# Section Three:

## The Planning and Designing of Learning, Training and Development

# 10

# Fundamentals of Adult Learning

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## INTRODUCTION AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Almost all of those with whom we are involved in human resource training and development are adults. If our programmes are to be successful in helping people to learn, we must understand something of how adults learn.

In this chapter we shall look at some of the features of adult learning and discuss briefly some of the theories that have been developed to help us understand how adults learn.

Since much of the material in this chapter can seem rather abstract, you might find it helpful to ground the material by relating it to your own learning. You might like to pause for a few moments and write down the outlines of two of your own experiences of learning as an adult, one good and one bad. If you keep these outlines close at hand as you read the chapter, you will be able to compare what is being suggested about adult learning with your own experience.

Having read this chapter you should understand:

- the processes of learning;
- some of the features of adulthood relevant to adult learning;
- some of the characteristics of adult learning in particular; and
- the chief features of the main theories of learning.

## LEARNING

We are all learning all the time. From day to day, even from minute to minute, we find ourselves faced with the need to adapt in order to survive in different circumstances. We adapt our behaviour and our ways of thinking about the world and interacting with it in order to cope and continue to live. For most of the time the changes required of us are small and hardly noticed; at the other extreme, there are occasions when we have to make major changes very quickly. In between are those occasions when we realize that we have changed, adapted, and now behave differently or see the world differently, or even understand ourselves differently. We realize that we have learnt something.

Learning is difficult to define. It is part of the process of change and adaptation to different circumstances. It enables us to draw on the past in order to cope better with the future. It is to do with change.

But what kind of change? Through learning people may change their view of the world, or their understanding of themselves, or their behaviour, or something else. The change may not always be immediately obvious to others, or even to the learner. However, learning eventually produces some observable effect.

What has been said so far implies that learning is a process. There is not one event, but a series of elements that go to make up learning. As with any process, learning is difficult to observe when it is happening; but as with any process, learning can be helped or hindered by many factors which are not themselves part of the process.

It is useful at this point to make a distinction between formal and informal learning:

- *Formal learning* is learning that takes place in a structured and intentional way. Typically formal learning takes place when we attend some kind of course, often in a particular setting. A good example of formal learning is the learning that takes place in school classrooms or training rooms.
- *Informal learning* is not structured, though it may occur in a structured setting. Informal learning takes place when we learn something new without intending to. It is the kind of learning that occurs when we pick up tips on doing something from watching an expert at work, or discover a new piece of information through a casual conversation. Much of our learning is informal.

## THE LEARNING PROCESS

The process of learning can usefully be split into several stages. To learn we must:

- receive new information or data;
- take the information in;

- assimilate the information;
- store the information;
- use the information.

Exactly how we perform these tasks, by what physical processes they happen, is a matter of great discussion and controversy. For our present purposes, the details are not significant; those interested should refer to books such as Hill (1997), Pinker (1997) and Thompson (1993). However, we must say a little about each stage of learning.

## *Receiving*

We note first that for the purpose of learning we are interested in the new information we receive. Much of the information we receive, especially as we get older and have the benefit of more experience, is not new. We do not ignore it, but it is not part of our learning.

However, we should note that new information is not just pieces of data about the world. New information may include ideas that help us make new connections between pieces of data already stored away in our memories.

Information comes in many forms. Our senses offer us information all the time. We filter the information, selecting what is relevant at the moment, that is, what is significant for the task in hand. Sometimes we make mistakes, and ignore something important; sometimes one piece of information is so overpowering that it blots out everything else. Thus when my sense of touch tells me that I am very cold, this information can blot out everything else, including the words of wisdom of a teacher. This is one reason why the efficiency of our learning is affected by the circumstances in which the learning takes place.

## *Taking in*

Having received information and selected what we wish to take notice of, we have to take the information in. How we do this is not very well understood, but it is clear that human beings vary considerably in their ability to take in information. There are great variations in what we can see, hear, feel and so on. Many of these variations have to do with physical capability, and are affected by circumstances. For example, I see less well in dim light, and hear less distinctly if there is a lot of background noise. Our physical capabilities also change with age. Most people notice a deterioration in their sight and hearing as they grow older, though the speed of change varies enormously.

The effect of all this is that our physical capabilities affect our ability to learn. We learn from what we take in, and it seems that we take in only a fraction of the information we

receive through our senses. For our learning to be efficient and productive, we need to maximize the amount of information we take in.

In practical terms this means making sure that we have the best possible chance of taking in as much as possible. The physical setting of our learning is therefore important, as is our own physical state. We can also add to the efficiency of learning by providing more than one means of taking in the same information. Not only do our senses provide information, each can reinforce the other. The old saying, a picture is worth a thousand words reminds us that what we see has as great an impact as what we hear. For this reason, mind-mapping, developed by Buzan (1995) has become a very effective tool of some people. So too does what we touch, and the combination of sight, sound and touch in doing something is very powerful – which is why we often learn most quickly and easily through doing things.

## *Assimilating*

In order to learn something, we must connect what we have taken in through our senses with information we already have stored away. This helps us first to make sense of the information we have received. Until we can connect the new information in some way with our existing framework of thought and experience, we cannot decide whether the information is significant or worth retaining.

How the processes of assimilation work is again not well understood, but the details do not matter for our present purposes. What is important is the role played by existing frameworks of thought. The more easily we can assimilate information to our existing frameworks, the quicker and more efficient will be our learning. Hence those offering learning must find ways of helping learners to connect new information to old. This is partly expressed in the idea familiar to trainers and teachers, that you must start 'where the students are'.

With adults, starting where they are can be very difficult: in any group of adults there is a variety of experience and a variety of starting points. Even where the group is coming to a task unfamiliar to all of them, the frameworks into which the new information must be assimilated are very varied.

An important aspect of assimilation is the resolution of conflicts between the information we already have and the new information. Generally this is not too difficult, especially if information is presented in units which allow time for the recognition and resolution of conflicts. However, sometimes the conflict is great, for example when a cherished and familiar working practice is described as inefficient or bad practice; then the resolution of the conflict may require a change in the framework of thought as well as the assimilation of new information. Changes in frameworks of thought are difficult, and may have considerable implications – which is why they are often resisted. Sometimes, it has been suggested, the changes are simply rejected. We shall look briefly later at one famous discussion of responses to new information, by Piaget, which suggests this.

## *Storing*

Once information has been assimilated, it must be stored for re-use, if we are to be able to say we have learnt it. The processes of memory have been closely studied for many years, but are still a subject of considerable debate and research (see, for example, Shanks, 1997). However, it is now generally agreed that we store things in short- or long-term memory, at least. Many of the items stored in short-term memory will be lost after a period, sometimes of minutes, sometimes of days. Information stored in long-term memory may be there indefinitely, though we may also have difficulty accessing it.

It is often said that memory declines as you grow older. Recent work suggests that it is *use* of memory that declines, rather than memory itself. Other work suggests that older people find it easier to remember some things, because they can assimilate them: what older people may find more difficult is assimilating information that requires changes or extensions in frameworks of thought. Think for example of the difficulties of learning a new language as you get older! A good summary of recent work in this area can be found in the chapter by Boulton-Lewis in Sutherland (1997). See also Chapter 13 on diversity and the dangers of stereotyping certain groups.

One implication of our present understanding of memory is that trainers and teachers have to think about the kind of information being given and what learners are expected to remember. If we want information stored in long-term memory then we must give the learner help in storing.

## *Using*

We cannot say we have learnt something until we are able to use it and, usually, use it in contexts different from the context in which we gained it. This implies that we cannot claim to have learnt something until we have tried to use it. So learning opportunities should carry with them the opportunity to use what has been learnt. This may be as simple as trying to show someone else a skill you have acquired, or explaining to someone else a new idea you have learnt.

For the provider of learning, this stage of learning is relevant to assessing learning. In order to know whether students have learnt, and what they have learnt, we need some form of evaluation. The nature and form of evaluation or assessment will vary according to what is supposed to be learnt. For good assessment it is necessary that learners are given the opportunity to show that they can use the information they have gained in different ways. For example, in assessing whether or not someone has learnt to use a word-processor, we might need to ask them to produce more than one document, to show that they have learnt the skills rather than just a recipe.

## LEVELS OF COMPETENCE

One of the problems of organizing our learning is that we do not know what we don't know! In other words we are unconsciously incompetent. Through placing ourselves in learning situations or sometimes through serendipity we find ourselves discovering something new but in which we have no ability – conscious incompetence. The next stage of learning and assimilating knowledge and skills is conscious competence, which might be when we are driving a car but have to think about what we are doing. Lastly, there is unconscious competence, which is where we might be thinking about work as we drive home and can't even remember doing the driving, nor the journey home! These levels of competence are shown in Figure 10.1.

Next, we must notice three features of learning implicit in what we have discussed so far: learning takes time; learning is an interactive process; and learning is an iterative process.

### *Learning takes time*

It is important to notice that the stages we have described take time. We may receive, take in and partially assimilate information in a very short period, but it may take hours or days for us to assimilate the information completely. Learning opportunities must provide time for the necessary reflection to take place.

### *Learning is an interactive process*

Receiving, taking in and using information require us to respond in some way to the world in which we live. Our interaction may be with other people, with objects, or with

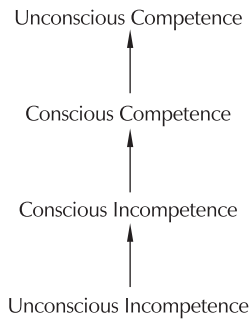


**Figure 10.1** Levels of competence

both: but unless there is interaction, we shall not learn. The interaction may be small, as in so-called 'passive learning', in which we receive information and process it without response (for example, in the traditional lecture to a large audience). However, there is much discussion and some evidence to suggest that the greater our interaction, the quicker and more efficient is our learning: see, for example Brookfield (1991) and Kidd (1983).

## *Learning is an iterative process*

Learning is a process that is never complete. This is partly because neither human beings nor the world we inhabit are static. Changes are always taking place, in us and around us. At any stage of our lives we may find ourselves acquiring new information which makes us change some of the connections we have made, perhaps even discarding old information.

We acknowledge this as the need to revise views and practices. Having learnt something, we use it, and we find that it works tolerably well. But we can do better, so we revise our ways of thinking and doing, and try again, and then revise again and so on. A useful way of visualizing this process is given in Kolb's experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984), presented in Figure 10.2.

What Kolb's cycle emphasizes is that learning is a process which involves both noticing things and reflecting on what we have noticed. It is iterative and interactive. Not only does new experience or information become a spur to reflection and action, reflection can lead to testing ideas through experience.

Kolb's cycle is simplified. Just a little thought about our own learning should show that we need to also take account of choices, deliberate decisions to accept or reject particular ways of reflecting, goals and so on. However, the simple picture is sufficient for our present purposes, emphasizing as it does that learning is a process that feeds on itself.

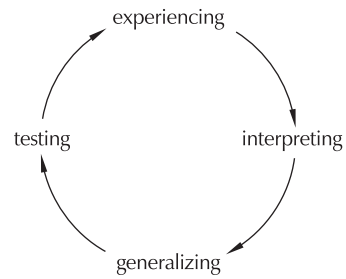


**Figure 10.2** Kolb's experiential learning cycle

# ADULTS AND ADULTHOOD

Having looked very briefly at the processes of learning, we turn to the second part of our task and consider adults and adulthood. Much of our thinking about learning is based on studies of children learning. However, there are significant differences between children and adults, and some of the differences affect learning. This is emphasized by some writers using the distinction between pedagogy and andragogy. Pedagogy is claimed to be a form of teaching and learning appropriate to children in formal settings, which sees them as recipients of instruction; andragogy in contrast is seen as a process of teaching and learning in which the learners are participants. This distinction will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.

## *What is an adult?*

There are many ways in which we normally pick out adults from children, for example, age, size, or occupation. Thus we usually say that someone aged 14 is not an adult; someone aged 41 is an adult. Someone six feet tall is likely to be an adult, someone three feet tall is likely to be a child. Someone in full-time employment is likely to be an adult, someone in full-time compulsory schooling is more likely to be a child.

But already doubts should be creeping in. There are short people who are adults and tall people who are not adults. Whether or not someone in employment or schooling is described as an adult may depend on the laws of the country concerned relating to employment and school attendance. Sometimes we describe people of adult age as behaving like children, and some children are described as behaving like adults. So there are areas of doubt.

The law does not help us either. In many countries there are clear legal rules about when a person may serve in the armed forces, take on debts, vote, marry and so on. All these are taken to be signs of being an adult, yet the variation in age across the world for these significant events is enormous, and in some cases affected by gender.

Clearly then for our purposes none of these ways of characterizing adults is sufficient. Wherever the boundary is drawn there will be people who do not fall into the category of adult but who are nevertheless of interest to us because they are among our adult learners.

## *Adulthood*

It may be more helpful to distinguish between being an adult and adulthood. To be an adult is to fulfil a set of criteria, usually based on age, size, legal status and similar features. Adulthood is a state that is related to age, but not determined by any of the features we have noted so far.

What are the characteristics of adulthood? We can begin to explore these by recalling a remark made above: sometimes we describe people of adult age as behaving like children, and some children are described as behaving like adults. This suggests that we might identify some of the characteristics of adulthood by considering what we expect of adults, for example in their behaviour.

A short list might include words like maturity, experience, responsibility and independence. We expect adults to show maturity in their behaviour for example; we do not, expect adults to fly into a rage just because they cannot have exactly what they want immediately. We expect adults to have experience of life, and to draw on that experience in making decisions. We expect adults to take responsibility for their decisions. We expect adults to show independence, making their own decisions.

This does not mean that all adults fulfil these expectations all the time. However, if someone has reached adulthood, we expect him or her to show more of these characteristics rather than less. It is important to recognize that adulthood is a state that is incomplete. Adults are changing and developing all the time, just as children are. But in adults the changes are less dramatic, usually.

We should now note another word of caution: words like maturity and independence are slippery. What counts as maturity in one context will not necessarily count in another, and the same is true of words like independence and responsibility.

Clearly defining adulthood is hard. We can see that adulthood involves a range of attributes, of which we have noted some. Our judgement about whether or not someone has achieved adulthood will involve assessing the extent to which they display appropriate attributes.

The immediate significance of this for adult learning is this: we cannot assume that all adults are the same. They differ markedly, and those differences affect the way they learn. To see this we shall look further at some of the characteristics of adulthood which are of significance for learning.

## Adult learners are mature

We have already noted that it is hard to define maturity, but we can recognize it. Among other things, to say that someone is mature is to say that they have a framework of ideas and experience into which everything new must be fitted in order to make sense. The framework has been formed through reflection on a variety of experiences, and may be more or less fixed. Mature people may find it easy to recognize challenges to their frameworks of thought, but hard to adapt those frameworks.

## Adult learners are experienced

They have lived through a number of years and a range of experiences, from many of which they have learnt. Some of the experiences have been good and positive, others have

been bad and negative. Positive or negative, they are part of the baggage brought by adults to learning opportunities and colour the way in which people are able to respond to learning opportunities.

## Adult learners are capable of making informed choices

We expect adults to make decisions and choose between courses of action, so it is natural that we should expect them to do so in relation to learning. This means not just that we can expect adults to make choices about courses or whether or not to take up particular learning opportunities; we should also expect adults to make decisions about what they want to learn and how they want to learn. Sometimes it is hard to get adults to make decisions about their own learning, because of their past experience of learning. Sometimes they make decisions which seem wrong, and that raises questions about who controls adult learning, and how.

