Reflective Practice: Learning from Work

COURSE GOALS

“Research on leader development suggests that reflection, especially for highly successful action-oriented leaders and managers, is counter-intuitive, requires disciplined and intentional practice to become a solid part of a leader’s development strategy, and is critical to success.” ¹ The goal of this course is to provide the basis on which students can begin to build the tools to become disciplined and intentional reflective practitioners. To this end, we will explore:

- the issues of self at work, including ways of paying attention to the individual, small group, and large group dynamics of organizational life;
- the concept of building theory from practice; and
- the ways to create space for reflection.

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. Learning about group dynamics is a course goal and requires in-class group work as well as group reflection. Because of this 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 and to maximize learning.

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 (“11 Rules of Writing”). There are also writing tutors at Wagner who are available to review general assignments.
   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 textbooks and blackboard article links. There are two major texts for the course - *The Unconscious at Work: Individual and Organizational Stress in the Human Services*, edited by Anton Obholzer and Vega Zagier Roberts, *Trade Up! Five Steps for Redesigning Your Leadership and Life From the Inside Out* by Rayona Sharpnack, and *Strength Finder, 2.0* by Tom Rath. All texts are available at the NYU Main Bookstore, 726 Broadway. In addition, articles available on the blackboard site are 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. In your first journal entry please specify participation goals for contributing to your individual learning and to group learning during this Reflective Practice class.

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 are also 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 to write the entire journal for the semester in one sitting. Part of the discipline expected in this course is attention to the effect of the time factor on your learning. Your journal will be collected twice during the semester, Weeks 6 & 14. We will respond in writing with our thoughts and/or comments.
**Aligned Practice.** Being reflective requires space, intention and discipline. You may have a practice in your life – i.e. yoga, meditation, exercise – that requires these three ingredients. We believe that such “aligned practices” can strengthen our reflective practice work. During the semester we invite you to find or continue an “aligned practice” that you can do at least once a week. Some examples include those stated above as well as:

- Artist date* – a block of time each week where you explore your creative side i.e. visit museums, attend a concert, attend a reading
- Morning pages* – three pages of longhand writing strictly stream-of-consciousness written each morning
- Tai chi, Yoga
- Spiritual work, i.e. walking a labyrinth, reading sacred text (see Blackboard for list of NYC labyrinth sites).

**Short Written Assignments.** There are several short written assignments due during the semester, each of which is described in the syllabus. 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:**

- Executive Coach Memo Due February 9th
- Generalizable lesson paper Due February 23rd
- Journal Submission (Part 1) Due March 1st
- Role Analysis paper Due March 8th
- Group presentation Due April 12th
- Social defenses paper Due April 26th
- Journal Submission (Part 2) Due May 3rd
- Final synthesis paper Due May 10th

WEEKLY CHECK-IN

Each week at the beginning of class you will be asked to track the ongoing development of your reflective practice. You will be provided with a card on which you will answer the following questions:

1. Is there anything you need to put aside to be present for the evening? If yes name it.
2. Did you come to class prepared for the work (completed readings, assignment)?
3. Were you able to apply any of the tools or skills you have learned? If so name?
4. What was your “aligned practice”?
5. Did you find yourself on the balcony?

These cards will be collected each week and returned to you at the end of a semester. You’ll be able to review how your capacity for reflective practice has developed.

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 26th

Topic: Reflective Practice: Introduction

This class will explore what reflective practice is and its value and introduce class members to each other.

Readings:

Future Assignment:
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. 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 17th 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: February 2nd

Topic: The Importance of Self-Awareness: Understanding Self and Others

This class will outline the importance of self-awareness in leadership development. Reflection becomes an essential element in gaining self-awareness. Reflecting on one's person and role and interactions with others can be insightful. We will explore various ways to gain self-awareness to enhance your leadership.

Readings:
- Craft Associates. “Using Your Understanding of MBTI Type Differences at Work” (BB)
- Johari Window (BB)
- Rath, Tom. Strength Finder, 2.0.

Optional Reading:
Assignment for Week 2:

Come to class prepared to discuss the results of the various assessments to be taken prior to class:
- MBTI *
- Strength Finders**
- Map Your Context (utilize Table 1.1 and/or figure 1.7 in *Trade Up!*)

*If you took the core management course you may have taken 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. If you did not have the opportunity to take the MBTI assessment or review this material when you took the core management course please take the MBTI assessment and review the optional reading. You may take the self-administered Myers Briggs personality inventory available at [http://similarminds.com/myers-briggs-jung.html](http://similarminds.com/myers-briggs-jung.html). This link is on Blackboard under External Links. Follow the prompts and answer the questions (@ 48).

**The code to access the on-line assessment is found at the back of the book. Once you complete the assessment print the Personalized Strengths-Based Leadership Guide that will be provided to you upon completion of the on-line assessment.

Week 3: February 9th

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

1. **Executive Coach Memo:** You’ve been given the opportunity to work with an executive coach. Your prospective coach has asked you to submit a memo summarizing the results of your assessments and how they relate to the way you do your work. Identify your strengths and challenges. What do you clearly know about yourself as it relates to how you work? Identify areas that you believe your coach could help you improve (be specific) over the next 6 months. The Memo should be two to three pages (double spaced).

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 16th**

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

The class will continue to build theory from their own practice and will receive feedback on their generalizable theory from class members.

**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 close of business, February 13th.

**Note:** Role messages from your colleagues are to be returned by February 17th.
Week 5: February 23rd

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 and use it.

Readings:

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. 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: March 1st

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:


- Forward and Chapter 12 in The Unconscious at Work.

Optional:


Assignment:

Journals will be collected for review and comment. Be sure that you have been explicit about your class participation goals in for your individual learning as well as for your contribution to group learning.

Week 7: March 8th

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

The class will continue to explore the concept of role and the link between role in family of origin and role at work.

Readings:


Reflective Practice, Spring 12

- McIntosh, Peggy. “Feeling Like A Fraud,” speech presented in the Stone Center Colloquium Series in April, 1984. (BB)

Optional Readings:

Assignment:
Write a 2 - 5 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 3rd 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 22nd

Topic: Author of Your Own Story

Reflecting on the knowledge you’ve acquired in the course thus far, you will have the opportunity to think about how you may want to reframe your way of being and moving forward in your work/career.

Readings:
- Chapters 3, 4, 5 in Trading Up! Five Steps for Redesigning Your Leadership and Life From the Inside Out.

Week 9: March 29th

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 5th**

**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".

**Assignment:**

Post on Blackboard by close of business on April 4th two ideas you thought important and/or interesting in the readings and why.

**Week 11: April 12th**

**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 in *The Unconscious at Work*.

**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 19th**

**Topic: Social Defenses**

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

**Reading:**

- Chapter 1 in *The Unconscious at Work*.

**Week 13: April 26th**

**Topic: Organizations as Systems**

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

**Readings:**

- Chapters 18 & 20 in *The Unconscious at Work*.

**Optional (Strongly recommended):**

Assignment:
1. Stage one: By midnight Sunday, April 22nd 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.

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?

3. Turn in anonymous role messages for instructors no later than April 27th. Instructors will work with this feedback in class on May 3rd. Forms can be found on blackboard and should be emailed or faxed to Emily Gadd – emily.gadd@nyu.edu or 212-995-4161.

Week 14: May 3rd

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.

**Final Synthesis Paper: Due May 10th**

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.