999) said, a symptom of chronically anxious, gridlocked, and regressed functioning. It is possible to be playful and serious at the same time. "… intellectual curiosity and flexibility are manifest in the free play of the mind upon a topic" (Dewey, p.218).

Reflective practice will sometimes be playful, sometimes demanding work, and even painful, confusing, among many others. Sometimes it will be a mixture of different feelings and qualities at the same time. It is important to observe how the process feels and what that might be telling us. This comment by Friedman (1999, p.ix) is a helpful guideline to hang onto.

> Playfulness can get you out of a rut more successfully than seriousness.

3

INTEGRATING LEARNING AND EMOTION

Reflective practice is sometimes thought of as an analytical tool in a cognitive sense, and other times to do with emotions. While it can be helpful in both cases, the most powerful form of reflection combines both. It is not helpful to consider our thinking as either emotional or cognitive. We function most effectively when we integrate both. Friedman (1999, p.177), talking about leadership, explains why we must combine emotions and thoughts as relevant forms of data.

> Study of the brain has become one of the most adventurous new research frontiers of our age. The cartography that describes the latest findings produces, almost daily, new understandings of the relationships of its parts and their reciprocal communication with the body. While there is some difference of agreement among the "cartographers", most concur on one point: the brain takes emotional factors into account during the very process of cerebrating, and not just after one has produced thoughts. Emotions do not simply modify thinking, reasoning, or decision making processes; they are part and parcel of the process of reasoning. Cerebration, in other words, involves more than logic, and thinking involves more than cerebration. "Mental" includes feelings. And the brain's method of processing data always includes emotional variables.

Highlighting this point, General James Mattis of the United States Marine Corps said,

> If I was to sum up the single biggest problem of senior leadership in the Information Age, it's a lack of reflection. Solitude allows you to reflect while others are reacting. We need solitude to refocus on prospective decision-making, rather than just reacting to problems as they arise. (In Kethledge and Erwin, 2017)

As reflection is sometimes dismissed as being 'only' a soft skill, it is interesting that General Mattis should recommend it so strongly. It is also taught in military training (Johnson, 2020; Rocklein, 2014). In high-risk situations, emotions can run high, which means reflection can be vital to prevent reacting unhelpfully with potentially disastrous consequences.

### Example – Paying Attention to Feelings

The following is a simple example of what Schön (1983) referred to as reflection-in-action rather than reflection-on-action. A CEO is chairing a weekly senior management meeting. The meeting attendees are the 'heads' of each of the organization's departments. This is a diverse professional group. Some are more familiar with reflective practice than others. The agenda

includes prominent issues that may need decisions. On one of them, the discussion is heading towards a clear preference for a decision. While the arguments in favour sound plausible, the CEO senses that the group is more anxious than usual. This makes her hesitant about the decision. She decides to name her feelings about the anxiety and asks if people are dealing with things outside of the meeting that may be bringing anxiety into the meeting.

One person asks the CEO why she is asking about feelings while they are talking about a critical issue. The CEO suggests, how we are feeling about other things might be influencing the way we are looking at the issue. After a bit of unease, two people acknowledged difficulties in their departments that others were not aware of. After this, the mood changes, and so does the discussion. New perspectives are brought in, and it is decided to defer the proposed decision. Had the CEO not named the feeling of anxiety and asked people about it, it is likely as it turned out that a reactive, unhelpful decision would have been made.

This is a good example of what Friedman said about emotions being 'part and parcel' of reasoning, thinking, and decision-making. Emotions are equally important 'data' to reflect upon as our more tangible thoughts. Our emotions also influence the way we perceive all information. Effective decision-making takes place when the emotional and cognitive parts of the brain, the right and left hemispheres, are connected. The strength of intellect is undermined if it is not integrated with emotion. This is evidenced by neuroscientific medical research (Merzenich, 2013). It has been shown that when a person's emotional part of the brain is compromised through damage, such as an accident or operation, the logical cognitive part of the brain is also less effective. This goes against the idea that emotions get in the way of logic. Emotions can inform logic and can lead to better judgment.

Learning Professionals and Organizations
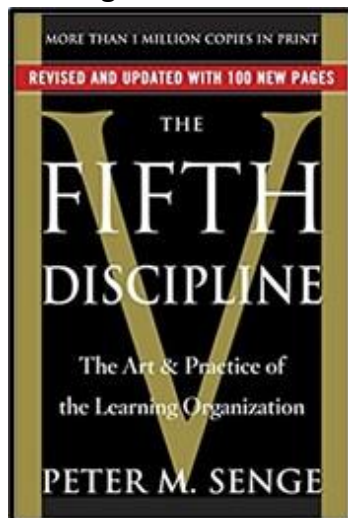
Peter Senge, the American Systems Scientist, also draws upon the work of Argyris and Schön. His book (1990), The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization, was highlighted by Harvard Business Review as "one of the seminal management books of the last 75 years" and by the Financial Times as one of five "most important" management books. Emphasizing the importance of becoming a learning organization, Senge (p.8) states,

"The organizations that will truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organization. Learning organizations are possible because, deep down, we are all learners."

Senge (p.177) points out that reflective practice has been used as a learning tool in professions as diverse as medicine, architecture, and management. He also refers to the influence of Dewey and others, such as David Bohm, who was a theoretical physicist. Bohm developed a theory of

dialogue (we discuss later), which is a shared process of analysing thoughts on a subject. Senge (p.222) says that this approach goes back to ancient Greece and Indigenous cultures, such as Native Americans. It is also found in the Aboriginal practice of Dadirri, which goes back 40,000 years and means deep inner listening and quiet contemplation (Duncan, 2021).

A vital point in all of this is that reflective practice must have a purpose that is relevant to our progress individually, in groups, in organizations, and in societies. In a work environment, without a purpose linked to desirable outcomes, it is likely to be perceived as a waste of time. The quality of reflective processes is variable. It is influenced by matters such as the,

- Capability and experience of the people involved
- The complexity of the work
- Quality of leadership and facilitation
- Safety within the context.

Unfortunately, reflective practice carried out poorly can have the effect of reinforcing defences against thinking and learning. Explaining the positive reason for reflective practice, Moon (2004, p.10) states,

> Reflection is part of learning and thinking. We reflect in order to learn something, or we learn as a result of reflecting, and the term 'reflective learning' emphasises the intention to learn from current or prior experience.

Reflection and Learning Cycles
Two well-established models of reflective learning are those by Graham Gibbs (1988) and David Kolb (1984). Gibbs and Kolb develop the work of John Dewey's concept that we do not learn from experience but by reflecting on it. This is experiential learning and action research, an integration of theory and practice. Gibbs and Kolb developed concepts of learning cycles. Gibbs (1988, p.14-15) summarizes,

> "It is not sufficient simply to have an experience in order to learn. Without reflecting upon this experience it may quickly be forgotten or its learning potential lost. It is from the feelings and thoughts emerging from this reflection that generalisations or concepts can be generated. And it is generalisations which enable new situations to be tackled effectively.

> Similarly, if it is intended that behaviour should be changed by learning, it is not sufficient simply to learn new concepts and develop new generalisations. This learning must be tested out in new situations. The learner must make the link between theory and action by planning for that action, carrying it out, and then reflecting upon it, relating what happens back to the theory. It is not enough just to do, and neither is it enough just to think.

Nor is it enough simply to do and think. Learning from experience must involve links between the doing and the thinking. The fourstage model of learning by doing which is elaborated here is that of Kolb. Quite a few theorists have proposed cyclical models to explain how people learn from experience, but they all share the important features of Kolb's model which is itself derived from Kurt Lewin.
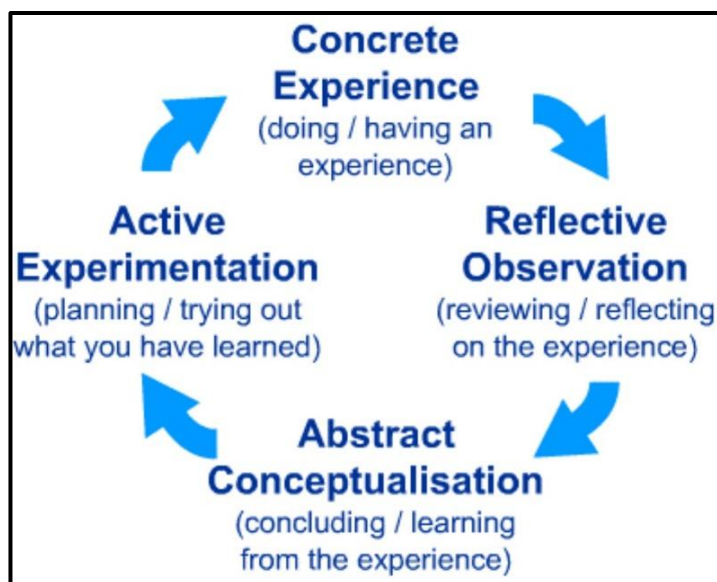
Learning from experience involves four stages which follow each other in a cycle, as in the diagram.

The terms used here as labels for the four stages come from Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, and placed in this sequence they form the experiential learning cycle. The cycle can be entered by the learner at any point, but its stages must be followed in sequence."