## Adult learners are capable of taking responsibility

This follows on from the last point. We expect adults to take responsibility for their actions, and we should expect adult learners to take responsibility for their own learning. To encourage this to happen, adults need to become actively involved in the design of learning opportunities.

The last two characteristics are very important for the consideration of motivation. It is clear that nobody will learn unless they are motivated to do so. This can be seen in children in school. It is also true of adults. We need to understand something of what motivates those who undertake learning: why they are doing it, what they hope to gain from it, what impediments to learning they carry with them.

This is particularly important in many training programmes. Many of those involved in training and development programmes will be there because they must be there – it is a requirement of the management – and they may not be well-motivated to learn.

One further aspect of adulthood should be noted. Adults are people who have developed an identity, a sense of who they are and how they relate to others. Their identity has many components, but one important element is related to their own particular combination of experience and ideas. In some learning situations new ideas will be presented which require significant changes in their ways of thinking and acting, and those changes may threaten a person's identity. Threats to our identity are always hard to handle, as they have implications for every aspect of life. This aspect of adulthood alone makes the task of offering learning to adults challenging.

# STYLES OF ADULT LEARNING

In this section we look at how to engage people in the processes of learning. As we have seen, we need to pay attention to why people want to learn, what they want to learn, and how they want to learn. In practice we shall then need to compromise between the learners' needs and desires and what it is possible to deliver through particular learning opportunities.

## *Why people want to learn*

Usually adult learners will have a mixture of reasons for wanting to learn, and their reasons may change over the course of a learning programme. We can never assume that we know exactly why people have opted to become adult learners. However, it is useful to group the main reasons for learning in ways that relate to the main psychological theories about adult learning. We do not have space for a detailed discussion of these theories, especially as there are many variants within each of the main streams. Books such as Atkinson *et al* (1993) and Hill (1997) provide more detail, and the psychology section of any good library or bookshop will provide a range of detailed discussion for those interested. Here we shall indicate only founding figures and broad strands relevant to our particular concerns.

### Behaviourist theories of learning

Some of our learning comes about as a response to a stimulus. We react to something outside ourselves. If the result is good for us, we learn to react in similar fashion in a similar situation, while if the result is bad, we learn not to do that again. This is the basic idea of the behaviourist school of thought, which can be traced back to the work of Pavlov (1927) who taught dogs to salivate at the sound of a bell; and Skinner (1974) who taught pigeons to play table tennis through operant conditioning.

Behaviourists concentrate on modifying behaviour by reinforcement. Behaviour that is seen as positive or good is reinforced by rewards (your car insurance is reduced if you do not make a claim), while unwanted behaviour is treated to negative reinforcement (you are fined if you are caught speeding).

Most people have experienced both positive and negative reinforcement at school, and we can see that behaviourist learning theories have their strengths. At very least they remind us of the importance of the reactions of a teacher to the work of learners. However, this approach to learning has been criticized as mechanistic and tending to focus only on certain behaviour. There is no idea of the exploration of alternatives, and there is evidence to suggest that reinforcement may need constant topping-up to remain effective.

## Cognitivist theories of learning

If some of our learning is reactive, some learning can also be described as proactive. That is, we seek out information and try to make sense of it in order to understand better our world and our place in it. This is the basis of cognitivist theories of learning, which make use of the work of researchers such as Kohler (1925) and Piaget (1950). Kohler worked with apes and Piaget concentrated on child development, but their results have been applied more widely.

For the cognitivist, the key feature of human beings for learning is that we are intelligent seekers. According to cognitivist theories, we constantly find that our experience of the world does not quite fit the way we see the world, and we try to do something about the misfit. We seek new information, we adjust our view of the world, we may create a new way of seeing the world. There are clear connections here with some of the elements we noted earlier in the different stages of the learning process.

As we noted earlier, we do not always adjust our view of the world easily; sometimes we resist change. Piaget (1950) claimed that sometimes we reject change. He developed a three-fold classification of responses to new information, suggesting that we may:

- *assimilate* – the new information poses no great challenge to our existing framework of thought and is absorbed;
- *accommodate* – the new information does not fit easily into existing frameworks, but can be taken in with some changes;
- *reject* – the new information is so different from anything we have already that we cannot take it in without great changes in our framework of thinking, and we are not willing to make the changes.

It is questionable whether Piaget's model, developed from work with children, can be applied directly to adults, who have very complex frameworks of thought and considerable experience of accommodation. Nevertheless, we should note that in a cognitivist view, a person's desire to learn may conflict with a reluctance to change established frameworks. I may want to learn information technology skills, but if I am convinced that I cannot cope with 'clever machines', I will struggle.

Cognitivists, we said, see us as intelligent. To some critics, that should read: cognitivists see us as rational. That is, some critics claim that cognitivist theories are biased towards that learning which involves intentional rational thought, in which we are consciously trying to make logical sense of our ideas and bring order to the world as we see it. However, the world is not very orderly, nor are human beings totally rational. Consequently there are aspects of our learning which do not fit the patterns of cognitivist theory.

A development of cognitivist approaches is personal construct theory, due to Kelly (1955). Kelly suggested that we each create our own model of the world and of other people

in it, and our relationship to them. Our constructed picture, he suggested, is shaped as much by feelings, beliefs and values, as by our experience. As a result, we all also create our own, individual, way of learning, which is closely related to our beliefs and values.

## Humanist theories of learning

Some of our learning is a response to outside stimulus, some of our learning is an attempt to make sense of our world. Some of our learning is the outcome of a natural potential for learning: we learn because in the right circumstances we cannot help it. This is the key idea of the humanist school of thought, exemplified by the work of Rogers (1974). His perspectives on learning are also mirrored by Galileo who stated that, 'You cannot teach anyone anything. You can only help them discover it for themselves.'

This approach recognizes that humans generally respond to warmth, care and understanding. It claims that all human beings are born with a potential for learning. All human beings can learn, and potentially can learn almost anything. What prevents human beings from learning is a combination of external factors and internal fears, associated with a lack of warmth, care and understanding.

The importance of this approach is that it leads to the idea of learner-centred learning, in which the 'teacher' is seen as a facilitator. Responsibility for learning rests mainly with the learner, while the teacher provides resources and encouragement. In learner-centred learning, the learner sets the pace of learning, and the learner's existing knowledge and skills are recognized and used positively.

This approach to learning is very affirmative of learners, especially those who come with very low expectations of themselves. The problem the approach presents is that in many learning situations it is not possible to allow individuals to go at their own pace. Nor, generally, can learners be allowed to determine the content of learning: they do not have the knowledge or experience to do so, and there are frequently constraints imposed by demands for specific outcomes of a learning programme. Finally this approach can leave learners blaming themselves, or being blamed by others, for their failure to learn.

We can summarize this section by saying that people want to learn because:

- they are responding to a stimulus (which may be the need to upgrade skills in order to keep a job);
- because they want to improve the fit between their perception of the world and their experience (perhaps they need to understand the organization better to make career progress); and
- because they are encouraged to develop their potential (having left compulsory education at the first opportunity, they realize that they are capable of learning a great deal more).

All these reasons for learning can be found expressed in a variety of ways. For those concerned with adult learning, it is important to be aware that behind the many different stated reasons for wanting to learn there lie these different views of human beings and their learning capacities and behaviour. Providers of training and development need to draw on all these theories in order to understand the task before them.

## *What people want to learn*

We engage in learning to acquire skills and knowledge. However, there are several kinds of skills and several forms of knowledge, and the ways in which we learn skills and knowledge reflect this variety.

It is useful first to make a broad distinction between generic knowledge or skills and domain-specific knowledge or skills. Generic knowledge and skills can be used in a variety of situations. The ability to manipulate things with your fingers is a generic skill with applications in feeding and dressing as well as using tools or turning the pages of a book. Knowing that some materials are impervious to water is generic knowledge that has applications in house building and drainage as well as choosing your waterproofs for the rainy season.

Domain-specific knowledge and skills relate to particular areas or domains of our experience. The ability to drive a car is a skill specific to road transport: someone who can drive a car may also be able to drive a bus or truck, but will not automatically be able to steer a boat or fly an aeroplane. Knowledge of the attributes of the particles that make up an atom is domain-specific: it is unlikely to be of use outside specialized fields of particle physics or chemistry.

The significance of this distinction for our purposes lies in the part of the learning process that we called assimilation. Someone who is already knowledgeable or skilful in a specific domain is likely to find it easier to assimilate further knowledge or skills within the same domain, simply because there is already a framework of thought to which to relate the new information. On the other hand, someone who is new to a specific domain may struggle to learn until a suitable framework is established. It is worth noting that expertise in one domain does not guarantee expertise in another, nor does expertise in one domain assure us that learning in a new domain will be quick or easy.

With generic skills and knowledge, we usually find that we learn them once and can then apply them again and again. We may, however, be able to refine our generic knowledge and skills by reflection on our use of them (recall Kolb's learning cycle).

As well as the distinction between generic and domain-specific knowledge and skills, it is worth noting the differences in the types of skills and knowledge we acquire. The best known way of listing these types is Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom *et al,* 1956). Bloom classified skills under three domains: cognitive, psychomotor and affective. His taxonomy is represented in Figure 10.3.

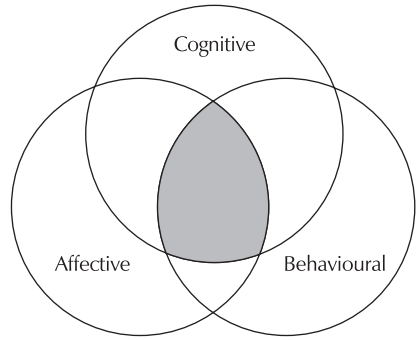


**Figure 10.3** Bloom *et al*'s taxonomy of learning

- 'Cognitive' covers knowledge-related skills, knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation in ascending order of complexity.
- 'Psychomotor' covers motor skills in the form of abilities, techniques and competences.
- 'Affective' covers feelings and attitudes and activities such as responding, valuing and judging. Krathwold *et al* (1964) identified these as: receiving, responding, valuing, organization and characterization by a value or value complex.

This taxonomy, and other ways of differentiating the skills we learn, are important because they remind us that different skills may be most efficiently learnt in different ways. If we wish to develop psychomotor skills, say the skill of knocking a nail in straight, we may learn best by following the example of an expert and practising until we can do it. If we wish to learn about the political system of a particular country, we may do so most efficiently by reading a book written by an expert.

There are other ways of classifying learning skills and knowledge, such as those of Gagné (1967), and Gardner (1984) who proposed seven forms of intelligence:

1. linguistic;
2. logical/mathematical/scientific;
3. visual/spatial;
4. musical;
5. bodily/physical/kinaesthetic;
6. interpersonal;
7. intra-personal.

No one classification is universally accepted. Whichever classification appeals most to us, we should always remember that they are guides only, and that no classification, however complex, can take account of all the differences we find in adults.

### *How people want to learn*

Bloom's taxonomy leads us on to consider how people want to learn. We have noticed that different forms of skill or knowledge may be most efficiently learnt in different ways. However, our concern is with adults learning, and research suggests that adults have their own preferred learning styles, which cut across some of the distinctions made above.

A classification of learning strategies is offered by Honey and Mumford (1986) which is based on the work of Kolb. They isolated four styles of learning:

- *activist* – the style of those who learn by doing things, intentionally or unintentionally;
- *pragmatist* – the style of those who learn by deliberate experimentation;
- *theorist* – the style of those who learn by analysing information and developing models to help them understand;
- *reflector* – the style of those who try to stand back and view events from several angles.

You might like to spend a few moments relating these styles to Kolb's learning cycle, and noting how closely they correspond. This shows how discussion of learning can be a self-reflective process (see Chapter 12). In a work setting have you noticed how you sometimes become frustrated by the fact that some people seem to take a long time before acting; or alternatively act too fast without thinking? Perhaps they are only exhibiting their learning style which is different to yours and which thus creates organizational friction!

It is important to note that most of us use more than one style, without realizing that we are doing so. However, it is claimed that everyone has one or two preferred styles, and it is in using those preferred styles that we learn most efficiently. This is partly because in using our own preferred styles we are doing something with which we feel comfortable; and partly because constant use of one or two styles helps to make us both more comfortable with them and more expert in applying them, thus increasing our potential for learning in these ways.

## WHY, WHAT, HOW AND PRACTICE

Our discussion of why people want to learn, what they want to learn and how they want to learn has been very sketchy. Its purpose is to remind us that adults who take up programmes of training or development come with their own ideas about learning, based on past experience, and those ideas have a significant effect on the efficiency with which they learn.

Some of the ideas people have act as barriers to learning, making learning not just inefficient but difficult, perhaps even almost impossible. The next chapter will look in more

detail at barriers to learning and overcoming them as the theoretical ideas of this chapter are put into practice.

## NEGOTIATION TRAINING FOR AN NHS TRUST

A large NHS Trust in London had found itself increasingly challenged by the contracting aspects of the internal market, which had been introduced into the NHS in 1991. The Trust faced severe competition from nearby hospitals as well as numerous private hospitals and clinics. Traditionally, the hospital's referral area encompassed GPs in all London and Home Counties district health authorities (DHAs). Although the hospital had a well deserved reputation for its clinical excellence, it was also regarded as expensive and insufficiently responsive to the new market environment.

Each year the number of individual healthcare contracts to be negotiated and secured rose significantly. By 1994 there were over 50 contracts with a value range of £5000 to £30 million. The task also increased in complexity as the market became more sophisticated and competitive. Contracts were negotiated by multi-disciplinary teams from three Directorates lead by the Contracting Director or a Contract Manager.

Relationships and trust between personnel from the different directorates were difficult and fragile, roles and responsibilities were unclear, and there were different behavioural and negotiating style preferences among team members. Some DHA negotiating teams had been able to exploit these difficulties to the detriment of the hospital.

All relevant staff attended a one-day workshop which had been designed to:

- achieve further development of negotiating skills;
- improve trust and understanding;
- enable teams to be configured so that skills and styles were complementary, rather than conflicting.

The workshop was designed and run by a highly experienced facilitator who had previously met each participant. Preparatory work included completing a team styles inventory and the Kiersey Temperament Sorter questionnaire. The pre-workshop one-to-one meetings with the facilitator were particularly valuable. They provided him with knowledge and the opportunity to establish initial trust and confidence.

The workshop was action-learning-based and included:

- negotiation strategies, planning, processes and style preferences;
- personality and behaviour recognition and their implications;
- advanced negotiating skills.

Results were excellent. The next contracting round achieved better outcomes for both sides and was much less arduous:

- the configuration of some teams was changed to ensure a best fit of skills and styles;
- there was improved process planning and preparation with better account taken of DHA interests and negotiating preferences;
- increased understanding and knowledge led to improved trust and relationships that were sustained afterwards. A major contributor to this was the sharing of the outcomes of the various inventories.

With acknowledgement to Carole Hall, Training Consultant, ETC.

## CONCLUSION

We have looked very briefly at some of the fundamentals of adult learning. Adult learning emerges from our discussion as a complex process, affected by many factors and discussed in many ways from a variety of perspectives. The provider of training and development for adults is faced with a bewildering array of elements to take into account in constructing learning opportunities. It might be helpful and encouraging to end with some cautionary notes.

