РЕФЛЕКТИВНАТА ПРАКТИКА И ПЛАНИРАНЕТО НА ЛИЧНОСТНОТО РАЗВИТИЕ НА СТУДЕНТИ ИЗУЧАВАЩИ БИЗНЕС И ИКОНОМИКА

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Резюме: Тази статия разглежда рефлективната практика и планирането на личностното развитие, както от академична, така и от бизнес гледна точка. Както ще бъде доказано, тези умения са от основно значение за студенти, желаещи да преследват кариера в света на бизнеса, и дават положително отражение върху настоящите им занимания и по-нататъшното развитие на техните знания и умения в среда, основана на познаване на икономиката, където на човешкия капитал се гледа като на най-ценен актив. На първо място, определението и процесът на рефлективна практика ще бъдат разгледани както в областта на академичния, така и на професионалния свят . Впоследствие ще бъде разгледано планирането на личностното развитие във връзката му с рефлективната практика и как това вече се прилага в Обединеното кралство. И накрая, ще се разгледа как тези процеси и дейности могат да бъдат интегрирани в академична среда.

Ключови думи: рефлективна практика, размисъл, планиране на личностното развитие, управление на знанията, партньорска оценка, учебни логове, портфейли

JEL : A12 , A20 , A22

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING FOR UNDERGRADUATES STUDYING BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS

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Abstract: This paper looks at reflective practice and personal development planning both from and academic and business point of view. As will be demonstrated, these skills are of fundamental importance to students wishing to pursue a career in the business world in order to properly reflect on their current practice and to further develop their knowledge and skills in a knowledge-economy based environment where human capital can be seen to be their most valuable asset. Firstly, the definition and process of reflective practice will be examined in both the academic and professional world. Personal development planning will then be

examined in its relation to reflective practice and how it has already been implemented in the UK. Finally, we will look at how these processes and activities can be integrated into the academic environment.

Key words: reflective practice, reflection, personal development planning, knowledge management, peer assessment, learning logs, portfolios

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1. Introduction

There are many elements that are included in a student's education at undergraduate level - lectures, seminars, theory, practical work, research, presentations, essays and reports, to name a few. One element, however, that remains to be fully integrated into teaching and learning in higher education institutions in Bulgaria is the art of reflective practice and subsequent personal development planning. The UK has already recognised the importance of this, and its higher education Quality and Assurance Agency (QAA) has clear guidelines on how this should be implemented in the academic environment, and the experience gained in the UK can help to create a similar system within universities in this country, albeit in a more voluntary and less formalised manner.

As will be demonstrated in this paper, these skills are of fundamental importance to students wishing to pursue a career in the business world in order to properly reflect on their current practice and to further develop their knowledge and skills in a knowledge-economy based environment where human capital can be seen to be their most valuable asset.

Firstly, the definition and process of reflective practice will be examined in both the academic and professional world. Personal development planning will then be examined in its relation to reflective practice and how it has already been implemented in the UK. Finally, we will look at how these processes and activities can be integrated into the academic environment.

2. Reflective Practice

As with many topics in higher education, the notion of reflection has encouraged a proliferation of literature as to what it actually is, both in theory and practice.

Reflection can be seen as a form of mental processing which can aid learning - reflection on something is undertaken in order to consider it in more detail. Usually, there is a purpose for reflecting – a goal to reach - and there is a useful outcome. Normally, things we reflect on are relatively complicated, not routine. We tend to reflect on things for which there is not an apparent or immediate solution.

Reflective practice is generally accepted as the process of learning through and from experience in order to gain better insight into oneself or to obtain an improvement in practice (Boud et al 1985; Boyd and Fales, 1983; Mezirow, 1981,

Jarvis, 1992)[1]. Usually, this means critiquing assumptions of practice as well as critical self-evaluation, meaning that the reflective practitioner needs some level of self-awareness. The aim is to gain new insight and understanding into past experience and so improve future practice - this can be seen as a process of life-long learning.

However, despite this deceptively simple generalisation, there have been a wide variety of definitions and clarifications espoused.

A more complex definition might be that reflection is applied to relatively complicated or unstructured ideas for which there is not an obvious solution and is largely based on further processing of the knowledge and understanding that we already possess (Moon, 1999)[2].