A crucial point is that for learning to take place, the four stages must be completed. The four-stage concept has been impactful in the world of learning and development. The learning cycle diagram has been produced in many different variations, but in essence, the simple but powerful concept of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation remains the same. Here is an example of a variation, shared by Martin (2021).
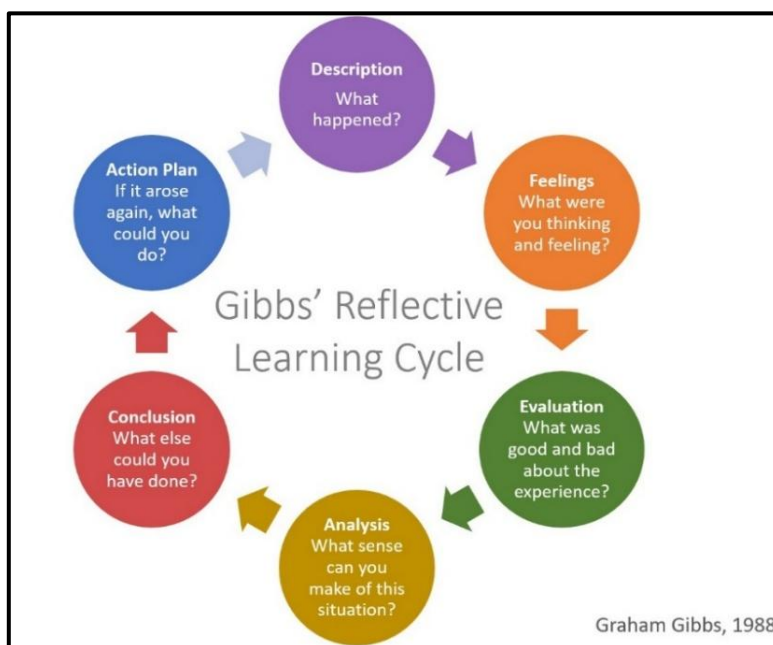
These concepts of reflecting and learning cycles have had a major impact in many fields of work. Jasper (2003, p.2) explains,

"Reflective practice as a concept for learning was introduced into many professions in the 1980s. It is seen as one of the ways that professionals learn from experience in order to understand and develop their practice. The idea behind this is a relatively simple one. Basically, reflective practice means that we learn by thinking about things that have happened to us and seeing them in a different way, which enables us to take some kind of action.

Reflective practice can be summarised as having three components:

1. Things (experiences) that happen to a person.
2. The reflective processes that enable the person to learn from those experiences.
3. The action that results from the new perspectives that are taken. These can be summarised as experience–reflection–action (ERA) and seen as a cycle."

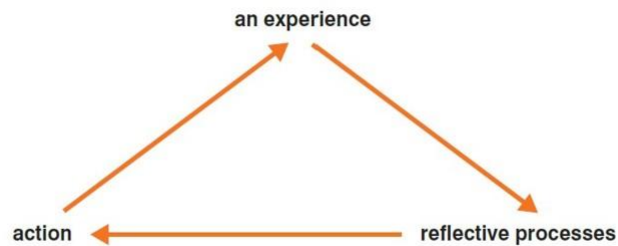Jasper's (2003) ERA model leads to a slightly simplified cycle of reflection and learning.

an experience

action

reflective processes

Figure 1.1 *The ERA cycle of reflective practice*

4

WHEN IS REFLECTIVE PRACTICE NECESSARY?

If we agree that reflective practice can be an invaluable approach to development and improvement, we might then ask - what are the situations where active, persistent, and careful consideration are most needed? On the one hand, as said earlier, reflection is how we learn, so it can always be beneficial in life and work.

However, complex situations and complex roles are most in need of reflective thought. Complex variables require careful consideration, and multiple perspectives give a clearer picture. Heightened awareness is necessary to work with complex tasks effectively. Therefore, complex work environments will benefit especially from reflective processes. And the more complex the role, the more it will be necessary. Therefore, leaders and managers especially will benefit from these processes. According to Janet Moyles (2006),

> Active reflection enables leaders and managers to discover, rediscover and understand the complex range of knowledge, skills and understanding they have and to develop and use the intellectual and emotional power within themselves to try to improve or enhance their situation (Fullan 2003; Day 2005). From their research and conceptualization of the issues, Ghaye and Ghaye (1998) also suggest that reflection has the potential to empower individuals, because the process enables them to become more effective, personally and professionally.

In some fields of work that are high risk and where people may be harmed if the work is not done well, reflective practice is essential for human safety and well-being. Some professions are obvious examples, such as the military and health care professions. Bond and Holland (1998, p.17) highlight the purpose of reflective practice and what may arise without it.

> [it is] a way of supporting workers who are affected by the distress, pain and fragmentation of the client and how they need time to become aware how this has affected them and to deal with reactions. This is essential if workers are not to become over full of emotions, or alternatively heavily defended against the distress of the client, therefore lacking empathy and good-enough care.

These potential consequences of lacking empathy and good enough care can cause stress and negative effects on health, and at their worst, can cause serious harm and even be fatal. The same issues arise in many situations where risk and human vulnerability are involved. It is no wonder that much of the experience and literature on reflective practice stems from fields such as the military and nursing. Menzies Lyth (1959, 1961 (1961b), 1970, pp.54-55), talking about her work on the role of nurses in the UK national health service, highlights how decision-making and reflective processes can become defensive to avoid the anxieties inherent in the work.

"*The attempt to eliminate decisions by ritual task-performance*. Making a decision implies making a choice between different possible courses of action and committing oneself to one of them; the choice being made in the absence of full factual information about the effects of the choice. If the facts were fully known, no decision need be made; the proper course of action would be self-evident. All decisions are thus necessarily attended by some uncertainty about their outcome and consequently by some conflict and anxiety, which will last until the outcome is known. The anxiety consequent on decision-making is likely to be acute if a decision affects the treatment and welfare of patients. To spare staff this anxiety, the nursing service attempts to minimize the number and variety of decisions that must be made. For example, the student nurse is instructed to perform her task-list in a way reminiscent of performing a ritual. Precise instructions are given about the way each task must be performed, the order of the tasks, and the time for their performance, although such precise instructions are not objectively necessary, or even wholly desirable."

Therefore, particularly in higher-risk anxiety-provoking situations and tasks, we must consider whether reflection is being used sufficiently to improve understanding and decision-making or whether it is being used excessively to avoid responsibility.

Reflection in Daily Life
In ordinary daily life, we must continuously evaluate whatever situation we are in, to inform what kind of action or direction we need to take. We think, decide, and act. We might decide to do nothing, which is also an action. We observe what happens next. What are the outcomes? Has our decision been effective? In Argyris's (1991) words, we assess our theory of what we think we are doing (espoused theory) against what we are doing (theory in use or action). Hopefully, we learn from experience and our theories evolve. This is a reflective process. It can help us make effective decisions and enable us to develop and expand our capabilities.

We must not think that reflective practice will magically solve our problems or guarantee that we go in the right direction. It can help cast a light on the way. But even with more insight and understanding, we still have choices and must make a judgement. Simply deciding whether to do something or not is usually a matter of judgement. We should be careful that we do not use reflective practice as a defence, as a way of avoiding getting on with something, of making a judgement, and of sticking our necks out. We should consider if the process is leading to rumination, overthinking, and a lack of direction.

As Dewey (p.107) says, "… learning is not wisdom; information does not guarantee good judgment". We can become obsessed with gathering data as if that will relieve us of the anxiety involved in decision-making and leadership (Friedman, 1999). We can never guarantee that a decision will turn out to be right. If we could, it would not be a decision as there would only be

one option. As reflective practice is a form of data gathering, it could also become obsessive. We should be wary of becoming excessively reliant on it.

We might ask, is reflective practice necessary if everything is going well? An answer is that reflection is not just about dealing with difficulties and solving problems. It is a powerful way to learn and to create shared meaning and understanding in groups. It is a process of constant evolution. So, if things are going well, maybe they could be even better. However, if the negative consequences of our thinking and actions are not too great, we may conveniently dismiss the problem or attribute it to something else. This could be the beginning of a bad habit that reflective practice might help prevent us from slipping into.

Another problem might be that things are not going as well as they seem. We may be deluding ourselves. A reflective process might help us see a problem developing and prevent it. If reflective processes are not in place and maintained, it will not necessarily be easy to become reflective, especially if the need is provoked by a crisis. Reflective practice is a discipline that needs deliberate practice. As we have said earlier, reflective practice is likely to grow and improve through repetition.

5

MENTAL MAPS AND SUBCONSCIOUS (UNCONSCIOUS) PROCESSES
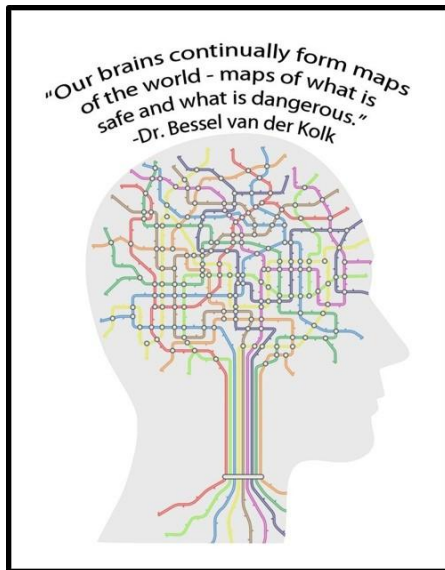
It is recognized from many perspectives that much of what governs our thoughts and actions is unconscious or subconscious. Some theorists use the terms to mean the same thing, and others imply an order from the unconscious to the subconscious to the conscious. The main point here is that often we are not conscious of what is behind our thoughts and actions. And we tend to think we know what we are doing to a much greater extent than is the case.