First, it is clear that there are many different theories of adult learning, not all of which are totally compatible. We have touched briefly on major strands, but the research work goes on and the discussions grow steadily. No one theory covers everything. We need to be aware of the different ideas, but we also need to recognize that these are ideas. They are ways of helping us to draw in a systematic fashion on the experience of others. They are not prescriptions.

Secondly, we need to recognize that we cannot do everything. We can be aware of the different styles of learning and of the enormous differences between people on any given training programme or event. But we cannot take account of everything. It is therefore vital to consider what is appropriate and possible in any particular learning situation.

Finally, providers must not be worried by failure. The perfect training event has never happened and probably never will, human beings being what they are. Those professionally involved in training and development can only do their best – and learn from their experiences.

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# 11

# The Adult Learner: Theory into Practice

*Janet Parr*

## INTRODUCTION AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The whole topic of adult learning has been in the arena for discussion for a number of years, with the current emphasis on both sides of the Atlantic being on lifelong learning. With this increasing awareness, and the emphasis on a changing and flexible workforce, it is important, both for organizations and individuals, not only to encourage adults back into education and training, but to provide a learning environment which ensures that maximum benefit is gained from their return to learning (Longworth and Davies, 1996; Thijssen, 1992).

Adult learners bring with them a range of educational experiences and motivations. They come from a variety of educational backgrounds and a diversity of social experiences, which can be both bonus and impediment. This chapter builds on the previous chapter by revisiting and developing some of the theories outlined therein. It then moves on to examine some of the issues and difficulties which mature students face when they return to education and training. In writing this chapter I have used, in illustration, verbatim material from my recent research into mature students returning to learning on a range of courses, from motor mechanics to Master of Education degrees. Their names have been changed to protect their identity, but their words add depth and reality to the discussion.

Having read this chapter you will:

- know Gagné's five domains of learning;
- understand the distinction between pedagogy and andragogy;
- understand the nature of the learning cycle and learning spiral;
- understand some of the barriers which hinder adult learning; and
- understand how theory can inform practice.

## ADULT LEARNING

Learning can be interpreted in three ways:

- To get to know: for example, I learnt last week that certain government White Papers are now published on the Internet.
- To learn as in to memorize or learn by heart, as those of us who are old enough learnt our multiplication tables at school.
- Learning as change, which can be either reinforcement or alteration of certain ideas or behaviour.

It is this last meaning which is what is usually meant by learning in the sense of education or training and which is the focus of the theories of learning developed and discussed in this chapter.

Learning can be either active or passive. The traditional approach to learning was, by and large, based on passive learning, where the teacher is seen as the expert and fount of all knowledge and the pupil is seen as the recipient of that expertise – what Bowles and Gintis (1976), in a different setting, call the 'mug and jug' theory. The student is the mug – an empty vessel, receiving the knowledge from the teacher – the jugful of knowledge, which is given to the student to fill the deficit.

Many recent theorists of learning though, and particularly those of the humanist school, suggest that people cannot learn simply by being given information – the old saying of 'You can take a horse to water but you cannot make it drink' is central to this argument. The student must have active involvement in the process, either mentally or physically or both, and a desire for knowledge, for learning to occur. To return to the horse metaphor – if the horse is thirsty it will drink, and if it drinks, its thirst will be quenched. The water alone cannot do the job.

One of the long-standing distinctions has of course been between practical skills and knowledge, though obviously the division is not as clear-cut as this dichotomy would imply. Certainly, in a modern society, few practical skills do not engage knowledge and

understanding in their learning. Gagné (1972) suggested five types (or domains) of learning and Rogers (1996:79) has built on this, making clear links between knowledge and skills:

1. We may learn new *knowledge* as we collect information that is largely memorized.
2. Such knowledge may be held uncomprehendingly. We thus need to learn to relate our new material in ways that lead to new *understanding,* that process of organizing and reorganizing knowledge to create new patterns of relationships.
3. We may learn new *skills* or develop existing skills further; not just physical skills, our ability to do certain things, but also skills of thinking and of learning, skills of coping and solving problems and survival strategies.
4. Further, since we can learn new knowledge, new understanding and new skills without necessarily changing our attitudes, the learning of *attitudes* is a distinct sphere of learning.
5. Finally, it is possible for learning changes to be brought about in all four of these areas without accompanying alterations in our way of life, our pattern of behaviour. It is therefore necessary to learn to apply our newly learned material to what we do and how we live, to carry out our new learning into changed ways of *behaving:* what some people would call to learn 'wisdom', in short.

## MOTIVATION AND LEARNING

It is generally supposed that adult learners come voluntarily into learning situations and because of this, they will be well motivated. This is not always the case of course, particularly in organizational training situations where there may be an element of compulsion. Motivation then can be both internal and external. Internal motivation comes from the drive within the individual to gain knowledge or a skill. One must remember of course that this internal drive may well have been influenced by external factors. In my recent research on mature women returners to education (Parr, 1991, 1996) the data revealed a determination by the students to develop new areas of identity which they had some control in shaping. This was influenced greatly by external factors, such as childhood abuse, restrictive and controlling parents, abusive partners, painful divorce and so on. For example, Gerry told me that she had been sexually abused when she was a child and this had had a considerable affect on her self-image. Her intrinsic motivation in returning to education was very much influenced by external factors:

> *Gerry:* My sister and my brother have both got degrees but I hadn't got that kind of qualification and I think probably in the back of my mind I was feeling that I had to prove myself, not just to them but to myself … that spurred me on – perhaps this was a way I could prove

> to myself, more to myself than anybody else that I wasn't a failure. Even if I didn't actually succeed it was something that I actually got the courage to go and try and have a go at. . . with everything that happened I felt almost like a failure, well I failed at this; I failed at that.

Grace's internal motivation came from the label which her ex-husband had attached to her:

> *Grace:* Now I know that I've got ability to do things, I'm not an idiot … I'm not a dumb blonde. … nobody can take off me what I've learnt. …
> I've found out I can do things that I didn't know I could do before.
> I think I've got more confidence now than what I've ever had really.
> My ex-husband said, 'Oh you'll never survive on your own'. I thought, 'Well, I'll show him'.

External factors are those which may put pressure on us, but may not necessarily be converted into internal, or psychological pressure. Better pay, promotion, a better job or the potential loss of employment may be issues here. When I interviewed Annabel, she was studying part-time to gain her National Vocational Qualification in Motor Mechanics:

> *Annabel:* I need the qualification really. … I did think I'd learn something as well. Now I'm just here for the qualification. I wanted the practical and the learning, so I have more confidence to go out for jobs.

There are of course situations in which adults participate in education and training unwillingly. This could be the case with employees whose attendance on courses is compulsory rather than voluntary. The external motivator here may well be loss of employment if there is a refusal to attend a course and gain the required updating of necessary skills. Harrison (1993: Ch.12) discusses the issues extensively and argues the importance of involving individuals in determining their training/education requirements, recognizing that there may be a tension between organizational and individual needs. It behoves the trainer/teacher to remember this and to create a learning environment which recognizes the diversity of motivations and backgrounds from which the participants come.

This necessity to take on board the different needs and learning styles of adults has contributed since the 1950s to the creation of a theory of adult learning termed 'andragogy'. (You may like to refer to Brookfield, 1991, for a discussion of this development.)

## ANDRAGOGY

Knowles (1996) maintains that most of what we know about learning has come from studying children and animals. This has been termed 'pedagogy', which literally translated means 'leading the child', but has come to mean the art and science of teaching the child.

This approach, he maintains, ignores the wealth of experience which adults bring to their learning. He built on and took forward the thinking on 'andragogy' – the art and science of teaching adults, since he felt that our approach to teaching adults should be substantially different from that of teaching children. Adults, he maintains, bring substantially more experience to the learning arena than children:

> These differences in experience between children and adults have at least three consequences for learning:
>
> 1. Adults have more to contribute to the learning of others; for most kinds of learning, they are themselves a rich resource for learning.
> 2. Adults have a richer foundation of experience to which to relate new experiences (and new learnings tend to take on meaning as we are able to relate them to our past experience).
> 3. Adults have acquired a larger number of fixed habits and patterns of thought, and therefore tend to be less open-minded. (Knowles, 1996:89–90)

Andragogy is a distinct shift away from 'teaching' to participatory learning in groups, drawing on adult experiences as a resource. This again has implications for the teacher/trainer in that it is necessary to create an environment in which the adult feels safe to perform. It is also necessary for those of us who work with adults to recognize adults' insecurity in being expected to contribute and participate, rather than being told 'the right answer'. There are also issues here for the learners who may have to 'unlearn' some learned behaviour from childhood when experiences may have been negative.

Adult needs from training and education are also different in that there is more immediacy and perceived (or expected) relevance to their everyday lives than there is with children, whether this is voluntary participation or that enforced by a training programme at work. The centrality of the learners, and the recognition of the personal agenda they bring to the learning arena, which is a central tenet of andragogy, clearly has some of its roots in humanist theories of learning, which also focus on the learner rather than on the teacher/trainer.

## HUMANIST THEORIES

Humanist theories developed on the one hand as a resistance to the structured, objective and scientific approach of positivism, which assumes stability, the general applicability of scientific laws and universally acceptable values. On the other hand, but clearly linked, there was the emergence of a changing world, with instability, complexity, uncertainty and a range and variety of values. In this more fluid situation,

where rapid change was occurring, it was no longer adequate to assume that the teacher was the sole source of learning. Humanist theories thus resisted the passive focus of learning and stressed the active nature of the learner. Carl Rogers (1969) – a leading writer in the humanist school – developed his approach to learning from his concept of client-centred counselling, which is based on the premise that people can generally draw on their own resources to deal with their problems, given a supportive and encouraging environment in which to do so. This led Rogers to the belief that people have a natural desire to learn and the teacher role should be one of encouraging and supporting the learner to learn, rather than the mug-and-jug idea which we discussed earlier. Not only do humanist theories stress the centrality of the learner in the learning process, they also focus on the environment in which learning takes place. As Alan Rogers (1996:99) writes:

> Motivation for learning comes from within; and the material on which the learning drive fastens is the whole of life, the cultural and interpersonal relationships that form the social context.

So, according to humanists, there are both motivational and environmental factors brought to bear in the learning process. We have already discussed the fact that there are both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors. Extrinsic factors are those incentives that are external to the individual, such as retention of a job, promotion, a new direction, a completely new skill and so on. Intrinsic factors are those which come from within a learner, although they may well have been influenced by extrinsic factors as I suggested above.

Maslow (1968) and Carl Rogers (1974) have put forward strong cases for arguing that motivation comes from within to meet certain needs. Maslow developed a hierarchy of needs that range from biological to psychological (see Figure 11.1). Although attempts to scientifically replicate this have not proved very successful, it is often quoted, and as the examples which follow show, it can contribute to our understanding of factors which influence learning.

The needs at one level must become at least partially satisfied before the individual can move up to the next level. For example, when food and drink become difficult to obtain, the satisfaction of these needs will take priority over all other needs, and only when this need is satisfied, will the individual move on to address other needs. The model also posits an interesting link between the individual and environmental factors. We can relate this directly to learning.

If we move up the hierarchical structure, it is easy to see that the motivational factors in any student can be many and varied. It may be sufficient for some students to be accepted as part of a group and to achieve competency in one small area, whereas others may have an expressed need to know and understand. In addition, threats to lower-order needs may

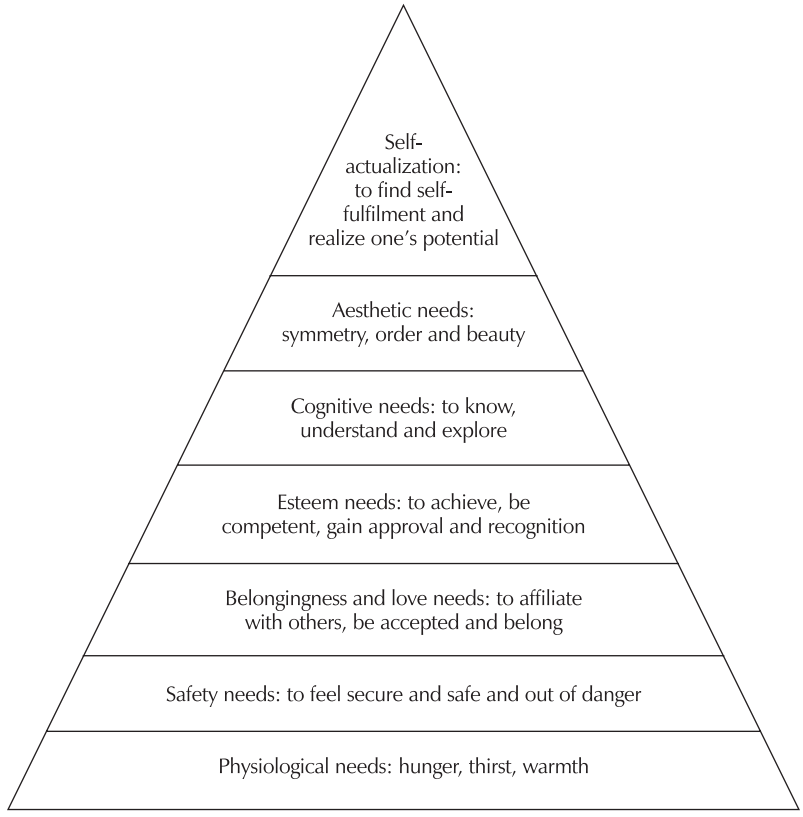


**Figure 11.1** Maslow's hierarchy of needs

## PERSONAL FACTORS AND LEARNING

Jane arrived late for a residential weekend which was part of her course. She was very distressed and left soon after the start, saying she was very tired, had too much to do and couldn't cope with the work. When I asked her some weeks later whether she was feeling any better, she told me that she had had some negative results from a screening test, and also had problems in a close relationship. She could not over-ride these to concentrate on her work. Within a few months, these were both resolved and she was again able to focus on her course.

well explain why students become withdrawn and focus on issues other than the immediate learning situation. For the teacher/trainer of adults, these are important points to take on board. We need to recognize that students may have factors that are influencing their decisions, which they may be unwilling or unable to discuss with us at the time. The following case study provides an example.

When I spoke to Della as part of my research, she clearly illustrated the conflicts between some of her needs. She had returned to learning after separation and subsequent divorce from a very violent relationship. She had taken on a voluntary post in the college which gave her a positive status:

> *Della:* I'm going to do this year … doing what I do now and doing what I did last year I feel safe … I want to do a BEd in Special Needs. … Now I'm scared of nothing, but sometimes I am … in HE there's not going to be that personal support like I've had here … I'm not ready … until I've dealt with everything I need to deal with within me then I don't think I can go. …

The emphasis with both Rogers and Maslow is that motivation is intrinsic, but there are those who suggests that motivation may well be goal-centred with motivation changing according to the nearness of the goal. For those learners with long-term goals, the motivation to keep going can decline, and it is important for the tutor/trainer to ensure that both long- and short-term goals are given and achievable. Of course students may well have both long- and short-term goals which are linked. Deidre was a student enrolled on a European Union-funded 'Women into Management and Technology' course at a local college, and was part of my research. Her short-term goals were clear, though her long-term ones were more tentative:

> *Deidre:* I can't decide whether I want to go into further, higher education, or just go for employment. It really depends on how well I do on this course. I wanted to know how well I'd done up to Christmas before I applied. From what I can gather, I'm not doing too bad really.

