

**UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, SYDNEY  
FACULTY OF DESIGN, ARCHITECTURE AND BUILDING**

Student Number: 11844141

**Integration Of Reflective Practice And Knowledge Within The  
Organization**

By

Gerard Datoc

Submitted to:

Chivonne Algeo & Dr. Amela Peric

16<sup>th</sup> June, 2014

Completed as part of the requirements for Project Performance Improvement 15356  
for the Masters in Project Management

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## 1. Abstract

### 1.1 Reflective Practices And The Organization

In today's organizations, it becomes vital to be able to adapt to the changing markets as it develops an incline for new and more innovative products or services. Companies spend countless money and human resources in improving the way they achieve results and develop a structure for continuous improvement plans. An extensive percentage of this is dependant on the teams who are the drivers of success for every organization; hence through my research I endeavour to tackle the qualities of successful teams in how they structure knowledge and reflective practices that are the drivers behind these accomplishments. Through coaching and mentoring, reflecting on our experiences can further develop how an individual can process data and turning that into knowledge. Individuals may have years of experience but that a learning experience is more beneficial for both the individual and the organization. There are challenges in bringing cohesion regarding the transference of explicit and implicit knowledge through training sessions. By integrating reflection within organizations and marrying that with knowledge, organizations contributes to improving business processes and further defining business objectives. The application of David Kolb's Learning Cycle and incorporating that as part of reflective practices of an organization can manifest benefits in how any organization can develop knowledge management practices. Reflective practices foster growth on many levels and create an avenue for situations that require problem-solving skills. It is evident that reflection also enhances our skill sets and how we instigate resolutions and possible actions.

*Key Words: Reflective, Learning, Knowledge, Implicit, Explicit.*

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## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 Knowledge And Correlations To Reflective Practice

In our rapidly changing world, organizations take little time to reflect on past experiences and take the wisdom of what was gained or lost and be able to apply that to shape and mould future decision-making processes. Knowledge management then plays a crucial role and reflective practices in this regard providing an avenue for recognizing learning potentials within project environments, thus emphasizing opportunities and increasing flexibilities having captured the lessons and developing channels for transference of the lessons learned. Andrew Sense stated in 2007 that *to ensure survival and growth, organizations attempt to adaptively respond to dynamic and unstable competitive markets and the human, political and technological conditions that they confront.* (Hedberg, 1981; Leonard-Barton, 1992, 1995; Choo, 1998; Boud & Garrick, 1999; Kezsbom & Edward, 2001).

Hence, organizations adopt differing structural changes to meet certain challenges, and to be dynamic would be to have experiences that can be resourced against these challenges and the emergence of reflective practices becomes more magnified.

*Information and knowledge are often emphasized here because these have become key elements and consequently belong to the group of essential raw materials of the so-called 'new economy' (Bukh, P.N., Christensen K.S., & Mouritsen, J., 2005 p.1).* Using knowledge as a resource, organizations can shape outcomes by the data that is gathered. Data alone is deemed isolated in a sense that it can be treated objectively that bears no value, no relevance or significant importance. *Data becomes information when it is structured and brought into a certain context (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).* Experiential learning would have significance by providing data with the context based on our experiences and how we have dealt with situations from our past and learning from those situations and structure our cognition in how we perceive the world. *Knowledge is continuously derived and tested in the experiences of the learner (Kolb, D.A., 1984, p.27).* This creates a bridge between knowledge and reflective practices that are in essence concrete, reflective and absorptive as the cognition of human learning is a continuous process that envelops every stage of our lives and is considered to be a part of human adaptation.

This paper endeavours to dissect the learning process that we all go through as individuals and in groups and create awareness in how we attain our learning curves. To highlight this research, a case study will be included based from my own empirical study from the perspective of an individual and within a group environment; this paper will also incorporate a literature review, by doing this, it will create an analytical perspective and develop sound understanding to the case study and comprehend the differing dynamics and the highly complex nature of learning.

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## 2.2 Perspective On Reflective Learning

*The simple perception of experience is not sufficient for learning; something must be done with it. Similarly, transformation alone cannot represent learning, for there must be something to be transformed, some state or experience that is being acted upon (Kolb, D.A., 1984, p.42).* As a postgraduate student in Project Management, reflective learning can be utilized as a tool to develop competencies or gaps within our own knowledge that through reflective practices we can enhance and develop these experiences for future situations. *Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, D.A., 1984, p.38).* As I go through my day-to-day activities, I go through intricate learning processes as I interact with the environment, the people, their knowledge, and their skills.