Sometimes our subconscious ability can help us perform tasks effectively without thinking. This is especially true with simple tasks, like riding a bike, for example. Once we have learned how to do it, we do it without thinking. However, in complex situations, our subconscious is more prone to unhelpful influence by our internal mental maps (Argyris and Schön, 1974; Senge, 1990), or what John Bowlby (1973) called Inner Working Models. These models of the world, ourselves, and our relationship with others are created in the formative years. They are basic interpretations of what we experience, such as the world is safe/unsafe, I am good/bad, and people are trustworthy/untrustworthy. They can change through new experiences, but are slow to do so. Magzan (2012) summarizes,
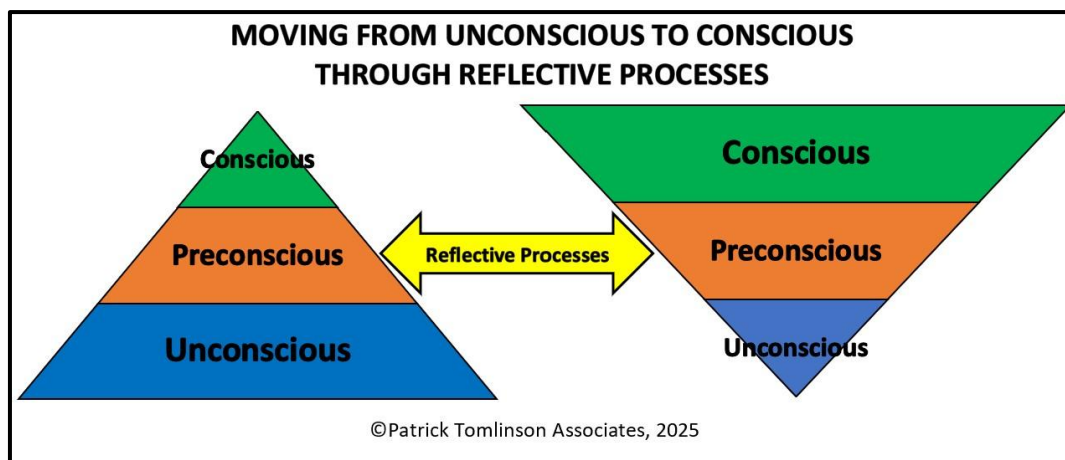
> Mental models are representations of reality that people use to understand specific phenomena. They represent deeply ingrained assumptions or generalizations that influence how we understand the world and how we take action. These deeply held internal images of how the world works are developed over time through the process of socialization, including education, experience and interaction with others. Mental models are very often hidden and we are not consciously aware of our mental models or the effects they have on our behavior. Once created, they become fixed and reinforced in the mind, becoming difficult to change. The function of mental models is to 'mediate reality for our minds and help us categorize and organize an endless stream of information we take every day' (DeBono, 1991).

Senge (p.160) points out that, "Philosophers have discussed mental models for centuries, going back at least to Plato's parable of the cave". Referring to the work of Argyris, he highlights (p.230) the difficulty of working with our mental maps when we are in a complex role and situation.

> For more than twenty-five years, Chris Argyris and his colleagues have studied the dilemma of why bright, capable managers often fail to learn effectively in management

teams. Their work suggests that the difference between great teams and mediocre teams lies in how they face conflict and deal with the defensiveness that invariably surrounds conflict. "We are programmed to create defensive routines," says Argyris (1985), "and cover them up with further defensive routines . . . This programming occurs early in life".

Reflective practice is an essential way for us to become more aware of our mental maps. Awareness is improved by self-observation and feedback from others. The aim is to have greater self-awareness and less unhelpful subconscious interference. This simple diagram illustrates the objective.

MOVING FROM UNCONSCIOUS TO CONSCIOUS THROUGH REFLECTIVE PROCESSES

Conscious
Preconscious
Unconscious

Reflective Processes

Conscious
Preconscious
Unconscious

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Our subconscious/unconscious not only influences the actions we take it also has a huge influence on how we feel. Our internal reality often overrides what is happening in the external world. Psychoanalysis and neuroscience have helped us to understand the importance of paying attention to our feelings as well as our thoughts. For example, in psychoanalytic theory, concepts such as transference, countertransference, projection, and splitting. In neuroscience, Stephen Porges's polyvagal theory and neuroception are especially helpful. Referring to the concept of transference, Barton, Gonzalez, and Tomlinson (2012) state,

> Transference was first described by Freud (1912, 1914) who observed in his analytic work that patients transferred feelings that belonged to past relationships, onto the analyst in the present. Most commonly but not exclusively, it is feelings associated with the formative relationship with mother and father that tend to be transferred. Freud (1950, p.116) wrote that 'a whole series of psychological experiences are revived, not as belonging to the past but as applying to the physician at the present moment ...'

So, for example, a worker may respond to a manager as a maternal or paternal figure. Issues of authority often evoke formative experiences and the transference of them into the present situation. Another typical example is sibling rivalry. Countertransference is how we respond to the transference. It may be a combination of what is evoked within us by another and our inner working model. Usually, these processes are unconscious, and it is only through a reflective process that we might become aware of what is going on before we start reacting to the

situation. Gabbard (2010, p.15) referred to countertransference as a "major therapeutic and diagnostic tool that tells the therapist a great deal about the patient's world". While these concepts derive from psychoanalysis and therapist-patient work, it is clear how they can also be useful in organizations and other settings. Two further useful concepts from psychoanalysis are projection and splitting.

> Projection is a similar but, in some ways, more primitive process to transference, and is what psychodynamic theory refers to as a defence mechanism. Whereas transference takes place in the context of a relationship that may evoke aspects of previous relationships, projection is a way in which someone gets rid of overwhelming, distressing, or persecutory feelings by projecting them into someone else. (Barton, et al., 2012, p.38).

This may happen in organizations between team members, teams, or departments. I expect we are all familiar with the dynamic, where it is felt that everything would be great if it were not for so and so (i.e., an individual, team, or department). What can be happening is that difficulties are projected onto one person or department, for example. Projection can also be a way of unconsciously communicating how we are feeling. For example, making someone else angry when we are feeling angry.

Being on the receiving end of powerful projections can begin to produce the exact negative projected qualities, such as we are failing, incompetent, overly aggressive, etc. Taking on a projection in this way is called projective identification, i.e., accepting the projection as if it were one's own. Another problem with this is that those who are projecting are not owning and working on their difficulties. A reflective process may help identify what is happening before it becomes too destructive. The process may enable insight into troubling aspects of the situation, allowing them to be worked on.

'Splitting' is another tendency in individuals and groups. Again, we all do it to some extent. It is a normal part of our development and a defence mechanism to protect us from intolerable conflicts. It is a way of avoiding the pain of ambiguity and ambivalence. Instead of objects/people being part 'good' and 'bad', the object is split, so one part is idealized as all good and another denigrated as all bad. This starts in early infancy as a defence against overwhelming psychic pain. It is a primitive process that adults are more likely to revert to in highly threatening situations.

Splitting is usually an underlying symptom when polarized views become the norm. For example, I am no good and she is brilliant, that team is rubbish, and that one is amazing. Or as a young child might say or imply, I hate you, Daddy. I only love Mummy. And the next day it could be the other way round. These kinds of presentations rarely reflect objective reality. Reflective practice can help us recognize these underlying processes before they destructively take hold. The aim is to maintain a mature position, be grounded, and build the capacity to tolerate the anxiety/pain of ambivalence and ambiguity.

All these unconscious dynamics are part of daily life and work. The greater the complexity, anxiety, and threat in a situation, the more we see phenomena such as splitting. We see groups taking very split positions, with no grey areas. This is common in all human systems, from families to organizations to society. It has become prevalent internationally in the way political views are expressed. Highly defensive unconscious processes that become ingrained may eventually become highly dysfunctional. They may even contribute to total collapse. However, through reflective practice, the unconscious processes might become conscious and informative, contributing to a growth in maturity.

Coming at things from a distinct perspective, neuroscience has also shown how our brains and nervous systems perceive the world and our place in it. For example, Stephen Porges (1998, 2017), in his work on polyvagal theory, has described neuroception. Tomlinson (2021) summarizes,

"Porges (2017) explains that a vagal pathway (nerve) is part of the autonomic nervous system, and poly means there are many of them. The vagal pathways function to protect safety. They alert the person to a threat and mobilize a protective response. This happens at an unconscious level, which Porges refers to as neuroception. In other words, it is the nervous system that identifies threats to safety, as well as opportunities for enhancing safety and well-being. Dana (2018, p.35) summarizes, "Neuroception results in the gut feelings, the heart-informed feelings, the implicit feelings that move us along the continuum between safety and survival response. Neuroception might be thought of as 'somatic signals that influence decision making and behavioural responses without explicit awareness of the provoking cues" (Klarer et al., 2014, p.7067)."

To feel safe is a basic human need and part of our genetic make-up. Delizonna (2017) states,

Ancient evolutionary adaptations explain why psychological safety is both fragile and vital to success in uncertain, interdependent environments.

Understanding this can be invaluable in an organization as well as to individuals. What do we sense is going on? What do our feelings tell us might be happening? By providing the space where we pay attention to questions like this, vital information might come to light. However, this is unlikely to happen if people feel psychologically unsafe. Safety is vital to creating an environment where people are willing to openly explore what they think and feel (Kim, Lee, and Connerton, 2020). In her book The Fearless Organization, Amy Edmondson (2019, p.8) states the importance of this,

I have defined psychological safety as the belief that the work environment is safe for interpersonal risk taking. The concept refers to the experience of feeling able to speak up,

with relevant ideas, questions, or concerns. Psychological safety is present when colleagues trust and respect each other and feel able – even obligated – to be candid.