A supportive learning situation was vital for Deidre, as it was for other students I interviewed. It was important both for Deidre and for Della that their tutors recognized *their* short-term goals, and gave them encouragement to achieve those, even though their long-term goals may well have been the completion of the course in preparation for higher education. What we need to remember as trainers and educators is that just as with the learning styles discussed in the last chapter, the 'right learning environment' may well vary from one person to another.

What is clear from both Deidre and Della, and the other students with whom I spoke, is that environmental factors have a central influence on learning/training achievements.

## *Experiential learning and the learning cycle*

For many theorists, and particularly those of the humanist school, the basis of all learning is rooted in experience: the active involvement of the learner in the search for knowledge and meaning is central to the whole activity. Pivotal to the search for meaning is that learners critically reflect on, that is, they critically analyse, their experience. As we have seen in the previous chapter, this has been presented in the form of a cycle (see Figure 11.2).

The learning cycle starts with an experience – this can be something seen, heard, felt, read and so on. This is then reflected on, which leads to action, which then becomes the concrete experience for further reflection, and so on. Action is seen as central to the learning process, rather than as a result of it.

However, I feel that this is rather a simple approach for a very complex process. Reflection is not as simple and straightforward as this implies. If we refer back to the discussion of cognitive theories in the previous chapter, new knowledge (or experience) is set into a prior framework of knowledge which is informed by our own and others' experiences. We draw on this framework to make sense of our experiences. If we cannot, then we may seek further information before taking action.

As has already been discussed, Kolb (1984) argues that in some cases, reflection will lead to generalizations (or in his terms, 'abstract conceptualizations') – identifying a range of possible answers, which then leads to active testing in new situations. The result of this then becomes the new experience (see Figure 10.2, in the previous chapter).

Carl Rogers (1969) however, argues that this cycle does not account for goals, choice and decision-making, which he maintains must occur after reflecting and before generalizing. I would argue also that the cycle does not fully account for extrinsic and environmental influences on those decisions, nor the constraints on the action, which can be taken. The process is therefore much more complex than it would appear to be. For some simple learning, the cycle will stop, and will indeed be a cycle. For more complex learning, the cycle should really be termed a learning 'spiral', as in a coiled spring, which implies forward movement and development; this is shown in Figure 11.3. This spiral may get tighter as a particular topic gets more focused, or may get bigger as the learner seeks to include broader factors into the learning cycle. Other spirals may also be created, as peripheral decisions impinge upon the central focus.

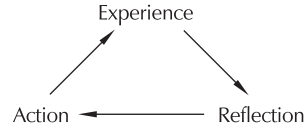


**Figure 11.2** Critically analysing experience

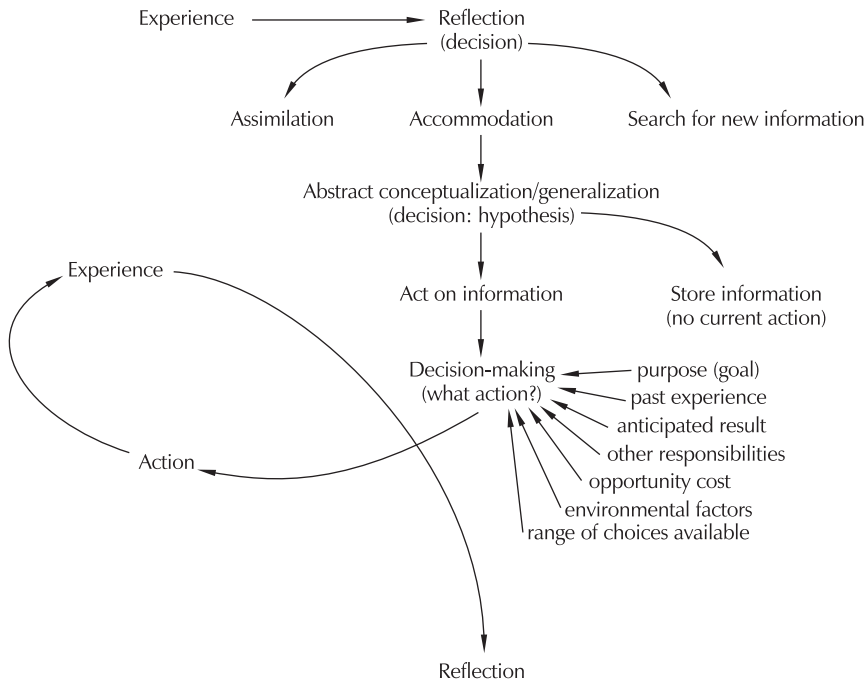


**Figure 11.3** The learning spiral

Let's take for example a lone parent who has the opportunity to take up a training programme, which involves being away from his home and children for a number of weekends out of the year. In making the decision, one of the factors he will have to take into account is the welfare of his children. This will set him off on a 'sub-spiral' in which he will need to consider all the alternatives, and take account of the factors shown in the spiral which will impinge on his decision. He may also have to consider when he does his course-work, which sets him off on another 'sub-spiral'. If we also put into the equation his motivation for doing the course, then we begin to realize that the spiral is complex indeed.

At every decision-making point, extrinsic factors will impact on the decision. Individuals will search for explanations within their existing framework, which has been influenced by the culture and socialization processes experienced thus far. The search for new information will involve engagement with others, either directly or indirectly. This will then inform the conceptualization/generalization stage, where a hypothesis or hypotheses may be formed, or 'vague ideas' may begin to take shape. The choice of action will be informed by a range of external issues, such as past experience, the intended goal, other responsibilities such as domestic, caring and work commitments, environmental factors such as access to resources and so on. These external influences should not be underplayed, since they

may have a considerable influence on learning, particularly for adults, and create barriers that will have to be negotiated.

## BARRIERS TO LEARNING

Adults may also bring with them considerable personal baggage into the learning setting which may act as barriers to and constraints on their learning. There is a considerable literature that indicates that some adults do meet these barriers to learning, whether that learning is full-time or part-time, vocational or non-vocational, academic or practical, for a wide variety of reasons. See ACACE (1982); *Adults Learning* (special editions in January 1990 and December 1989); Britton and Baxter (1994); Browning (1990); Hughes *et al* (1989); McGivney (1995, 1993); Parr (1996, 1991); Pye (1991); Woodley *et al* (1987); Schutze *et al* (1987).

Both recent and current research in which I am involved indicates that many of these issues exist for students who have returned to learning after a number of years out of the system, regardless of the course they are taking and whether they are full-time or part-time. These barriers may be grouped under five broad headings: psychological, practical, economic, institutional and relationship issues.

### *Psychological issues*

These include the feeling of being too old to learn; of not being bright enough, or as Chris mentioned, the re-emergence of negative feelings from compulsory schooling. Chris left school pregnant with no qualifications at 15, and told me:

> If the classes had been held in a school, I wouldn't have gone, I don't think I could have coped with it.

Dilys talked of the courage it took for her to return to learning:

> When I came on the first day I was nervous as hell and I thought, 'God, what am I doing this for?' I was so scared, and I kept thinking, 'You're going to show yourself up, they're going to ask you all these things, they're going to talk about all these words that you don't know what they're talking about, and they're going to be all these posh people …' but when I got talking to them, I felt like they're only like me. …It's made a big difference in me, it's given me a lot more confidence, it's shown me what opportunities there are out there.

The following comments are from two students on a Master's course, which indicate that whatever the level, lack of confidence may still be present:

> Studying at this level is demanding and initially I doubted my ability. I still do at times, but feel that the tutorials and residentials help.
>
> Academically I'm still not sure what standards are required.

## *Practical issues*

Concerns mentioned by the respondents in my research included travel and domestic and caring responsibilities. Frances was enrolled on a European-funded training course close to home:

> It's nearer to come here, you know, when I've took Mark to school, better than actually having to travel – 'cos I haven't got a car or anything and if I went to college … well, I do everything … he (her partner) don't do nothing, except go fishing, so I take Mark, then I come here.

Another student gave his reason for choosing a distance learning course:

> eliminates the problem of transport, travel costs and time wasted travelling.

By far the greatest practical difficulties concerned the juggling of domestic and learning responsibilities, particularly for women. Edwards (1993) talk of the 'two greedy institutions' of home and education and the constant juggling which partnered women with families have to do to satisfy the needs of both. For working women, I have argued that there are 'three greedy institutions' – home, work and education or training. The following vignettes from women are fairly representative of the whole:

> Well, I've got a child and a husband – but it's me mum really, she's the hardest 'cos she's, sort of ill, really, and she's more of a commitment.
>
> Having a young son (nearly 3) and a household of husband, dog, etc, it is often 9pm before I can settle down to do any work for this course.
>
> When work and family pressures mount, study becomes of low priority.

And from two male students:

> Neglecting my wife.
>
> Defending the time to undertake the studying (with) two teenage children and a demanding training role. …

## *Institutional barriers*

Institutional barriers are those concerned with timetabling, choice of courses, availability of information and so on. Timetabling of both training and education is an important issue for many people. The students with whom I spoke often chose courses that fitted in with other commitments. This was particularly so for those with school-aged children:

> *Wanda:* I would have done psychology, but I ended up doing social history instead and although I had to come in five days, I could leave after the children and arrived at the latest about quarter past four which of course is the time they arrive.

For students on the distance learning Master's degree, the flexibility of the timetable was emphasized, particularly as they were in employment.

> Flexibility of being able to choose when to study.
>
> I can study when I can fit it in without committing myself to several hours in the same day/evening which in my job would be difficult.
>
> Because of illness, I have been able to continue my studies whereas if I had been required to attend regular classes/tutorials I would not have.

## *Financial concerns*

The extent to which finance was a problem varied according to the social circumstances and the age of the student. This was dealt with in a variety of ways including choice of course, grants, claiming state benefits and both part-time and full-time work.

One would expect finance to be less of a problem for those students who were working full time. However, while some organizations paid for training and education as part of their staff development programme and gave extra help with travel, books and so on, others did not, and some of the students on the distance learning Master's course had to pay their own fees and meet their own expenses, thus creating a considerable inequity. There is need for serious consideration here when planning and delivering both education and training courses in which all students are assessed using the same criteria.

## *Personal and social factors*

Personal and social influences include relationships with partners, children, relatives and friends. These varied according to the demands of the programme undertaken and the

number and type of other commitments. The stresses on relationships with family and friends are implicit in the discussion above on domestic and caring responsibilities. Here, the focus is on partners, albeit briefly.

Some students had partners who were extremely supportive:

> *Heather:* He agreed I should do something I enjoyed doing, so yeah, he backed me up … but doesn't do anything practically to help.
>
> *Rhona:* He's been very, very supportive, all the time I've been up there … he's also done a great deal to build up my confidence, teach me how capable I am.

Where partners are not supportive, the situation can be very difficult and can lead to undue stress at the least and course drop-out at the worst.

> *Bryony:* He can't see the point in what I'm doing; he thinks it's just a waste of time. He can't understand why I just don't want to go and get any job … so I go home, cook the meals, doing the ironing at the same time, as you do … then I do my homework at night. I get very tired – he says it's my own fault.

Two students put the general situation succinctly:

> Little time for social life/family.
>
> Practically speaking, my hobbies and friends have taken second place to study.

## *Barriers? What barriers?*

So where does this leave us? These extracts and issues have been drawn mainly from research into students returning to education, though some are from more practical training programmes in the post-compulsory sector. I have only touched on some of the issues here, but clearly adults' motivation to learn is influenced considerably by extrinsic social and environmental factors. It is interesting that none of the people with whom I spoke used the term 'barrier' and the fact that they are enrolled on education and training programmes means that they are the success story. This is not, however, to underplay the issues, nor the resources which may have had to be used to negotiate the hurdles. Bryant (1995:270) describes the situation for adult returners to formal education, but this can equally apply to training in the workplace:

> For many adult students the return to further or higher education represents an obstacle course of Grand National proportions. Self-confidence has to be developed, writing skills polished up or acquired, academic language demystified and personal and family relations re-ordered.

Clearly, as trainers/educators, we need not only to take on board the learning needs of the adults with whom we are working, we also need to acknowledge the social and environmental factors which impact on their learning.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has ranged across a variety of issues, but the central focus has been on adult learners and the intrinsic and extrinsic influences that impact on their motivation to learn. It has taken some of the learning theories outlined in the previous chapter and expanded and illustrated them with verbatim researched material, moving on to look at some of the issues that adults bring into the learning arena.

What is important to remember for those of us who work with adult learners is that they bring considerable experience, both positive and negative, into the learning arena. These experiences can be both motivators and barriers to adult learning. It is incumbent upon the teacher/trainer to provide a learning environment that maximizes the learning value from those experiences. As Knowles (1996:95–6) says:

> The central dynamic of the learning process is thus perceived to be the experience of the learner, experience being defined as the interaction between an individual and his (sic) environment. … The critical function of the teacher, therefore, is to create a rich environment from which students can extract learning and then guide their interaction with it so as to maximize their learning from it.

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# 12

# Reflective Practice

*Cheryl Hunt*

## INTRODUCTION AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

> The real magic of discovery lies not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes. (Marcel Proust, 1899)

The term 'reflection' is evocative of a number of images: mirrors, tranquil scenes in still waters, thinking idly about times past, and forms of meditation come immediately to mind. In the context of education and training, though, the term is often used specifically to signify an important stage in the learning cycle where a complex and deliberate process of thinking about and interpreting an experience is undertaken in order to arrive at a new understanding of events and our part in them (Boud *et al,* 1985; Kolb, 1984). I have heard the process jokingly described as, 'What enables someone to have 20 years' experience instead of one year's experience 20 times over'!

The important thing to note about reflection in this context is that it is a conscious act, deliberately engaged in, with the intention of finding out more about our own learning processes and how they affect our professional practice and working relationships. In the final part of this chapter I shall describe how this kind of reflection can be enhanced through writing, and I shall indicate several texts that can be consulted for suggestions and outlines of various reflective techniques and case studies.

First, I shall introduce some of the 'theory' behind the concepts of reflection and reflective practice. Although it is not necessary to know this before trying out the techniques that can enhance reflection, or applying what is learned in this way to professional practice, my own view is that it usually helps to know something about the territory you are going to enter. I should tell you at this point that I read guidebooks in order to find out what I can about local customs and traditions before I visit a country with which I am unfamiliar. I have also worked in a university environment for many years where 'theoretical knowledge' is often privileged over 'practical knowledge' (Schön had something to say about this as we shall see in a moment). Let me explain why I have mentioned these two things about myself.

Part of my own attempt to become a reflective practitioner has been to try to recognize behaviour patterns that I have developed in response to particular situations and to determine where they spill over into other, seemingly unconnected, things that I do, and with what effect. I try, too, to look at how what I do is influenced by the organizational context in which I do it: that way I can begin to identify what I have the power to change, what is a real constraint of my job, and what is merely an habitual response. I believe that an important element in reflective practice is to be able to take ownership of my actions and say, 'This is how it is for me now; and these seem to be some of the reasons that have led me to think/feel/act as I do.' In attempting to facilitate the process for others, I also believe it is essential to try to model it.

