Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service

Reflective Practice: Learning from Work

P11. 1901      Spring, 2008
Thursday, 6:20-8:00 pm     Room: Tisch UC58

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COURSE GOALS

The goal of this course is to foster a lifetime of learning by providing tools to help students learn from their own experiences in the workplace as well as from the experiences of others. To this end, we will explore:

• The concept of building theory from practice; and,

• The issues of self at work, including ways of paying attention to the individual, small group, and large group dynamics of organizational life.

STATEMENT OF COURSE EXPECTATIONS

1. Students are expected to be working or interning at an organization during the semester they are taking this course.

2. Students are expected to attend every class on-time, be prepared to discuss readings and assignments and to participate in class and blackboard discussions.

3. Because learning about group dynamics is a course goal and due to the frequency of in-class group work, class attendance is essential. Students are at risk of not passing the course if they have more than 1 unexcused absence.

4. Students are expected to accord the same professional respect to their classmates' contributions as they do to the instructors’ remarks. Given the nature of the course material, it is especially important that students listen carefully to one another and respond with consideration.

5. Students are expected to keep class discussions confidential. This is necessary to facilitate full and open exchange.
6. Assignments:

   a. Late assignments are not accepted unless prior arrangements are made with the instructors.

   b. All written assignments except journals are to be typed double-spaced using standard English grammar and spelling. If you need help with writing, see www.junketstudies.com for excellent refreshers on grammar and writing. Wagner also provides a working tutor so inquire with your Wagner program administrator.

   c. Journals (see details below) can be written informally and in a way that best expresses the intentions of the author; however, the instructors need to be able to read them so they should be legible.

   d. Students will submit two copies of each assignment (with the exception of their journals) to the instructors. Students should keep a copy of all their assignments in the event of loss.

7. Students will be assigned to a small group. Each small group is expected to prepare a brief group presentation for Week 11.

REQUIRED READING

Required reading for this course consist of a textbook, a course packet and blackboard article links. The text, The Unconscious at Work: Individual and Organizational Stress in the Human Services, edited by Anton Obholzer and Vega Zagier Roberts, is available at the Professional Bookstore, 566 LaGuardia Avenue. The course pack of articles is available at the Unique Copy Shop located on Greene Street between Waverly and 8th. In addition, many articles are available on the blackboard site and have been identified on the syllabus with the following notation – (BB).

Additional readings may be distributed in class.

BLACKBOARD WEBSITE

The class website can be found at http://classes.nyu.edu/. To login, enter your NYU net ID and password. If you have not activated your NYU account or have forgotten your password, you can activate or change your password at http://start.nyu.edu. You must activate your account as soon as possible in order to access the on-line discussion and other materials; once you’ve accessed the website, please change your email address to whatever you use most often by going to “Tools” and then “Personal Information”.

ASSIGNMENT OVERVIEW

Journaling

Keeping a journal is an excellent way to explore issues, express yourself creatively, and track personal learning and growth. For this course, we require that students keep a journal in order to encourage a habit of reflection. Documenting your learning, responses to class, and finding links to your experience of your workplace is a type of scholarship in its own right. Journaling is a way to begin to unpack these connections.

You may keep a journal in any format that is comfortable for you, written or typed. If you hand-write your entries, please be sure that your writing is legible. Your entries should include reflections on the course as well as on your work experience and should demonstrate an understanding of the material being discussed and read. Insights and reflections on the dynamics of group work within the class also are appropriate material for journaling. The following questions may help you focus:

1. What sticks in your mind about a reading or a class session? Why? What was comfortable, known? What was not?
2. Select a quotation (from a reading or class) with which you agree or disagree. Copy it into the journal and explain your reaction to it.
3. What ideas and/or feelings are stirred up by a reading or a class session? Elaborate.
4. What questions have emerged for you from a reading or a class?
5. Do you link class work or reading to other learning you've done? How?
6. Have you come to a new understanding due to a reading or a class?
7. Has your reading or classwork affected your behavior in your workplace or how you view the behavior of others there?

Journal entries of at least one typed page or the equivalent (250 words) should be made weekly (or more frequently if you prefer). It defeats one of the main purposes of journal work (which is to display/document the effect of the passage of time on your learning) to write the entire journal in one sitting. Part of the discipline expected in this course is attention to the effect of the time factor on your learning.

