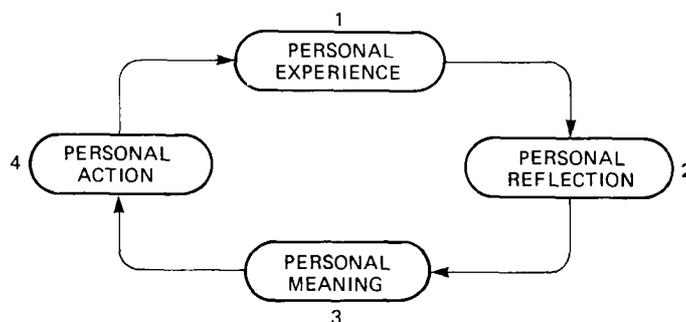


## CHAPTER 14<sup>1</sup>

# Reflective Learning

*Richard Boot and Philip Boxer<sup>2</sup>*

Reflective Learning is a method of facilitating learning from experience. So why not stick to the more commonly used term 'experiential learning'? There are a number of reasons for this and in this paper we hope that by describing what we mean by reflective learning those reasons will become clearer. A useful starting point might be to state one of our basic assumptions, which is that experience alone is not learning and does not guarantee that learning will take place. It is no use providing people with 'experiences' either in the classroom or in the workplace in the hope that they will learn. Whether or not they learn will depend on what they 'do' with that experience. This fact is recognised in the old cliché that there is a difference between the man who has lived one year thirty times and the man who has lived thirty years once. It is also recognised in the idea of an experiential learning 'cycle' expressed by many practitioners in the field and explored in some detail by Kolb and others (Kolb and Fry, 1975). A closer look at this cycle will give one indication of why we choose to refer to the methods we are developing as reflective learning. The figure below represents our version of the learning cycle.



For us the major aspect of learning is *not* change in overt behaviour as a result of experience, but the process of discovering new, personal meanings in that experience. Those meanings may lead to new forms of personal action and so be observable in terms of changed behaviour, but equally they may not. The stage in the cycle that influences the quality of learning from experience (i.e. the extent to which it leads to new meaning) is reflection - the process of thinking back on, reworking, or searching for meanings in experience.

<sup>1</sup> In 'Advances in Management Education', edited by John Beck and Charles Cox, Wiley 1980.

<sup>2</sup> The authors would like to acknowledge the support and assistance given during this project with Ellerman Lines Ltd of Don Young, Group Personnel Director and Mick Crews, Group Management Training and Development Manager; and of the other consultants on the project - Fred Kohler and Tony Blake.

For many management trainers or educators, their main intervention in the learning cycle is at the first stage. They provide 'an experience' in the form of a structured exercise, a business game or simulation or something similar. Indeed, as Boydell points out, for many this is what experiential learning is (Boydell, 1976). The methods we are developing, however, involve intervention at the second stage. Their purpose is to encourage and support personal reflection by the use of reflective techniques. We are making a conscious distinction here between the terms 'method' and 'technique'. The distinction is to us a very important one and worth elaborating.

We have frequently been struck by the fact that different trainers can use an identical technique and claim to be involved in the same process and yet seem to provide quite different experiences for the learner. In our use of the terms this is because the learner experiences more than the technique. He experiences the method, of which the technique is only one part. The other part of prime importance is the ideology of the trainer. Brown (1973, p. 179) defines an ideology as 'a system of beliefs about social issues, with strong effects in structuring thoughts, feelings, and behaviour'. This term has been preferred to alternatives like theory or philosophy because of its greater connotation of involvement of the trainers own value system. By making this distinction between technique and method it is possible to avoid some of the circularity that goes with the debate about whether technology is neutral or whether there is always an inherent set of values. In educational terms it is our contention that techniques may be neutral but methods can never be. The implications of this have been noted by others. For example Cooper and Levine (1978, p. 12) state:

It is terribly important for trainers to be aware that their behaviour reflects, communicates and in many cases, models certain values which can influence immediate learning and subsequent behaviour of participants.

Postman and Weingartner (1971, p. 43) make the same point, perhaps more forcefully.

There can be no significant innovation in education that does not have at its centre the attitudes of teachers, and it is an illusion to think otherwise. The beliefs, feelings, and assumptions of teachers are the air of a learning environment; they determine the quality of life within it. When the air is polluted, the student is poisoned, unless of course, he holds his breath.

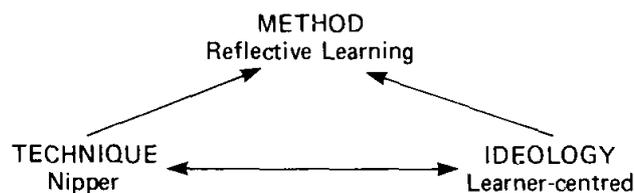
How then might this distinction between technique and method evidence itself in practice? To answer this we can refer to the different trainers mentioned earlier, all of whom would claim to be involved in the same activity - experiential learning. Their technique is to set up and run the NASA group decision-making exercise, widely used in management training (Pfeiffer and Jones, 1969). Their objectives in running the exercise, however, and the values implicit in those objectives are quite different. The first wants the participants to learn 'that'. In other words the exercise is used as a subtle variant of the information transmission method. It is intended to provide empirical evidence for the 'truths' about group decision-making that the participants are made aware of in accompanying lectures or recommended reading. They learn 'that' group decision-making takes longer in elapsed time as well as man-hours than individual decision-making, and 'that' groups produce more and better solutions to problems than do individuals. Problems arise for the trainer when, as sometimes happens, the outcomes of the exercise fail to support these 'truths'. He is faced with explaining how

this particular group is the exception to the rule or why it was a bad exercise anyway, or worse still why the participants did it wrong.