I am not sure that I can do that successfully here, but the purpose of alluding to my own background is to indicate how the structure and style of this chapter are essentially the product of my particular experience, of 'baggage' from my past that constantly entwines with pressures in the present to shape how I think and what I do. How you read the chapter – whether you do so from beginning to end, turn to the last part first, look for headings or bullet points, or skip it altogether – and whether you feel comfortable or exasperated with it will similarly be the product of your experience.

So, too, will be your reasons for consulting the chapter: you may be unfamiliar with the term 'reflective practice'; you may be experienced in the practice but wonder if I have anything to add to what you already know; or you may be charged by your employers with doing and/or facilitating reflective practice and want some practical tips. How you approach the task of reading the chapter, as with any other task, will, in turn, affect what you get out of it and what you do afterwards.

The main reason for consciously and systematically engaging with the process of reflection is to learn how to identify, articulate, take ownership of, and begin to control that which constitutes the 'baggage' – habits, ideas, assumptions, preferences, needs and so on – that would itself otherwise control our thoughts and actions; and to consider to what extent, and with what effect, the influences from our past interact with the requirements of the environment in which we now live and work. To be a 'reflective practitioner' is to apply the understanding thus obtained to professional practice so that this can be simultaneously informed by and freed from what we have learnt so far.

Though Aristotle spoke of the need for reflection in developing moral action, Dewey (1933) is generally acknowledged as the first modern educationist to write about the function of reflective thought in learning from experience. However, the notion of the 'reflective practitioner' emanates directly from the work of Schön (1983).

In the next section I shall draw attention to key aspects of this work, to the intellectual and social background against which it was developed, and to some of the major critiques of Schön's ideas.

In keeping with what I believe to be the spirit of reflective practice, I shall continue to use the conversational 'I/you' style where appropriate. This enables me both to indicate and reflect on how I, as writer, am located within the chapter. It also invites you, as reader, not simply to view these pages from 'outside' but to place yourself in the chapter too in order to observe and reflect on the thoughts and feelings that arise during your reading.

Having read this chapter you will:

- understand the nature of reflective practice;
- be able to 'reflect' on thoughts, attitudes and behaviour;
- understand single and double loop learning; and
- understand the role of reflection in professional practice.

## THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER: DONALD SCHÖN

Schön wrote his seminal text on the subject of 'the reflective practitioner' because he wanted professionals to recognize the importance of being able to articulate what it is they do. Writing in the early 1980s when, in the USA and the UK in particular, changing political and social attitudes were bringing the purpose and function of the professions increasingly into question, Schön (1983) argued that the lack of clarity about what professionals actually did was one consequence of a widening rift between both research and practice, and thought and action.

Underpinning this was a familiar piece of dualistic 'either-or' thinking in which the 'hard', 'theoretical' knowledge traditionally associated with the universities was seen as separate and different from what Schön (1983:vii) called the 'mystique of practical competence' which allowed professionals to claim that their 'art' could be neither adequately described nor subjected to analysis.

(Interestingly, such thinking seems almost to have come full circle in recent debates about the feasibility of incorporating reflection within the framework of National Vocational Qualifications without divorcing values from techniques. See Ecclestone, 1996,

for an examination of this issue in the context of continuing professional development for lecturers in post-compulsory education.)

At the root of Schön's work is an attempt to develop an 'inquiry into the epistemology of practice' (a formal study of the source, nature and limitations of the knowledge which underpins practice) which asks questions like:

> What is the kind of knowing in which competent practitioners engage? How is professional knowing like and unlike the kinds of knowledge presented in academic textbooks, scientific papers, and learned journals? (Schön, 1983:viii)

It is based on the view that the development of a taken-for-granted 'theory of action' in professional practice is an inevitable consequence of the impossibility of developing a new response to every new situation by working through from first principles but that, when asked to articulate their practice, professionals generally do so in terms of 'espoused theories' – usually the 'textbook' theories they were taught as part of their initial professional training. In other words, they fail to address the underlying assumptions they have learned through experience – what, in earlier collaborative work, Argyris and Schön (1974:8) referred to as 'theories-in-use'. Pivotal to the inquiry is the concept of 'reflection-in-action' (Schön, 1983:54–9).

We shall return to this in a moment. It may be useful first to note two other key terms and concepts which were developed during Schön's collaboration with Argyris since they clearly informed his subsequent thinking.

## MODELS AND LOOPS

### *Behaviour patterns: Model I and Model II*

Working on extensive case-study material, Argyris and Schön (1974) identified two distinct patterns of behaviour based on the kinds of goals people strive to achieve in their social interactions, especially at work. For the most part, they argued, these goals, or 'governing variables', seem to be built on unquestioned assumptions about the social world and expectations about the behaviour of others. What they called 'Model I' behaviour is governed by the following imperatives:

- *Define and achieve goals*. (People exhibiting this behaviour rarely try to develop a mutual definition of purpose with others, especially subordinates or clients; and they do not seem open to others' perceptions of the task in hand.)
- *Maximize winning, minimize losing*.

- *Minimize generating or expressing negative feelings*. (Because, it is usually felt, this demonstrates incompetence; permitting or helping others to express feelings is regarded as poor strategy.)
- *Be rational*. (ie, objective, intellectual, unemotional.)

Argyris and Schön (1974:83) point out that such behaviour almost inevitably results in 'competitiveness, withholding help from others, conformity, covert antagonism, and mistrust while de-emphasizing cooperation, helping others, individuality and trust.' Nevertheless, most people tend to remain unaware of how such a climate is generated and, especially, of their own contribution to it; it becomes 'self-sealing'.

As Argyris and Schön (1974:86–95) go on to demonstrate, the most significant property of Model II behaviour is its ability not to be 'self-sealing' because it encourages the testing of underpinning assumptions. The governing variables that drive Model II behaviour are:

- *Maximize valid information*. This involves providing others with directly observable data and correct reports about one's thoughts and feelings.
- *Maximize free and informed choice*. A choice is free to the extent that individuals can define their own objectives and how to achieve them, and that they have the capacity to achieve these objectives and relate them to personal needs.
- *Maximize internal commitment to decisions made*. Individuals need to feel that they are responsible for their own choices: to be committed to action because it is intrinsically satisfying, not because someone else is rewarding or penalizing the action (as in Model I).

Where Model II behaviour becomes the norm, Argyris and Schön contend that people are more likely to test publicly their 'theories-in-use' – to examine openly and honestly the assumptions which underpin their actions. Such behaviour is also likely to set learning cycles in motion whereby the climate of trust which such behaviour tends to generate leads to more detailed examination of assumptions, the sharing of more valid information, and the mutual facilitation of learning. (See Radford, 1995, especially pages 196–8 for a practical example of the use of these ideas in creating a learning organization and the responsibilities of the human resource or personnel manager in this context.)

## *Learning loops*

Argyris and Schön also identified two distinct learning patterns. What they termed 'single-loop learning' (see Figure 12.1) helps people to design and select actions which satisfy their governing variables so it is exhibited by people using both Model I and Model II behaviour patterns. It is a form of 'means-ends', task-oriented, non-reflective, thinking: it looks, for example, for more effective methods of suppressing conflict.

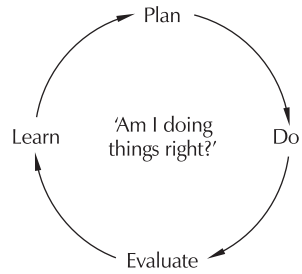


**Figure 12.1** Single-loop learning

'Double-loop learning', by contrast, involves reflection and is likely to result in the questioning of, and possible changes in, one's predominant governing variables and underpinning assumptions (see Figure 12.2). Generally associated with Model II behaviour, it asks not only the single-loop question 'Am I doing things right, and if not what can I do to correct my/others' actions?' but also, 'Am I doing the right things, and if not how can I change what I do and/or encourage others to change what they do?' It looks, for example, for ways to articulate and bring conflict to the surface and to resolve, rather than suppress it.

Significantly, as Argyris and Schön (1974:19) point out, 'Double-loop learning does not supersede single-loop learning.' The latter enables us to cope in predictable situations. The former, however, can cause 'ripples of change to fan out over one's whole system of

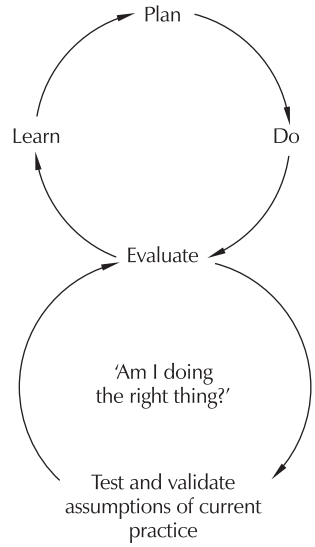


**Figure 12.2** Double-loop learning

theories-in-use' (ibid.). 'Double-loop learning' therefore lies at the heart of reflective practice. Let us now return to Schön's later work in that area, and the concept of reflection-in-action.

# REFLECTION-IN-ACTION

## *Tacit knowledge*

The concept of reflection-in-action derives from the idea that, in exhibiting skilful action, people often appear to be drawing on information that they are subsequently unable to put into words. It owes much to the work of Polanyi (1967) on 'tacit knowing', an example of which is how people recognize faces. (Just try to explain how you recognize a face that you know!) Another example is of using a stick or tool to feel the way (simply to walk, or in a craft like sculpting). During this process, which is an essential part of all physical skill acquisition, the nature of the contact between tool and object provides data which are literally 'sensed' in the hand and internalized as tacit (unspoken) knowledge.

The belief that people do know more than they can verbalize probably gave rise to one of the earliest forms of training. Commonly known in the UK as 'sitting next to Nellie', this required a newcomer to sit next to, observe and subsequently try to emulate a skilled operator. In a newer, more sophisticated form, it emerges in the modelling techniques of neuro-linguistic-programming (NLP) and, in sports psychology, in 'playing the inner game' where the sportsperson literally reflects on his or her previous winning performances and mentally 'plays through' the feelings and techniques that will be required in the next race or match. (See Garratt, 1997, for a practical guide to using NLP in training, pages 39–44 in particular for discussion of modelling techniques. Gallwey, 1996, discusses 'inner-game' work.)

The last example is obviously of reflection-on-action with the clear intention of internalizing certain actions for future use. Reflection-in-action occurs when internalized knowledge arises in, and informs, current action. Schön (1983:55), who was an accomplished musician himself, suggests that this is what happens when good jazz musicians improvise together: in the action of playing they 'feel' where the music is going by drawing on past experience and a collective knowledge of musical 'rules'. In essence, they make new sense of what is happening in each moment and adjust their individual performances accordingly.

## *Points to note*

Several aspects of reflection-in-action are important to note from the examples given so far:

- Lacking past experience and being new to the rules of the particular game, novices are usually unable to improvise as well as experienced practitioners (literally, like the jazz musicians, or in complex or emergency situations).
- It is unlikely that the musicians (or other skilled practitioners in other situations) reflect in action through the medium of words.
- So, if asked what they are doing/have just done, skilled practitioners usually find it difficult or impossible to give a detailed verbal analysis (try to describe exactly what you do when riding a bike in traffic – or what the ingredients are that really make a training session buzz). Finally:
- Most of the time, most practitioners do not question what they do.

Some practitioners are understandably wary about the concept of reflection, either in or on action, because they feel that putting what they do into words will either 'break the magic' of what they do well and/or take time that could be better spent actually getting on with their job. To some extent they are right. If you think about how you are doing something as natural as breathing, for example, it will sometimes change the rhythm! And, of course, if every professional stopped to question every decision or event, it would soon bring the wheels of society to a grinding halt

Nevertheless, there are two key issues here. The first is that when our usual performance yields nothing particularly new or unpredictable, it simply reinforces the behaviours/attitudes/values which underpin the performance but which may no longer be appropriate and/or as effective as they might be. The second is that, if professionals are unable to 'speak their own practice' there is a danger that others will do it for them – defining and bounding what is required from a political, academic or managerial perspective.

The new requirements laid on teachers, doctors and others in the UK during the years of the so-called 'Thatcher project' when social relationships were drastically redefined are a case in point. Teachers' professional standing and judgement, for example, were called increasingly into question as politicians first defined how teachers should be trained (with more 'practice' in schools and less 'theory' in the universities), how children should be tested, and what the relationship should be between parents and teachers and between the worlds of education and of business – and then set financial and other controlling mechanisms in place to support their own ideas, leaving little room for debate or manoeuvre.

Although Schön's primary impetus came from what he saw as a crisis of confidence in professional knowledge, this crisis was itself part of a more general, and radical, shift in thinking about the nature of knowledge, where it comes from, and what status is attached to different kinds of knowledge. I shall draw attention in a later section to other authors whose ideas you may like to explore further in order to locate Schön's work, the concept of reflective practice, and subsequent developments in the field within this broader context.

Before that I want to do two things: provide a pause for you to reflect on questions that may have emerged from what you have read so far, and draw attention to some of the critiques of Schön's work and its influence.

Several questions are implicit in the foregoing discussion. If you define yourself as an educator or trainer those listed below may be particularly pertinent to your professional practice. However, they probably cannot be answered fully without venturing into the minefield of what constitutes the difference between 'education' and 'training'. (You will find comment on this in Chapters 1 and 2. An interesting perspective is also provided by Clark, 1992:120.)

Here are some questions to reflect on:

- If in 'doing' reflective practice yourself, you begin to expose taken-for-granted assumptions and beliefs in your everyday practices which receive tacit endorsement by your employers but which, when you articulate them fully, suggest a conflict of values between what you thought your job was about and what you are actually required to do, what might you do about it?
- Is reflection only for professionals to incorporate within their practice, or should other 'workers' be encouraged to reflect on what they do, and why and how they do it? (This, of course, leads into another minefield surrounding the concept of 'profession'. Carr, 1995:67–72, includes a useful analysis.) It seems, incidentally, to be a little-reported element of engaging in reflective practice that it will always open up increasingly bigger questions! Does that bother you or not? You may like to set your answer in the context of what you know of your preferred learning style (see Chapter 10).
- What responsibility does the reflective educator or trainer have for encouraging students/trainees to reflect on their own work (and/or learning processes)?
- If you encourage/facilitate reflective practice for others, what is the extent of your responsibility to them?

## *Critiques*

Although the concept of 'reflective practice' is now commonplace and, in some professions, most notably nurse and teacher education, a systematic approach has been taken to its incorporation into all levels of training, it should be noted that neither Schön's original text nor the practices to which it has given rise are unproblematic. The following authors have provided extensive critiques of both.

*Atkins and Murphy* (1993) and *Greenwood* (1993) look at reflection in the specific context of nursing where reflective practice has become a statutory requirement. Atkins and Murphy provide a selective review of the literature, focusing in particular on the skills required for reflection but also demonstrating the lack of clarity in definitions and studies of reflection

and reflective practice. Greenwood looks specifically at the collaborative work of Argyris and Schön and suggests that there are important inconsistencies between their theorizing and the pedagogical interventions they implemented/recommended.

*Gilroy* (1993) takes issue with Schön's epistemological stance. His argument is set in the context of teacher education and is a deeply philosophical one based on Plato's *Meno* paradox: 'How will you look for something when you don't in the least know what it is?' In a later work, Schön (1987) refers to, and feels he has successfully resolved, the paradox but Gilroy refutes this and also argues that it was unnecessary for Schön to seek a new epistemology of practice in the first place since one already existed within Wittgenstein's 'Descriptivism'.

