

Thanaraj, Ann (2016) Improving leadership practice through the power of reflection: an epistemological study. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 15 (9). pp. 28-43.

Downloaded from: <http://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/2980/>

***Usage of any items from the University of Cumbria's institutional repository 'Insight' must conform to the following fair usage guidelines.***

Any item and its associated metadata held in the University of Cumbria's institutional repository Insight (unless stated otherwise on the metadata record) may be copied, displayed or performed, and stored in line with the JISC fair dealing guidelines (available [here](#)) for educational and not-for-profit activities

**provided that**

- the authors, title and full bibliographic details of the item are cited clearly when any part of the work is referred to verbally or in the written form
  - a hyperlink/URL to the original Insight record of that item is included in any citations of the work
- the content is not changed in any way
- all files required for usage of the item are kept together with the main item file.

**You may not**

- sell any part of an item
- refer to any part of an item without citation
- amend any item or contextualise it in a way that will impugn the creator's reputation
- remove or alter the copyright statement on an item.

The full policy can be found [here](#).

Alternatively contact the University of Cumbria Repository Editor by emailing [insight@cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:insight@cumbria.ac.uk).

# Improving Leadership Practice through the Power of Reflection: An Epistemological Study

**Ann Thanaraj**

University of Cumbria  
Carlisle, United Kingdom

**Abstract.** This paper reports on a personal journey using reflection to benefit and transform the development of the author's thinking on important elements of leadership. The paper discusses the value of critical reflection in professional development before building upon the dynamic and complex multi-facet process of leadership. The reflection has helped to draw out the author's epistemological stance on the variety of different responsibilities, requirements of professional, personal and interpersonal knowledge and skill and the need to engage in reflection and continual improvement and growth as a leader. In order to grow and improve as a leader there is a strong need to address personal values and challenges that underpin thinking about leadership and the manner of implementing leadership.

**Keywords:** Reflective learning; personal values; leadership, professional learning, situational leadership, ethic.

## **Introduction**

This paper is an epistemological study which reports on a personal journey using reflection to benefit and transform the development of the author's thinking on key elements of leadership. The paper is written in a first person speech in order to allow for personal reflection, drawing on lived experiences and self-awareness as this develops.

As an academic team leader and a principal lecturer in my subject discipline of law, the nature of my work and areas of responsibilities are set out in my contract. To name a few, these include team leadership, management of programmes, setting and meeting the objectives of the department, researching, influencing academics and students through research, income generation and contributions to the wider university and the professional bodies.

Within the context of working in higher education, I believe leadership is a dynamic and complex multi-facet process of initiating positive impact on others. This process brings with it a variety of different responsibilities, requirements of professional, personal and interpersonal knowledge and skill and the need to

engage in reflection and continual improvement and growth as an experienced leader. This echoes what theorists have suggested; that leadership cannot be taught as a skill set but it can be developed (Gill 2011; Avolio 2009; Yammarino et al. 2005). As such, I am keen to develop more effective practices, learning and evolving from challenges that have I have attempted to overcome. The paper reflects on the skills, traits and challenges of leadership.

I began conscientiously reflecting on my experience of leadership two years ago, with a strong desire for my team members to have confidence in me, as their new leader and, together as a team, for us to take our subject area into a successful and sustainable future. In order to achieve the wider aim of my leadership, I set myself three priorities that underpin my leadership focus and objectives:

- To achieve excellence in higher education through successful management of teaching, learning and student support
- To instil a clear sense of purpose
- To motivate team members and work effectively

Increasingly, however, I have realised there is much more to being a leader than effectively fulfilling the responsibilities set out in the job description. I decided to keep a reflective journal, posing questions and issues that I found I needed to address around my values that underpin what I think leadership is; my understanding of influence and its place within leadership, my character and its impact on how I lead, what it means to lead, the emotional dimension to leading and general people skills. These reflections are reported in this paper.

This reflection is undertaken in light of the significant changes that higher education continues to undergo in response to such factors as the advancement of the new Higher Education bill in England and Wales being considered by Parliament, contributions to the research excellence framework, impact of the teaching excellence framework, impact of digital education, league tables, widening participation and globalisation, to name a few (Times Higher Education, August 2016). Furthermore within the legal profession, method of delivery of legal services and legal education itself is undergoing vast consultations and review (Legal Education Training Review 2013). In this climate of change, there is a need for good strategic leadership and as such, I will need to reflect, identify and develop my skills and qualities as a leader.

## **Methodology**

This study is a reflective biography giving an account of the author's thinking on the development of leadership skills and qualities over the past two years within the context of the higher education sector.

The reflection is written in an auto-ethnographical style. This gives priority to the lived experiences and reflections drawn from considering issues and questions which has raised self-awareness and critical thinking from the author's point of view. As such, a self-study research provides readers with the

opportunity to draw on the author's questions and experience and reflect on their journey through leadership development.