The second trainer wants the participants to learn 'how'. His method is basically conditioning. His intention is to reinforce those behaviours which he regards as essential for effective teamwork and to extinguish those he regards as dysfunctional. He may get into trouble if questioned too closely on his definition of effectiveness.

The third uses the exercise as a vehicle to provide the opportunity for participants to explore and make sense of the way they relate to others and to collective tasks. As a trainer he cannot know in advance what they will learn in terms of facts and behaviours. His intention is to facilitate reflection and the discovery of personal meaning. He may encounter difficulties with those who are expecting to be 'taught' or 'trained'.

The point of these examples is that, whatever is learnt from the technique, the methods of the three trainers are teaching very different lessons about who is responsible for the learning that takes place, who determines what is good and bad behaviour, what is the nature of knowledge, and what is worth knowing. These lessons have their origin not in the technique but in the ideological standpoint from which it is applied. The figure below represents the relationship between technique and method diagrammatically. It also indicates our own ideological position and refers to a particular technique that has been developed to support the Reflective Learning Method.



In the following sections we shall be looking more closely at the ideology of reflective learning, the technique, and the method in practice. We shall also be discussing the implications for subsequent research.

## ***THE IDEOLOGY***

We like to think that we are involved in the development of a truly learner-centred method of management development. But what is learner centredness? We believe this is something about which many trainers deceive themselves. For some it simply means 'not lecturing', for others it means 'activity based', for yet others it means 'individualised'. While all of these approaches may be part of learner centredness, they are not synonymous with it. There are other ways of being trainer-centred than standing in front of a group with a piece of chalk in one's hand. The central issue seems to be one of control. Who determines what is to be learnt, why, and how? There are subtle ways in which the trainer can delegate this control or determination to the 'subject matter', or, and this is a particular concern of ours, to the technology. So the participant is given total freedom to learn the 'right' answers to questions regarded as important by the trainer. This may take the form of 'guess my list' discussion leading or it may take the form of 'individualised' programmed learning packages. On the latter Rowntree (1974, p. 97) has the following to say:

Resource materials are sometimes so preselected, prestructured and virtually predigested (what Edgar Friedenberg calls the 'TV-dinner approach' to educational packaging) that the student is left no freedom to use the package in his own way and take from it just what he needs. We should be suspicious of monolithic packages that assume that all students have the same objectives and the same learning style.

But any attempts to define learner centredness in terms of the techniques employed is likely to be inadequate in that it implies that the choice as to what techniques are appropriate remains with the trainer. Learner centredness expresses itself in the relationship established between the trainer and the learner and in particular in the location of control in that relationship. It also expresses itself in the way the trainer defines, implicitly or explicitly, his own role in the learning process. Rogers (1969), who is probably the best known proponent of the learner-centred ideology, insists that the role should be that of a 'facilitator' of learning. (A term which, it seems to us, does not sit easily on the British tongue, but for which we have not yet found a suitable alternative). And he is quite clear about what that role involves. Amongst other things he suggests it involves establishing a suitable climate for enquiry, helping the learners clarify their own goals and purposes, making available the widest possible range of resources for learning from which the learner can choose those which are appropriate to his own purposes, and regarding himself as a flexible resource to be utilised by the learners. (Note that this last point could involve him in employing a whole range of different educational techniques, including lectures).

And what does this mean for the development of particular techniques? Here again we quote Rowntree (1974, p. 97):

... they should impose minimum constraints on teachers and students who wish to choose from among them and combine them with other resources and experiences in personally meaningful ways. Better may be to hack out a path to your own destination than to ride the royal road to someone else's.

He expresses the principle that has guided our development of a range of computer aided techniques at the London Business School (with support initially from the National Development Programme in Computer Assisted Learning and currently from the Training Services Division of the Manpower Services Commission).

## **THE TECHNIQUE**

The technique which we wish to describe is a flexible system known as NIPPER. It will probably be clear from what we have already said that we do not regard this as the only technique of relevance nor do we believe its use will inevitably result in reflective learning. But we do believe that when applied within a learner-centred approach it can be a very powerful catalyst in the reflective learning process.

NIPPER is based on the principles of Personal Construct Theory and the Repertory Grid Technique. Although different in some important respects from the conventional Repertory Grid, it is still prone to the same kind of abuse and distortion that Fransella and Bannister (1977) caution against in the use of that technique. The intention in the design of the technique is to minimise the constraints it places upon facilitator or learner. In this connection it is important to emphasise that we have not developed a 'package' which the learner opens at one end, is guided through, and then is dropped out of at the other. A better analogy would be a box of Lego bricks which the facilitator or learner can put together into any shape to suit his own purposes. NIPPER, then, consists of a series of modules each designed to support the reflective process within individuals and groups. It places no constraint on the content or implicit structure of the 'subject matter' being reflected upon. Obviously our preference is that these be determined by the learners themselves on the basis of what they regard as significant in their own experience. The role of the computer is restricted to aiding the process of learning from that experience by feeding back to the learners patterns which appear to emerge in their reflections upon it. It does not in itself draw any conclusions from or attribute any meanings to those patterns. The intention is to provide the learners with the opportunity to do that for themselves.