One of the reasons it is vitally important that people can speak up is, as Jay Forrester said, that the hallmark of a great organization is "how quickly bad news travels upward" (in Senge, p.211). Reflective practice can be an excellent way of enabling people to speak up about difficult things.

6

HOW DO WE CARRY OUT REFLECTIVE PRACTICE?

It is a way of thinking about task-related issues. Therefore, it can be built into all existing organizational processes involving people. Reflection processes can be structured or unstructured (Johnson, 2020, p.26). Structured processes may follow a set pattern with specific questions, such as What am I learning from this situation? Unstructured processes may allow for a freer flow of thought. Johnson (p.26) explains the benefit of this.

> The randomness creates space for creativity, inspiration, and innovation. Additionally, the free-following nature of unstructured reflection removes the inhibitions that sometimes restrict thinking about feelings, making way for the exploration of emotions (Haga et al., 2009).

There are many ways we can develop reflective practice, including,

1. By contemplating and thinking over situations on our own.
By observing ourselves. Bailey and Rehman (2022) state,

> Research shows the habit of reflection can separate extraordinary professionals from mediocre ones. … Cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. These parts of you are constantly in motion and if you don't give them time to rest and reflect upon what you learned from them, you will surely fatigue.

Argyris and others have referred to "reflection-in-action" as an aim of reflective practice. What we should aim for is an approach where a reflective way of working becomes the norm and not something that just happens in a reflective meeting. Such meetings or spaces may be necessary to establish and role model a reflective approach, but as Senge (p.177) states,

> While many professionals seem to stop learning as soon as they leave graduate school, those who become lifelong learners practice what he (Schön) calls "reflection in action," the ability to reflect on one's thinking while acting. For Schön, reflection in action distinguishes the truly outstanding professionals.

We know that dealing with extreme difficulties, including trauma, can be common at work and in work roles, so it is likely that the findings above are relevant. Creating regular, uninterrupted spaces for thinking on one's own is also important. Johnson (2020, p.27) explains,

> Solitude provides the mental space to disconnect from the immediacy of the work environment and the freedom to immerse in contemplation (Akrivou, Bourantas, & Papalois, 2011; Deresiewicz, 2010).

2. Keeping a reflective journal, writing, and reading.
Dan Ciampa (2017) claims, "The more senior your job title, the more you need to keep a journal". He argues that this is helpful from a leadership and business perspective. It will improve performance. Johnson (2020, pp. 26-27) also claims that,

> Putting words to experiences frees thinking, increases awareness, reduces inhibition, and promotes self-understanding (Lanaj et al., 2019, p. 3). Writing provides the structure for disciplined thinking.

The benefits of reflective writing in a more general sense of improving well-being have been well-established by research. For example, James Pennebaker (1988) at the University of Texas in 1986 looked at the well-being differences between groups who carried out a writing task.

> One group would write about what was currently going on in their lives; the second would write about the details of the traumatic or stressful event; and the third would recount the facts of the experience, their feelings and emotions about it, and what impact they thought this event had had on their lives. The third group had a 50 percent drop in doctor visits compared with the other two groups. Writing about their deepest thoughts and feelings about traumas had improved their mood and resulted in a more optimistic attitude and better physical health.

> Writing experiments from around the world, with grade school students, nursing home residents, medical students, maximum security prisoners, arthritis sufferers, new mothers, and rape victims, consistently show that writing about upsetting events improves physical and mental health. (In, Van der Kolk, 2014, p.239-241).

We know that dealing with extreme difficulties, including trauma, can be common at work and in work roles, so it is likely that the findings above are relevant. The process of reflective writing is helpful.

Reading can also be an excellent way of reflecting. In his book on Personal and Professional Development, Olson (2013, p.260) says his top recommendation for development is reading at least ten pages of a relevant book every day, and "Building your own personal self-improvement library may be the single most valuable and important investment (after your personal health) that you can make".

3. Reflection-in-action.
Sometimes, an unhelpful split is created between doing and thinking. As if we are either doing one or the other, and not both together. Senge (p.278) helpfully explains,

> If there is no authority figure to turn to, then successful professionals (according to Schön) must develop the capacity to work in continuous cycles of pausing to develop hypotheses, acting, and pausing to reflect on the results. Schön calls this "reflection-in-action" and talks about it as a characteristic of professionals who are successful learners.

Phrases like 'thinking on your feet', 'keeping your wits about you', and 'learning by doing',” he wrote, "… suggest not only that we can think about doing but that we can think about doing something while doing it".

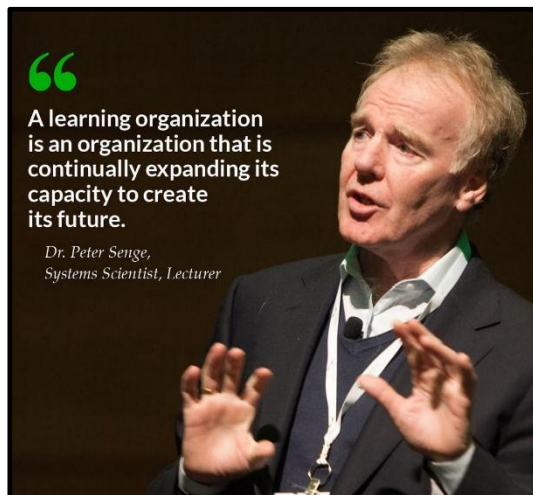**4. Talking with and listening to others and being open to feedback**.
This can be done informally and spontaneously, as well as in a planned and structured way. We must be willing to make our views open to influence and be careful not to confuse our mental models with reality (Senge, p.229).

5. Specific 1-1 processes.
Such as line management supervision, consultation, mentoring, and psychotherapy. These can be an invaluable way of working on our approaches and thought processes to gain a better understanding of the relationship between ourselves, our role, and the task. These processes are useful for reflection-on-experience (Schön, 1983).

6. Group processes.
Such as team meetings, group supervision, and consultation. Senge (p.12) outlines the importance of team learning and the concept of dialogue, which is a key part of reflective practice.

A learning organization is an organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future.

Dr. Peter Senge, Systems Scientist, Lecturer

“When teams are truly learning, not only are they producing extraordinary results but the individual members are growing more rapidly than could have occurred otherwise. The discipline of team learning starts with "dialogue," the capacity of members of a team to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine "thinking together". To the Greeks *dia-logos* meant a free-flowing of meaning through a group, allowing the group to discover insights not attainable individually. Interestingly, the practice of dialogue has been preserved in many "primitive" cultures, such as that of the American Indian, but it has been almost completely lost to modern society. Today, the principles and practices of dialogue are being rediscovered and put into a contemporary context. (Dialogue differs from the more common "discussion", which has its roots with "percussion" and "concussion", literally a heaving of ideas back and forth in a winner-takes-all competition.)

The discipline of dialogue also involves learning how to recognize the patterns of interaction in teams that undermine learning. The patterns of defensiveness are often deeply engrained in how a team operates. If unrecognized, they undermine learning. If recognized and surfaced creatively, they can help accelerate learning. Team learning is vital because teams, not individuals, are the fundamental learning unit in modern organizations. This is where "the rubber meets the road"; unless teams can learn, the organization cannot learn.”

All the above processes will help establish a reflective way of personal being, working, and organizational culture. As Schön pointed out, sometimes we must reflect on our own. In some situations, there is no other option, and we can learn much by doing this. However, we all have blind spots, and we need others to help us see them. Also, in complex situations, our ability to think can be seriously challenged. A group or team may also find it extremely difficult to think and see the 'wood for the trees'.

A facilitator or consultant who is looking in from the outside may be able to restore reflective thinking. Reflection can simply be considered an effective way to learn, develop, and improve. Few organizations would not benefit from developing their reflective practice. However, we must hold onto the reality that no process guarantees anything. We know that group reflection and perspective-taking can also develop into "Group Think" (Janis, 1982). This can inhibit enlightening views that go against the group consensus, sometimes with disastrous consequences. We must observe how we are thinking as well as what we are thinking.

7

PERSPECTIVES, DIALOGUE, AND SUSPENDING ASSUMPTIONS

Reflective practice helps us to look at different perspectives. On our own, we can consider different ways of looking at a situation. Doing this with others has the added benefit that people in different roles have different vantage points. And we have our unique mental map, which is the filter through which we see everything.

In these two pictures of a Barbara Hepworth sculpture, we can see how a slightly different perspective can make a significant difference to what is seen. If we were to look at each image quickly, we might either see one object or two separate objects. Very different perspectives would be gained if we walked around it.

These next three pictures of another Hepworth sculpture illustrate this vividly. If we look quickly from the three perspectives and describe simply what we see, the result might seem as if we are looking at quite different objects rather than the same objects. Reflective practice helps us to get a more rounded view of a situation and to consider something from different angles. To become aware of what we cannot see on our own or from one perspective.

Referring to the work of the Physicist, David Bohm, Senge (1990, p.225) argues that collective learning is vital to realize the potential of human intelligence.

> Through dialogue people can help each other to become aware of the incoherence in each other's thoughts, and in this way the collective thought becomes more and more coherent [from the Latin *cohaerere*— "hanging together"].