*Eraut* (1995) assesses Schön's contribution to thinking about professional knowledge and expertise. He argues that Schön does not properly demonstrate the difference between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, and that none of his examples relates to crowded settings (like a seminar room). He proposes a re-evaluation of Schön's ideas taking into account reflection outside the action, the time dimension involved in different kinds of reflection, and the difference between decision-making and problem-solving processes.

*Bright* (1996) cautions that although reflective practice has been adopted so rapidly and on such a broad scale by many professional groups, adoption and implementation should not be confused with understanding what it is, the processes and skills it involves, or its implications for practice. He provides a detailed analysis of what seems to constitute reflective practice and its theoretical underpinnings, including among the latter the earlier collaborative work by Argyris and Schön (1974). In Bright's (1996:183) opinion, the present widespread professional acceptance of reflective practice seems 'relatively superficial, and/or is in need of reformulation and review. In other words, we may need to "reflect" on "'reflective practice"'.

## SOCIAL CONTEXT

Though the naming and popularizing of reflective practice is largely attributable to Schön, the intellectual and social environment in which the concept took root had inevitably been shaped by other ideas and traditions, most notably those emanating from the Enlightenment and from the critical thinking which underpinned the emergence of the social sciences. This section looks briefly at this broader context and at the way Schön's work has itself become a strand within subsequent developments.

### *Legacy of the Enlightenment: John Dewey and C Wright Mills*

In Western democracies, thinking has long been shaped by the key theme of the Enlightenment period. This holds that, as individuals or as members of social groups,

human beings have the capacity to reflect rationally upon their own actions and to use the understanding thus derived as a basis for the personal change which is an important element in social change. Dewey's work in education was very much a part of this tradition. Dewey (1933:137) argued that all productive thinking and learning has its origins in 'problematic situations' which cannot be resolved simply by the use of prior solutions and, foreshadowing an important technique in reflective practice, noted:

> To grasp the meaning of a thing, an event or a situation is to see it in relation to other 'things', to note how it operates, or functions, what consequences follow from it, what causes it, what uses it can 'be put to'.

Dewey (1939:131) later questioned whether it was any longer enough to hold 'the simple faith of the Enlightenment', that rational thought would automatically precipitate change, especially in society at large. C Wright Mills (Mills, 1967:4–6) subsequently took a similar line, arguing that people could no longer rely on reason alone to sustain them in a society where 'information often dominates their attention and overwhelms their capacities to assimilate it'. What people now needed to develop, according to Mills, was a 'sociological imagination' which would enable them to 'grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society.' Mills (1967:8) maintained that:

> Perhaps the most fruitful distinction with which the sociological imagination works is between 'the personal troubles of milieu' and 'the public issues of social structure.' This distinction is an essential tool of the sociological imagination and a feature of all classic work in social science.

In Mills' terms, 'troubles' are private matters, usually precipitated by a threat to an individual's values occurring within his or her immediate social setting: it is up to the individual to resolve or deal with them. 'Issues', on the other hand, are of public concern: they include things like unemployment and war which, though they have drastic implications for the individual, can only be resolved at a political/societal level.

In undertaking reflective practice, a useful exercise is to identify the 'level' of a problem in just this way, perhaps also including institutional/organizational levels of management and control: it saves wasting energy and 'worry time' on things that are beyond one's own immediate control! (That does not mean, of course, that managerial or societal 'issues' should be ignored, merely that it is important to locate problems where solutions can most appropriately be found.)

## *Critical social science: Jurgen Habermas*

Writing in the 1970s, Habermas expressed some of the same concerns as Mills about the 'limits of reason'. He argued that the very success of reason, as expressed through advances

in the natural sciences, had led to an uncritical acceptance of 'the scientific method' which had subsequently clouded thinking about the social world.

Where Mills had highlighted the distinction between the personal and the political and put forward the sociological imagination as a different way of thinking, and of taking forward the newly-developing social sciences, Habermas sought to demonstrate that there are several legitimate forms of scientific inquiry, each geared towards the satisfaction of different human interests/needs and grounded in a different kind of knowledge. His ideas have been extremely influential, particularly in relation to the concept of 'emancipatory knowledge' which empowers people to re-view what they know within a broader social/political framework which they may subsequently choose to challenge in order to try to effect change in it.

Although Habermas's ideas have given impetus to those of many other people, his own writings do not make easy reading. Carr (1995:114–17) provides a very useful short summary in the context of educational theory; Giddens (1994) gives a general overview and also recommends further reading.

## *Critical reflective practice: beyond Schön*

Though Schön's concern seems primarily to have been with the individual's ability to reflect on, in order to articulate, his or her own practice, the perspective provided by Habermas's work has subsequently led other writers to suggest that reflective practice in Schön's terms is too limited. Brookfield (1995:217) claims, for example, that 'Reflection in and of itself is not enough; it must always be linked to how the world can be changed.' Indeed, Brookfield (1995) argues a case for what he calls critical reflective practice that specifically requires the practitioner to take account of, and, where possible, direct action in response to, broader social issues.

Just as earlier intellectual traditions can be identified in Schön's work, so this has itself become a strand in subsequent developments. Brookfield (ibid.) sees it as one of three that inform the processes of critical reflective practice. Another strand is that of 'critical pedagogy'.

Critical pedagogy is closely associated with the ideas of Habermas and others linked to the so-called Frankfurt School of thought (such as Adorno, 1973, and Horkheimer, 1947) but can be traced back to the writings of Hegel and Marx. The central theme is of the teacher as 'penetrator of false consciousness', as a facilitator who will help his or her students to identify and challenge oppressive ways of thinking and acting which have been imposed by dominant groups and cultures and often sustained by force of habit. The intention is to create change that will result in more democratic and harmonious forms of living and thinking in which people understand and honour their own and others' experiences.

The concept of critical pedagogy is also influenced by the writings of, among others, Gramsci (1978) on hegemony, Friere (1994) on liberation theology and its application in education, and Giroux (1992) on 'oppositional pedagogy', all of which have served to emphasize the political nature of the processes of both teaching and reflection.

Research and theory in and of adult learning constitutes the third strand in Brookfield's view of critical reflective practice. At the base of adult learning theory is the belief that, because adults think and learn in the context of extensive prior experience, the nature of adult learning is qualitatively different from that which characterizes childhood and adolescence.

It would require a separate chapter to discuss in detail the many ideas and investigations that have sought to explain the relationship between experience, reflection and learning. However, the following list indicates some of the authors whose work has been influential in this field and which you may wish to explore further via the bibliography at the end of this chapter.

- Mezirow: One of the most influential theorists. Openly acknowledges influence of Habermas, particularly in relation to 'perspective transformation'. Like Schön, viewed own work as a reaction to forces of 'scientism and technicism' and found support in Polanyi's ideas. Builds on Kelly's (1955) work on personal constructs. Emphasizes the central role of critical reflectivity in adult learning and development as a means by which people can recognize how they are caught in their own history and constantly relive it (see Mezirow 1981). Mezirow (1990) includes advice on how to learn critical reflection and encourage it in others. (NB: Usher and Bryant (1989) also provide useful discussion of critical reflection.)
- Kolb: Identification and acknowledgement of reflection as key stage in the 'learning cycle' helped put reflection on the learning map. Work contemporary with, but independent of, Schön and Mezirow.
- Boyd and Fales: Acknowledge influence of Mezirow (1978) and Kolb *et al* (1974). Work in context of humanistic psychology on concept of reflective learning: 'the process of internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self, and which results in a changed conceptual perspective' (1983:100). (NB: This continues to be one of the most useful and succinct descriptions of the underpinning process of reflective practice. Reviewing the literature on reflection, Atkins and Murphy, 1993:1191, conclude that involvement of 'self' in the reflective process and acquisition of a 'changed perspective' are the 'crucial aspects which distinguish reflection from analysis'.)
- Boud: Notes influence of personal growth movement on his thinking (Boud and Miller, 1996:198–201). Focuses on experiential learning in adulthood. Work conceptualizes reflection and the part it plays in making sense of experience (see Boud *et al,* 1985, 1993). Builds explicitly on Kolb's work.

- Revans: More usually associated with development of management techniques than reflective practice but his work on action learning acted as direct prompt for Kolb and is echoed in Argyris and Schön. Provides a useful bridge between reflection as a tool for self-development and as an essential element of organizational learning. (NB: see McGill and Beaty, 1992, for a guide to action learning as a continuous process of learning.)

## PUTTING REFLECTION INTO PRACTICE

### *Problems and approaches*

So, what of practice? How do professionals act on the legacy of traditions and theories and 'do' reflective practice? What do they do? And how can the process best be facilitated for individuals and for the benefit of the organization?

It will probably have become apparent that 'reflective practice' is not one 'thing'. Though the term undoubtedly belongs to Schön, the concept is multifaceted. It incorporates elements of processes and ways of knowing which have been variously referred to as 'tacit knowledge', 'critical thought', 'perspective transformation', 'reflective learning', 'experiential learning' and 'action learning'. Thus, there are no easy answers to the questions above, or to those I posed earlier. The processes of reflection are such that individuals must necessarily arrive at their own answers and preferred techniques, in the light of their own history, values, needs and inclinations.

Wellington and Austin (1996) illustrate this clearly in a useful discussion of 'orientations to reflective practice'. Drawing on work by Van Manen (1977) and Grimmett *et al* (1990) they postulate five different, mutually exclusive, orientations, each of which is closely associated with specific social science paradigms and educational beliefs and values. Orientations are determined by requiring practitioners to follow a decision path based on three questions:

> Does the practitioner engage in reflective practice or not? Does the practitioner believe that education ought to be domesticating or liberating? Is the practitioner systems-orientated or people-orientated? (Wellington and Austin, 1996:313)

It is perhaps because of the apparently fundamental differences between approaches to professional practice and to the place of reflection within it that it is so difficult to determine any 'universals' in reflective practice. Johnston and Badley (1996) have made an attempt to discover 'working definitions, main objectives, processes of reflective practice, perceived difficulties and the main competences needed' but conclude:

> reflective practice at its best is neither just a set of operational techniques nor only a clearly identifiable group of academic skills, but is rather a critical stance. Good reflective practice takes practitioners beyond mere competence towards a willingness and a desire to subject their own taken for granteds and their own activities to serious scrutiny. Competence is not enough. The reflective practitioner has to become, if not an agent provocateur, an educational critic who is willing to pursue self and peer appraisal almost to their limits. (Johnston and Badley, 1996:10)

Given the semantic and operational difficulties with the concept and the nature of individual practice, it is inevitable that there should also be difficulties in pursuing reflective practice with peers, in facilitating it for others and, of course, in assessing it. Hunt (1997, 1998), Hunt *et al* (1994), Knights and Sampson (1995) and Sumison and Fleet (1996) address some of these issues.

Despite the difficulties there are, nevertheless, some tried and trusted techniques to facilitate reflection. The following references will take you to some of them:

- *Critical Incident Technique* (based on Flanagan, 1954). See Pearn and Kandola (1990:25–30) for a description of the technique and of how it can be used specifically in job analysis. Brookfield (1995: Ch. 6) describes a variation on the technique. Benner (1984:299–302) provides guidelines for recording critical incidents.
- *Good Practices Audit* (Brookfield, 1995: Ch. 8).
- *Reflective Writing and Journal Keeping* (Holly, 1989; Morrison, 1996).

In addition, Schön (1991) contains some interesting case studies that indicate how various approaches worked in practice.

## PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

My own preferred form of reflective practice is through a two-stage process of writing and discussion. The writing may be either structured or unstructured but the crucial thing is that it is for my eyes only – I ignore the niceties of grammar, punctuation, spelling, even of being polite about people! The purpose is to help me to capture and sort out some of the whirling and unfocused thoughts that have occurred throughout the working day and which would otherwise disappear. Once the thoughts have been captured I can then choose from them which ones to share with a 'critical friend' who, as I then do in return for her, provides me with a different perspective and asks questions which help me to explore my thoughts and feelings in ways that I might not have considered had I worked on them on my own.

The importance of writing as opposed to merely 'thinking about' my practice is encapsulated for me in the phrase 'How do I know what I think until I see what I say?' The process

of writing helps me not only to see what I say to myself about aspects of my professional practice but also to 'unpack' why I have said it. It helps me, in other words, to find out more about how my mind works. Holly (1989:76) puts it like this:

> Describing how the mind works will help to clarify why journal writing works as a means for reflection: 'Instead of a single intellectual entity that can judge many different kinds of events equably, the mind is diverse and complex. It contains a changeable conglomeration of different kinds of "small minds" – fixed reactions, talents, flexible thinking and these different entities are temporarily employed – wheeled into consciousness – then usually discarded, returned to their place, after use' (Ornstein, 1987:25). Which of the many small minds gets wheeled in depends on many factors, some within our control, others not.

And:

> Writing 'works' because it enables us to come to know ourselves through the multiple voices our experiences take, to describe our contexts and histories as they shape the many minds and selves who define us and others. Through writing we intentionally focus our attention and in so doing assert and affirm both our ideas and the mind itself. (Holly, 1989:78)

Sometimes I take a 'stream of consciousness' approach to what I write. It is not always easy to start writing because, like many educators, I have been 'conditioned' to worry about order and structure. Before I write, therefore, I often find myself dithering over whether I should say A before B and whereabouts C should come – and my brain refuses to release any words at all! By just plunging in – even if the first words I write are, 'I really don't know what I want to say here but …' – I find that thoughts begin to flow, often so fast that my writing hand cannot keep up.

Sometimes I focus on a particular incident which could be:

- a particularly positive experience;
- an occasion when my intervention seemed to have made a real difference to someone's learning;
- a negative experience where things seemed to go badly wrong;
- an experience I found hard to handle;
- something trivial but which made me think, 'What's going on here?'

I then follow the procedure described below.

*Structured writing about a practice incident*

**Process**

1. Describe what happened. Be objective. Ask questions like: What did I learn? How did I learn it? In what ways was the experience similar to/different from others I have had?
2. Make judgements. Capture what was good/bad about the experience; its best/worst features; what went well/badly; how did I contribute to all of that?
3. Analyse. Focus on questions like, How did that happen? How can I make sense of that? How can that be explained?

**Personalize**

Instead of settling for a general statement like, 'It was good/bad', use personal statements like:

- What I understood/enjoyed was …
- What I felt uncertain/uncomfortable/irritable about was …
- What I did well/not so well was …
- What I could have done differently was …

**Probe**

Instead of settling for a personal statement like, 'What I felt annoyed about was the way X hogged the discussion', use probing questions like:

- Why did it annoy me so much?
- Why didn't I do anything about it?

Make a note of other similar situations; identify any recurring themes eg, particular people, situations, questions that regularly cause you to have the same emotional/behavioural response. Ask:

- Why?
- What can I do?
- Do I want to?

**Plan**

Out of the above, begin to identify your favoured learning methods, 'hang-ups', responses, etc and make plans for the future, particularly about what you want to change. Focus on one thing at a time, eg:

- personal values;
- working relationships;
- gaining a better understanding of …;
- your role within the organization.