*Our learning is grounded in prior experience. It is profoundly influenced by this experience as well as the context in which we operate. (Boud,D. & Miller,N, 1996, p.3).*

Studies by David Kolb, David Boud and Nod Miller both have strong relationships on the distilled wisdom of reflective learning through experience. If my experiences were the groundwork of my learning, it can be stated that I would not be as proficient in my profession had it not been from my experiential learning. People by nature, are highly absorptive in experiential learning, in infancy we are naturally curious in our surroundings, we would touch and taste things and that was how we learned. *As we get older and need to learn more and more complex concepts and skills, our innate capacity to learn (and to learn how to learn) becomes developed and modified by experience. ((Boud,D. & Miller,N, 1996, p.158).*

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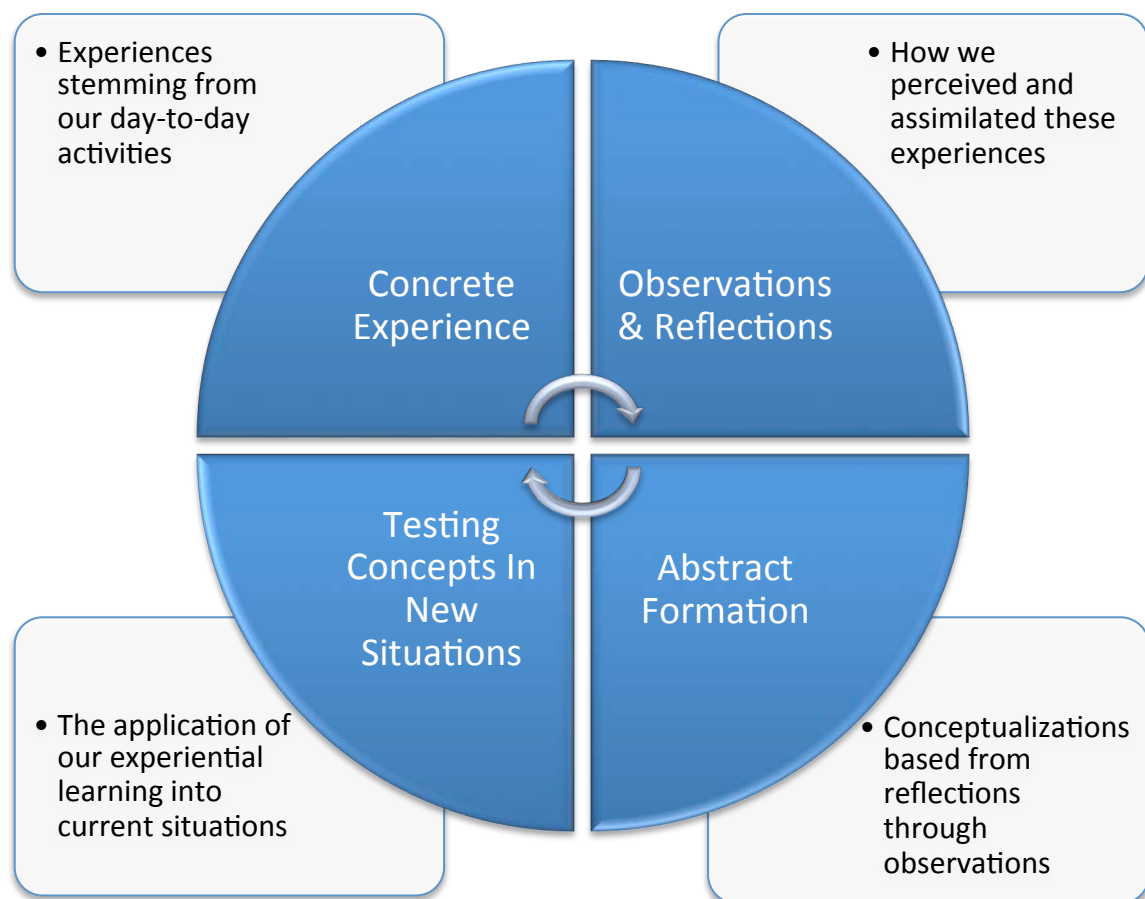
## 2.3 Reflective Tools And Techniques

David Kolb's research had contributed greatly to our thinking practices with the use of the Learning Cycle. It is a model that gives emphasis on the integral part those reflective practices shares within the learning process. This model is essentially how our experiences are turned into concepts that can be used as a guide in choosing new experiences, thus developing our experiential learning.