Dewey described reflection as a discrete and specialised form of thinking, as, "a kind of thinking that consists in turning a subject over in the mind and giving it serious thought".   He defines reflection as, "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and further conclusions to which it leads…it includes a conscious and voluntary effort to establish belief upon a firm basis of evidence and rationality" (Dewey, 1933)[3].

David Kolb (1984)[4] developed a theory of cycle of experiential learning, based on reflection. The following is a simplified version: **Concrete experiencing** (having an experience), **active experimentation** (trying out what you have learned), **abstract conceptualising** (learning from the experience), **reflective observation** (reflecting on the experience) This cycle perpetuates as new learning leads to active experimentation which is 'recycled' through new experiences.

Donald Schon is an eminent authority on reflection with regard to professional knowledge and its subsequent further development (1983, 1987)[5]. He noted that the relationship between the theoretical and how a professional uses this to infom practice tends to be 'theory-in-use' - future development and improvement in expertise is constructed via reviewing, describing, analysing and evaluating past practice. He identified this as reflection-on-action (after the event). However, he stated that professionals also use a tacit, implicit form of reflection - reflection-in-action (while the event is taking place) – a method where business professionals sometimes cannot

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[1]Boud, D. and Fales, A. (1983) Reflective learning: key to learning from experience. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 23(2), 99-117. Boud, D; Keogh, R and Walker, D (1985), *Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning,* Kogan Page, London. Mezirow, J. (1981) A critical theory of adult learning and eduaiton. Adult Education,32(1), 3-24. Jarvis, P. (1992) Reflective practice and nursing. *Nurse Education Today*, 12(3), 174-181

[2] Moon, J. (1999) Reflection in Learning and Professional Development: theory and practice. London: Kogan Page.

[3] Dewey, J. (1933) *How we think: a restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process*.Chicago IL: Henry Regnery Co.

[4] Kolb, D. (1994), *Experiential Learning as the Science of Learning and Development,* Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ

[5] Schon, D. (1983), *The Reflective Practitioner,* Jossey-Bass, San Francisco. Schon, D. (1987), *Educating Reflective Practitioners,* Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

explain the basis for their actions, which therefore makes reflection difficult or impossible. He envisioned the role of professional development as making this form of 'reflection-in-action' explicit so that it could then be consciously reflected on and developed, with professionals examining their experiences and responses as they happened. Schon did not see professional practice as being a predictable entity where set rules and procedures can always be applied - professionals have to improvise and innovate in-the-moment and act intuitively and creatively in order to be effective. Therefore, he focused on facilitating the development of reflective practitioners rather than describing the process of reflection.

In the academic environment, Marton, Hounsell and Entwistle (1997)[6] undertook research on approaches to learning and they related academic success to a 'deep' approach, while those who were less successful academically were found to have a 'surface' approach to learning. A deep approach is where the learner wishes to understand the meaning of the material, to re-explain it in light of their own current understanding, to integrate it into their existing body of knowledge, reconsidering and altering previously held beliefs as necessary. New ideas are 'filed' carefully and integrated. A surface approach, however, is where a learner simply memorises the material 'by rote' without trying to understand it in relation to their own or other ideas, beliefs or areas of knowledge.

Therefore, reflection has a role in 'deep' approaches to learning, but not in 'surface' approaches to learning We learn from representing learning to ourselves, for example, by writing an essay, and learn from re-processing and re-explaining the information (Eisner, 1991)[7]. This is an inherently reflective process. We make sense of what is learnt and re-process this information by reflecting on it and integrating it with our current understanding of the topic (Vygotsky, 1978)[8]. This might be thought of as a kind of cognitive 'housekeeping' process.