### **Research focus**

The research focus presented below guides the author's reflection on current leadership experience.

The term leadership provides us with a '*mental picture of power, prestige, and authority*' (Yukl 2002, p4). There is also some disconnect and ambiguity as to what leadership is (Bryman, 2002, 2004). Some consider leadership as a function or task for completion, or a role defined by the person carrying that responsibility (Goodall, 2006). Others consider this to be a process of influence to achieve common objectives (Northouse, 2004). It is acknowledged that skills such as problem-solving, interpersonal skills, organising and planning, decision making and delegating are absolutely crucial for successful leadership.

The aim of undertaking this reflection is to create some time and space to consider personal characteristics, the values essential for leadership and to develop awareness and reflect on current practices in higher education. Within a wider context, it is hoped that this reflection may help to address whether good leadership is derived from the personal traits of the leader or whether it is a functional process.

The reflection will focus on:

1. Understanding the power of critical reflection in professional practice;
2. Identifying and reflecting on what my leadership values are;
3. Drawing out the extent to which emotion, influence and authority (Yukl, 2002) has an impact upon my leadership values; and
4. Reflecting on my character and its impact on the leadership process.

### **Evaluating the power of reflection in an ongoing journey of becoming an effective leader**

I have seen effective and transformational development in our students' ability to formulate new ideas and they try to figure out a solution to a problem on their own, whilst identifying areas for change and improvement through applying what was learned from one situation to other situations, through the embedded reflective learning scheme across all our law programmes.

As such, being a believer in the power of reflections and its ability to bring to surface awareness, improvement and tackling challenges, I adopted reflection as a part of my personal and professional development as an academic leader to understand and recognise influences and improvements to my leadership practice.

There is no straightforward or simple definition of reflection; instead there is a wide variety of literature on what it is and how it is best implemented. Moon's

(1999; 2005) work on reflection explains that reflection is *“a form of mental processing...that we can use to fulfil a purpose...based on the further processing of knowledge and understanding and possibly emotions that we already possess”* (Moon 1999, 2005, working paper 4). This presents useful insights into what reflection is:

- Thinking carefully about complicated matters where there is no obvious or immediate solution;
- There is an emotional dimension to reflection;
- Existing knowledge is the starting point where reflections commence;
- Through the mental processing we may add new knowledge or areas for further investigation after an experience; and
- Consequently, addressing the purpose of the reflection

Done well and effectively, reflective practice can be an enormously powerful tool to examine and transform practice. It facilitates the time and space for one to go *“...to the heart of things...to reengage with beliefs of fundamental importance, which provides a cohesive bedrock for all of life’s activities”* (Fook 2013).

There are a variety of frameworks, for example from Argyris and Schön (1974); Schön (1983, 1987); Dewey (1933); Brookfield (1995); Ghaye (2004); Boud and Walker (1998) and Reynolds and Vince (2004) on reflective practice and how the *“mental processing ... to achieve some anticipated outcome...”* (Moon, 2005, Working Paper 4), however a review of the literature shows that there is no one right way of reflecting effectively. Instead a number of features of effective reflection need to be present in order to draw out the process of learning from experience in order to improve practice.

We begin with Dewey’s (1933) *‘How We Think: A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process’* as a starting point in reviewing reflective practices. Dewey was a pioneer in advocating for reflection becoming a core feature in any education stating that *“while we cannot learn or be taught to think, we do have to learn to think well, especially acquire the general habit of reflection”* (p.18). He takes a holistic view of reflection as a process which moved people away from routine ways of thinking about an experience towards reflective action involving *“active, persistent and careful consideration”* (p.4).

Dewey’s (1933) view has influenced theorists such as Kolb (1984); Schön (1983) and Boud and Walker (1998) thinking about learning from reflection.

Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning model features reflection as its nexus for effective and active learning. It has been defined as fundamental to develop, renew and expand one’s knowledge and learning, achieved through a *“cyclical process of identification, review, questioning and reconstruction through experience”* (p.27).

Schon’s (1983) work explored the development of one’s professional practice through reflection. He provided some helpful tips for reflection, which although not a linear and sequential model, it offers structure to the process: i) being aware of feelings or thoughts which may be challenging or uncomfortable, ii)

undertaking a critical analysis of the experience and iii) evaluating new perspectives derived from the analysis. The use of such a process has been suggested to lead to a state of expertise by bringing to the forefront of thinking one's existing knowledge so that it could be considered and improved through the process of reflection (p.67).