Our own experiences are unique and we possess strengths within the different cycles, so to be effective in the application of the above model, the individual will require to develop skills to operate the full spectrum of the Learning Cycle.

Within the Learning Cycle there are (4) stages that will be illustrated below:

Illustration 1:



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## **3. Case Study – Career Enhancement Program**

### **3.1 Project Development Plan**

As part of my career enhancement program, I wanted to progress my competencies and methodologies to become a skilled Project Manager, this meant that not only would I need to acquire a structured formal-based learning, I also would need to be able to apply that knowledge within a project environment through a secondment within the Project Delivery team.

Discussing this intent with my Manager and being given the approval, I set out to design a plan for this project. Within my team there were only few individuals who have different knowledge based from our roles, I needed to align that knowledge across the different roles because as part of the project scope, I need to pursue higher education, therefore I would be away and my role would need to be managed during these absences.

There were only (2) other employees that I felt had the capacity to do so, mainly because of their abilities within their tenure at the company, have proven themselves capable as they assisted a great deal on larger deployment projects surrounding my work and I highlighted that with my Manager who initially wanted another person because based from his experience the individual rose to certain challenges within other projects, but I felt that there was not enough knowledge from our spectrum and that more training would be required and I was calculating of the amount of time spent on training.

### **3.2 Project Approach To Coaching And Mentoring**

I took the first person and gave her training on a daily basis, depending on the task that I was doing, this was mainly explicit knowledge so the process of on-boarding clients into our systems and trouble-shooting issues for those clients was highly mechanical and I wanted her to develop the understanding of the information being handled. I started to recognize her confidence as I took it as a sign that the fewer questions asked meant that she understood the objective of the training sessions. Next, I took the second individual and did exactly the same thing, in between the training sessions I would transfer all the explicit knowledge into a procedure guide so during my absence they can refer to and be guided by that accumulative knowledge.

The approach I took was a highly systematic approach, I broke down the levels of knowledge into sequences and smaller work packages and I had the trainees go through the different stages of deployment and processing. By applying the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle (PDCA) quality management method, I was able to comprehend where the knowledge gaps are and I ensured how this can be rectified through reiterating that process and breaking it down further for the trainees. This guaranteed the process was understood, it did not create re-works for the team and if it did, they would be knowledgeable in how they can rectify that ensuring no impacts to the end client.

I encouraged feedback on the process, and I showed them the drafts I did for the procedure guides and checklists, and I wanted to make sure that the language I used was suited for them. People have different ways of comprehension and how I articulate towards different levels of management would depend on whom I was communicating with and to avoid confusion in interpretation of the wordings.

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## 4. Reflective Analysis And Discussion

### 4.1 Reflection On The Project Approach

As a mentor and coach, you can only transfer so much information and regarding the aspect of implicit knowledge it becomes challenging to impart as developing acumen for understanding people particularly within my role is of vital importance and that is something that I cannot manifest into a document. The individuals I trained came from an administrative background and did not deal so much with external stakeholders, this meant that the way they engaged or gauged stakeholders or a situation is under developed and I found that onerous to manage. Reflecting on past experiences, I had the same challenges in developing implicit aspects within different contexts. *Even when individual instruction is extensive, if the social context is missing, confusion and disillusion are likely. (McLellan, H., 1996, p.51).*

To keep up with developing markets, organizations are strongly focused on information and data and not enough on knowledge. The approach I had used were more towards that aspect of the job where the information is readily available and the processes are heavily in place to meet the market deadlines. Financially, the business makes their profit and reaches the intended client sooner than later where another competitor could have the possibility to reach our opportunities.

The challenges were solely not my burden, the trainees also had the burden of developing key implicit knowledge in taking ownership for the role, with limited exposure with stakeholders, the onset for them was dealing with different client temperaments and levels of management seeking information. Without a way of operationalizing implicit knowledge it becomes more strenuous than it should.

As the driver behind the training sessions, I created an environment conducive more on data acquisition and strong process implementation that were based from my experiences throughout my career. As I progressed the project, I relied more heavily on the scope of works and time constraints; I needed the trainees to understand concrete process to be able to perform the role to which they did, but not without recognizing their difficulty.