The process of reflection slows down learners' activities, giving them time to fully process and comprehend learning materials and then connect this new information to previous ideas. Certain research has demonstrated that when a lecturer pauses in a lecture it enables students to learn better (Tobin, 1987)[9]. Students should be persuaded to stop and think about an issue that has arisen in a lecture, as reflection gives learners greater personal 'ownership' of the learning materials, which makes it more meaningful to them and helps them to grasp the essence of what is contained in the educational matter (Rogers, 1969)[10]. Metacognition - the awareness of your own cognitive function – is supported by reflective practice and there is evidence to show that more successful learners have better metacognitive processes (Ertmer and Newby,

[6] Marton, F., Hounsell, D. and Entwistle (1997), *The Experience of Learning,* Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh

[7] Eisner, E. (1991), 'Forms of understanding and the future of education', *Educational researcher 22,* pp 5-11

[8] Vygotsky, L. (1978), *Mind in Society, the development of higher psychological processes,* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA

[9] Tobin, K. (1987) 'The higher wait time in cognitive learning', *Educational research, 57 (1),* pp 69-75

[10] Rogers, C. (1969) *Freedom to learn,* Charles E. Merrill, Columbus, Ohio

1996)[11].   Educational programmes that support the learner's awareness of their learning processes have been shown to be highly effective (Main, 1985)[12].

3. Personal Development Planning

According to the U.K.'s Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for higher education, academic personal development planning (PDP) is, "A structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development."[13] Reflection is an integral part of PDP.

In the U.K., PDP has to be integrated into the higher education (HE) experience at all levels (undergraduate and postgraduate), resulting in a progress file that shows the learner's reflections on their learning and planning for improvement towards stated goals, alongside the transcript of records regarding their achievements. The motivation for developing and expanding practice in personal development planning (PDP) was instigated by recommendation 20 of the Dearing Review (NCIHE 1997)[14], which directed HE Institutions (HEIs) to develop the, "means by which students can monitor, build and reflect upon their personal development".

Effective PDP develops an individual's abilities to reflect on, review, plan, monitor and take responsibility for their own learning in an active manner and also to understand what and how they learn by articulating their learning. The purpose of PDP is self-awareness and self-improvement. Students should be able to recognise and discuss their own strengths and weaknesses via the PDP process via reflection. PDP also helps to make the outcomes of HE more explicit, and supports the concept that learning is a lifelong activity.

In the UK, via a specific PDP programme students are encouraged to articulate their personal goals and evaluate progress towards their intended achievements. PDP is intended to help students relate their learning to a wider context and improve their general skills for study and career management by being better prepared for seeking employment or self-employment and being more able to relate what they have learnt to the requirements of employers. By having experience of PDP, students are also better prepared for the demands of continuing professional or vocational development when they enter employment in the new knowledge economy where personal appraisals of current performance and future training needs are now commonplace.

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[11] Ertmer, P. And Newby, T. (1996) 'The expert learner, strategic, self-regulated and reflective', *Instructional Science 24,* pp 1-24

[12] Main, A. (1985) 'Reflection and the development of learning skills', *Reflection: turning experience into learning,* Kogan Page, London

[13] The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2009) *Personal Development Planning: guidance for institutional policy and practice in higher education,* http://www.qaa.ac.uk

[14] NCIHE (1997) *Higher Education in the Learning Society.* Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education HMSO 2 vols.

The reflective and planning skills on which the idea of PDP is based are integral to knowing how to learn in different contexts and to the ability to transfer learning from one context to another – vital in today's job market, where a 'job for life' is now a rarity.

In an academic context, core questions that underpin reflective learning and planning for self-improvement might be[15]:

- what have I learnt or done? - retrospective reflection
- what do I need to learn or do to improve myself? - reflection on current situation
- how do I do it? - review of opportunities and identification of personal goals or objectives
- how will I know I've done it? - strategy for setting targets and reviewing progress

In a non-academic context, these questions may be re-framed as follows:

- where have I been? - retrospective reflection
- where am I now? - reflection on current situation
- where do I want to get to? - review of opportunities and identification of personal goals or objectives
- how do I get there? - review of possibilities and decisions on the best way of achieving goals/objectives
- how will I know I've got there? - strategy for setting targets and reviewing progress

Personal development planning (PDP) can involve different forms of reflection and reflective learning. Academic reflection is a structured and formal process, having a definite and defined purpose. Students may be given structures to follow, such as the Kolb cycle. The results of student reflective activity will normally be viewed and probably assessed and it will not be a private and personally-motivated activity. The object or context of the reflection will need to be described, unlike private reflections, where what is being reflected on is not systematically decomposed.

