**THE HR PROFESSIONAL**

**Learning Outcome 5: ACTIVITY 1**

**SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY**

**Effective reflective practice**

**Aims:**

**The aim of this activity is to develop an understanding of the features and characteristics of effective reflection.**

**Learning objectives**

* To identify the features and characteristics of effective reflection on learning
* To develop understanding of double loop learning, learning on action and in action.

**Task brief**

Working in groups of 3, consider the following reflective accounts which were written by a 22-year old (Marianne) in her first job after graduating.

Using these accounts:

* Identify the features and characteristics of effective reflection
* How do these accounts illustrate the concepts of double loop learning, reflection in action and reflection on action.

**Account 1**

I had to take an agenda item to the weekly team meeting in my third week of working at PIGG PLC. I had to talk about the project that I am on (creating a new database for the management information system). I had done a presentation before and then I relied on my acting skills. Despite the acting, I spent quite a bit of time preparing it in the way that I have seen others make similar presentations.

The presentation at the last team meeting, given by my colleague, went well – she used Power Point and I decided to use it. I decided that a good presentation comes from good planning and having all the figures that anyone might request so I spent a long time in the preparation and I went in feeling confident.

However, I became nervous when I realised they were all waiting for me to speak and my nerves made my voice wobble. I did not know how to stop it. Early on, I noticed that people seemed not to understand what I was saying despite the PowerPoint. Using Power Point meant that people received my presentation both through what I was saying and what I had prepared on the slides. In a way that meant they got it twice but I noticed that Mrs Shaw (my boss) repeated bits of what I had said several times and once or twice answered questions for me. This made me feel uncomfortable. I felt it was quite patronising and I was upset. Later my colleagues said that she always does it. I was disappointed that my presentation did not seem to have gone well.

I thought about the presentation for several days and then talked with Mrs Shaw about the presentation (there was no-one else). She gave me a list of points for improvement next time. They included:

- putting less on Power Point;

- talking more slowly;

- calming myself down in some way.

I also have to write down the figures in a different way so that they can be understood better. She suggested that I should do a presentation to several of the team sometime next week so that I can improve my performance.

**Account 2**

I had to take an agenda item to the weekly team meeting in my third week of working at PIGG PLC. I had to talk about the project that I am on. I am creating a new database for the management information system. I had given a presentation before and that time I relied on my acting skills. I did realise that there were considerable differences between then and now, particularly in the situation (it was only fellow students and my tutor before). I was confident but I did spend quite a bit of time preparing. Because everyone else here uses Power Point, I felt I had better use it – though I realised that it was not for the best reasons. I also prepared lots of figures so that I could answer questions. I thought, at that stage, that any questions would involve requests for data. When I think back on the preparation that I did, I realise that I was desperately trying to prove that I could make a presentation as well as my colleague, who did the last one. I wanted to impress everyone. I had not realised there was so much to learn about presenting, and how much I needed to know about Power Point to use it properly.

When I set up the presentation in the meeting I tried to be calm but it did not work out. Early on the Power Point went wrong and I began to panic. Trying to pretend that I was cool and confident made the situation worse because I did not admit my difficulties and ask for help. The more I spoke, the more my voice went wobbly. I realised, from the kinds of questions that the others asked, that they did not understand what I was saying. They were asking for clarification – not the figures. I felt worse when Mrs Shaw, my boss, started to answer questions for me. I felt flustered and even less able to cope.

As a result of this poor presentation, my self-esteem is low at work now. I had thought I was doing all right in the company. After a few days, I went to see Mrs Shaw and we talked it over. I still feel that her interventions did not help me. Interestingly several of my colleagues commented that she always does that. It was probably her behaviour, more than anything else, that damaged my poise. Partly through talking over the presentation and the things that went wrong (but not, of course, her interventions), I can see several areas that I could get better. I need to know more about using Power Point – and to practice with it. I recognise, also, that my old acting skills might have given me initial confidence, but I needed more than a clear voice, especially when I lost my way with Power Point. Relying on a mass of figures was not right either. It was not figures they wanted. In retrospect, I could have put the figures on a handout. I am hoping to have a chance to try with a presentation, practicing with some of the team.

