

Additional case studies

Reflection-in-Practice: A Practice-based Study

Relevant to: Chapter 3 (Practice-based Perspective on Knowledge)

Keevers & Treleaven report the findings of a study into the nature of reflexivity in organizations. The empirical data they present is based on a case study of a voluntary organization which provided counselling and support to women who had been the victims of sexual abuse. It utilizes, what is here labelled, a practice-based epistemology, but which they label a relational view of knowledge, which they argue, '*emphasizes that organizational learning and knowing come from direct material engagement with the world*', (p. 506).

The type of reflexivity that Keevers & Treleaven are concerned with is not so much after the fact, post-hoc reflection, but what they label as, '*reflection-in-action*', and, '*in-the-moment reflexivity*', (p.506). This refers to reflexivity that occurs when people are directly involved in, experiencing, and carrying out particular work practices. Furthermore, they also suggest that conceptions of reflexivity should be extended beyond the optical metaphor of 'reflection' to include what they label, 'diffraction'. Diffraction is a type of reflexivity focussed not on the nature of the practices people have undertaken, but the effect that these practices have had on people and the world.

Keevers & Treleaven identified four specific types of reflection that were utilized in the organization they studied. The first two were 'in-the-moment' reflexive practices used by counsellors as they talked to their clients, and the second two were more post-hoc processes of reflection done after counselling sessions. However, the aims of all four types of reflexivity identified were concerned with developing and enhancing the ability of counsellors to be able to engage in, 'in-the-moment' reflection.

The first type of reflexivity the identified was 'anticipatory', which was forward looking and which was focussed on, and aimed at, deciding on how to act next. This type of reflexivity is not pre-planned, but emerges during counselling sessions through counsellors taking account of the specific characteristics of an interview in deciding what to do next. The second type of 'in-the-moment' reflexivity that was identified during the research was labelled 'deliberative practices of mindfulness'. This was a practice whereby counsellors 'slowed down' and focussed their attention on very specific aspects of the interview experience, such as the way a client was talking, sitting, or moving. One aspect of this type of reflexivity was a willingness to acknowledge the limitations of a person's knowledge or experience, and to feel comfortable with the sense of 'not knowing' that was being experienced. For example, this may relate to the counsellors knowledge and understanding of the types of experience that their clients had experienced and were attempting to articulate and deal with.

Keevers & Treleaven identified two other types of more post-hoc reflection which were used in the organization they studied, whose aim was to help and facilitate the type of 'in-the-moment' reflexivity just considered. The first of these processes they label, '*organizing processes of reflection and diffraction*'. This type of reflexivity included a number of distinctive types of activity which typically involved counsellors discussing their experiences with others. For example, this could be done through informal discussions with colleagues immediately after a counselling session, counselling sessions which were co-supervised, and where counsellors shared their experiences afterwards. One aspect of the organizational culture which facilitated the discussion in these

activities was that it was recognized as legitimate to admit to mistakes, ask for help, and to supportively critique each other's experiences. One 'diffraction' orientated type of reflexivity that was undertaken to allow reflection on the impacts of counselling sessions involved both the counsellor AND the client reflecting on a counselling experience with an independent counsellor.

The final type of post-hoc reflexivity engaged in within the organization studied was labelled, '*critical reflexive practices*'. These practices were concerned with being sensitive to issues of power in the construction of knowledge claims regarding clients. This involved the counsellors being aware of the potential power they had over clients in their relationships with them. Through this awareness, the aim was to attempt to avoid labelling clients simply via the use of their own understanding and knowledge claims, and instead empowering clients in the interview process via taking full account of their wishes, experiences, and sense-making activities.

Question

- 1) The types of reflexivity identified by Keevers and Treleaven were from the context of counselling. Can you think of other types of organizational context in which this type of reflexivity could be useful?

Source: Keevers, L, Treleaven, L. (2011). 'Organizing Practices of Reflection: A Practice-based Study'. *Management learning*, 42/5: 505-520.