To make it possible to demonstrate some of the forms in which these patterns might be fed back, we have chosen a hypothetical example. Our concern at this stage is simply to describe the mechanics of the technique and for this reason a fairly trivial but tangible subject matter has been chosen. It involves Richard reflecting upon a current problem of choosing a new car.

The starting point for the exercise is Richard's thoughts and feelings on the subject. Here NIPPER requires that Richard distinguish his thoughts in terms of 'elements' and 'concepts'. The term 'elements', in this context, is used to refer to specific examples from the chosen subject area. They might be critical incidents at work, current options open to him, people he deals with, past decisions he has made, or whatever. In this example they are the particular cars he is considering. 'Concepts', on the other hand can be used to express subjective, evaluative ideas or feelings which describe how he experiences, reacts to, or responds to those elements. In this example they are not the hard analytical facts such as purchase price, miles per gallon, etc. that might allow him to define the range of cars to be considered. Rather they are expressions of the values implicit in his personal statement of preference for one car rather than another. He is required to state the elements he is considering and the concepts he is using to differentiate between them:

Reflective Learning

How many elements do you wish to consider at this stage?  
(You may add more later if you wish).

?6

Please type in your element names, one per line  
(Element names should not be more than 20 characters long)

- < DYANE
- < GOLF
- < CITROEN GS
- < RENAULT 12
- < RENAULT 14
- < PEUGEOT 304

Do you wish to amend any of these element names?

?NO

How many concepts do you wish to use at this stage?  
(You may add more later if you wish)

?9

Please type in your concept names, one per line.  
(Concept names should not be more than 20 characters long)

- < FUN
- < CAMPING
- < ME
- < COMFORT
- < STAID
- < CHEAP TO RUN
- < LASTING
- < SOLID
- < EASY TINKER

Do you wish to amend any of these concept names?

?NO

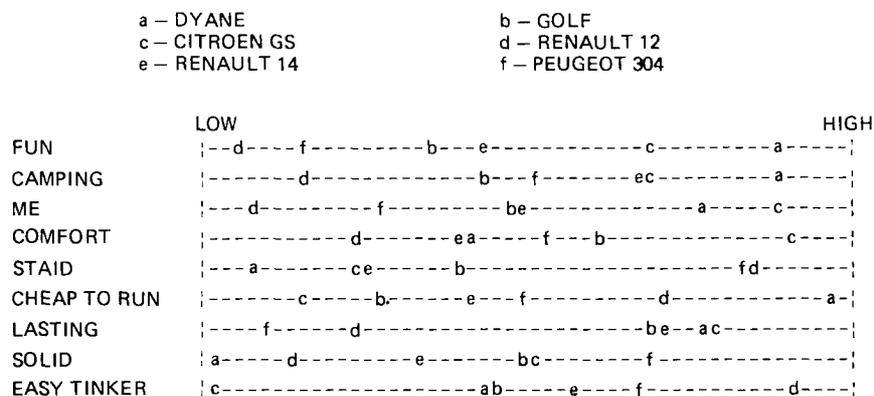
He is then encouraged to reflect upon the extent to which he feels each concept applies to each of the cars. He expresses this by representing each car by a letter and positioning the letters along a scale provided for each concept:

WHEN RATING THE ELEMENTS AGAINST EACH CONCEPT  
USE LETTERS TO REPRESENT THE ELEMENTS AS FOLLOWS:-

a – DYANE	b – GOLF
c – CITROEN GS	d – RENAULT 12
e – RENAULT 14	f – PERGEOT 304

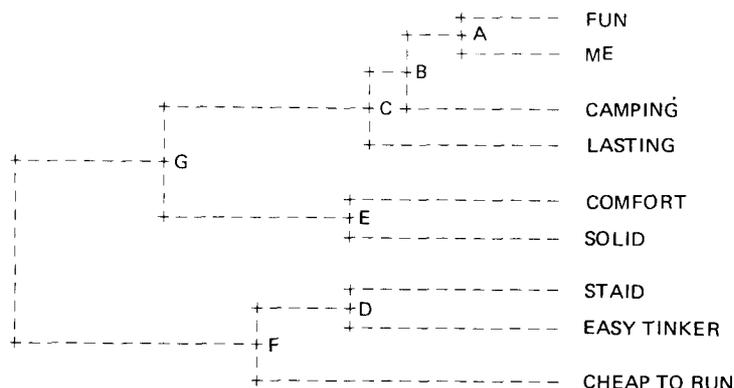


Thus he thinks of the Dyane as a lot of 'Fun' and the Citroen GS as a little less but still quite high. The Renault 12 and the Peugeot in contrast he rates as rather low on fun and so on. Eventually, then, he will have entered into the computer a pattern of ratings for each of the concepts:



This stage, however, represents more than the mere 'inputting' of data. It is an important part of the reflection process. As he rates the cars he is inevitably forced to become more aware of, or at least clarify for himself, the real meaning to him of each of the concepts when applied to this kind of decision.

As was said earlier, once this information is entered, it is possible to ask NIPPER to feed back to Richard the various patterns that appear to be emerging in his reflections so far. It can do this in a number of different ways. For example it can represent the similarities in the ways he has used the various concepts in the form of a diagrammatic tree or 'dendrogram':



This tree suggests to him that the concepts he has used to differentiate between the cars cluster together into three distinct families: one family consisting of 'fun', 'me', 'camping', and 'lasting'; the next of 'comfort' and 'solid'; and the third of 'staid', 'easy tinker', and 'cheap to run'. It rests with Richard to reflect upon these family clusters that NIPPER has identified, and consider whether they are in any sense 'meaningful' for him. In the context of this example 'meaningful' might imply that they represent some underlying concepts which are important influences upon his order of preference among the cars.