I know from personal experience that trying to understand what reflective practice is can be mind-boggling. 'Doing' reflective practice in any of its many forms can sometimes feel overwhelming, and attempting to facilitate it can be frighteningly complex. However, to return to the quotation with which I began this chapter, there is also some magic to be found in seriously exploring reflective practice – with or without a guidebook! By helping us to discover new meanings and perspectives in ourselves and what we do, it can transform the familiar landscape of professional practice so that we do, indeed, begin to see it through new eyes.

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# 13

# Workplace Diversity and Training – More Than Fine Words

*Joan E Keogh*

## INTRODUCTION AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This chapter could have been fashionably titled 'Managing the Mosaic'; earlier it would have been more prosaically an obligatory chapter on equal opportunities; and before that it would have been a discussion on discrimination in the workplace.

Such concerns are still a live issue for organizations, however progressive, but there is more and more emphasis on management's need to recognize and develop the potential of *all* individuals in their workforce. Some writers argue that people differ in more ways than disability, ethnicity or gender; they regard organizational culture, overall, as the most important element for effective management, with diversity seen more as added value. However, there has been a slow but recognizable change of attitude over the past two decades in general acknowledgement that '*people matter*' at the workplace, regardless of their differences.

Having read this chapter you will:

- understand the nature of diversity;
- understand the business imperative for diversity in the workplace;
- know the UK legislation which relates to diversity; and
- understand some of the training and development responses that apply to diversity.

## EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND MANAGING DIVERSITY – WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

Basically the main differences between the two are as follows (IPD, 1996):

*Equal opportunities*

- concentration on discrimination/unfairness;
- perceived as an issue for women and ethnic minorities and people with disabilities;
- focuses on boosting proportion of minority groups in employment;
- strategy has to be 'mainstreamed';
- emphasis on positive action rather than corporate vision.

*Managing diversity*

- aims to ensure that all employees maximize their potential and contribution to the organization;
- concentrates on movement within an organization, its culture and the meeting of business objectives;
- concerns all staff and especially managers;
- does not rely on positive action and provides a vision.

### *Diversity defined*

One of the problems with words is that they can subtly change in meaning as they become applied to management theories. For example in Handy's (1993:256 et seq) seminal work, *Understanding Organizations*, the term 'diversity' occurs more than once in relation to organizational design and 'management of diversity' is all about distribution of organizational power, match of culture, and structure.

Discussing the wider aspects of organizational culture, Handy (1993:188) suggests that diversity in the organization inclines towards what he categorizes as a 'task culture', with influence based on expert power. Handy describes this as a team culture where 'getting the job done' tends to wipe out 'most status and style differences'. Although it might be unwise to take this parallel too far along the road of organizational theory, in terms of a diverse workforce it points towards a training ethos which encourages mixed group/team learning as a way forward from the more formalized instruction type sessions.

But workplace diversity has now taken on a whole new meaning and Donaldson (1994:5–6) quotes Dr Judy Rosener from the University of California and author of *Workforce America: Managing Employee Diversity as a Vital Resource* as saying:

> We do not mean just race and gender. We have looked at dimensions of diversity as things that make people different from one another … Everyone has different dimensions. There are things you cannot change such as age, race, sex and sexual orientation … and others such as marital status, religious beliefs.

Rosener avers that there are 'three steps to diversity – recruiting a diverse workforce, valuing them so that they are not token and managing them (and) you have to have all three.'

From the UK there is Kandola and Fullerton's (1994:8) widely accepted concept of workplace diversity:

> The basic concept of managing diversity accepts that the workforce consists of a diverse population of people. The diversity consists of visible and non-visible differences which will include factors such as sex, age, background, race, disability, personality, work style. It is founded on the premise that harnessing these differences will create a productive environment in which everyone feels valued, where their talents are being fully utilized and in which organizational goals are being met.

In the IPD position paper (1996:1) Bett sees diversity as an evolutionary step in equal opportunities and suggests that:

> The diversity concept expands our horizons beyond equality issues covered by the law and builds on recognized approaches to equal opportunities. It adds new impetus to the development of equal opportunities and the creation of an environment in which enhanced contributions from all employees will work to the advantage of the business, people themselves and society more generally.

Rosener's dimensions are expanded to include a considerably wider range of personal differences alongside the more generally acknowledged ethnic origin, gender, physical and mental abilities, such as:

> academic or vocational qualification, accent, age, caring responsibilities, learning difficulties, marital status, political affiliation, religion, sexual orientation, spent or irrelevant conviction, trade union or non-trade union membership.

A simple model of good practice is provided by La Fasto (1992) from an American case study (The Baxter Healthcare Corporation), and is shown in Figure 13.1. This is a different sequence from Rosener above, who puts 'valuing' *before* 'managing'.

## *More a kaleidoscope than a mosaic?*

Rather than a 'mosaic' the IPD illustrates diversity with its own multicolour design in the form of a snowflake, each snowflake representing a unique form made up of many different but equal parts to symbolize diversity and equality.


**Figure 13.1** The diversity progression

As yet another analogy, the concept of diversity points to every single member of the organization as being a unique shape, as in a jigsaw, everyone together making up the picture that is the whole, and which is not complete if even one of the pieces is left out. But both the concepts of a mosaic and the human jigsaw suggest an immutable and static whole, coloured and original as the total image may be. And snowflakes melt!

My own flight of fancy leads me more to the kaleidoscope with its innumerable permutations of patterns depending on the way the shapes and colours re-form again and again. For those of us concerned with training and development perhaps we should envisage diversity more within the kaleidoscope's vibrant and changing patterns, different pictures each time it is shaken up but always combining from the same source – and that is the challenge!

## THE BUSINESS CASE

Worman (1996:8) points to the 'voluntary self-interest of adopting a diverse workforce'. Her model (1998) demonstrates the *external* as well as the *internal* pressures forcing action by employers (see Figure 13.2).

It is useful to take general lessons from the experience of the more progressive companies whose successes in managing diversity are reported worldwide. These include such US 'giants' as Proctor and Gamble, Du Pont and Macdonald's, as reported by Labich (1996), and Thomas's (1996) studies of Bell South Corporation, Hallmark Cards, Goodyear Tire and Rubber, and General Motors, among others.

In the UK, Smith Kline Beecham and Rank Xerox are two of the many examples singled out by Ford (1996) as publicly demonstrating commitment to equal opportunity and diversity in ways that suit their particular culture and operational objectives. For example, Smith Kline Beecham conducted a company-wide survey of some 8000 employees and among the gaps identified by the respondents were training opportunities, career guidance, and communication.

The advantages of relating more to diverse customers has been highlighted by Donaldson (1994:6) who cites the BBC World Service as one of the early pioneers in

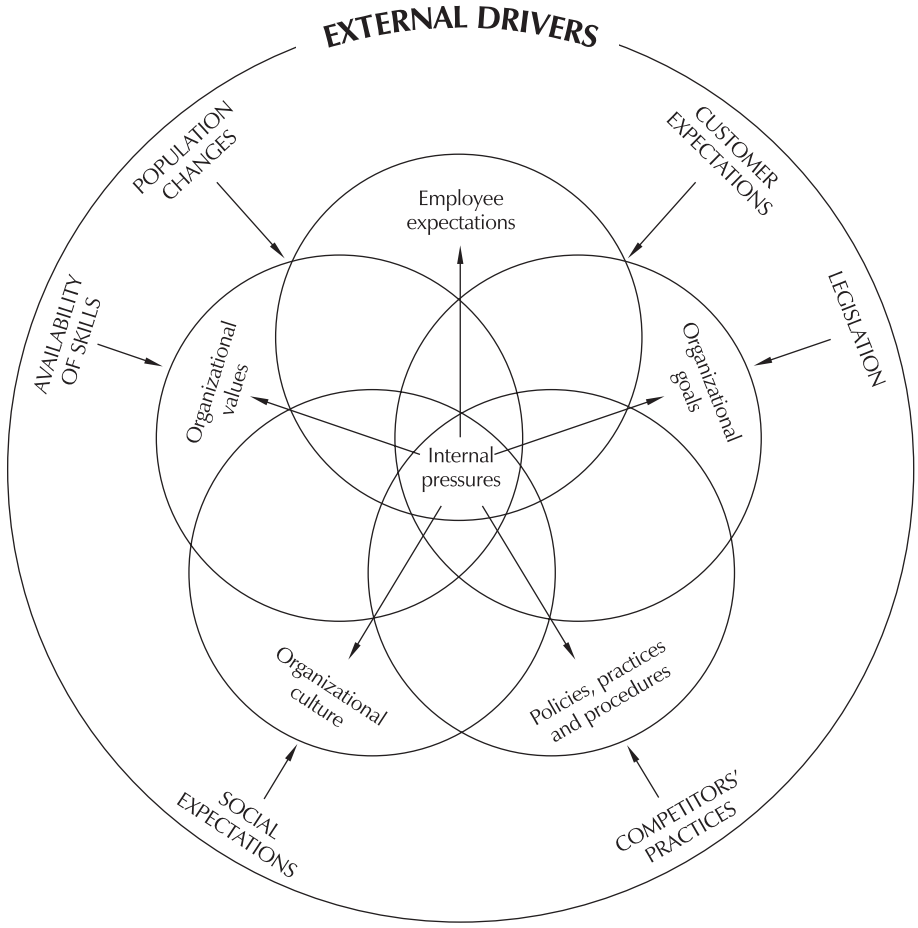


**Figure 13.2** Managing diversity: pressures forcing action by employers

management of diversity training which is said to have 'helped achieve a workforce which more closely reflects the service's worldwide audience'. Among a number of other UK employers similarly relating to external community patterns are Birmingham City Council and Littlewoods.

Organizations writing in support of the IPD position (op cit.) have been wide-ranging and include Rolls Royce Military Aero-Engines Limited, Scottish Hydro Electric, NSK-RHP Europe Ltd, and Royal Mail South Wales. Grand Met (IPD, 1996:7) sums up the business case succinctly:

> Customers are increasingly looking through the front door of companies they buy from. If they do not like what they see in terms of social response, they will not go in.

## TRECARE NHS TRUST: MANAGING DIVERSITY

### *Introduction*

Trecare NHS Trust values people as individuals not only for moral and social reasons, but also because it makes sense for our organization and services. The Trust has recognized the complementary link between equal opportunities and diversity and how this can take equal opportunities forward in the organization. The Trust believes that it has sound and fair employment and service policies and procedures in place and management who are trained to ensure such policies become active. In fact one of the first steps in the Trust's management of diversity approach (in 1996) was to hold seminars for those individuals who have responsibilities for recruitment, training and staff management.

### *Action plan*

The Trust's Special Interest Group for Equal Opportunities and Opportunity 2000 agreed a comprehensive action plan in April 1997. The action plan was based upon the positive feedback obtained from workshops held during the seminars. The Special Interest Group has a monitoring role for charting progress and updating the plan on a quarterly basis. Members of the Special Interest Group include the Chief Executive, a Royal College of Nursing (RCN ) Regional Officer and a UNISON lay representative.

### *Aim*

The Trust's aim is to mainstream equality into its business at all levels, particularly in the formulation and review of employment policies and practices and the way services are provided to clients.

### *Key principles*

The Trust's vision of diversity-focused culture includes:

*value setting*

- recognizing the ways people are different from each other is an asset;
- the need to develop an open culture with good communication and feedback channels with open dialogue;

- making equality an issue for everyone;
- setting and communicating standards of behaviour based upon treating people with respect and dignity;
- continually looking for ways of addressing and improving the diverse needs of clients and their carers.

## *Policy agenda*

The main thrust of the managing diversity initiative is to simulate, develop and promulgate the ideas and principles of equality throughout the work of the Trust. This includes:

- progressively implementing the managing diversity action plan;
- keeping people informed about developments in the equality field through team briefing;
- linking management of diversity to business strategy and quality initiatives such as the King Fund Audit, Chartermark, and Investors in People;
- building diversity concepts and practices into training, education, team building and induction programmes;
- ensuring that merit, competence and potential are the basis for recruitment, employment and development decisions;
- non-tolerance of harassment, bullying and intimidating behaviour;
- support for development training to help people reach levels of competence which let them release their true potential.

## *Monitoring*

The Special Interest Group have responsibility for coordinating and evaluating the Trust's progress and for assessing business benefits from equality initiatives. Reports are sent to the Trust Board on action taken and recommendations on future priorities.

With acknowledgement to Trecare NHS Trust.

### *Ethics*

More directly of concern for those responsible for training and development might be to remind ourselves of the ethical arguments supporting the notion of diversity. It has been said that fear, ignorance and the preservation of selfish interests are at the root of most discriminatory practices. With the third millennium imminent there is a groundswell of opinion that businesses have an ethical obligation to widen their horizon and must cast aside the non-acceptance of divisions within our society. A model diversity programme is no substitute for evidence of commitment from senior management and only proactive efforts will translate the rhetoric of equal opportunities for everyone into workplace reality.

Levi-Strauss & Co provide an example of focusing on workplace diversity as part of its company values. Their 'Aspirations Statement' (Glasenk, 1997:10) describes the kind of leadership required to value diversity:

> Leadership that values a diverse workforce (age, sex, ethnic group, etc) at all levels of the organization, (and values) diversity in experience, and a diversity in perspectives.

And continues:

> We have committed to taking full advantage of the rich backgrounds and abilities of all our people and to promote a greater diversity in positions of influence.

## TRAINING FOR DIVERSITY

Although, as yet, most published information has tended to highlight individual organizations, in a UK survey on successful managing diversity initiatives the 285 who responded represented a mix of small, medium and large organizations with some 60 per cent in the private sector (Kandola and Fullerton, 1994). From the responses, fair selection training for recruiters was said to be one of the 10 most successful initiatives, together with training trainers in equal opportunities. Introducing awareness training to staff, although taking place, appeared less likely to be evaluated for effectiveness, perhaps because it was more difficult to establish criteria. Training in awareness and communication was seen by nearly half the organizations as a priority area for future action although these two terms are too general for practical application, unless defined in terms of identified needs within a particular organization and for a specific group.

It is one thing to advocate more focused training in general and another to consider in practice what is the best fit. For as long as I can remember, communication(s) training has remained high on the list of managers' training needs – a subject which continues to be universally delivered by trainers in various forms, and still with a number of different orga-

nizational objectives. As for awareness training, this usually includes a necessary appreciation of the relevant employment legislation as well as a mix of behavioural studies. Training programmes may include case studies, role-play and simulation. Enhancing management ability to carry out appraisals in a fair and equitable manner; an appreciation of recruitment and selection processes without unfairly discriminating; even-handed grievance and disciplinary practices – these are all likely to be viewed just as extensions to what might have become standardized equal opportunities programmes planned around statutory obligations. Small wonder, then, that training for workplace diversity has received little direct reporting. Attention has focused more on new initiatives that tend to be as much about mission statements and objectives as specific practical examples.

## *The way forward*

Certainly training for diversity is likely to be influenced by senior management's perception of what is appropriate as well as their public and private commitment to valuing people as individuals. Progressive organizations accept workplace diversity as covering diverse styles of working, thinking and communicating with others from a rich 'mix' of different people, and as a positive advantage. They no longer expect everyone should end up conforming to some central and long-established standard 'norm'. Outmoded preconceptions of the 'norm' have been suggested by Ousely (1994) such as 'an able bodied Caucasian male', to which could be added 'working full-time with no domestic responsibilities'. Certainly a stereotype from the past!