The journal will be collected twice during the semester, Weeks 6 & 14. Journals will not be graded, although the seriousness with which they are taken up will be factored in as part of the participation grade. We will respond in writing as our side of the conversation. Included in the introductory reading packet, were some helpful journaling strategies; you may want to refer to these throughout the semester if you get stuck in your journal writing.

Short Written Assignments. There are several short written assignments due during the semester, each of which is described on the syllabus under the date due. These assignments should be carefully written using the guidelines noted under the statement of course expectations.
Final Paper. The final paper will be a synthesis of what you have learned during the semester. It should include material from the course as well as from your work experience. It may be helpful to refer to your journal when pulling together your thoughts for this final paper; however, the final paper differs from the journal in that it sums up the most potent ideas affecting your thinking and/or your behavior that you see yourself taking away from this course.

Group Presentation. Students will be assigned to a small learning/teaching group (LTG). This group will prepare a brief presentation for Week 11. Further information about this will be given in class.

Assignment Due Dates:

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<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preference Paper</td>
<td>February 7th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Generalizable lesson paper</td>
<td>February 21st</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journal Submission</td>
<td>February 28th</td>
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<td>Role Analysis paper</td>
<td>March 6th</td>
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<td>Group presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social defenses paper</td>
<td>April 24th</td>
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<td>Journal Submission</td>
<td>May 1st</td>
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<td>Final synthesis paper</td>
<td>May 8th</td>
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GRADING

The grade for this class is pass/fail. Class participation includes participation in class exercises and group work as well as completion of all assignments. In your first journal entry, please specify participation goals for contributing to your individual learning and to group learning during this Reflective Practice class; later, you will be asked to evaluate how well you met your own goals.
COURSE INFORMATION

Week 1: January 24th

Topic: Reflective Practice: Introduction

This class will explore what reflective practice is and its value.

Readings:


- Krantz, James. "Foreword" The Unconscious at Work.


Future Assignment:

Discussion and distribution of role message information.

Each student should select five to ten people with whom s/he works, asking each of them to participate in a feedback exercise related to the work of this Reflective Practice course. These forms can be downloaded from the course blackboard site. Depending on your workplace environment, you may also wish to write a personal cover note to those you are asking to give you feedback about yourself as a worker. To each person you select, give 1) a copy of the (class) cover letter describing the purpose of role messages and 2) a role message form with your name on it for them to complete. The forms must be returned by February 15th so distribute them ASAP. Forms may be emailed to Emily Gadd, executive assistant to the Dean, at emily.gadd@nyu.edu If respondents prefer they may fax the completed form to Emily at 212-995-4161. You will receive the (anonymous) compilation of the results in Week 5 when the topic is, appropriately, Feedback.
Assignment:

As part of your first journal entry, discuss your class participation goals, both for individual learning and for contributing to group learning. (Your journal will be collected in Week 6 and Week 14.)

Week 2: January 31st

**Topic:** Understanding Preference and Moving Beyond: Ways of Seeing Ourselves (& Others) in the Workplace

This class explores the variety of preferences and styles present in the workplace and advances our capacity to appreciate difference. The goal is to develop the capacity to identify how our preferences may interfere with our work role and find ways to move beyond.

Readings:

- Craft Associates. “Using Your Understanding of MBTI Type Differences at Work” (BB)

Optional Reading:


Assignment for Week 2:

Come to class prepared to discuss (from notes) an incident that illustrates an example of how personality preference (MBTI) may have played out in a work situation. This may be an incident where you were challenged in your sense of effectiveness and/or frustrated by the outcome.

If you took the core management course you recall taking the MBTI personality type assessment. This instrument was used to help you understand team dynamics by exploring your preferences and understanding the preferences of others. {Other instruments you may have taken that are designed to give you insight into yourself and others are Social Style, Emotional Intelligence, 360 Feedback Assessment}. 
If you did not have the opportunity to take the MBTI test or review this material when you took the core management course please take the MBTI test and review the optional reading. You may take the self-administered Myers Briggs personality inventory available at http://similarminds.com/myers-briggs-jung.html. Follow the prompts and answer the questions (@ 48).

**Week 3: February 7th**

**Topic: Building Theory from Experience, Part I**

In Weeks 3 and 4, the class looks at models for building theory, testing it, and applying it. The emphasis will be on identifying and communicating lessons learned from experience, specifically how to generalize lessons learned so that they might be of use to others.