If, as in this case, he feels that there are, then NIPPER can help him explore what those underlying concepts might be. It does this by presenting the same information in a different way. It presents each of the links in the tree to him in turn (starting with the closest) and suggests that he consider what it is that underlies the two concepts that are being linked. In this example the closest link is between 'fun' and 'me':

(11) FUN AND ME => A [DIFFERENT]

For Richard the underlying concept is 'different'. The next closest link is between 'different' and 'camping':

(15) A [DIFFERENT] AND CAMPING => B [HOLIDAY CAR]

Here the underlying concept is 'holiday car'. As the process goes on he can build up a clearer picture of the concepts underlying the patterns represented in the tree diagram:

(11) FUN	AND ME	=> A [DIFFERENT]
(15) A [DIFFERENT]	AND CAMPING	=> B [HOLIDAY CAR]
(18) B [HOLIDAY CAR]	AND LASTING	=> C [GOOD BET]
(20) STAID	AND EASY TINKER	=> E [RELAXING DRIVE]
(29) D [ORDINARY]	AND CHEAP TO RUN	=> F [SENSIBLE]
(39) C [GOOD BET]	AND E [RELAXING DRIVE]	=> G [MY KIND OF CAR]



For the purposes of this example, however, we shall stay with the original concepts, and ask for an indication of how the overall patterns in them seem to apply to the particular cars Richard is considering:

- 1 DYANE
- 2 GOLF
- 3 RENAULT 14
- 4 CITROEN GS
- 5 RENAULT 12
- 6 PEUGEOT 304

	1	2	3	4	5	6					
1	++	-	=	+	---	-	FUN	} GOOD	} MY KIND		
2	++	-	-	++	---	-	ME			} BET	} OF CAR
3	++	-	+	+	---	-	CAMPING				
4	+	+	+	+	---	---	LASTING				
5	-	+	-	++	---	+	COMFORT	} RELAXING	}		
6	---	+	-	+	-	++	SOLID			DRIVE	
7	---	-	-	-	++	++	STAD	} SENSIBLE	}		
8	-	-	+	---	++	+	EASY TINKER				
9	++	-	-	---	+	-	CHEAP TO RUN				

This suggests to him that he is thinking of the Citroen GS as not very 'sensible' but as a 'good bet' and a 'relaxing drive' - in fact as 'my kind of car'. The Renault 12 on the other hand he regards as very 'sensible' but definitely not 'my kind of car'.

There are a number of other aspects of NIPPER as a technique, including some which support pairs or groups of individuals in the exploration of shared experiences. But as our purpose in this section was simply to give some indication of the mechanics we shall not go into these. One thing, however, will probably have become clear. That is that its real virtue lies not in 'teaching' managers 'what they should know' but in helping them explore their own experience in order that they may better learn from it.

## **THE METHOD IN PRACTICE**

This section describes a particular application of NIPPER within the context of a Workshop designed for Ellerman Lines Limited. The particular form of NIPPER which Philip used is fully described elsewhere (Boxer, 1979). Needless to say, the views expressed in this section are Philip's own, and should not be taken as representing the views of others involved in designing the workshop. The workshop was designed over a period of eight months leading up to October 1978.

The proposal initially put to Ellermans had the following objectives:

- To generate a network of people who can and do manage their own development in the direction desired by Ellerman Management.
- To develop an internal consultant to be capable of maintaining and expanding that network within the Ellerman group of companies.

The essence of the Workshop was that it was concerned with developing 'learning to learn' competencies in relation to the participant's own job. It was designed to involve five different sessions of varying lengths over a period of six months totalling 11 working days. Evaluation of their effectiveness was dealt with by giving Ellermans the following guarantee:

At the conclusion of the Workshop each participant shall be able to manage his or her own personal development, shall be confident of that ability, and shall be willing to take full responsibility for that development. If it is determined that any individual is not so able,

confident, and willing, then Boxer, Blake, and Kohler shall refund 75% of the Workshop fees related to that person's participation.

Between this first draft proposal and the final form of the Workshop, much development work was done. During the development process, three strands were discernible: firstly, there was the process of learning about Ellermans as a context to the Workshop. This process culminated in detailed briefings about the potential participants. Secondly, there was the process of 'contracting' with the organisation. This did not just mean agreeing on a final form of words arising out of the initial proposal, but involved ensuring that the climate of expectations surrounding the Workshop would not only enable the participants to draw benefit from it, but also enable Mick Crews to manage the impact on Ellermans expected to result from the Workshop. Thirdly, there was the process of designing the form of the Workshop itself and deciding how the boundaries between the different sessions and Ellermans would be managed.

## The Ellermans Context

Ellerman Lines Limited had been a very private Private Company. The Sunday Telegraph said about it on June 27th 1976:

For 40 years the company ran on until by the time of the shipping slump in the late 1960's, the Ellerman Lines, largely through lack of direction and professional management, was in trouble. Real losses in one year were £4 million, rising to £6 million the next.