**Account 3**

I am writing this back in my office. It all happened 2 days ago.

Three weeks after I started at PIGG PLC had to take an agenda item to the team meeting. I was required to report on my progress in the project on which I am working. I am developing a new database for the management information system of the company. I was immediately worried. I was scared about not saying the right things and not being able to answer questions properly. I did a presentation in my course at university and felt the same about it initially. I was thinking then, like this time, I could use my acting skills. Both times that was helpful in maintaining my confidence at first, at least. Though the fact that I was all right last time through the whole presentation may not have helped me this time!

I decided to use Power Point. I was not very easy about its use because I have seen it go wrong so often. However, I have not seen anyone else give a presentation here without using it - and learning to use Power Point would be valuable. I was not sure, when it came to the session, whether I really knew enough about running Power Point. (How do you know when you know enough about something? – dummy runs, I suppose, but I couldn’t get the laptop when I wanted it).

When it came to the presentation, I really wanted to do it well – as well as the presentations were done the week before. Maybe I wanted too much to do well. Previous presentations have been interesting, informative and clear and I thought the handouts from them were good (I noticed that the best gave enough but not too much information).

In the event, the session was a disaster and has left me feeling uncomfortable in my work and I even worry about it at home. I need to think about why a simple presentation could have such an effect on me. The Power Point went wrong (I think I clicked on the wrong thing). My efforts to be calm and ‘cool’ failed and my voice went wobbly – that was, anyway, how it felt to me. My colleague actually said afterwards that I looked quite calm despite what I was feeling (I am not sure whether she meant it or was trying to help me). When I think back to that moment, if I had thought that I still looked calm (despite what I felt), I could have regained the situation. As it was, it went from bad to worse and I know that my state became obvious because Mrs Shaw, my boss, began to answer the questions that people were asking for me.

I am thinking about the awful presentation again – it was this time last week. I am reading what I wrote earlier about it. Now I return to it, I do have a slightly different perspective. I think that it was not as bad as it felt at the time. Several of my colleagues told me afterwards that Mrs Shaw always steps in to answer questions like that and they commented that I handled her intrusion well. That is interesting. I need to do some thinking about how to act next time to prevent this interruption from happening or to deal with the situation when she starts\*. I might look in the library for that book on assertiveness.

I have talked to Mrs Shaw now too. I notice that my confidence in her is not all that great while I am still feeling a bit cross. However, I am feeling more positive generally and I can begin to analyse what I could do better in the presentation. It is interesting to see the change in my attitude after a week. I need to think from the beginning about the process of giving a good presentation. I am not sure how helpful was my reliance on my acting skills\*. Acting helped my voice to be stronger and better paced, but I was not just trying to put over someone else’s lines but my own and I needed to be able to discuss matters in greater depth rather than just give the line\*.

I probably will use Power Point again. I have had a look in the manual and it suggests that you treat it as a tool – not let it dominate and not use it as a means of presenting myself. That is what I think I was doing. I need not only to know how to use it, but I need to feel sufficiently confident in its use so I can retrieve the situation when things go wrong. That means understanding more than just the sequence of actions\*.

As I am writing this, I am noticing how useful it is to go back over things I have written about before. I seem to be able to see the situation differently. The first time I wrote this, I felt that the presentation was dreadful and that I could not have done it differently. Then later I realised that there were things I did not know at the time (eg about Mrs Shaw and her habit of interrupting). I also recognise some of the areas in which I went wrong. At the time I could not see that. It was as if my low self-esteem got in the way. Knowing where I went wrong, and admitting the errors to myself gives me a chance to improve next time – and perhaps to help Mrs Shaw to improve in her behaviour towards us!

\*I have asterisked the points that I need to address in order to improve.

(**Source:** examples taken from Moon, J. (2001) ‘PDP working paper 4: reflection in higher education learning’, The Higher Education Academy)

**Outcomes:**

You will contribute to a discussion on reflective practice based on your reading and assessment of these three examples.

**Time:** 30minutes for group discussion.