**Readings:**

- Bateson, Mary Catherine. "Composing a Life" from *Sacred Stories: A Celebrations of the Power of Story to Transform and Heal*, Simpkinson & Simpkinson, editors, 1993.\(^{BB}\)


- Schall, Ellen. "Notes from a Reflective Practitioner of Innovation," 1997 in Altschuler and Behn (Eds), Innovation in American Government, 360-377. \(^{BB}\)

**Assignments (Note: these are two separate assignments):**

1. Submit a final written version of your incident. It should be 2 - 3 pages (double-spaced). Discuss the incident as it happened and then reframe and highlight your learning edge and how you would replay the incident with your new insight.

2. Come to class prepared to discuss (from notes) a work experience from which you learned a lesson that you think can be generalized in a way that would offer learning to others. Think specifically about how you can describe the experience in a way that might allow others to learn from your experience.
Week 4: February 14th

**Topic:** Building Theory from Experience, Part II

**Readings:**


**Assignment:**

Working with the experience about which you spoke in class last week, prepare a 2 - 3 page typed draft that aims to share a lesson you learned in a way that generalizes it into "theory" that others might use. Post that draft on Blackboard to your small group (TBA) by midnight February 12th.

Week 5: February 21st

**Topic:** Feedback

This class focuses on the value of receiving feedback from colleagues, including supervisors, subordinates, and peers. Students receive feedback in the form of role messages from colleagues and work with each other to understand how to interpret it and use it.

**Readings:**


- Johari Window *(BB)*


Assignment:

1. Submit the final version of your generalizable lesson paper.

2. In weeks 6 and 7, the class focuses on the concept of role in the workplace and its power to define work. Additionally, we consider how a person's role in his or her family of origin (the family the person grew up in) influences the way a person takes up his or her role at work. Note: To facilitate group learning, class members willing to do their role analysis work openly with the rest of the class will be needed for Weeks 6 & 7 (one volunteer for Week 6 and two volunteers plus four volunteer interviewers for Week 7).

Week 6: February 28th

**Topic: Role: The Impact of Family of Origin - Part I**

In weeks 6 and 7 the class will explore the concept of role by exploring the links between role in family of origin and role at work.

Readings:


• Chapter 12, The Unconscious at Work: "The Self-Assigned Impossible Task."


Assignment:

Journals will be collected for review and comment. **Be sure that on one page you have been explicit about your class participation goals** in this Reflective Practice class, both for individual learning and for contributing to group learning.
Week 7: March 6th

**Topic:** Role: The Impact of Family of Origin - Part II

**Assignment:**

Write a 2 - 4 page narrative description that speaks to the following issues. The goal is to help you become more aware of your role in your family of origin, a role dilemma you have at work, and any possible links between the two. The following outline is provided for guidance. Post on Blackboard by midnight March 5th one comment that shares a learning from this assignment.

I. **Background**

   A. Name
   B. Age, gender, race (and any other ways in which you would describe yourself)
   C. Professional training and experience

II. **Family of Origin: Role Issues**

   A. Birth Order
   B. Your relationship to your mother, father, siblings, and any other important figures in your family life
   C. Role in family (e.g. pathfinder, caretaker, peacemaker)

III. **Work Organization: Role Issues**

   A. Please describe your position at work. You may want to include the following information. For whom do you work? How are your tasks defined? With whom do you interact? Where do you fit in the organizational structure? A simple organizational chart may help clarify your position.

   B. Describe a role dilemma at work. A role dilemma can be many things, e.g. a problem facing you at work, an aspect of your job you find problematic, conflicts that keep occurring at work.

IV. **Hypothesis Generation**

   On a separate piece of paper:
   Develop several hypotheses about possible connections between your role in your family of origin and your current role dilemma. Have you recreated a role at work similar to any roles you played in your family of origin? Do you see ways in which the way you take up your role at work is shaped by the role you had in your family of origin?
Week 8: March 13th

**Topic: Role: The Impact of Identity Groups**

This class will focus on the impact of group identity on work role. Students will explore identity group affiliations and how these affiliation influence how others see them and how they take up their roles in the work.

**Readings:**


**No Class:** Spring Break - March 20th

Week 9: March 27th

**Topic: The Psychodynamics of Individual & Group Processes**

A look at psychodynamic processes that affect individuals and groups and the ways that unconscious processes manifest themselves in the workplace.