Under the Chairmanship of Dennis Martin-Jenkins, however, this began to change. In 1973 the company was divisionalised into Shipping, Transport, Travel, Brewing, and Investment Services; and in 1970 Peter Laister was brought in as Group Managing Director from British Oxygen. Ellermans had traditionally been a paternalistic institution with closed boundaries, operating with very low financial gearing in a stable environment. The implicit managerial assumptions had been that managing was a purely technical and routine operation. The introduction of new senior management from outside, combined with reorganisation of traditional activities, had begun to change these implicit assumptions; but it was the primary purpose of the Group Personnel Function to accelerate this development towards a new managerial culture more appropriate for the 1980's.

The contents of the Personnel Function Mission for 1978/79 provides a useful summary of the strategy of which the Workshop would form a part:

'the mission is to develop a management culture which can be defined as moving towards the following characteristics:

- more generalist
- more visionary and enterprising
- realistic
- integrative
- team working
- achieving
- adaptive and self-developing

The mission will never be fully achieved, and the idea of movement "away from" and "towards" is an important one. Some of the essential initiatives for implementing the mission are: getting the top

people right, developing a management "network", developing key management systems, developing Divisional and Group Boards and Management Development and Training'.

Mick Crews had already considered using a teaching approach aimed at supporting this mission through the use of self-directed use of teaching material. The need to which the Workshop was responding was therefore to support the mission similarly, but to do so with much less emphasis on pre-structured material.

## **Contracting with the Organisation**

By August 1978 Ellermans felt that the consulting team could deliver something that would meet its need, though they were not precisely clear how the consultants would do it. That was not surprising since the three of them did not finalise the form of the first Workshop until the end of September. Two parallel strategies were being pursued (implicitly) by the consultants however. One strategy was concerned with the contract they would make with the actual participants who would be doing the work on the Workshops. The other involved working through the contacts at Ellermans to ensure that if the Workshop was effective, then it would be legitimate for the participants to ask for 'space', i.e. if the participants were to become self-developing, then it would inevitably lead to attempts to change some of the patterns of working within Ellermans. Effective contracting with the organisation was therefore necessary to ensure that what energy was released could be usefully focused on the organisation. The reverse side of this contracting was that its failure would lead either to a great deal of anxiety for the participants or to their departure from Ellermans.

The result was a memorandum which outlined the basis of the proposed Management Development Workshops, and sought approval to proceed. The argument was that a series of Workshops were necessary at this time because:

- The Group's development in part depended upon the availability of more highly skilled middle and senior managers.
- The current ability of the organisation to facilitate management development was limited in both the line and in Personnel Departments.
- The current management development practices - i.e. the Management Review of Appraisal and Counselling - were not yet mature.
- Expectations of career and individual development has been raised by various statements and actions over the previous two years.

On September 12th the proposal to run a series of Management Development Workshops for Middle Management was approved. The first of these was to commence on November 7th with the first session. The plan was to commence a second Workshop at the end of January or early in February the next year. During September and October the consultants were briefed on about 30 potential participants, and nominations were asked for from Divisions.

## **The Shape of the Workshop**

The Workshop was to be designed to give the participant a space within which to manage his own development. The three consultants, in designing the Workshop, had to contend with the fact that they were very different in their background and experience. In order to harness this difference they had to develop some vision of how

the Workshop could be. The result was a series of sessions and an initial Contract Interview. The first session was to start about one week after the Interview, to last three days, and to be followed the next week by a further two-day session. In both these sessions the concern was to be coming into focus and clarifying the participant's contract with himself. About two months later the third session of two days was to be concerned with helping the participants to draw on each others' strengths and to extend what they were doing. The fourth and final three-day session one month later was then to enable the participants to own the process as a whole and thereby be able to manage it for themselves.

The consultants did not try to, nor was it possible to tell the participants what they would be doing during the Workshop - that had to be the participant's choice. The Contract Interview therefore involved enabling the participants to decide whether or not they wanted to work with the consultants, and placing responsibility for evaluation firmly in their hands. In return for that, the consultants decided to ask the participants to accept three conditions:

- Throughout the Workshop you will only act in ways which you choose.
- You will accept a duty to express yourself always in your own individual way.
- You will accept responsibility wholly for your actions *throughout* the period of the Workshop.

The consultants' intention in imposing these conditions was to clearly break any connotations the participants might have of the Workshop with normal learning contracts - most contracts involve the participant in letting someone else choose what he is to do, how he is best to do it, and thereby handing *in loco parentis* powers to the teacher. The belief that the consultants could be any different was based on the idea that they could work with the participants through the medium of their relationship with them, rather than through the particular things they chose to do with them. This meant of course being able to act resourcefully as each moment arose; but it also meant trying to adopt particular relationships with the participants in order to create a space within which they could choose to move. This concept of different focus within a relationship was to be present also in the form the Contract Interviews were to take and in the way the team used physical space during the Workshop.

The first focus was associated with Fred Kohler and was 'Doing'. Its symbol was the individual expression - a display (as in exhibition) which would open possibilities of communication and which was constructed in as many different media and alternative forms as possible. The expression was of what the participant found true and significant; and for Session I it was based on the past and present; while for Session II it was on the present and future. 'Doing' was to be analogous with focusing a reflex camera - the participant needed to introduce coherence, clarity, and composition to his picture, even when the object of his focusing was moving.

The second focus was associated with Tony Blake and was 'Being'. Its symbol was the Address Book containing extra leaves for the participant to record any golden rules he might wish to remember. 'Being' was to be a focus on the experiential method of learning, and the Address Book represented the mutual support which could be drawn from other participants.

