



Reflective Learning

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The role of a teacher is not to teach but to create a conducive environment to learn - Albert Einstein

Education for competency building should result in understanding, acceptance and the will to practice what is learnt. Managerial contexts being ambiguous, diverse and ever changing, managers need to develop an ability to learn from ambiguity, uncertainty, change and the resultant experience by a process of reflection. If one wants to learn cycling, one cannot achieve it by taking a distance education or listening to an excellent lecture on cycling. It requires hopping on a bicycle, taking a few falls, and bruises... and one has learnt cycling for life. It requires the ability of reflecting on experience and learning from it. Thus, reflective learning occupies an important place in management education and any business school that strives to excel ought to provide students many opportunities for reflection in their learning process.

What is reflective learning? How do certain business schools achieve this? The first type of reflective learning involves imbibing that requires prior learning of fundamental concepts by students and applying them relevantly, by reflecting upon the fit between the concepts and the given context. In this process, students comprehend not only the meaning of concepts but also the applicability and shortcomings of them by experiencing it in application. This process enables students to internalise concepts rather than learning them cerebrally. The second type of reflective learning focuses on the behavioural aspects of students. Evidently, learning concepts cerebrally and imbibing them do not assure that students will practice what has been imbibed unless they witness their mindsets and mental blocks first-hand in a situation that presents a context for such application. Role-plays and simulations make students to act in a given context, the control of which is entirely in their hands. The teacher's role is merely to debrief the students about their action and guide them in their reflecting on why they acted in a certain manner and the forces behind such actions. Students are in a far better position to appreciate the gap between learning and practice and the steps to be taken to bridge it consciously. The teacher's role is not passive. Far from it, the teacher is actively involved in moderating discussions through insightful

comments, probing questions and dialectical counter arguments.

Many available non-traditional methods ensure learning for internalisation and practice. Case-analysis, group discussions, role-plays, simulations and student-presentations are a few normally used methods in certain leading business schools in India. In addition, field research, project works and interaction with industry personnel form the other set that involves non-classroom activities facilitating such learning.

Lecturing and presentations are far easier for the teacher both in terms of preparation and in terms of class-control. On the contrary, use of non-traditional methods of teaching requires adaptation by teachers to low class-control and open-ended nature of discussions without losing focus on the learning agenda. Not every teacher can be comfortable with such a scenario. The teacher should not only be open to questions and questioning by students but should encourage such interruptions, putting the students in the centre of the learning process. Moreover, training facilities for management-faculty in such non-conventional learning methods are limited in our country. The use of most of these methods is either time-consuming or costly. Besides, non-conventional learning-methods do not lend themselves to testing by the traditional method of examination that involves either question-answers or clear-cut problem solving. This means a new type of evaluation that can be time-consuming, laborious and even contentious. All these make non-traditional methods of learning quite strenuous for teachers.

Reflective learning calls for academic autonomy and necessary support to the teaching faculty in the creation of a conducive learning environment for the students. The teachers facilitate students' learning through the process of experimentation, reflection and abstraction continually, thus enabling them to navigate to higher levels of learning. They too go through the same reflective process that enables them to repeatedly modify and upgrade the learning methods. Students soon learn to learn and they are ready to take the plunge and perform.