Building on previous literature on reflection and its processes, Boud and Walker (1998) explain that reflection is more than "*an intellectual exercise*" (p.194) and acknowledges the emotional dimension of undertaking reflections. They offer a structured approach to reflecting to encapsulate and harness the value of emotions in reflections. They encourage one to begin with reflecting on an experience by mentally replaying the experience and describing it in a descriptive, non-judgemental way. After this, identify the positive and negative feelings triggered by the experience and attempt to 'discharge' negative feelings which may obstruct the reflection. When the emotional dimension has been expressed and acknowledged, re-evaluate the issue by associating new information to what is already known and integrating new ideas with existing knowledge. One is also encouraged to validate the authenticity of the newly developed ideas, exploring inconsistencies or contradictions. Although they do not explain how this process of validation may be achieved, I would be keen to develop a reflective dialogue to inject a much needed social dimension to this process. Finally, to adopt and appropriate the new knowledge or behaviour as part of one's own practice to be applied in future circumstances.

With regards to achieving the depth of awareness and learning through reflection, Mezirow (1990) explained, reflection requires critiquing on the assumptions on which our beliefs and values have developed. In Van Maanen (1995) and Thompson's (2008) view, to engage in critical reflection, an issue or experience will need to be explored with the "*breadth and depth of practice, rather than to focus on the negative or 'crisis point' interpretations of the term*" (p.23). Taking this a step further, Fook and Askeland (2006) advises to critically reflect using a clear rationale and analysis embedded in theory to draw upon a structured process for reflection.

#### Reflection can aid successful professional identity

Reflective practice is often discussed as the foundation in achieving improved professional development (Schon 1983). In adopting Schon's (1983, 1995) and Fook and Askeland's (2006)'s view, to engage in critical reflection effectively, we need to be involved in more than just thinking about our experiences and move towards understanding our experiences within the social context, based upon theories and research, to help us develop our knowledge about our practice. In turn, this helps professionals including leaders become aware of the wider organisation and context in which they operate. There are some insightful studies situated within the realm of the literature surrounding the value and implication of reflection on leadership.

Research shows that the ability to reflect on experience is evident in leaders who exhibit higher levels of cognitive development seen through their thought processes, problem solving and decision-making (Kegan, 1994; Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). Reflective leaders also seem to be self-aware, able to reconsider their assumptions and current practices and are more open to new ideas (Mezirow, 1998). Neck & Manz (2010) explain that through self-awareness comes *“improved work performance”* (p. 185) and as such *“have higher productivity and more fulfilling careers”* (p.195). Further, adopting reflection as part of one’s professional identity can also assist and encourage one to draw upon personal values, examine personality traits and consider their ethical stance in light of challenging situations (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005), whilst developing one’s capacity to be mindful of the emotional dimensions in which leadership operates (Goleman et al. 2002).

Fook (2004) proposes that critical reflection is a valuable tool which leaders could employ to help them consider and understand the power and political relationships within organisations and as such it has the potential of offering a transformational approach to the manner in which one leads (Kayes, Kayes and Kolb 2005), both to the individual and team level (Ghaye 2005).

#### Personal experience of reflection

From my own experience, conscientious and structured critical reflection has the potential to bring about new ideas, renew practices and a sense of confidence over the way I lead and decisions I make.

I enjoy writing and reflecting by making notes on my experiences, ideas, feelings, challenges. Writing is a powerful mode of thinking (Smith 1998). I adopt a structured approach to reflection by referring to a set of questions I have developed which help me to draw out, focus and structure thoughts about my experiences. This enables me to explore, question and evaluate my performance and development as a leader. These questions which I have developed to aid my reflection are derived from my tactical knowledge and past experiences and are used as prompts when analysing a particular issue. Initially, I found that being new to leadership and having read a limited amount of research on effective practice, it was difficult to understand assumptions and analyse how pre-conceived ideas of leadership could influence outcomes in a positive or negative way.

Having adopted Fook and Askeland’s (2006) advice on critical reflection to question what we know as well as how we know it using theory (p.35), I enrolled on a leadership study programme and studied various pieces of research on effective leadership (including leadership papers by Kempster and Stewart’s (2010) *Leadership as purpose: Exploring the role of purpose in leadership practice*; George & Sims et al’s (2007) *discovering your authentic leadership*; Dent’s (1999) *Challenging “resistance to change”*; Duignan & Bhindi’s (1997) *Authenticity in leadership: an emerging perspective*; Kotter’s

(1995) *Leading change: Why transformational efforts fail*; Bennis & Nanus' (1985) *Leaders: The strategy for taking charge*).

This period of learning helped me to open up to new ideas and change as well as realise the importance of adapting to new strategies (Napier & Fook, 2000). It was this combination of reflection underpinned by critical theory which allowed me to deconstruct and understand assumptions about practice and its influence, explore perceptions and expectations and consider different ways to reconstruct the incident with other possible outcomes in a structured manner.

I found that, over time, I became more confident and open to examining assumptions and expectations about my values and personality which helped me gain awareness on some of the key facets of leadership such as control, management, uncertainty and change; all of which require more than just decision making or problem solving skills. In fact, many of these facets require personal strength in courage, integrity and values to succeed. From my experience of critical reflection, I believe it is a powerful technique that has the potential to bring about new understanding and confidence in knowing how to handle a situation.

