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Dear Reader,

Isn't it puzzling, the paradoxes we have to deal with? Consider these few:

It is important to react and respond fast.	Carefully think through your decisions.
Finish as much as you can from your daily list.	Do quality work, not just quantity.
Don't postpone decisions.	Make sure to ponder all the factors, implications.
Give your opinion clearly, be assertive.	Check your assumptions.
The devil is in the details.	Focus on the larger picture.
Be proactive.	Take time to relax, recharge.
Learn from what you are doing.	Don't linger on what is already done; let go.

Actually, what is amazing is that the burnout rates aren't higher. This month we are sharing with you a tool that can help you find your way around those paradoxes. It is called Reflection. Do you have a moment?

Enjoy the reading!

Isabel Rimanoczy  
Editor

**Quote of the Month**

***"The unexamined experience is not worth living"***

*Socrates* - In Plato: Apology - (c.[427](#)-c.[347](#) BC)

# LIM NEWS



20 YEARS developing your leaders while they develop your business

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## REFLECTION

By Isabel Rimanoczy

**W**e Westerners are an action driven society. And action means movement. Standing still is not action. To pause is to stop the action. Sitting in silence is often viewed as being disengaged, as withdrawing from life's motion. We are encouraged to "Get going", to "just do it", to "step into action", to "think on our feet", to be "fast movers" and multi-taskers. As my mother was visiting in Florida, she said it would be difficult to share with her friends back home that she "just watched sunsets in silence". This focus on activity almost succeeds in positioning calm and reflection as something to be avoided in organizational life.

"Susan, you're next. As you know, we figure the Cadlink merger is going ahead. They expect their Wentworth localization unit to be merged with your marketing group. What do you think?"

"No problem, Charlie," Susan replied. "We can integrate them, no sweat."

"Wait a second," Charlie said, looking a little uneasy. "I heard they use an entirely different

CRM model. Don't you want to think about this a little?"

"Charlie," Susan insisted. "I'm working on a news release on the merger. I don't have time to think!"

*Source: Raelin, J. "I don't have time to think!" versus the art of reflective practice. Reflections, Vol. 4, Number 1, 2002.*

I remember an executive who used to lock his door in order to give himself some time for quiet reflection. This was not well regarded in an "open door" organizational culture, but his experience was that when he sat in silence, people would stop by to talk, indicating "now that I see you're not busy, let me share with you..."

While no one would accept that the act of thinking is not valued, the gap between saying it and doing it is significant. Even in the above vignette, I can imagine Charlie insisting to Susan "give it some thought", but that probably should be happening while driving, in the shower or on a train ride. At the workplace, many don't want to be seen as still, because stillness means being inactive. It is a bad image to give, you may get more projects assigned, or your performance may be questioned, your deadlines seen as too generous, and some may think you are slow or even lazy.

### **The Magic of Reflection**

Reflection is what happens to our image when we hold up a mirror. We are able to see what others get to see, but we otherwise don't.

Reflection is when a beam of light bounces and sheds light on something else.

Reflection is what happens to the half circles of the bridge over the lake, when they are mirrored in the water and become full circles.

Gosling and Mintzberg <sup>[1]</sup> remind us of the etymology: "The Latin origin of the word reflection lends a nice image; flect is a "fold," so to reflect is to re-fold. When you fold something, the surface comes face-to-face with itself. A reflective mind turns its attention to its own activity..." (Mintzberg, 2005)

By reflecting we distance ourselves from the immediacy of the events and we are able to ponder what happened. We can move beyond the obvious and see patterns, relationships, connections. We can establish cause-effects linkages, we can interpret behaviors and make meaning. We can see a larger

picture, a more systemic perspective. We can see the forest and not just the trees. Heifetz <sup>[2]</sup> calls this distance taking "moving from the dance floor to the balcony".

Reflection also allows us to distance ourselves from ourselves: to sit apart from "just being" and become the object of our own observation. We can explore motives, feelings, reactions, origins of our responses to circumstances. We are able to identify our assumptions, and in so doing we realize that something that appeared to be true has different interpretations for different people. We are able to scrutinize how our expectations and self image mold the way we address the world and others, and how they impact our automatic meaning making.

Philip W. McArthur <sup>[3]</sup> describes this as the Reflective observer role in his example:

<i>Reactive observer</i>	<i>Reflective observer</i>
"Sam [is challenging] our very	"What is it about Sam questioning this group questioning not only why we need to meet so that I find

purpose. He is often. . . . He [seems] to be questioning why we even [need] to meet at all!"	difficult?" "These are my interpretations. I need to test them publicly."
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<sup>[4]</sup> Lewin pointed to reflection as a key step for learning from experience, in order to extract conclusions that would inform the next experience. Action Reflection Learning, an adult learning methodology, utilizes reflection as one of the central columns that hold together any learning intervention. As Gosling and Mintzberg (op.cit.) agree, "managers can learn from each other in ways that can be startlingly effective, if given the chance to reflect personally and collectively on their own experience."