'Deep' levels of academic reflection - the preferred levels that a student should reach in order to gain academic success - can be described as dialogic and critical. Dialogic reflection suggests that the learner has 'stepped back' from events and actions which leads to a higher level of discourse than simply recording events. There is a sense of 'mulling over', and discourse with an exploration of the role of self in events and actions is evident. Consideration of the qualities of judgements and of possible alternatives for explaining and hypothesising are shown. Reflection is analytical or integrative, linking factors and perspectives. Critical reflection, in addition to dialogic reflection, provides evidence that the learner is aware that the same actions and events may be seen in different contexts with different explanations associated with the contexts.

The implementation of PDP in academia has been proven to be most effective

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[15] Jackson, N. (2004) *Personal Development Planning: what does it mean?*, The Higher Education Academy, UK

when it is a mainstream academic activity which is linked to the outcomes and assessment of the academic programme under study. It should also be seen to have the support of senior managers and academic staff so that students understand that the process is valued.

4. Applications for Undergraduates in Business and Economics

Reflection-in-action underpins the concept of knowledge management (Alavi & Leidner, 2001)[16], which became a key business concept from the middle of the 1990s. Grant (1996)[17] proposes a knowledge-based theory of the company and suggests that an organisation's individuality and distinctiveness develops from the way in which knowledge is internally integrated. Again on the subject of knowledge management, Leonard and Rayport (1997)[18] explicitly note reflection and analysis as a stage in their advocated process of capturing and building further on knowledge regarding a specific business and the market in which it operates.

In more recent literature, Vince (2004)[19] talks about collective reflection-in-action with regard to learning processes within a business when rapid changes occur and Snowden (2002)[20] emphasises how complex knowledge in business actually is and also mentions the value of narrative approaches in knowledge development.

Thus, the importance of students learning to reflect on their practice and development and the relation to the business environment can be clearly seen. Indeed, the significance of knowledge management in business implies that students who are skilled and adept at participating in reflective dialogues can bring this experience usefully into their working lives once they have graduated.

Cowan (2006)[21] states that learners are seen to be reflecting in an academic manner, "when they analyse or evaluate one or more personal experiences, and attempt to generalise from that thinking". However, as Biggs notes, "a reflection in a mirror is an exact replica of what is in front of it. Reflection in professional practice, however, gives back not what it is, but what *might* be, an improvement on the original" (2001)[22]. This is in accordance with Schon's theories, as mentioned

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[16] Alavi, M., & Leidner, D. (2001). 'Knowledge management and knowledge management systems: Conceptual foundations and research issues.' *MIS Quarterly*, 25, 107-136.

[17] Grant, R. M. (1996). 'Toward a knowledge-based theory of the firm'. *Strategic Management Journal,* 17 (Winter Special Issue), 109-122.

[18] Leonard, D., & Rayport, J. (1997). Spark innovation through empathic design. *Harvard Business Review,* 75(6), 102-113

[19] Vince, R. (2004). *Rethinking strategic learning.* London: Routledge

[20] Snowden, D. (2002). Complex acts of knowing: Paradox and descriptive self-awareness. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 6, 100-111

[21] Cowan, J. (2006). *On becoming an innovative university teacher: Reflection in action (2nd ed.).* Maidenhead, England: Open University Press

[22] Biggs, J. (2001). *The reflective institution: Assuring and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning.* Higher Education, 41, 221-228

previously.

In order to facilitate reflective practice and subsequent PDP, students need to spend time contemplating their own learning – both what and how they learn, and the connections they can forge between their existing knowledge and new information. The new knowledge they obtain may be from external sources, outside the classroom. To successfully reflect and improve, students also need to look at themselves critically so that they can not only be aware of their current knowledge, but can plan for future development by being aware of what they still need to learn.

When developing reflective skills, it is important that students feel supported, that they are given an appropriate amount of time and that they have access to others who are effective at reflecting and on whom they can model their own practice. To really engage in a deeper way, students should use different forms of reflection in different contexts: for example, both reflection-in and -on practice; private and dialogical reflection; experimentation with different forms of formal, informal, written and verbal reflection. Through engaging with different forms, students can learn what is appropriate for different contexts and, as a crucial part of subsequent self-development, what works best for them in what types of situations.