Bohm contended that the collective view increases perception far beyond what is possible individually. A pool of shared meaning develops, which is capable of continuous development. Only by working in a group are we able to go beyond the nature of our limited thoughts, which tend to be fixed. As has been said, the definition of insanity is doing the same thing repeatedly and getting the same result, but expecting a different one. By getting different perspectives on the same subject/object, there is a fuller, more coherent, and richer view. However, this does not necessarily make the task easy. Our perspective, which seems very real to us, will be challenged. It may even challenge our sense of how we perceive reality. As Senge has pointed out, the incoherence of our thoughts is exposed.

Looking at sculptures from different perspectives may not arouse our defences too strongly. But if we are looking at our deeply held beliefs or matters where we feel vulnerable, it can feel extremely threatening. When this happens, rather than modify our views, we can become defensive and strengthen them even in the face of contradictory information. The attraction of doing the work is that we may improve our thinking, our maturity, and achieve better outcomes. To do this, dialogue must be an open and collaborative process. Referring to Bohm, Senge (1990, p.225) outlines three basic conditions that are necessary for dialogue,

> **1.** All participants must "suspend" their assumptions, literally to hold them "as if suspended before us".
> **2.** All participants must regard one another as colleagues.
> **3.** There must be a "facilitator" who "holds the context" of dialogue.

A facilitator who is outside the group may notice how the group may also become stuck and unable to observe its thinking. Groups, as well as individuals, tend to develop fixed ways of thinking. To reflect on our views and consider changing them, we must 'suspend our assumptions' and be willing to look at new information or perspectives. If we can do this, we move towards establishing the vital qualities of learning – a culture of inquiry and curiosity. No person or organization can genuinely learn without these qualities. We must keep learning if we are to adapt to a constantly changing and complex world at home and work. Senge (p.226) expands upon the value and challenges involved in suspending assumptions.

> To "suspend" one's assumptions means to hold them, "as it were, 'hanging in front of you,' constantly accessible to questioning and observation." This does not mean throwing out our assumptions, suppressing them, or avoiding their expression. Nor, in any way, does it say that having opinions is "bad," or that we should eliminate subjectivism. Rather, it means being aware of our assumptions and holding them up for examination.

This cannot be done if we are defending our opinions. Nor, can it be done if we are unaware of our assumptions, or unaware that our views are based on assumptions, rather than incontrovertible fact. Bohm argues that once an individual "digs in his or her heels" and decides "this is the way it is," the flow of dialogue is blocked. This requires operating on the "knife edge," as Bohm puts it, because "the mind wants to keep moving away from suspending assumptions... to adopting non-negotiable and rigid opinions which we then feel compelled to defend.".

As part of suspending our assumptions, we must consider how individual and collective biases and prejudices may be a central part of our perceptions. One of our aims must be to become more aware and open to diversity and less discriminatory. Dewey (p.218) referred to the importance of an "absence of dogmatism and prejudice" and the "presence of intellectual curiosity and flexibility". Reflective and anti-discriminatory practices fit well together.

8

SILOS AND INTEGRATION

Sea Lake Silo (2019), Drapl (Travis Vinson) & The Zookeeper (Joel Fergie)

The word silo is often used in the workplace, and mostly as if being in a silo is a negative thing. Winding through Victoria, Australia, is a trail of painted grain silos called the "Silo Art Trail". This was a creative project intended to bring rural communities together in a new way. The original silos were transformed by a group of artists who brought a fresh vision to the industrial-looking structures. The pictured silo is situated along the main highway into Northern Victoria, in a small Mallee town called Sea Lake. The painting was a community-led project and has an Aboriginal theme related to the past, present, and future. Social worker and psychotherapist, Helena Moore, lives and works in the area, and she describes some of her thoughts.

> As I look at the Silos in a new way, I wonder – how are they joined up (the stairs, ramps, and chutes)? What is happening inside them (are there rooms inside)? Why are some of the silos connected? Are the small ones vital to the big ones? Are there underground parts that we can't see? What does the painting mean to me? What might it mean to others?

Silos are an excellent metaphor. It is easy to see how the questions Helena asked herself are relevant to many situations. We might explore further with questions like,

- What are the complex and nuanced connections?
- What is hidden?
- Are there other ways to see what is happening?
- Other ways to know?

Walking Around the Silos and Cross-Silo Collaboration

As with Hepworth's sculptures, if we were to walk around the silos, they would look different depending on our position. Some are joined together, and others are separated. Other factors affect what we see. Even if we are looking from the same place, environmental factors, such as the quality of light, will alter what we see.

This is like how mood alters what we see. We can also have the same angle, the same light, and still see something different, because we each have a unique lens, like a filter over what we see. The filter is like our unique disposition, history, and cultural background.

In an organization, if silos represent different departments, teams, roles, or functions, we might question how we view the different silos. How do we reach that view? Should we be more joined-up? What is the appropriate level of togetherness or connectedness and separateness? The same applies in other relationships, for example, in a family. If our silos are part of a whole, they need to be joined up and in touch with each other. But not merged, so there is a lack of distinction between role and function. There needs to be a healthy combination of connectedness and separateness. Friedman (1999, p.14) stated how important it is for a leader to achieve the right balance.

> I mean someone who can be separate while still remaining connected, and therefore can maintain a modifying, non-anxious, and sometimes challenging presence.

We could say that this is a model of integration, as the neuroscientist, Dan Siegel (2012) has said, separate but connected. Integration does not mean blended. Separation and differentiation are central to the process of becoming integrated. Differences are appreciated, but linkages are encouraged.

An integrated organization recognizes the importance of this and constantly works on it. This is a key aspect of organizational leadership. Safety, connection, and integration are the foundations of an effective organization. In the silos picture, the artwork integrates the various parts into a whole. In an organization, reflective practice can have the same effect as integrating and linking the parts together. It can help create a common language and way of thinking. As the history of reflective practice has demonstrated, it can help any person, whatever their role, become more self-aware and capable. Unfortunately, in some organizations, reflective practice only takes place in a silo and is not integrated. Not only is this a missed opportunity for the organization, but it may also strengthen the closed-silo mentality.

Edmondson, Jang, and Casciaro (2019) have written about what they call cross-silo leadership. They argue that it is difficult to take the perspective of others who have dissimilar roles and skills. However, they believe that when this happens, there are significant benefits to the organization.

> As a rule, cross-functional teams give people across silos a chance to identify various kinds of expertise within their organization, map how they're connected or disconnected, and see how the internal knowledge network can be linked to enable valuable collaboration.

They also acknowledge how difficult this is.

> Though most executives recognize the importance of breaking down silos to help people collaborate across boundaries, they struggle to make it happen. That's understandable: It is devilishly difficult.

Where Edmondson et al. talk about breaking down silos, they do not mean that silos should be dismantled. What we call silos in the workplace are created for functional reasons. For example, we need departments to gather specialists together. We are identified with our core skills. It helps our effectiveness and development to work together in a team. However, the term silo is usually used to mean a closed team or department. One that is not open to perspectives from outside the silo. What we need to strive for is the right balance between getting on with our specific tasks and being interested in what others are doing. How are the organization's activities, teams, and departments (silos) integrated? What is the right degree of separateness and connectedness?

It is the responsibility of leadership to role model how to work across silos. Without this, it is unlikely that effective cross-silo collaboration will happen. One of the benefits is that it encourages people to ask questions and to be curious to understand the work and perspective of others. If we are more tuned in to the views and concerns of others, we may make better decisions because we are more aware of the potential consequences outside of our 'silo'. These qualities are a key part of reflective practice and essential in effective and innovative organizations. As Edmondson et al. state,

> Today the most promising innovation and business opportunities require collaboration among functions, offices, and organizations. To realize them, companies must break down silos and get people working together across boundaries.

9

EMOTIONAL AND STRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE

Emotional Intelligence

Referring to the work of Daniel Goleman and defining emotional intelligence, Cole (2019) states,

> The term emotional intelligence was popularized in 1995 by psychologist and behavioral science journalist Dr. Daniel Goleman in his book, Emotional Intelligence. Dr. Goleman described emotional intelligence as a person's ability to manage his feelings so that those feelings are expressed appropriately and effectively. According to Goleman, emotional intelligence is the largest single predictor of success in the workplace.
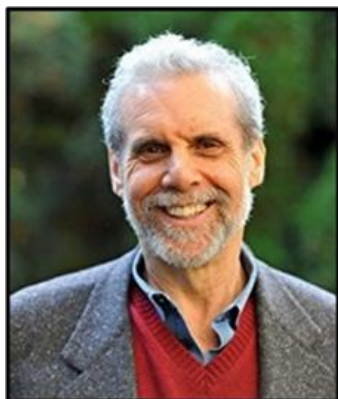
> Goleman has been a major influence on understanding the value of emotional intelligence for outstanding leadership and organizational performance. He claimed (1998) that emotional intelligence is now far more important than IQ in almost any job, and in "… leadership it counts for almost everything". For anyone who does not get the relevance of emotional intelligence, usually, because they think of it as a 'soft' skill not relevant to business, he states, "Companies that leverage this advantage add measurably to their bottom line."

Goleman (1995) outlined five components of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Goleman (2008) succinctly states the importance of developing these abilities in organizations.

> About ten years of accumulated data from organizations of all kinds shows that there's a direct correlation between the emotional intelligence of leadership at every level and how that organization performs by whatever performance metric you want to use.