### 4.2 Project Benefits Of Reflective Practice

Organizations can greatly benefit from reflective practice if they can operationalize this transference. If organizations can incorporate social practices and find ways to create training environments to be productive this can be used to increase performance in the workplace. *To redesign the learning environment so that newcomers can legitimately and peripherally participate in authentic social practice in rich and productive ways-to in short, make it possible for learners to 'steal' the knowledge they need. (McLellan, H., 1996, p.49).*

This holds true based on my experiences as by nature I am not an articulate communicator and being able to adjust how you interact with stakeholders is a form of knowledge that I have honed through years of exposure. As I started out, a previous Manager who was highly articulate and could communicate through the different levels mentored me and he was adept and engaging, and from my observations, I would mimic that skill and apply that to my current situations essentially 'stealing' his knowledge and incorporating that as part of my experiential learning. Organizations that exercise

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reflective practices understand the value of knowledge and how this knowledge can be utilised as part of a tool set that can enhance our performance in the workplace. Through self-reflection or self-assessments we would be able to compare how we solve problems against another who have more exposure within the given situation. It is therefore *critical to understand people's beliefs and use of knowledge in order to design the knowledge management system and knowledge transfer mechanisms that match the requirements of individuals and groups of individuals*. (Bukh, P.N., Christensen, K.S. & Mouritsen, J. 2005, p.152).

### **4.3 Improved Outcome Through The Learning Cycle**

In the analysis of the case study, I will focus initially on the application of David Kolb's Learning Cycle and the absorptive capacity of operationalizing the transference of this knowledge for practice. Through the use of this cycle and creating an environment more conducive to reflective practices we enhance the performance of the individuals by developing a much deeper understanding of the process.

Integrating the Learning Cycle, we define concrete experiences that are the foundation for observations and reflections. Such reflections can then be absorptive through conceptions or theories, which then can be used in testing 'new experiences', which can be reiterated back in the learning cycle. The individual's learning can begin at any stage within this cycle and can be repeated depending on the individual's learning style.

Through time allocation for reflective practice and feedback sessions the organization can encourage and manage knowledge flows between employees.

The relationship between data gathering and knowledge and the marriage of reflective practices with that knowledge can contribute to not only defining business objectives but also to process improvement strategies that have a direct impact to these objectives.

Another improved outcome would be the growth of the trainees and success rates of projects for future applications, trainee experiences would expand, though they could have (5) years experience doing the same role, it is different from experiential learning. *Experience is not quite the same as learning from experience*. (Winter, R., 1989, p.8).

### **4.4 Lessons Learned Through Reflective Practice**

The below bullet points are what I have learned through my reflection and the importance of reflective practices in undertaking this case study and future projects;

- Enhancement of competence through in-depth reflections
  - Self regulation and assessments
  - Collective continuous improvements and appropriate practices
  - Develop professional self confidence
  - Fosters growth and stimulates problem solving skills
  - Transferring knowledge and experiential learning can come from actual experiences more effectively than from another person
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## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, research shows through a review of literature of the benefits that can be established in the integration of reflective practices and knowledge management and how this can be utilized to define business objectives and contribute to process improvement strategies. It is also evident that knowledge is derived from information and data but through our learning from experiences this is transposed to become valuable knowledge that we apply in situations appropriately within context.

Organizations that develop environments conducive to reflective practices elevate employee value, professional confidence and promote growth for the business. The absorptive elements of experiential learning can serve as the foundation of performance drivers for the people behind the process in which organizations are reliant upon.

David Kolb's Learning Cycle can be integrated to serve as a catalyst to improve ways of transferring implicit knowledge and how this can directly improve explicit knowledge in the workplace environment.

Through the undertaking of reflective practices, we enhance our competence by performing self regulation or assessment checks, we gain understanding in our own knowledge gaps and thereby giving us the opportunities to close these gaps and develop and cultivate our professional development.

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## 7. Appendix: Plan-Do-Check-Act

### 7.1 PDCA Quality Management Method

For the purpose of clarification regarding the approach used to mentor and coach the trainees as part of the career enhancement program. Below is an illustrative model of how I executed my training sessions and gave visibility on the gaps relating to the transference of explicit knowledge through these sessions and have guided the structure of the procedure guides and checklists.

