

The Benefits of Structured Reflection as part of Adult Leadership Programming

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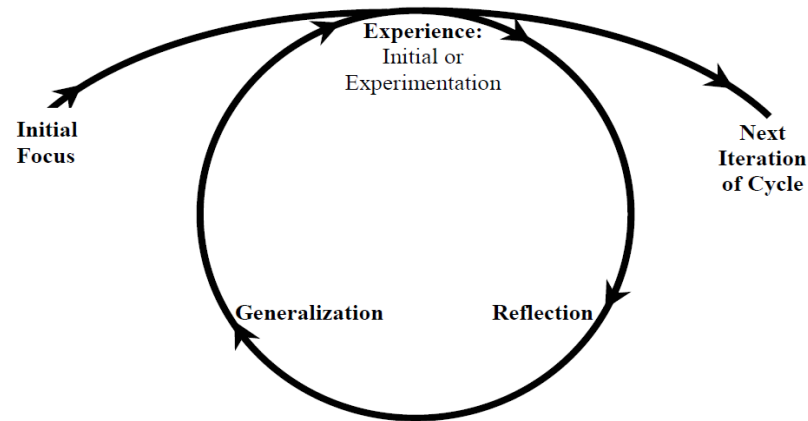
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Agricultural Leadership Programs

- Adult leaders develop leadership skills and study issues facing their industries to prepare themselves for leadership roles.
- Programs develop leaders that have an increased understanding of economic, political, and social issues (Miller, 1976).
- 39 programs established (Lindquist, 2010).
- Use a variety of teaching methods to develop leadership abilities and increase issue awareness and understanding (Carter & Rudd, 2000).

Experiential Learning

- The best way to learn about leadership is through experience (Zaleznik, 1993).
- Roberts (2006) model of experiential learning provides framework for agricultural leadership programs.



Reflection

- Learning does not take place if experiences are left unexamined (Herrera, 2010).
- Maximizes potential by allowing participants to “evaluate the significance of their experiences from a leadership perspective” (Densten & Gray, 2001, p. 119).
- Program design should incorporate reflection as it allows for participants to learn from their experiences and encourages lifelong learning through practice (Van de Valk, 2010).

Purpose

- To assess the benefits of structured reflection in adult education and leadership programming.

Objective

- Examine how the practice of reflection was used as a result of participation in an agricultural leadership program.

Methods

- Qualitative Study
- Wedgworth Leadership Institute for Agriculture and Natural Resources, Class VIII ($N = 30$)
- Participants asked to describe how they use reflection in their lives as a result of their leadership program experience
- Analyzed using Glaser's Constant Comparative Method (Glaser, 1965)

Findings

- Reflection is used to improve relationships and organizations
 - Professional
 - Increased awareness
 - Finding ways to improve the organization
 - Aids in leading others
 - Personal
 - Used in the contexts of family and marriage
 - Increased communication

“With important customer meetings, I now spend 10 to 15 minutes afterward reflecting on what I learned, how I can improve the business, and what is our next relationship.”

“In my personal relationships, reflection has made me a better communicator because I give more thought now to concerns and issues.”

Findings

- Reflection challenges what is known
 - Questioning initial stances
 - Understand where others are coming from
 - Reflect on topics accepted as the norm
 - Reflect on assumptions
 - Look for patterns

“It has made me rethink on issues within an organization that are accepted by me and now I have a personal view versus accepting the norm.”

Findings

- Reflection aids in decision making
 - In-tune with the impact of decisions
 - Helps to look at different outcomes before coming to a decision
 - Thinking things through

“Reflection has allowed me to slow down which in turn has allowed me to think things through and get the whole picture which prevents hasty decisions.”

Findings

- Reflection increases understanding of others
 - Look at both sides of an issue
 - Examine where others are coming from and their past experiences
 - Increased respect for other opinions and differences
 - Listening to others rather than planning what to say next
 - Consider reflection from a third party

“As we reflected during sessions, it was nice to hear what others gleaned from an experience and that what they got out of it was totally different than what I got.”

Findings

- Reflection aids in personal growth
 - Positive thoughts to make it through tough situations
 - Reflect on how I can be a better person
 - Work on delivery and communication
 - Goal setting
 - Taking time to learn how to do things differently

“Take stock. Each day on my 20 minute drive home, I measure my stock value. Did it go up? Go down? Stay the same? I look at what I can do to keep my stock going up.”

Findings

- Importance of reflection
 - Intentionality of reflection
 - Learned how to deeply reflect on issues
 - Seen as a valuable tool
 - Motivate others to reflect as an increased benefit to everyone
 - Increased sharing as a result of reflection

“I actually reflect on almost everything now. Prior to WLI, I would do this occasionally, but not knowingly. I now realize the importance of taking time to reflect.”

Discussion/ Implications

- Reflection is used in multiple contexts for various reasons.
- Once the practice of reflection is taught, it is applied in both personal and professional settings.
- Increased desire to understand how others approach issues and come to conclusions.
- Participants continued to reflect on program material.
- Curriculum moves beyond information to the utilization of skills and learning methods.

Recommendations

- Reassess the practice of reflection in later experiences
- Determine levels of reflection
- Utilize both individual and group reflection and assess differences
- Examine probing questions and impact on how reflection is utilized and by participation
- Providing opportunities to reflect within program structure

Questions?

Thank you.