The third focus was associated with Philip and was 'Knowing'. Its symbol was the Journal which the consultants had specially printed for the participants. The Journal contained a summary of the sessions at the beginning, and then a pair of facing pages

for each day over the period of the Workshops, except during the Workshops themselves, when there were three pairs of pages each day for morning, afternoon, and evening. The left hand of each pair was ruled and intended for recording *what* was happening. The right hand page was left completely blank, and was intended for recording how the participant experienced what he experienced. The 'Knowing' focus was not therefore a 'facts' kind of knowing, but rather was the inner kind of knowing developed by the reflective method of teaching and essentially complementary to the experiential method.

In the descriptions of the sessions which follow, Philip can only describe them as he experienced them, since at no time did the consultants work together apart from interviewing. Early in October participants were selected for the Workshop, and a memorandum sent to them explaining that there would be a briefing, that they could decide whether or not they wanted to go on the Workshop, that there would be some kind of 'project' involved, and that this was 'the first money-back guarantee *ever* on this kind of management development'. The result was 14 nominees whom the consultants met over a period of four days at the London Business School. The evening before meeting the team they met Mick Crews, and were filled in informally on what the Workshops were about.

## **The Contract Interview**

The three consultants produced their own individual expressions for the Interview. During the initial period however they talked generally about the participants, talked about the kinds of 'projects' the participants might undertake, and tried to say what each of them would not be doing. When there were no more concerns that the participants wanted to deal with collectively, the team handed out the Contract, the Address Book, and the Journal, and briefly took them through their contents. The consultants then broke into three rooms. In one room Philip introduced half of them to the reflective method of learning, while in a second room Fred Kohler interviewed them individually on the focus they might wish to pursue. In a third room the remainder of the group had an informal discussion with Tony Blake.

Philip's aim was to introduce the participants to the implications of considering their experience both in terms of *what* they experienced and also *how* they experienced - the distinction underlying the left-and-right-hand pages of their Journal. He started by asking each participant to list a number of significant past experiences from which he felt he had learnt something. In doing this Philip had to help the participant not to deal with his experience in terms of stereotypes, but to get back to what actually happened; and also to choose experience which was not so extended in time and space that the participant felt unable to reflect without fragmenting it. When a number of different experiences had been identified, Philip then asked the participant to express how he felt them to be significant in terms of personal concepts of value. The difficult part here was to treat the feeling as a facet of himself rather than a property of the experience. This process of referencing the feeling within himself was the beginning of reflecting on personal meaning, and when expressed in the form of a pattern along a continuum, provided the basic data needed for the application of the reflective technique.

The patterns thus produced were a side product of a conversation between Philip and the participants. The conversations felt very personal and reflective, although their content was always under the participant's control. What he was doing was managing the process, and thereby giving them a strong feeling for his mode of

working. As a result of the interviews, eight individuals contracted for the first Workshop, three contracted for the second, two decided not to come on a Workshop at this time, and one never made it to the initial meeting.

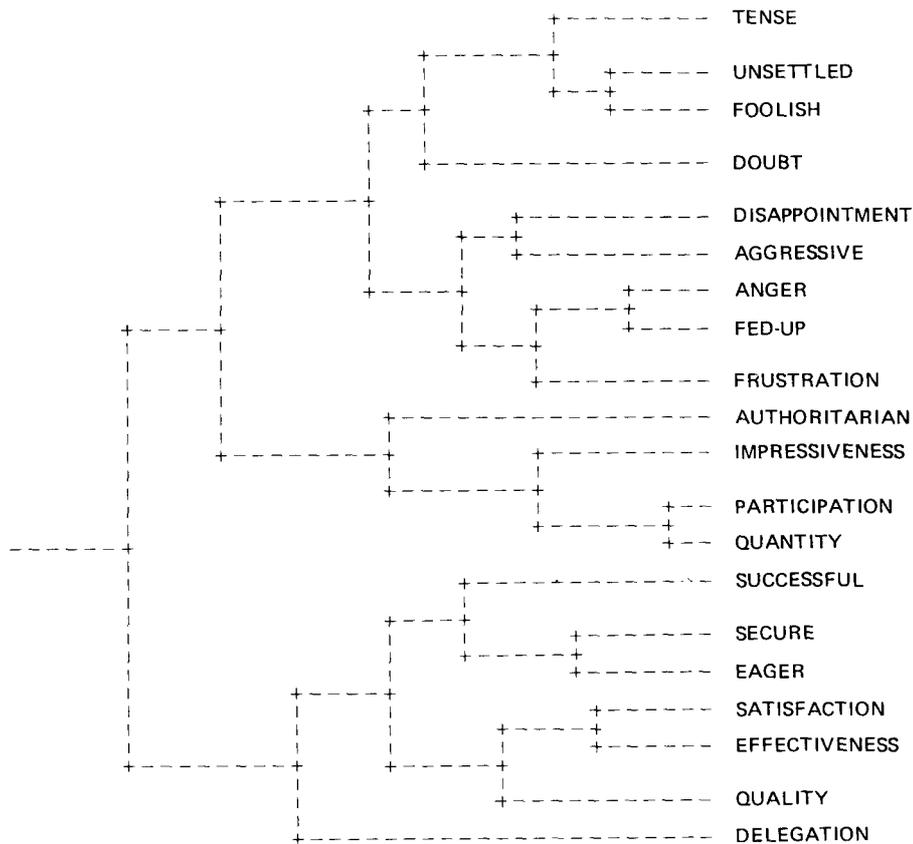
## Session 1

The participants started filling in their Journals on day one, and planned what to put into their individual expressions. On the evening before the first session the consultants assembled in the hotel and occupied three rooms. One room was a large assembly room which was to be Fred Kohler's base, and in which the exhibition stands were placed. Philip also put a computer terminal in this room for using NIPPER. The two other rooms were drawing rooms en suite – Philip had table and chairs and flipchart paper, Tony had the bar and easy chairs. The three consultants had agreed to eat together on a separate table, but otherwise to operate autonomously. The next morning they found themselves amongst eight participants, none of whom had any idea of how they were to start.