So far we have considered the training function in the light of winning the hearts and minds of those predisposed to question the value of a diverse workforce. As well, today's emphasis is on the importance of all employees having an equal chance to develop their full potential, at the same time making a positive contribution to the undertaking. Such development programmes will call more and more for ways of mutually exchanging the values and knowledge of culturally and socially diverse individuals with a mutual recognition of similarities as well as differences.

Collin (1994:283–4) suggests that women and disabled people, together with cultural and social minorities, who suffer from negative stereotyping tend to reinforce this themselves by correspondingly low expectations and aspirations. Although this blanket assumption can be challenged by success stories from within these groups, in many organizations, trainers should still be wary of judging learning abilities solely on the dominant culture standards and action learning might be an appropriate solution.

So how, as trainers, do we attempt to aid people at all levels in the organization to unblock their particular mindsets and to recognize what they really see and believe about different people? Perhaps the first step is to confront our own. We all carry baggage that holds our beliefs and prejudices – our view of the world that has built up from childhood.

And as Handy (1993:76 et seq) reminds us, it is only if we know someone very well that we accept them as the kind of person they are, with whatever differences. When dealing with others we are likely to make assumptions about how they will behave, etc and from these assumptions most of us then tend to categorize and predict. For example 'older workers do not adapt easily to new ideas' – in other words, stereotyping with expectation of certain characteristics.

Torrington and Hall (1994) quote Ellis and Sonnenfield (1993) as being concerned that training for diversity carries some risk of reinforcing stereotypes and in my own experience, amateur role-play, for example, holds such underlying dangers of caricature performances.

Awareness programmes are seen as 'sensitizing workers and managers to the needs of a culturally diverse workforce' albeit realistically linking it to 'maximizing potential productivity'. Cooper and White (1995) reinforce Kandola and Fullerton's suggestion that all employees in an enterprise should feel reliant on one another for overall success and this team spirit directs attention away from individual differences and towards similarities.

On the other hand, more than one writer has emphasized the inherent danger of targets or positive action, that is, singling out a particular group for special training and thus suggesting they are different. This could be either way, for example, men only for outdoor activity training, women only for assertiveness training (or the reverse). Although such segregation is occasionally appropriate, it is fast becoming less likely and trainers are starting to reassess their programme content to suit heterogeneous groups. A mix of people with common workplace interests such as their team or their section can build on cultural and gender differences within a spread of age groups which may also include people with different characteristics or physical abilities, for example, female paraplegic, older Asian male, young female ex-offender, male carer, and many other permutations. The challenge for training is to focus on the unique contribution from each individual, rather than an over-emphasis on stereotypical differences and social category.

It could be said that even to differentiate between management 'development' and employee 'training' in itself has a discriminatory shade of meaning. Certainly, though, trainers should be looking at:

- flexibility of venue – access for the handicapped; accessible location for carers with home responsibilities; and with some sensitivity towards dietary restrictions and customs;
- timing of training events – so as not to exclude those on part-time, shift or flexible working, and with due regard to religious observances such as fast days and prayer time.

## IS THE EDUCATIONAL APPROACH ENOUGH?

Removing the main barriers to the cultivation of what amounts to a paradigm shift of attitude within an organization calls for more than what has been described as the *educational* approach; that is to say, information giving and examples of best practice, necessary as this remains. It is perhaps worthwhile to repeat what all experienced equal opportunities trainers already endorse. Within the wider context of diversity, instead of addressing single issues separately and thus reinforcing the 'difference' (and some trainers go into auto pilot on just three – gender, race and disability), effective diversity training is emphatically not only about instruction or information giving; it is to do with the generation of particular experiences, and reflection, rather than exhortation to conform.

One of the means of achieving a wider consideration of diversity might be discussion on values, perception and attitudes through focus groups, with minority views on how they themselves perceive their position – a proactive role for training within the organization. Hunt's Chapter 12 on reflective practice could usefully be revisited, while appropriate delivery methods are addressed in Chapters 15 and 16. I am also indebted to Robertson (1994) for the following views, originally to cover training on racial awareness and which have been expanded here into good counsel for diversity awareness programmes:

- we are all members of the same species;
- differences exist between cultures – we learn and acquire them;
- no one is superior or inferior to any human culture; they do, however, differ, especially in their strengths and richness;
- mental, physical and cultural differences do not cause sexism, racism, ageism and the like but they are often used to justify and maintain the existence of discrimination.

And as Holmes (1987:50) points out:

> Nature confers different abilities on different people but a development approach for individual fulfilment comes from the premise that each person's growth centres upon the realization of whatever potential he or she might have.

## TRAINING CHECKLIST FOR DIVERSITY

The following checklist has been adapted for diversity training from NACRO's (1987) original document, which illustrates good practice in equal opportunities training.

### *Trainer's attitudes*

- Inform yourself about workplace diversity – read, discuss, undertake training.
- Check feedback mechanisms regarding your training work – are they working? – how do you know?

### *Training content and materials*

- Have all audio-visual materials and handouts been checked for offending images and language?
- Can diversity be built into case studies/exercises? How effective is role-play? Ensure you are not illustrating people in stereotypical ways.

### *Access and participation*

- Are those distributing information for you ensuring it is seen by all?
- Do you need to consider other channels for circulating information?
- What information do you ask for – disabled access? Dietary requirements?
- Can you ever provide childcare ?
- Is the make up of your training events predominantly white male/female? Or segregated special groups? Check through the planning process and ask yourself, why?

### *Tutors and training providers*

- Are the people you use for training aware of your organization's diversity policy?
- Who do you usually use for training – are they all white, predominantly male?
- Does any trainer's approach to diversity give you cause for concern. Have you challenged him or her? How will you do it?

With acknowledgement to National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, original document (1987).

## THE LAW

Evidence indicates that discrimination still exists and there continue to be inequalities of opportunity and treatment of whatever minority group. Indeed there is a suggestion in some quarters that the growing emphasis on diversity and its link with organizational efficiency serves to mask the realities of discrimination. The continued need for statutory protection is recognized, despite what has been called 'the sophistication of equal opportunities' and the current emphasis on a holistic approach. This need is manifest in the extension of statutory rights for people with disabilities, a growing lobby for legal redress against ageism, and implementation of the European Social Chapter, which covers things such as paternity leave and holiday entitlement.

Employers committed to the management of diversity accept that some form of legal framework will always be necessary. Particularly when considering management training, it will always be useful to present what the law says as a backcloth to positive discussion on voluntarism versus legal penalties. It also helps to remove misconceptions (the 'I know for a fact …' statements), while a judicious use of case studies will serve to demonstrate what the courts are saying about what is not good practice.

In the UK, the very first breakthrough, statutorily, for individual equal rights at work was with the Equal Pay Act in 1970, although of course the Disabled Persons Act and its quota requirements had been brought in at the end of World War II (1944). In 1974 legislation founded on the principles of equal treatment for sex and race was later followed by Codes of Practice with the aim of promoting voluntary improvements in, for instance, selection and promotion. The legislation does not provide for group action. Some positive action related to training is permissible by law but in general 'quotas' and other proportional representation at the workplace have not been seen as the best way forward. Instead employers have been encouraged to analyse the composition of their workforce and take steps to redress imbalances and to make positive and public commitment to equality of treatment and opportunity.

There have been a number of government backed initiatives such as Opportunity 2000 (women), the Employers' Forum on Disability, and Race for Opportunity to provide a platform for promoting such commitment. The present climate suggests an increasing number of international and other large UK organizations, particularly those with European connections, are positively moving towards consolidation or expansion of their existing equal opportunities policies if only for demographic reasons, while supporting the Equal Opportunities Commission's call for the existing legislation to be overhauled and substantially updated.

In the USA it is often said that the legislation on equal rights came about as a result of the original 1960s campaign for civil rights, and specifically racial equality. Federal laws provide for positive selection of candidates from minority groups and women, associated with an obligation to meet statistical targets from workplace 'profiles'. This long-standing

positive action policy has more recently been argued in some States as effectively demeaning women and minority groups due to growing suggestions that, in order to fulfil the legal obligations, it is not always the most qualified person who is selected for the job or promotion.

In Europe different countries have differing legislation but those in the European Union (EU), including the UK, were signatories to the Treaty of Amsterdam, 1997. Legislation adopted under the Social Chapter, only requiring a majority vote, will include equal treatment. The law still has a place in that statutory provisions underpin the ideology with a framework of rules that also provide safeguards against discriminatory practices, more particularly related to gender, race and disability.

An overview of the main UK legislation relating to equal opportunities is appended to this chapter, although it is not intended to be a detailed account of all the relevant statutes.

## TOWARDS A LEARNING ORGANIZATION?

We have seen that the drive towards organizational effectiveness and business success has led to the UK embracing an originally transatlantic notion of diversity that emphasizes the contribution each individual employee can make to the overall impact of their organization, whether in profit-making or social terms. The leaders in industry and commerce are already coming forward to champion the cause publicly. The training function has a crucial role in reinforcing this increasingly wider view of equal opportunities and in seeking the most appropriate ways that 'awareness' can be engendered and nurtured through appropriate learning opportunities for everyone. If the concept of diversity does indeed result in the paradigm shift envisaged, 'trainers' will find themselves entering even further into the role of change agents within the truly learning organization defined by Pedler *et al* (1989:2): 'one which facilitates the learning of all its members and continually transforms itself'.

## CONCLUSION

There is a compelling business case for encouraging a rich diversity within the workforce. World-wide, we all tend to identify with others similar to ourselves in organizations with which we come into contact, as customers, clients or associates.

There is also an ethical argument and this message has been adopted by leaders in the field of equal opportunities, as can be seen from the case studies and other examples. In spite of the advances which have occurred over the past thirty years or so, there remain a number of areas still to be addressed. For many of these, training and development is in the forefront, holding the key to further understanding of investing in people.

## BT AND DIVERSITY

### *Then (1988)*

In 1988 British Telecom issued a 'Guide for Managers and Supervisors' – *Equality of Opportunity in Practice*. The basics covered at that time relating to 'training and education' are well worth reproducing for the purpose of today's management training as they still go to the heart of the matter, in simple terms.

### *Training and education*

#### General

Make sure all your staff are told of training and education opportunities for which they are eligible to apply or which could meet their developments needs. Do not assume that any particular group will not be interested or suitable.

#### Residential courses

Give as much notice as possible of residential courses so that those with young children or other dependants can make arrangements for their care.

Consider the use of alternatives to residential courses where domestic responsibilities make it impossible for staff to be away from home overnight; in some cases, distance learning might provide an answer.

#### Industrial language training

If communication difficulties are acting as a barrier to an individual's advancement, affecting efficiency or working relationships, industrial language training provided by, eg local authority units, may be able to help.

#### Special training schemes

From time to time BT offers special training schemes for groups that have been under-represented in particular areas of work, eg engineering training for women. If you feel that locally organized training would benefit members of your staff from under-represented groups, discuss it with the Equal Opportunity Adviser.

### *Now*

As a leading player in global telecommunications, BT believe it is critical to harness the talents, skills and capabilities of all its people to gain and retain competitive advantage.

In doing so BT aims to create opportunities for everyone in the company to achieve their best in the interests of themselves and the company as a whole.

In BT, managing diversity embraces a range of key programmes from measuring employee attitudes and expectations, auditing behaviours and practices, to engaging in initiatives to raise the profile of individuals in minority groups.

Examples include:

- *a Steering Group of senior operational managers* advising on high level strategy and policy for the management of diversity;
- *a Women's Development* Portfolio providing opportunities for personal and professional development for women of all grades;
- *an Ethnic Minority Network* which is the voice of BT's ethnic minority employees. Amongst other functions it acts as a sounding board for senior BT management to test ideas for new policies;
- *the Disability* Programme includes forums at which disabled employees meet with senior managers to discuss BT's approach to disability issues and their work requirements.

With acknowledgement to BT Equal Opportunities Policy Unit.

## *Conclusion*

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There is also an ethical argument and this message has been adopted by leaders in the field of equal opportunities, as can be seen from the case studies and other examples. In spite of the advances which have occurred over the past thirty years or so, there remains a number of areas still to be addressed. For many of these, training and development is in the forefront, holding the key to further understanding of investing in people.

## *Appendix*

### Equal Pay Act, 1970 (EPA)

Amended by the Sex Discrimination Act, 1975 and the Equal Pay(Amendment) Regulations 1983.

The purpose of the Equal Pay legislation is to eliminate discrimination between men and women in pay and other terms of their contract of employment. It gives a woman the right to equality in terms of her contract when she is employed:

- on like work: that is, work of the same or broadly similar to that of a man;
- on work rated as equivalent: that is, in a job which a job evaluation study has shown to have equal value to that of a man;
- on work of equal value: that is, in a job which is equal to that of a man in terms of the demands made on her under such headings as skill, effort and decision making.

The Act applies to men and women although the term 'woman' is used throughout.

## Sex Discrimination Acts, 1984 and 1986 (SDA)

Sex Discrimination in employment – main points:

- employers cannot lawfully discriminate in the arrangements made for recruitment, selection, training, promotion or transfer;
- it is unlawful for an employer to discriminate in the benefits, facilities or services provided to employees;
- discrimination is unlawful in dismissals or other favourable treatment of employees;
- it is unlawful to discriminate against a woman as regards age of retirement;
- exceptions are made where gender is a genuine occupational qualification for the job;
- it is not unlawful to give different treatment to men and women in respect of pregnancy and childbirth.

*See also* Code of Practice.

The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) continues to press for the above two Acts to be brought under a single statute to remove anomalies in the domestic legislation which have built up over some 20 years as a result of the European Court's rulings.

## Race Relations Act, 1975 (RRA)

Racial Discrimination in Employment – main points:

- it is unlawful for employers to discriminate in the way arrangements are made for recruitment, selection, training, promotion or transfer;
- exceptions are made where race is a genuine occupational qualification.

*See also* Code of Practice.

## Disability Discrimination Act, 1995 (DDA)

Prohibited discrimination – employment:

- employers cannot lawfully discriminate against disabled workers in the arrangement made for recruitment, selection, training, promotion or transfer;
- it is unlawful to discriminate against disabled workers in relation to terms and conditions of employment;
- it is unlawful to discriminate against disabled workers in relation to employment benefits;
- it is unlawful to dismiss a person solely on the grounds of his or her disability.

Definition of 'a disability':

> Generally speaking a 'disability' is a physical or mental impairment which has substantial and long term adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day to day activities (Section 1[1]).

This section is amplified in Schedule 1 and includes 'progressive conditions'.

*See also* Code of Practice.

## Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, 1974 (ROA)

The Act sets out to make life easier for many people who have been convicted of a criminal offence in civilian life, or in the Services, in Great Britain or abroad, and who have since lived on the right side of the law.

Anyone who has been convicted of a criminal offence and received a sentence of not more than two and a half years in prison, benefits as a result of the Act if she or he has not been convicted again during a specified period (the rehabilitation period).

If someone who can benefit under the Act is not convicted again during his or her rehabilitation period, he or she becomes what the Act calls a 'rehabilitated person' and the conviction becomes spent. The rehabilitation period depends on the sentence for the original offence.

(Source: Home Office)

## Ageism

Rather than go ahead with legislation on ageism, the government has decided to introduce a Voluntary Code of Practice to encourage organizational policies against ageism.

The Employment Service's Job Centres have set a good example by no longer accepting vacancies that feature upper age limits.

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