There has now been a vast accumulation of further research that affirms Goleman's views. Emotional intelligence is connected closely with reflective practice. It is not possible to develop and improve emotional intelligence and become more self-aware without reflective practice. If we aspire to develop as individuals and build outstanding organizations, reflective practice is essential, especially in leadership roles. Bailey and Rehman (2022) state,

> Even so, one competency that is often less talked about is reflection. Research shows the habit of reflection can separate extraordinary professionals from mediocre ones. We would go so far as to argue that it's the foundation that all other soft skills grow from.

Strategic Intelligence
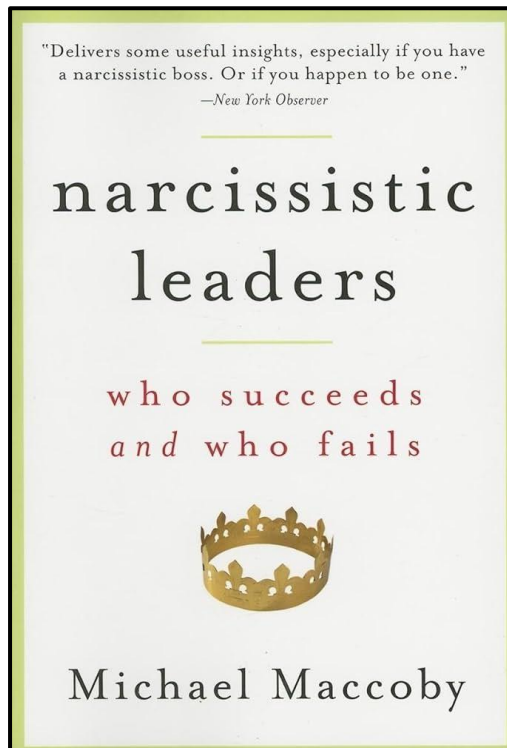
Goleman argues with considerable evidence that emotional intelligence, EQ, is often more important than IQ in influencing effective performance. Michael Maccoby (2007, 2015), who is recognized globally as a leadership expert, argues that in some leadership roles, what he calls strategic intelligence is even more important. He explains (2007, p.156) that strategic intelligence consists of "five interrelated concepts or competencies" – foresight, systems thinking, visioning, motivating, and partnering. Leaders with these qualities are often found in pioneering, groundbreaking organizations and industries. They have a "different way of seeing the world, an ability to synthesize and integrate, to conceptualize the whole rather than a collection of separate parts" (p.167). They may have the ability to see extremely complex patterns. They are alert to opportunities and threats.

Maccoby (p.150) defines the style of these leaders as visionary, productive, and narcissistic. The key point is whether they are productive or not, in a way that provides a benefit to others. He argues that many of them "have built highly successful and sustained businesses, (and) you'll find that they score very low on emotional intelligence". They are often not especially self-aware, reflective, sensitive, or empathetic. He continues (p.154),

> … that the model of an empathetic leader is not necessarily suited to head up a competitive, change-orientated industry.

What is the relevance of this to reflective practice and emotional intelligence? We must keep sight of the results and benefits derived from any work. While reflective practice and emotional intelligence may help achieve excellent outcomes, it is not a guarantee. Other approaches may also be highly successful in some situations. Someone who does not tend to be reflective may work on it, even if improvements are small. They may also build a team that provides a grounding effect and compensates when needed for what is missing. We need to guard against the uncritical and unreflective view that reflective practice and emotional intelligence are always good and necessary.

10

RESISTANCE TO REFLECTION, LEARNING, AND DEVELOPMENT

As reflective practice is essential to growth, development, effectiveness, and achievement at all levels from individual to organization, we might wonder why it is not more predominant. The simple reason is that it is difficult and can be a painful process. These are reasons we might be resistant.

1. We are not as self-aware as we like to think we are.
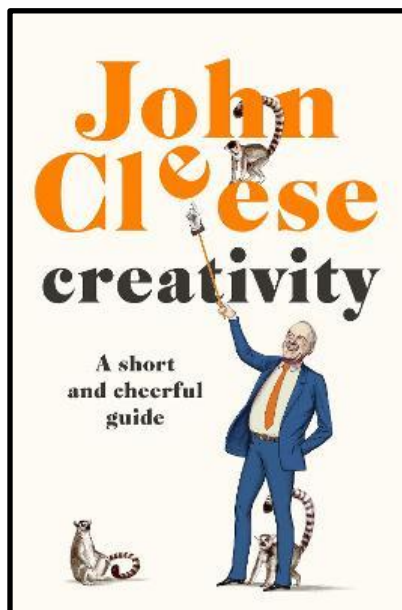
It is challenging to our perception of ourselves to be faced with a more realistic reflection of ourselves. Eurich (2018) claims,

"In our nearly five-year research program on the subject, we've discovered that although 95% of people think they're self-aware, only 10 to 15% are."

John Cleese, the famous comedian and actor, wrote a book with the renowned psychiatrist, Robin Skinner, 'Families and How to Survive Them'. Cleese has also worked on management training for organizations. He says (2021), "I've been doing a study for some years because when I wrote the book with Robin Skinner, I said to him, Robin, how many people in your profession really know what they're doing, and he said about ten per cent. And I was talking three months ago to the guy who looks after the LA Clippers (basketball), who was the best bodyworker I've ever come across, and I asked him the same question he said less than 10.

You have to realize that most people don't know what they're doing, you know, and it's kind of funny, but I'm being quite serious. Most people don't really know what they're doing, but the trouble is they don't know that they don't know what they're doing, that's the thing, and that gives them confidence. So, in order for something to work, the person in charge has got to know what they're doing. That's a very rare event, and the terrible thing is it's true."

Whether these gaps are as big as that, we are likely to think we are doing better than we are. It is hard, even painful, work to close the gap. It would be less painful if we were more open to the possibility that we don't know what we are doing. That is not so much of a problem. Thinking that we do when we don't is the problem. This can be especially difficult for 'smart' people (see below).

Children can be especially effective at inducing parents to feel like they do not know what they are doing. Maybe they wish to invite the parent to join them to find out something new, or they

may want the parent to feel how they feel. An effective parent will be able to tolerate this feeling and engage with it. Another might react with defiant rage. Unfortunately, defensive responses or routines, as Argyris says, "… as well as protecting us against pain… also prevent us from learning how to reduce what causes the pain in the first place" (in Senge, p.234).

2. We are not as productive as we may think.
Just as we tend to overestimate our self-awareness, we may also tend to do the same with our productivity and effectiveness. Liker (2004, p.87) claimed in his study of Toyota's lean production model that most business processes are 90% waste and 10% valued-added work. Do you know any senior person in an organization who would admit to that? It is far more likely to be the other way round.

Dr. Michael Maccoby is known internationally both for his books on leadership and his pioneering projects to improve the workplace. He has been especially interested in how different leadership styles can either improve or hinder effectiveness. In his research on senior professionals and managers at high-tech companies, such as HP, IBM, Intel, and Texas Instruments, he looked at how productive they were. He says (2007, p.91),

> I was astonished to find that even though they were some of the most highly educated professionals around, only 22% were highly productive, or, as I saw it, were engaged in their work with a passionate purpose in creating something that would improve people's lives as opposed to doing a job that was formatted for them by someone else.

What Maccoby believes is most important is not a person's style of leadership, for example, narcissistic, caring, or systematic, but how beneficially productive a person is. Maccoby claims that the key to productivity is having a clear purpose for which one has a passion or enthusiasm. This can be found if one does not have it, and it can also be lost. Talking of productive visionary leaders, he says (p.101),

> … they are all passionately engaged in a mission, and in turn, engage others. The most productive narcissists, the ones who do actually change our world, provide meaning not only for themselves, but also for the people who work for them, who believe in them, who follow them.

For over 40 years, Maccoby has worked as a consultant, coach, and psychoanalyst, all of which can help someone to become more productive. And all these processes are forms of reflective practice. Reflective practice of one kind or another is necessary to discover one's purpose, believe in it with passion, and then continuously improve how one implements it. Facing the reality of how productive, purposeful, and engaged we are can be painful. But if we can do it, we have the potential reward of finding a meaningful, engaging, and productive purpose.

3. Spending time reflecting and creating thinking spaces can feel like it is not a priority.
Most organizations have pressing priorities centred around getting work done and completing tasks. Reflective practice can be resisted because it might seem counterproductive in busy work

environments. However, Johnson (2020, p.22) highlights the benefit of finding time for reflection.

> … a key barrier to developing a habit of reflection is time. For many leaders, time-management is a constant challenge. Given daily organizational pressures, creating the time and space to think seems a lesser priority than executing necessary (or directed) actions. However, the consequences of not taking time to reflect can result in sub-optimization of leadership actions and decisions; which may lead to poor judgment and perhaps even ethical lapses (Thiel et al., 2012). Furthermore, though counterintuitive, reflection may save time by helping leaders appropriately align priorities (Di Stefano, Gino, Pisano, & Staats, 2015). Thus, setting aside time and space to think could be considered a leadership imperative.