An important part of learning about reflection is to understand the crucial elements of good reflective practice, which should contain[23]:

- Evidence of serious thinking and questioning;
- Self-awareness and honesty;
- Concrete and specific examples.

Effective reflective practice should also demonstrate:

- Good organisation and be correct in terms of grammar and mechanics;
- The ability to synthesise different concepts;
- The ability to analyse.

Students may be prompted in this process by using specific questions regarding a particular assessment, for instance:

- What exactly did I learn?
- How have I changed as a result of this experience?
- How did I go about making sense of the information/situation?
- What parts of the experience were the most/least valuable and why?
- How does what I learned relate to what I already knew about the concept?
- How does what I learned relate to my other classes?
- How does what I learned relate to my extra-curricular activities?
- How does what I learned relate to me as a person?
- What specific skills have I practiced/perfected in completing this assignment?
- What specific skills do I need to develop to do an even better job next time?
- What more do I need to learn about the subject/topic/concept?[24]

Students can also be asked to discuss and create a reflective account of their performance when giving a presentation - weaknesses and strengths, an assessment of their performance compared to their expectations, relationships to presentations given

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[23] BGSU Center for Teaching and Learning (2011) *Teaching students to reflect,* BGSU, USA

[24] BGSU Center for Teaching and Learning (2011) *Teaching students to reflect,* BGSU, USA

before, and so on. For students who have not considered reflectively before, it may be easier for them if they are asked to write a more descriptive account of their performance before they write reflectively.

Students can create a variety of documents to help support reflection. These can include both structured and unstructured forms of learning journals, logs and diaries. They generally consist of reflection over a sustained period, and are maintained with the intention of improving or supporting learning. Learning journals have already been used successfully for this purpose in most disciplines (Moon, 1999)[25]. Similar to this is the use of portfolios, which may be paper-based or in electronic form (e-portfolios). There is no one strict definition of what a student portfolio should contain, but most involve some reflective activity. They may include a non-reflective compilation of work, collections of coursework and reading with reflective comments, or be something very akin to a learning journal.

Reflection on experience external to the classroom may include a student's participation in internships and work-placements, as well as time spent abroad in other educational institutions or in employment – many students already have part-time jobs. This may help the student make sense of their experiences in world of work (Boud and Garrick, 1999)[26] in order to develop employment skills, or to use the experience as a basis for learning about self and personal functioning (Collings and Watton, 2001)[27]. As has previously been mentioned, just like effective professionals in business, students need to learn to learn from experience, or to make greater use of learning where there is no formal guidance or teaching.

Peer assessment is another method of reflection-on-action, designed to improve and enhance future performance of both the assessor(s) and the assessed. When students review the work of others they are likely to be reflecting on the work in relation to their perception of how they think it should be produced. This activity can be enhanced further if they are asked to write notes on their experience of the assessment process as an assessor, or, if they are the one assessed, on what they accept and reject of a peer's comments on their work (Moon, 2002)[28].

5. Conclusion

As we have seen, reflection and subsequent personal development planning are important, not just to aid the learning process, but also to develop efficient and effective business professionals who constantly examine and re-examine their current practice and knowledge in the light of new information and future skill development.

[25] Moon, J. (1999) *Reflection in Learning and Professional Development: theory and practice.* London: Kogan Page.

[26] Boud, D. and Garrick, J. (1999) *Understanding Learning at work,* Routledge. London.

[27] Collings, J. and Watton, P. (2001) JEWELS Project: *Learning through independent work experience.* Final report: jewels@exeter.ac.uk

[28] Moon, J. A. (2002) *Reflection in Learning and Professional Development*, Kogan Page.

Developing these skills by integrating them into the academic curricula need not be demanding, and, indeed, many of the recommendations for integration are already being practiced to some extent. However, due to the importance of reflective practice and PDP for undergraduate students in business and economics, a more thoughtful and integrative approach, fully backed by heads of department and curriculum leaders, would certainly benefit Bulgaria's undergraduate students and help them to gain the advantages they need to compete in the fast-paced global business environment.

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