### **My learning journey on the elements of leadership**

There is much ambiguity involved in forming an exact definition of leadership and whether it is a process or a function. From my own experience, I have found the art of leadership to be a process of influence, inspiring people to work towards goals which require fulfilling the tasks and objectives along the way.

#### Understanding leadership values

Personal values is the “...underlying moral, ethical foundation” (Copeland, 2014, p.129), which is capable of underpinning one’s leadership style and practice (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Gardner et al, 2005). I wanted to reflect and understand what my values were so that I had an awareness of how these could shape my decisions, reactions to issues, and effectiveness as a leader as well as the example I set for others.

Leadership theorists suggested that one’s personal values influence how leaders shape an organisation’s culture (Peregrym and Wollf, 2013), which consequently, can impact on how teams under one’s leadership will conduct themselves. In a business administration doctoral study, Lichtenstein(2005) contextualised the importance of this by reviewing 163 managers and leaders. The study found that a leader’s personal values had a “direct and significant” impact on organisational performance and influence, whilst their ‘age, experience and qualifications’ had no bearing on leadership (Lichtenstein, 2005, p.57).



Understanding the importance placed on value and its impact on a leader, I drafted a set of questions to provide me with structure to my thought process, whilst ensuring that I situated my thinking within critical theory.

- What characteristics do I possess?
- What do I know about effective leadership?
- Do I have the skills and attributes which contribute towards effective leadership?
- What does a leader do?
- How well do I understand myself as a leader?
- What do I hope to achieve as a leader?
- Do I worry about what others think of me?
- What do I believe to be the most important values in a leader?
- What are my values?
- What are my aspirations and how does it contribute to my personal and professional practices?
- What motivates me?
- What motivates my stakeholders? What are the differences? How do I adapt my values without compromising on my integrity and beliefs?

My reflections lead me to the following value statements which underpin my leadership style.

#### *Adapting to fit*

As a leader, I want to be able to help my team achieve our desired goals. In order to do so, I have learnt that the way to lead effectively is to be fluid, dynamic and responsive to change dependent on the needs of the group, using different leadership skills and techniques at appropriate times. This mirrors Fiedler's (1964, 1967), Hersey and Blanchard's (1969, 1977) and Yukl & Mahsud's (2010) findings that there are no templates or strategies on how best to lead; instead the style and manner of leadership should be appropriate to a situation, task and audience, and the level of attention paid to a situation or task or audience may vary and this requires a careful balance (Adair 1973).

For example, when faced with situations in the workplace which disrupt the normal operation of an academic delivery, I have been able to provide a rapid, decisive and appropriate response to minimize the adverse effects for staff, students and the organisation. However, this has been challenging for me as this has sometimes meant that I have had to find a balance for objectives that involve difficult trade-offs. From this, I have learnt that to be flexible and adaptive in my approach to leadership, I should attempt to be proactive in planning how to avoid anticipated problems and have a draft contingency plan to should a difficult situation arise.

#### *Understanding and appreciating those whom we are working with*

Being a results-focused individual, I have often failed to acknowledge that to take forward an objective, team members will need to feel included, empowered and engaged in the decision making process. Consequently, a leader requires skills to work in a variety of settings, both in formal situations and in informal settings, dealing with resistance and building relationships to share a common vision, including learning to work through the dynamics of those involved (Boyte, 1989).

Ramsden (1998) argued that successful leadership is about *"how people relate to each other"* (p.4). This is also known as emotional intelligence which is capable of influencing leadership effectiveness (Mayer et al. 2000; Goldman 1999, 2002). Apart from the functionalities of a leader, the process of leadership is a state of mind underpin by personal values and characteristics, which evolve from experience and reflection (Parry & Kempster, 2014).

I recognised that despite being self-aware, I need to improve on emotional intelligence and adopt a more suitable balance between prioritising people and objectives, rather than one over the other. Theorists such as Goldman (1995, 1999, 2002), Cowan & Heywood (2001) and Mittal & Sindhu (2012) explain that any form of effective people skill requires a good understanding of one's ability to recognise and manage own feelings, react appropriately, recognise feelings and emotions of others through especially paying attention to non-verbal cues, and managing relationships including interacting appropriately, resolving conflict and finding suitable outcomes (Arnold & Connelly, 2013).

#### *Being clear and focused about the direction of travel*

As a team leader, I have successfully and confidently created and established a sense of direction for the team by outlining the vision of the future, developing strategies for change to achieve goals, providing and justifying a clear sense of purpose, focusing explicitly on the needs and experiences of stakeholders and continually reinforcing key objectives. Although I have successfully implemented many of these strategies, I am aware of the need to be more people-focused, with an awareness and appreciation of the impact on team members, the additionality of any work involved or changes to their practices.