4. Learning is challenging and never-ending, though the rewards of being a lifelong learner are great.

Chris Argyris
James Bryant Conant Professor
Harvard Business School
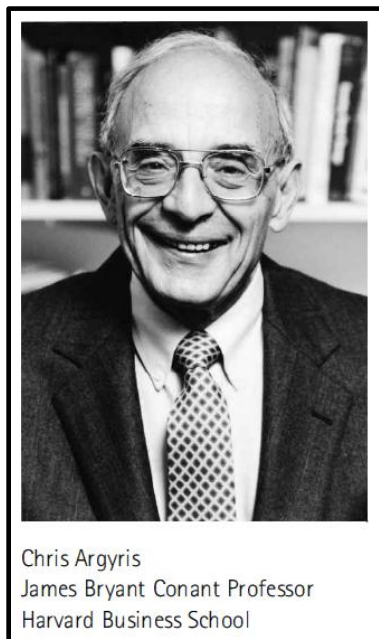
At some level, we would like to think we know what we need to know. Learning gets us in touch with what we do not know, which can make us feel vulnerable. Chris Argyris (1991) claims that it can be people at the top of an organization who find it the hardest to learn. Often their successes have been based on technical skills. They think they are smart, and the process of reflection is challenging as it implies not knowing the answer. Argyris illustrates this point,

"Put simply, because many professionals are almost always successful at what they do, they rarely experience failure. And because they have rarely failed, they have never learned how to learn from failure. So, whenever their single-loop learning strategies go wrong, they become defensive, screen out criticism, and put the "blame" on anyone and everyone but themselves. In short, their ability to learn shuts down precisely at the moment they need it the most."

5. Development is always a challenge.
Before an infant can walk, they fall over many times. Or as an Olympic gold medal ice skater said, I succeeded because I fell on my bum a thousand times. With encouragement and support, this might not feel too bad, but we know that even with support, the frustration and feelings of impotence are hard to bear. Fear of not knowing and being unable to do something is not easy to overcome. One way we might manage this is by setting ourselves low goals. To stay in the comfort zone of what we know we can do. Another possibility that Dweck (2016) has pointed out and that can get a grip at the highest levels of an organization, is to hide failure and exaggerate success. In the wrong kind of environment, Dweck and others have shown how children and adults will lie to avoid exposure to failure. And the wrong kind of environment,

Dweck argues, is one where there is an emphasis on the idea that success is based on talent, rather than arduous work and practice.

In his book on Personal and Professional Development, Olson (2013, p.101) explains how our interest in development may be connected to the way we perceive the potential benefits.

> From what I've observed, within the general population, only about 10 percent of people (10 percent *at most*) are genuinely open to working on personal development. When you bring the dimension of happiness into it, when you show them what has been happening in the last fifteen years in happiness research, then suddenly that 10 percent becomes more like 50 percent. …

Olson argues that if the focus on development is changed to one on happiness, then people's interest is much greater. He says that development and happiness are interconnected. The research on what it takes to raise happiness correlates closely to what it takes to improve personal development. The lure of happiness is more powerful than the idea of development to motivate us to take on hard and even painful work.

6. Not knowing is more anxiety-provoking than knowing.
This is especially so when we are in a difficult and threatening situation. As Friedman (1999) implied in the title of his classic book, "A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix", leadership is not easy. Being able to tolerate not knowing does not mean we stay in that position, but we stay in it long enough to find a better understanding and response to a problem. Not being able to tolerate the anxiety involved is likely to lead to reactive, counterproductive actions.

One way we might deal with the anxiety of not knowing or facing the reality of a situation is by 'magical thinking'. This is a defensive reaction where we might believe our thoughts can magically change a difficult situation without work. As Ogden (2008, p.16) states, magical thinking provides "an illusion or delusion of safety". Referring to the work of psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion on group processes, Ogden (p.14) explains,

> … genuine thinking is replaced by magical thinking. This allows the group, at least temporarily, to evade reality rather than attempt to think about it and modify it.

This takes in group-based tasks when primitive anxieties are evoked and not effectively contained. Bion (1959, p.86) argued that the defensive reactions reflect a group's "hatred of learning by experience" as well as its "hatred of a process of development" (p. 89).

> These fears and hatreds are born of the group members' fears of emotional experience for which they do not feel prepared (p. 82).

Ogden (2008, p.15) highlights the challenge involved in learning and maturing.

The group fears and hates the fact that immaturity is an inescapable part of the human condition and that the processes of learning and maturing require that one tolerate feelings of not knowing, of confusion, and of powerlessness.

However, Bion also believed that despite being drawn towards magical solutions (forms of non-thinking), groups and individuals are at their core "hopelessly committed to a developmental procedure" (p. 89), i.e., to thinking, learning from experience, and growing up. Bion linked this to perhaps the most powerful human striving – the need for truth (Ogden, p.14). Having an adequate grasp of reality is necessary not only to survive but to gain advantages by reading situations accurately and acting effectively.

It is almost as if human beings were aware of the painful and often fatal consequences of having to act without an adequate grasp of reality, and therefore were aware of the need for truth as a criterion in the evaluation of their findings [perceptions]. (Bion, 1959, p. 100)

Ogden (p.16) describes the attraction of 'magical thinking' and the consequences.

A magical world is simultaneously an ideal place and a nightmare: one cannot learn or grow; one is damned to live in an eternal, static, directionless present.

7. The avoidance of pain is a human instinct, individually and in groups.
Friedman (2007, p.67) states the reality for any person, family, or organization that wants to improve.

There is no way out of a chronic condition unless one is willing to go through an acute, temporarily more painful phase.

The problem is, as Friedman (p.67) says, "that chronic conditions, precisely because they are more bearable, also tend to be more withering over time". Most organizations are likely to have a chronic condition or two! The familiar phrase 'growing pains' is a good metaphor for what is involved if we want to learn, grow, and mature as individuals, groups, and organizations. Reflective practice will enable difficult things to be said and troubling issues to be raised. Sometimes, we might just not want to hear it. Our ability to hear difficult things is not static, and it changes from day to day or minute to minute. We must try to be aware of this and how it might be influencing our ability to listen, hear, and be patient.

8. Reflective practice exposes our thinking.
This means that errors in thinking might become obvious to ourselves and others. As well as being helpful, this can also evoke strong feelings such as embarrassment, humiliation, and fear of negative consequences. Senge (p.231) links our defensiveness with our formative experiences.

For most of us, exposing our reasoning is threatening because we are afraid that people will find errors in it. The perceived threat from exposing our thinking starts early in life

and, for most of us, is steadily reinforced in school—remember the trauma of being called on and not having the "right answer"—and later in work.

Edmondson (2019) in her book 'The Fearless Organization' has shown how fear is one of the main reasons people do not express their thoughts and ideas.

9. Being open and reflective might evoke fear of conflict.
People might be familiar with debates and arguments that become a matter of right and wrong, winners and losers. This can become a hostile climate where people can easily become upset with each other. If an organization has already engaged in reprisals and humiliation (if this has been the culture), then a reparative process will be needed to restore a safe environment.

11

CONCLUSIONS AND WHAT TO DO?

To summarize why we might want or need to do something to strengthen reflective practice, which will develop individual and collective emotional intelligence, and have the same positive effect on performance and outcomes, Argyris (1991) reminds us of the benefit of having reflective discussions.

> Such a discussion can be emotional—even painful. But for managers with the courage to persist, the payoff is great: management teams and entire organizations work more openly and more effectively and have greater options for behaving flexibly and adapting to particular situations.

So, if we wish to embed reflective practice into our work and workplaces, these are a few actions we might consider.

1. Start at the top.
Consider how leaders and senior managers are looking inwards and learning. This could be part of an organization as well as an individual review. Argyris (1991) states,

> Until senior managers become aware of how they reason defensively and the counterproductive consequences that result, there will be little real progress. Any change activity is likely to be just a fad.

> Change has to start at the top because otherwise defensive senior managers are likely to disown any transformation in reasoning patterns coming from below. If professionals or middle managers begin to change the way they reason and act, such changes are likely to appear strange—if not actually dangerous—to those at the top. The result is an unstable situation where senior managers still believe that it is a sign of caring and sensitivity to bypass and cover up difficult issues, while their subordinates see the very same actions as defensive.

2. What can I do individually, whatever my role?
If the person or people in senior positions are not showing a reflective approach, it might seem that one's influence is limited, even precarious. This might seem dispiriting and pessimistic. However, it is worth considering what one can do. Whether working in an organization or not, one can try out reflective practice by using the learning and processes described in this article.

One could try to role model a reflective approach. This might have a ripple effect on others. Even if it does not lead to major organizational change, one may notice benefits. The benefits may also extend outside of work into personal life. One could engage a colleague in discussion and see if the ideas take hold. If one's confidence builds and there is evidence of positive outcomes, the ideas could be presented to the team manager, and so on, upwards in the

organization. There may be some openness to the ideas. People 'at the top' may be receptive. The people at the top are not always the ones to spark change. In a healthy organizational culture, useful ideas are welcomed, whoever they come from. In their article, "How One Person Can Change the Conscience of an Organization", Eyrich et al. (2019) state,

> A single person with a clarity of conscience and a willingness to speak up can make a difference. Contributing to the greater good is a deep and fundamental human need. When a leader, even a mid-level or lower-level leader, skillfully brings a voice and a vision, others will follow and surprising things can happen - even culture change on a large scale.

3. Permit to be curious and ask questions.
The value of this to improving individual, team, and organizational outcomes has been stated over and over, supported by vast research. (e.g., Argyris, Edmondson, Goleman, Senge). Ask people and find out, even by using anonymized surveys, how fearful or inhibited they feel about being curious and asking questions. How often, for example, do you see people asking questions that might be challenging, or showing an interest in matters outside of their immediate task and role?

- Do people have permission to be curious?
- Are questions and different perspectives welcomed?
- Do we feel 'psychologically safe?
- How do we know if people feel safe in the organization?

4. Review your organizational culture and processes.
What processes take place in the organization where people reflect on the following?

- What is going on?
- How do we make sense of what is going on?
- How are we contributing to what is going on?
- How can we improve our actions and behaviour?
- How frequent are the processes/meetings where reflection takes place?
- What type, e.g., team meetings, project meetings, 1-1 meetings, supervision, consultation, training, etc.
- Do we use any external facilitators or consultants?