**Readings:**


Week 10: April 3rd

**Topic: Authority & Task**

This class explores the nature of authority, the sources from which it is derived, and how the definition of task affects authority.

**Reading:**

- Chapter 4, *The Unconscious at Work*, "Authority, Power and Leadership: Contributions from Group Relations Training”.

**Optional Reading** (on reserve in Bobst Library):


**Assignment:**

Post on Blackboard by midnight April 2nd two ideas you thought important and/or interesting in the readings and why.

Week 11: April 10th

**Topic: Organizational Dynamics**

This class will explore the role of the irrational in group/organizational life with a focus on Wilfred Bion's basic assumption theory.

**Reading:**

- Chapters 2 and 5, *The Unconscious at Work*.
  - Chapter 2, "The Unconscious at Work in Groups and Teams: Contributions from the work of Wilfred Bion," pp. 19-27.
Chapter 5, “The Dangers of Contagion”.


**Assignment:**

Students, working in their small groups, are to come prepared to make class presentations on one of the following topics (to be assigned):

- basic assumption, dependency
- basic assumption, fight/flight
- projective identification

Each group will have 10 minutes in which to teach its assigned topic.

The 10 minutes are to be devoted to a presentation in which the group is to briefly explain the concept, offering one or more examples of behavior representative of the concept. Each group is to decide how many examples to offer and the means for offering them, e.g. enactment of a situation illustrating the concept or a narrative description of one or more examples. The example scenarios can be from work or class. After two presentations on a topic, the two groups that presented on the topic will deal with a brief Q&A from the class.

**Week 12: April 17th**

**Topic: Social Defenses**

An examination of social defenses in organizations: what they are and how they can impede or facilitate work.

**Reading:**


Week 13: April 24th

**Topic: Organizations as Systems**

This class will focus on the opportunities and challenges facing organizations in the context of the larger systemic environment.

**Readings:**

- Chapter 18 & 20 from *The Unconscious at Work*
  - Chapter 18, “Managing Social Anxieties in Public Sector Organizations”.
  - Chapter 20, “Conflict and Collaboration”.

**Assignment:**

1. Stage one: By midnight Sunday, April 20th post on Blackboard a brief explanation of how you are using the term "social defense" related to the readings in your selected organization. If your current organization doesn't lend itself to the task, select another organization with which you are familiar, either as an employee or client. Identify two or three social defenses within the organization.

2. Stage two: Write a four to five page (double-spaced) paper concerning social defenses in the organization in which you work or intern in your selected organization. Summarize your understanding of social defenses and identify two or three defenses within your selected organization. Describe each defense; present your evidence for believing that it is a defense. State what particular anxiety you think it is defending against. State whether, in your view, the defense impedes or facilitates the organization's primary task. To do so, it may be helpful to think of the organization without this defense: how would the organization take up its primary task were it not for this defense?

2. Turn in anonymous role messages for instructors. Instructors will work with this feedback in class on May 1st.
Week 14: May 1st

**Topic: Applications - Taking Reflective Practice Forward**

Students will discuss the lessons they have learned over the last 13 weeks and share how they will continue their reflective practice outside the classroom.

Readings:


Assignment:

Journals are due, **including one page in which you explicitly address your class participation goals (stated earlier) and how well you think that you attained them.** Also, describe/explain the way you have contributed to group learning and state how you would grade yourself in regard to that aspect of class participation.

**Assignment: (due May 8, 2008)**

Prepare a final synthesis paper no longer than ten (typed, double-spaced) pages. This synthesis paper is an opportunity for you to reflect upon your learning in this course. It may be helpful to read through your journal and the syllabus, noting which readings were most productive for learning about yourself and life in the workplace. Give some thought to the "ahas" you had during the semester.

In the paper, describe a few examples of your learning, discuss how you are helped by this learning and consider the implications of the new ideas and understandings you have acquired for your effectiveness at work. Be specific and use examples.

The final paper is also an opportunity to synthesize elements of the course as a whole (e.g., when you look at a particular work issue now, can you see it in terms of authority and task, individual style differences, roles, a particular psychodynamic process?).

Note: the final synthesis paper differs from the journal in that it sums up the most potent ideas (affecting your thinking and/or your behavior) that you see yourself taking away from this course.