In the intervening period Philip had processed the data from the contract interviews. Not everyone had produced data, but for those who had, he had promised to return an analysis so that they could work through it if they wanted to. This Philip did, and out of the next three days, a pattern began to emerge. Working either from the interview data or from new patterns produced from conversation at the time, Philip would work reflectively with them through their 'dendrogram'. The criterion for whether or not they needed to produce new data was the 'experience difference analysis'. This enabled the participant to check whether differences made explicit in the data between his experiences corresponded to his intuitive feelings about their difference - and if not then what new concept patterns to add. On average it took about 20 minutes to produce a new analysis, which would then support about three hours reflective working. Expressing concept patterns consciously was in itself a learning process of varying difficulty. The 'dendrogram' then provided a technique for exploring the question: 'What underlying patterns are there in how you experience yourself in relation to this particular problem context?' At its easiest, the answer to this was an affirmation and extension of what they already knew intuitively. At its hardest, it involved a major struggle within the participant leading to self-confrontation, possibly for the first time.

It is impossible to convey hours of personal interaction in any useful way. The conversation however felt like a struggle with the participant's external rational being. The eventual locating of their internal being in the conversation not only led to new questions to take up with Tony Blake, but also to new ways of structuring activity which they took up with Fred Kohler. The figure below shows a 'dendrogram' produced at this stage.

SIMILARITY GROUPING OF CONCEPTS:



## Session 11

Session II occupied two days at the end of the following week at the same hotel. In between the two sessions participants had been home and spent one or two days in the office, and had had a chance to digest some of the issues raised by Session I. Philip had spent time with everyone at this stage, but not everyone had 'worked through' reflectively. As the Workshop progressed therefore, there was an increasing dispersion in the stages the participants had reached, as defined by the original design. This had as much to do with their internal readiness as with the particular work context in which they had to operate.

After having established the reflective mode of working, the participant found himself faced with a new perspective on himself which needed working through. The corollary to the patterns in his experience of himself was stereotype responses to certain kinds of problem in his environment, and also in his way of dealing with others. The second of these two was left until Session III when it was likely to be more of an issue. Philip worked on the first in Session II partly by seeking to recreate the participant's work environment using paper and pencil, and partly by repeating the reflective process with a future orientation rather than a past one. The figure below shows a pattern analysis applied to the same data as the Figure above:

PATTERN ANALYSIS OF OPTION PREFERENCES:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
1	+	-	++	++	++	+	+	-	+	+	+	---	---	-	-	---	TENSE
2	---	---	++	++	-	-	-	+	+	++	+	---	-	-	+	-	UNSETTLED
3	---	-	++	++	-	-	++	+	+	++	+	---	-	-	---	-	FOOLISH
4	-	-	+++	-	++	+	++	++	-	-	-	-	-	---	+	+	DOUBT
5	++	-	++	++	-	+	++	+	-	-	-	---	-	-	---	---	DISAPPOINTMENT
6	+	+	+	++	++	+	+	+	---	-	---	---	-	-	+	---	AGGRESSIVE
7	+	+	++	++	++	-	++	+	-	-	-	---	-	---	---	---	ANGER
8	+	+	++	++	++	-	+	-	+	+	-	---	-	---	---	-	FED-UP
9	+	-	++	++	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	---	---	---	---	-	FRUSTRATION
10	++	+	---	+	++	---	-	+	+	++	+	-	---	---	+	-	AUTHORITARIAN
11	++	++	-	---	+	-	-	-	+	-	---	++	++	+	+	---	IMPRESSIVENESS
12	++	++	-	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	+	++	---	---	-	---	PARTICIPATION
13	++	+	+	++	+	+	+	-	-	-	+	+	---	---	-	---	QUANTITY
14	+	-	-	++	++	-	---	-	-	---	-	++	+	+	+	+	SUCCESSFUL
15	+	++	---	-	---	-	-	-	-	---	+	++	++	++	+	+	SECURE
16	++	++	---	---	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	++	++	++	+	+	EAGER
17	+	-	-	---	+	-	---	-	---	---	-	++	++	+	++	+	SATISFACTION
18	-	+	+	---	++	-	-	-	---	---	-	++	++	++	+	-	EFFECTIVENESS
19	---	-	+	---	-	-	+	+	---	-	-	++	+	+	++	++	QUALITY
20	++	+++	---	-	-	---	---	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	-	-	DELEGATION

For reasons of confidentiality, the option names have been omitted, but from the figure it can be seen that they fall into groups which have characteristic connotations in terms of the individual's concepts. Working with the individual at this stage therefore involved exploring how he could create movement for himself along these dimensions and to what extent he was restricting himself through stereotyping rather than because of any particular restrictions in his environment.

The individual expressions of participants had acquired a great deal more focus between Session I and II. By the end of Session II the initial euphoric mood of the participants had begun to turn into cautious optimism. The three consultants working in the Workshop space had enabled each participant to leave with a personal focus which he could pursue. Shortly afterwards the team heard that they had organised a get-together to begin to give each other support. Mick Crews was invited to this, and amongst other things, the participants decided where they would like to meet next.