5. Review the complexity of the task.
Consider whether processes to support the task are balanced. Is there too much or too little? Some tasks and roles are exceedingly complex, and others less so. The more complex, the more the need for reflection.

- How complex are our tasks and roles?
- How well are we doing?
- Where could we do better?

- Are there signs of unproductive tension and conflict, dysfunction, and ineffectiveness?

All organizations tend to move towards a degree of defensiveness and resistance to change. There are always 'blind spots'. Would it help to use an external consultant to offer a perspective from outside of the system and help contain the anxiety involved in this type of review?

6. Consider what changes to introduce.
For example, what kind of meetings? Will training on reflective practice be helpful? Could we organize cross-silo dialogues? If a new kind of meeting is being introduced,

- What is the purpose?
- How frequent?
- Who is involved?
- How will it be chaired/facilitated?
- What are the ground rules, time boundaries, etc.?

Safety will be important and takes time to establish. It also depends upon factors such as the quality of facilitation and leadership. A well-led process, given enough regularity and time, may achieve a feeling of safety relatively quickly. For example, in a few months. But if a process only happens once a month, it may take much longer. In some cases, a lack of regularity may even prevent a safe space from developing. People need familiarity to feel safe.

7. Monitor Outcomes.
As reflective practice is task-related, we must monitor how well it is working. We need to consider the evidence of improvements and tangible results. We should look for trends over time, such as 3 months, 6 months, a year, and so on. The quality of reflective processes will vary, and reflection is not a guarantee of positive outcomes. It is possible to reflect and make no progress with a task. Sometimes more time is required. Or we try one approach to see if it works, and if not, consider a different approach. Reflection is a process of experimentation and learning.

12

A REFLECTION ON THE PROCESS OF WRITING THIS ARTICLE – HELENA MOORE

Patrick and I met in 2020 when he agreed to consult on a model of care that I was tasked with developing and writing. Along with a lot of other things, he provided a detailed twenty-two-step curriculum for therapeutic model development. This document played an important part in our shared thinking and anchored our work. I would highly recommend having something like this when embarking on model development. However, what I want to emphasize here is the reflective process. This, for me, powered our work together and was how we produced a model that was far better than either of us could have produced by ourselves. Even if we had perfectly followed the twenty-two steps. A few things stand out,

- The volume of material that we covered in a relatively short time
- The conscious use of noticing and commenting on dynamics
- and the use of pictures and playfulness to try to open other kinds of thinking.

We covered a huge amount of ground over the twelve months that we met, more than I would have thought was possible. We met every week almost without fail, and we engaged in a series of conversations on diverse topics, such as,

- International Therapeutic Model Research
- leadership
- reflective practice
- psychoanalysis
- culture
- creativity
- team dynamics
- internal working models
- And more recently, the explanatory power of outback grain silos!

The critical point is (and I am somewhat reluctant to admit this part) that we didn't always know where these conversations were going. Yet, each time we spoke, something new and important was added to the model. Our article refers to the work of Peter Senge (1990, p.225).

> Through dialogue people can help each other to become aware of the incoherence in each other's thoughts, and in this way the collective thought becomes more and more coherent [from the Latin cohaerere— "hanging together"].

In working together, we shared our thoughts and perspectives. And therefore, the incoherence of our thoughts was exposed. Our thoughts are always perspective and never complete. Through exploring and critiquing our thoughts, we enriched them. This led us to learn and develop our thoughts.

The experience of engaging in a reflective process is not linear. The philosopher Alan Watts (1971) has pointed out that nature never goes in a straight line. It is wiggly; only humans have designed straight lines. Research has shown that most change projects do not progress as expected. Maybe this is because we keep reverting to the safe and more certain idea that if we do enough planning, everything will proceed smoothly from A to B to C. Watts (1971) captures well the flaws in this thinking and why reflective practice can be so difficult, but so valuable.

> And we say, well, let's get things straightened out, let's get this ironed out, let's get it all squared away, and then somehow, we think we understand things. … Things become complicated only when we think about them and that's because we're trying to translate them into a form of life which is very much simpler and cruder than the forms of life we're talking about. … Human beings are just as wiggly as nature and our brains are an incredible mess of wiggles and that's the part of ourselves that we understand least of all.

The psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, among others, has shown that from birth, we need the right amount of challenge to grow and that the transitional space between us is alive with possibilities. Development happens because of the right degrees of presence and absence. On the one hand, the presence of another helps us grow and develop. On the other hand, we grow in the absence of the other. We grow into being connected but separate, neither detached nor merged. Some theories focus on the importance of presence and others on absence. What Winnicott (1953) helpfully did was focus on the space in between, what he called the transitional space. It is in this space that creativity and growth take place. This involves the tension and balance between being separate and connected, knowing and not knowing. Too much of either may disrupt the potential growth.

This is the place where we make sense of the world, and where human creativity first springs from. Children navigate this space in their first relationships and their play. As adults, we continue to navigate this space through our family lives, intimate relationships, and perhaps, if we are lucky, in our working lives.

After a while, Patrick and I got into the habit of consciously noticing and then commenting on our shared experience of the weekly meetings. It was remarkable how often this afforded valuable insight into team dynamics, a particular issue, process, or procedure that I was wrestling with, and the change process itself. In being brave enough to work in this focused/unfocused, not messy/messy way, I believe that we were better able to bring our full awareness and capabilities to the development of the model.

None of this was "magical" thinking. As our article points out, reflection is a very human activity that has been around since the dawn of time, and anyone can do it. At some point, I stopped fretting when I couldn't immediately work something out. I paid more attention to my thoughts and even dreams. I wrote things down in a messy workbook/diary, and I sometimes drew pictures and used other visual material to help me get across a concept or idea. I trusted in the process. It wasn't sophisticated, and it was often fun. To illustrate, I have added a picture that I

drew during one of our later conversations about model-making and the change process. I held this picture up to the screen, and Patrick instantly saw what I was getting at.
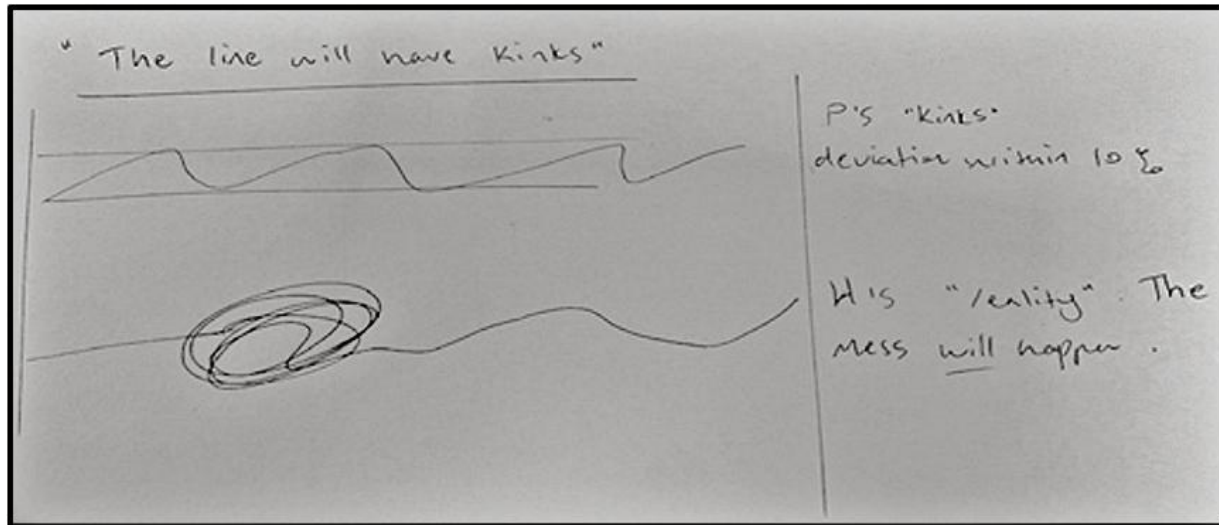
Human beings are not orderly creatures, and the anxiety-inducing material that we bury to maintain control is also the stuff of creativity and discovery. Knowing this makes the mess tolerable and even enjoyable. A bit like the pleasure of untangling a ball of string and making new connections, we can do a lot of interesting things with what we don't already know. There is a tension between curved or wiggly lines and straight lines. If nature is wiggly, as Watts says, is this more of a feminine quality, as the term 'Mother Nature' suggests? What influences our views on boundaries, processes, and change? How straight is our view? How much wriggle room do we allow?

I have re-evaluated my approach to deep change because of this work, and I have embraced my creativity and curiosity far more than I had previously. Ironically, accepting and working with not knowing has helped me to become a better and more confident leader.

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His experience spans from 1985 in the field of trauma and attachment-informed services. He began as a residential care worker in a therapeutic community for young people and has experience as a team leader, senior manager, Director, CEO, consultant, and mentor. He is the author/co-author/editor of numerous papers and books. He is a qualified clinician, strategic leader, and manager. Working in several countries, Patrick has helped develop therapeutic models that have gained national and international recognition. In 2008, he created Patrick Tomlinson Associates to provide services focused on development for people and organizations. The following services are provided,

- Therapeutic Model Development
- Developmental Mentoring, Consultancy, & Clinical Supervision
- Character Assessment & Selection Tool (CAST): for Personal & Professional Development, & Staff Selection
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