#### *Doing the right thing*

When making a decision, I focus on why something should be done, what is to be done, and the values that underlie the situation. Integrity has been a cornerstone of my motivations behind making decisions, based on being transparent, truthful and trustworthy and having courage of conviction. I believe that my personal integrity and trustworthiness were important factors which led the team to come together and work on developing a vision (Bolden 2001, 2003). I have come to realise that even above the need to be organised and decisive; good people skills are most important in setting team direction, creating an environment of collegiality, acting as a role model, and driving forward goals and objective.

### Reflecting on my character and personality within the context of leadership

As a team leader, I believe that achieving excellence in the programmes we offer, encouraging my team, communicating a clear sense of purpose and motivating team members to work effectively are the overarching priorities that govern the work we do. Together with the values which influence my leadership and these objectives for the team which provides focus for my leadership, I reflected on my motivations and style.

I began thinking carefully and delving deeper into my assumptions and expectations; more so than the answers to the questions I had set out. I considered the following issues:

- How do I balance my personal values against external purposes, ethics, authority and social pressures?
- How do I balance meeting targets and objectives without compromising staff motivation and values?
- How do I support and develop new skills and make work as suitable and meaningful for team members?
- To what extent am I willing to make changes to my routine ways of doing things to meet objectives?

The reflection to the questions above can be categorised as follows:

#### *Using objectives to achieve results*

I have always been driven by objectives and focus on achieving the desired results in the interest of my team and students. In order to achieve a goal, I have often ventured beyond familiar territory to pursue ambitious new outcomes, in programme development, in identifying new opportunities for income generation and in seeking collaborations nationally and internationally.

Despite being proactive and persistent with a clear sense of what needs to be achieved, I have learnt that in order to achieve results, one cannot lead without creating a positive, supportive and collaborative working environment with the team's commitment and willingness to take forward objectives developed. I have found it challenging at times to take the necessary time to ensure that relevant stakeholders are on board with plans. However, I have learnt that persuading academics to be open to proposed new practices by explaining their perceived advantages and by ensuring that everyone is supported well, this has helped to create collegiality in the department and to facilitate motivation. Frequent communications on achievements, progress, new developments and practices from other institutions and setting achievable tasks have all contributed to motivating and promoting teamwork and sharing trials and triumphs with each other.

#### *Making decisions which prioritise students and staff:*

Literature on values-based leadership (such as George & Sims et al 2007; Duignan & Bhindi 1997) advocate for a leader to be credible, with clear values and using these to build a unified team-approach to vision and objectives.

As such, being a diligent and conscientious leader sometimes comes at the expense of one's own sacrifices. However, a commitment to the collective good, putting the team, student and the organisation's values first is paramount. I find this comfortable to do as I work from my core values of courage, integrity and loyalty and I have found that this helps create and sustain a sense of community that is empowering and collegiate.

However, being goal oriented, I am more concerned over the process and how to achieve a goal. I have come to realise that effective leadership requires nurturing of personality and the ability to empathise. I have in the past forgotten about addressing expectations and engaging team members effectively. With experience, as I have begun to realise the value and importance of the team and their support, I have improved in the manner and frequency of communicating our direction and creating a supportive and positive environment to encourage best performance.

Overtime, I have become aware that professionals, such as law lecturers who had practiced as lawyers before beginning their careers as academics require a more subtle form of leadership rather than the traditional sense of providing direction in the carrying out of tasks. This view is consistent with the literature on the management of professionals, as Mintzberg (1995) suggests "*most professional workers require little direct supervision from managers*" (p143). I have found it to be quite a challenge in managing professionals, some of whom are experienced academics and others who are new academics and all from professional legal and non-legal backgrounds. There is a need to balance their ability and experience in independent decision making and exercising professional skills and judgement, with working within the policies of a well-structured hierarchical organisation, following a regulated law curriculum, meeting key statistics and objectives and operating as creatively using various educational models of learning. As such, the structure of higher education requires some degree of control and direction over the overarching aims and mission of the department and university, whilst as a leader there is a need to protect staff's freedom to undertake tasks within the creativity and judgement necessary.

Further, Raelin (1995) suggests that for change to occur in universities, "*collegiality and persuasion must reign over bureaucratic control*" in which "*critical debate and open examination*" on making decisions and setting team objectives need to be adopted (p.208). Knight and Trowler (2000) view collegiality as mutual supportiveness among staff such as offering professional and perhaps personal support. With this in mind, I have moved away from setting directions for the team on my own and our goals and objectives for the department are set through collegiate discussions exploring the theoretical and educational rationale for our thoughts, underpinned by the trust and shared vision - which

has strengthened team motivation. As a result of revising my priorities, I now ensure that maintenance of staff's professional autonomy and they are consulted over important decisions.

#### *Reflection and learning underpin good leadership*

A leader needs to continually learn, reflect and develop. This is a continual and evolving process, adapting where necessary. I have learned to become more self-aware and more adaptive; recognising when change is necessary, provided it is driven by common good and new opportunities. In uncertain situations, I make decisions through deep thinking and rationalisation, weighing up the impact on all stakeholders and considering all possible options. Through my own leadership reflection journey I have realised what is important to me - adaptability, transparency, decisiveness, courageousness and empathy - to successfully lead the team. Though seeking feedback from team members annually, I learnt what worked for the team and areas for improvement; I tried new approaches to situations and discovered new ways of working.