### Session III

For Session III Philip decided not to take the computer terminal. This turned out to be a mistake, as one of the participants decided that he would like to work through a reflective analysis. Philip was able to do the first stage of identifying patterns, and explaining what the participant was working towards. Without the programs for doing pattern analysis however, it was not worth trying to do the next stage. This session ran for two days in January 1979 and at this stage Philip's mode of working was with participants in groups of two or more. The object of the reflective method was to develop participants' awareness of the internal meanings present in interpersonal activity so that they could deal with that as well as task activity. This involved enabling them to express these different aspects of themselves and further to confront stereotyping - both of themselves and of others.

### Session IV

The last session for this group took place over three days, at the end of February. One participant had waited until now to work reflectively, so NIPPER was of particular use to him and one other during this session. In addition to working with these two, Philip's mode of working was with the group as a whole. One important

activity was to help participants to find some way of seeing the Workshop as a whole. The consultants ended up with seven of the eight working through a particular Division's problems with a view to developing a new strategic plan for it, with two members of that Division present. The group was able to manage its own process so that it could use each individual effectively as a resource, while at the same time surprising itself at its ability to work on a work task. The emphasis throughout this session was on payoff for Ellermans.

## Postscript

By the end of the Workshop, the participants talked freely amongst themselves and to Philip about experiencing 'breakthrough'. This breakthrough was particularly associated with working reflectively. What seemed to be happening was that the reflective method had enabled them to 'know' in a conscious sense what and how they were experiencing both within and outside the Workshop. This 'knowledge' was enabling them to manage their own learning in qualitatively different ways. NIPPER as an analytical technique was an essential part of this process, not because it was doing something which could not otherwise be done, but rather because it enabled the individual's reflection to sustain a very high degree of focus on the quality of his own experience. The reflective method therefore complemented the work of Tony Blake and Fred Kohler.

One of the issues raised by the high internal orientation of the Workshop was the kinds of payoff which would appear legitimate for Ellermans. There was no doubt amongst the participants of the fact that there would be payoff, though there were no particularly obvious 'projects' going on. In one or two cases, a very high degree of anxiety was experienced, as participants experienced the confrontation between their internal needs and what they were presently doing outside. The other side of this was that the Workshop had very rigid timing, and did not fit the readiness of all those who contracted. All of these things meant that Mick Crews had quite a large 'change manager' role to play within Ellermans in between the sessions, and there was pressure for more work within the sessions on projects and payoff earlier on.

The other issue was around the staff/student ratio - three to eight was extremely high. On the second Workshop there were ten participants, and whereas for the first Workshop Philip had worked one-to-one, on the second one he worked predominantly with a group throughout, although the group had permeable boundaries. Fred and Tony however continued to work in one-to-one. In the long run the team felt that the norm would have to be one-to-many, but still with the flexibility to work one-to-one. As experience with the Workshops within Ellermans grew, the organisational necessity for the money-back guarantee diminished. It had a danger of becoming the famed Catch-22 for the participant, but even so, Philip's views on the feasibility of evaluation still lead him to want to keep it in some form. The form of the Workshop is still being developed, however, and at the time of writing Philip is only half-way through the second Workshop.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH**

By way of pulling together some of the themes running through what we have said so far, we would like to draw attention to what we believe are some of the implications of the reflective method for research. These can be loosely categorised into implications for the research process and implications for the content of research.

With regard to the research process perhaps what stands out most clearly is that the traditional academic split between teaching and research loses a lot of its meaning. That split is largely dependent upon a view of knowledge as concrete and existing outside of persons. This view of knowledge leads to a fairly logical division of labour between quarrying knowledge (researching) and selling it (teaching). We believe that in the field of human experience, at least, knowledge or more correctly knowing, is a process of discovering personal meaning. This implies regarding the research 'subject' as just that, i.e. not as research 'object'. The person becomes his own researcher. The role of the facilitator is to aid him in his research activity.

This leads on to implications for the process of educational research in particular. For a start it implies a move away from overt behavioural definitions of learning and their concomitant before/after externally evaluative research methods. What becomes important is the learner's own construction of the learning process. In NIPPER we have a potential vehicle for helping learners explore that process. But will it not influence the results of the research? Of course it will. But we believe that this is true of all research in the social sciences. Research is intervention. We would like to make sure that that intervention is facilitative and not alienating.

What of the content of research? Here there are a number of things in the field of management education and development which we would like to see explored more fully. Not surprisingly, high on our list would be the differing training ideologies and their impact on learners and the learning process. Here again NIPPER might serve as a useful vehicle. Perhaps equally predictably we would like to see research leading to a fuller understanding of the impact of technology on learning. In particular we would like it to lead to the development of less alienating and less over-determining computer software and hardware.

We have seen from the Ellerman's case study that the reflective method has implications for the design of whole learning 'events' and this is another area we believe deserves further attention and experimentation.

Finally we would like to see research leading to a greater understanding of the personal, organisational, and institutional pressures that often lead to the rejection, by learners, trainers, and training managers alike, of truly person-centred methods of learning. Clearly for all involved they represent a higher degree of risk-taking than conventional methods. But is this the only reason for rejection? Are there some definite 'contraindications'? If so what are they? Or could it be that we are totally misguided in our belief in their value? Reflection tells us we are not.

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