The human brain is capable of processing around 50,000 to 60,000 thoughts a day, according to Raelin<sup>[5]</sup>. "Unfortunately, as we encounter problems in our work, we tend to go no further than consulting our "solution database" to find an answer. Our solution database contains all the standard answers and assumptions we have used in our past to solve our problems." (Raelin, op.cit.). That means that when we respond quickly with solutions we miss the opportunity to explore the challenge in greater depth, and the quality of our responses is poorer.

<sup>[6]</sup> Chris Argyris observed that while solving a problem can be a valuable lesson learned for the next time we encounter a similar problem, the act of reflecting how we solved it (not just what solution we found) adds value and makes the learning more applicable. He calls this "double loop learning".

## **Reflective Practices**

Raelin (op.cit.) calls reflective practices the "stepping back to ponder the meaning of what has recently transpired to ourselves and to others in our immediate environment".

People use spontaneously different ways to reflect. We are listing here some of the reflective practices that can easily be adopted.

### **• Practices for individual reflection**

**Through writing:** Writing is not only a means to jot down our thoughts, it is actually a way to develop thoughts and to generate ideas and organize them.

- Use "sticky notes" to play around with ideas, as it allows us to group and regroup the ideas
- Write down your thoughts in a journal.
- Create a mind map<sup>[7]</sup> to lay down your thoughts/concerns

**Questions:** Questions are a powerful way to focus thinking. A question allows us to organize our concerns and speeds up the path to a solution. Write as many questions as you can think of, related to your challenge. Then select which one you need to answer first. A well phrased question is halfway to the answer.

**Stop-Reflect:** Take a couple of minutes when you are in midst of a complex problem, to pause, find the question you are trying to answer, and respond to it in writing. You will be amazed of the

power of the pause, the question and the writing, all combined.

**Check Assumptions:** Ask yourself what assumptions you have around the topic you are struggling with. Write them down. This exercise is a reflective strategy to distance yourself from the problem and shed new light on it.

**Why, What, How, So What?** When you are preparing yourself to make a request or to advocate for an issue, respond to these four questions. Why is this important? What is it about? How will it be/happen? So what are the practical implications? These four questions will help you reflect on your topic with more clarity, and organize better your ideas and your presentation.

**Use images:** As you are struggling with a dilemma, look around and find any image: it could be a picture, an object on your desk, something outside the window. Take a moment and think what message this image is giving you about your problem. Images connect with our deeper levels of knowing, and our unconscious mind will use the image you are focusing on to give you some new insights.

**Harvest lessons:** After a success or a problem, a challenge or a failure, take a moment to think what lessons you can extract from this event. How did you contribute to it? What would you do differently next time?

- **Reflection with others**

Reflection is also powerful when done with others. Some of the reflective practices are:

**Asking for feedback:** Feedback is a mirror held in front of us, and the impressions of the other person will "reflect" for us how we are perceived.

**Active listening:** To listen with the intention of fully grasping the meaning of the other person is to open new opportunities for reflecting on our own perspectives, for differentiating them, revising and expanding them.

**Dialogue:** Like active listening, dialogue opens a non-judging space where individuals can express themselves in a more candid way, which helps everyone to enter into a calm and reflective mode

**Thinking partners:** Find someone you feel comfortable to share your thoughts with, someone who will both challenge and support you in your thinking journeys. By being thinking partners to each other, you double the experience.

**Change roles:** Ask someone to play yourself, and you play the other person. This exercise acts as a mirror that reflects aspects hidden for yourself.

**Video recording:** Use an image recording device to see yourself in action when with others.

In addition to these reflective practices, there are many moments during the day we spontaneously use to reflect: when driving, swimming, listening to music, going for a walk. These are natural times when we process the stimuli of the day, without even being aware of it. Reflective practices like the ones listed in this article aim one step further. They help us to become aware of our thinking, they

help us take better control of our ideas, as they provide and set a frame to organize the information in a more clearer way.

If you don't believe it, do a Stop Reflect and ask yourself: What was the best thing I got out of this article? By answering this question, you will be reflecting and capturing a lesson that will stick. 

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[1] Jonathan Gosling, Henry Mintzberg. Reflect yourself: take time out of your busy day to reflect on yourself and where your team is headed. HR Magazine, Sept, 2004

[2] Sharon Daloz Parks. Leadership can be taught. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2005, p.50

[3] Philip W. Mc Arthur. Commentary to Raelin, J. "I don't have time to think!" versus the art of reflective practice. Reflections, Vol .4, Number 1, 2002, p 11.

[4] Kurt Lewin. Field Theory in Social Science New York: Harper, 1951.

[5] Joe Raelin. "I don't have time to think!" versus the art of reflective practice. Reflections, Vol 4, Number 1, 2002, p 2.

[6] Chris Argyris. Reasoning, Learning and Action: Individual and Organisational. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. 1982.

[7] Mind maps are a way of helping make notes that use only key words and images. They are quicker to make, and because of their visual quality much easier to remember and review. The non-linear nature of mind maps makes it easy to link and cross-reference different elements of the map.



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