#### Authority and influence in leadership

At the beginning of this journey, I used to align leadership with a position of authority or expertise in a particular profession or subject area and as such, Yukl's description of leadership being a "*mental picture of power, prestige, and authority*" (p4) resonated very well. Two years on, I view leadership as something quite different - being the voice of a collective decision, equipped with knowledge through continual learning and adapting, whilst creating ways to take forward common goals, nurturing, supporting and respecting each other.

When I started as a leader, as an academic who is frequently consulted on learning and teaching matters, curriculum design and matters involving digital education, I assumed that as I accumulated more knowledge and experience in my field, I would automatically be regarded as a good leader. This wasn't the case; instead, I was regarded as being an experienced and knowledgeable colleague, rather than a leader. In consulting French and Raven's (1959) model of power bases, I began to realise that knowledge expertise does not necessarily equate good leadership. It also challenges expertise and specialist knowledge such as with the possibility of making mistakes and keeping updated with changes to practices through evolving technology or policy. Having reflected on my experience thus far as a leader, I view leadership as demonstrating and setting examples of desirable abilities and good practices to colleagues, rather than only having the subject expertise in a field of practice.

Within the realm of influencing others, my default position usually begins with making requests politely and especially with being results focused, using detailed justification, with supporting information and reasoning. Although this is an effective way of achieving objectives, it lacked the empathy and the necessary support required by stakeholders. Now, I ask what would be the best

way forward for others, in meeting the wider goals of the department and organisation, rather than either give in or to carry forward with the plans.

I have always believed that successful influencing comes from meticulous planning. To an extent, armed with sufficient research, justification and knowledge I felt that it would allow me to influence a situation and in turn did not let down my team or key stakeholders to whom I was responsible for. Always being able to articulate a well-researched and well-defenced position was linked to my assumptions about good professional practice, and this mirrors Fook's (2002) challenge to question what we know as well as how we know it. Consequently however this assumption impacted on how I view the level of preparation expected from team members. I had to re-evaluate what efficient and suitable preparation meant, and how I managed to balance my own level of preparation against what I expected from others.

## Conclusion

Reflecting on leadership has helped me question and establish my assumptions and expectations of a leader, think critically and strategically about the ways in which I lead and align the team with the direction of the organisation. I am more aware about the importance of building relationships with those around me focusing on team dynamics and the way we work together. This reflection has provided me with new knowledge, an emphasis on what I have done well, a renewed awareness of my beliefs, capabilities and shortcomings. The process of reflecting had improved my ability to be more flexible and confident in my approach as a leader, and to approach leadership with the resilience and persistence needed to continue to inspire those around me.

## References

- Adair, J. (2003) *The Inspirational Leader: How to Motivate, Encourage & Achieve Success*. London: Kogan Page.
- Argyris, C. & Schon, D. (1978), *Organizational learning: A theory of action perspective*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers
- Arnold, K. A., & Connelly, C. E. (2013). Transformational leadership and psychological well-being: Effects on followers and leaders. In H. Leonard, R. Lewis, A. M. Freedman, & J. Passmore (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of the psychology of leadership, change, and organizational development* (pp. 175-194). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Avolio BJ. 1999. *Full Leadership Development: Building the Vital Forces in Organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bennis, W., & Nanus, B. (1985). *Leaders: The strategies for taking charge*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Boyte, H. C. (1989). *Commonwealth: A return to citizen politics*. New York: Free Press.
- Bridgforth, B. W. (2005). Advancing the practice of leadership: A curriculum. *The Journal of Leadership Education*, Vol.4(1), p.4-30. Retrieved from: [http://www.journalofleadershiped.org/attachments/article/138/IJLE\\_4\\_1\\_Bridgforth.pdf](http://www.journalofleadershiped.org/attachments/article/138/IJLE_4_1_Bridgforth.pdf)
- Bolden, R. (2001) *Leadership Development in Small and Medium Sized Enterprises: Final Report*. Centre for Leadership Studies, University of Exeter,

- Bolden, R. and Gosling, J. (2003) *Leadership, Society and the Next Ten Years*. Report for the Windsor Leadership Trust, Centre for Leadership Studies, University of Exeter
- Boud, D., Keogh, R., & Walker, D. (1985), *Reflection, Turning Experience into Learning*, London , Kogan Page
- Boud, D., & Walker, D. (1998), Promoting Reflection in Professional Courses: the challenge of Context, *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 23(2). Retrieved from:  
[http://www.racma.edu.au/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_view&gid=219](http://www.racma.edu.au/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=219)
- Brookfield, S. D. (1987), *Developing Critical Thinkers: challenging adults to explore alternative ways of thinking and acting*, San Fransisco, Jossey-Bass
- Brookfield, S. D. (1995), *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, San Fransisco, Jossey-Bass
- Brown, M., & Treviño, L. 2006. Ethical leadership: A review and future directions. *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 17(3)
- Bryman, A. (1992). *Charisma and Leadership in Organizations*. London, Sage.
- Bryman, A. (2004). Qualitative Research on Leadership: A Critical But Appreciative Review'. *Leadership Quarterly* Vol.15. Retrieved from:  
<https://umesorld.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/qualitative-research-on-leadership-2004-bryman.pdf>
- Copeland, M. K. (2014) The Emerging Significance of Values Based Leadership: A Literature Review, *International Journal of Leadership Studies*. Vol. 8 (2), pp.105-135
- Cowan, J. & Heywood, J. (2001) Curriculum renewal in an institution of higher education. In Heywood J, Sharp J & Hides M (Eds.) *Improving teaching in higher education* p.7-18, University of Salford, Manchester.
- Dewey, J. (1933), *How We Think*, Boston, D. C. Heath & Co.
- Duignan & Bhindi, (1997) Authenticity in leadership: an emerging perspective, *Journal of Educational Administration*, Vol.35(3), p.195-209. Retrieved from:  
<http://faculty.wvu.edu/~dunnc3/rprnts.authenticityinleadership.pdf>
- French, J. and Raven, B. (1959). The Bases of Social Power. In *Studies in Social Power*, D. Cartwright, Ed., pp. 150-167. Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research. Retrieved from:  
[http://www.communicationcache.com/uploads/1/0/8/8/10887248/the\\_bases\\_of\\_social\\_power\\_-\\_chapter\\_20\\_-\\_1959.pdf](http://www.communicationcache.com/uploads/1/0/8/8/10887248/the_bases_of_social_power_-_chapter_20_-_1959.pdf)
- Fiedler, F. (1967) *A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness*. New York: McGraw- Hill.
- Fiedler, F. E. 1964. A contingency model of leadership effectiveness. In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*. Berkowitz (ed.) New York: Academic Press.
- Fook, J. (2002). *Social work: Critical theory and practice*. London: Sage.
- Fook, J. (2010). Beyond reflective practice: reworking the 'critical' in critical reflection. In H. Bradbury, N. Frost, S. Kilminster, & M. Zukas (Eds.), *Beyond reflective practice approaches to professional lifelong learning*, London: Routledge, p.37-51
- Fook, J., & Askeland, G.A. (2006). The 'critical' in critical reflection. In S. White, J. Fook, & F. Gardner (Eds.), *Critical reflection in health and social care*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Fook, J., & Gardner, F. (2007). *Practicing critical reflection: A resource handbook*. London: Open University Press. Retrieved from:  
[https://is.muni.cz/el/1423/jaro2014/SPP002/Jan\\_Fook\\_Fiona\\_Gardner\\_Practising\\_Critical\\_Refl.pdf](https://is.muni.cz/el/1423/jaro2014/SPP002/Jan_Fook_Fiona_Gardner_Practising_Critical_Refl.pdf)
- Gardner, W. L., Avolio, B. J., & Walumbwa, F. O. 2005. Authentic leadership development: Emergent trends and future directions. In W. L. Gardner, B. J. Avolio, & F. O. Walumbwa (Eds.), *Authentic leadership theory and practice: Origins, effects and development*, p.387-406. Oxford, UK: Elsevier Science.
- Gill, R. (2011) *Theory and Practice of Leadership*. 2nd Edition. Sage, London

- Goodall, A. (2006). *Does it Take an Expert to Lead Experts? A Study of Business School Deans*. Warwick Business School, University of Warwick.
- Goleman D. (1995) *Emotional intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Goleman D. (1999) *Working with emotional intelligence*. London: Bloomsbury.
- George, Sims, McLean, and Mayer (February 2007) Discovering Your Authentic Leadership. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from: <http://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/item.aspx?num=23260>
- Hersey, P. and Blanchard, K. (1969) Lifecycle theory of leadership. *Training and Development Journal*, Vol. 23, 26-34.
- Hersey, P. and Blanchard, K. (1977) *Management of Organizational Behaviour*. Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Henkel, M. (2002). Emerging Concepts of Academic Leadership and their Implications for Intra-institutional Roles and Relationships in Higher Education, *European Journal of Education*, Vol. 37(1). Retrieved from: <http://people.exeter.ac.uk/hlr206/Henkel%20M.pdf>
- Jones, S., Lefoe, G., Harvey, M. & Ryland, K. (2012) Distributed leadership: a collaborative framework for academics, executives and professionals in higher education. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 34(1), 67-78.
- Kayes, A. B., Kayes, D. C., & Kolb, D. A. (2005). Experiential learning in teams. *Simulation and Gaming*, Vol. 36(3), p.330-354
- Kempster and Stewart J (2010) Becoming a leader: A co-produced autoethnographic exploration of situated learning of leadership practice. *Management Learning* Vol.41(2), p.205–219. Retrieved from: <http://mlq.sagepub.com/content/41/2/205.abstract>
- Knight, P.T. and Trowler, P.R. (2000). Department-Level Cultures and the Improvement of Learning and Teaching. *Studies in Higher Education* Vol.25, p.69-83.
- Knight, P.T. and Trowler, P.R. (2001). *Departmental Leadership in Higher Education*. Buckingham, SRHE and Open University Press.
- Kotter JP (1995) Leading change: Why transformation efforts fail. *Harvard Business Review*, p.59–67. Retrieved from: <https://cb.hbsp.harvard.edu/resources/marketing/docs/95204f2.pdf>
- Kolb, D. A.(1984), *Experiential Learning*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall
- Legal Education and Training Review (2013). Retrieved from: <http://letr.org.uk/>
- Lichtenstein, S. (2005). *Strategy Co-Alignment: Strategic, Executive Values and Organizational Goal Orientation and Their Impact on Performance*. DBA Thesis, Brunel University.
- Mayer, J. D., & Salovey, P. (1995). Emotional intelligence and the construction and regulation of feelings. *Applied and Preventive Psychology*, Vol.4, p.197–208.
- Mezirow, J. (1990). How critical reflection triggers transformative learning. In J. Mezirow (Ed.), *Fostering critical reflection in adulthood: A guide to transformative and emancipatory learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Retrieved from: <http://www.ln.edu.hk/osl/conference2011/output/breakout/4.4%20%5Bref%5DHow%20Critical%20Reflection%20triggers%20Transformative%20Learning%20-%20Mezirow.pdf>
- Mintzberg, H., Raisinghani, D., & Theoret, A. (1976). The structure of unstructured decision processes. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 21, 246–275.
- Mintzberg, H. (1973). *The nature of managerial work*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Mittal, V., & Sindhu, E. (2012). Emotional intelligence and leadership. *Global Journal of Management And Business Research*, Vol. 12
- Moon, J. (1999) *Reflection in Learning and Professional Development*, London, Kogan Page
- Moon, J. (2001), PDP Working Paper 4: *Reflection in Higher Education Learning*, LTSN Generic Centre, Retrieved from: [http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/id72\\_Reflection\\_in\\_Higher\\_Education\\_Learning](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/id72_Reflection_in_Higher_Education_Learning)



- Napier, L. & Fook, J. (2000) *Breakthrough in Practice: Social Workers Theorise Critical Moments*. Whiting & Birch, London.
- Neck, C. P., & Manz, C. C. (2010). *Mastering self-leadership: Empowering yourself for personal excellence* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Northouse, P. G. (2001). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (2<sup>nd</sup>ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Parry, K., & Kempster, S. (2014). Love and leadership: Constructing follower narrative identities of charismatic leadership. *Management Learning*, Vol. 45(1)
- Peregrym, D., Wollf, R., 2013. Values-Based Leadership: The Foundation of Transformational Servant Leadership. *The Journal of Values-Based Leadership*. Vol.6 (2), Article 7, pp 1-13
- Raelin, J.A. (1995). *How to Manage Your Local Professor*. Academy of Management Proceedings. Retrieved from: <http://proceedings.aom.org/content/1995/1/207.short>
- Ramsden, P. (1998a). *Learning to Lead in Higher Education*. London, Routledge.
- Ramsden, P. (1998b). Managing the Effective University. *Higher Education Research and Development*, Vol.17, p.337-370. Retrieved from: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0729436980170307>
- Reynolds, M. and Vince, R. (2004a) Critical Management Education and Action-Based Learning: Synergies and Contradictions. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*. 3 (4) 442 – 456.
- Schön, D. A. (1983), *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, Basic Books, USA
- Schön, D. A. (1987), *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, San Fransisco, Jossey Bass
- Smith A. (1998) Learning about reflection., *Advanced Nursing*, Vol.28(4) p.891–898.
- The Times Higher Education (August 2016) retrieved from: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/digital-editions/11-august-2016-digital-edition>
- Thompson, S., & Thompson, N. (2008). *The critically reflective practitioner*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Van Maanen, J. (1995). An end to innocence: The ethnography of ethnography. In J. Van Maanen (Ed.), *Representation in ethnography: In other worlds*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, p.1-35
- Yammarino FJ, Dionne SD, Chun JU, Dansereau F. (2005) Leadership and levels of analysis: a state-of-the-science review. *Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 16(8), p.79–919
- Yukl G (2002) *Leadership in Organizations*, 5th edn. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Yukl G & Mahsud R (2010) Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research, *American Psychological Association*, Vol.62(2), p.81–93. Retrieved from: <http://challenge2050.ifas.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/yuklmashud.2010.adaptiveleadership.pdf>