The Integral Role of Reflective Practice in Achieving Performance Excellence

Camille Powell

University of Western States

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Dr. Ashley Duguay

Introduction

The following is a discussion on the integral role reflective practice plays in optimal performance for coaches and athletes. This discussion will describe some of the main models of reflection, compare and contrast the difference between reflection and rumination, and the effects of these on performance.

Reflective Practice

Applying reflective practices is an important component in sports coaching and leadership context, as it allows leaders and coaches the opportunity to effectively learn from their experiences to support the achievement of performance excellence (Aoyagi, et al., 2017). Reflective practice increases accountability, as it ensures that professionals are showing up fully and effectively for their teams by being self-aware and showing up at their best, and being accountable to the best practices (Anderson, et al., 2004). Reflective practice allows professionals to anticipate possible problems proactively, ultimately preventing avoidable issues (Keegan, 2016). Research indicates that deep learning occurs only when reflective approaches are utilized (Keegan, 2016). The goal of reflective practice is to develop in-vivo reflection, which is in the moment knowledge in action and the core of professional practice, as it guides professionals most effectively through complex decisions (Keegan, 2016).

Reflective practices help coaches and leaders make sense of their experiences, through increased self-awareness (Chow & Luzzeri, 2019; Anderson, et al., 2004). This increased self-awareness promotes learning, growth, and the development of knowledge-in-action (i.e., the ability to choose from different knowledge sources in an experience, such as experiences, prejudices, values, social norms, empirical knowledge, personal knowledge, ethical knowledge,

and aesthetic knowledge), increasing self-regulation, allowing for effective practices and optimal decision making, ultimately supporting performance excellence (Chow & Luzzeri, 2019; Anderson, et al., 2004; UK Coaching, 2015; Neil, et al., n.d.). Regular reflective practice promotes perspective taking, reasoning skills, logical analysis, and greater understanding of cause-and-effect relationships, allowing leaders and coaches to optimize and utilize their knowledge-in-action (Chow & Luzzeri, 2019; Anderson, et al., 2004; UK Coaching, 2015; Neil, et al., n.d.).

The main models of reflection include the following. First, Gibb's Model (1988), which is a six component, circular, on-going process that involves reflecting on an experience to gain greater understanding, knowledge, and learning to support experiences going forward (EPM, n.d.). Gibb's Model first component is Description, which involves simply describing what happened; the second component that follows is Feelings, which involves defining the feelings around the experience (e.g., do not evaluate, just describe feelings felt); the third component is Evaluation, which involves evaluating what went well and what did not go well; the fourth component is Analysis, which involves reflecting on what might have helped or hindered the situation (e.g., explore tools); the fifth component is Conclusion, which involves determining what will be done differently next time; the sixth component is Action-Plan, which involves creating an action-plan based on the conclusions and committing to this action (EPM, n.d.). This process remains on going and individuals' can continue to reflect on their previous experiences to refine their process and approach (EPM, n.d.).

Another model of reflective practice is asking a series of reflective questions, conversationally or written, including, "What went really well today with your coaching?" "What was an obstacle that you had?" "How did you overcome it?" "What got in the way?"

"What can you take from this experience to support a more successful outcome next time?"
(Chow & Luzzeri, 2019). Other models of reflective practice include the Post-Event Reflection
which involves: Self-explanation (i.e., identifying the causes or explanations of various
outcomes, allowing individuals to decide more desirable behaviors); Data verification (i.e.,
reflecting on what worked well in a poor performance or what did not work well in a good
performance); and task feedback (i.e., direct feedback about the situation; What has been learned
from the experience?") (Ellis, et al., 2014).

The PER promotes competence by providing a comprehensive self-evaluation of one's
ability and autonomy by providing agency in one's process for improvement (Ellis, 2014).
Another model of reflective practice, is using SMS-diary protocol, involving three questions to
capture a full day and standardizing routine for mindful self-reflections, such as "1) How have
you experienced your mood today? (on a scale 1–10); 2) How have you experienced your energy
level today? (on a scale 1–10); 3) Briefly describe a highlight of your today (Chow & Luzzeri,
2019). The preceding questions allows individuals to establish a routine and become more
mindful of various moments throughout their day, allowing them to better self-regulate and make
more effective decisions (Chow & Luzzeri, 2019).

The difference between reflection and rumination is reflective practice allows
practitioners to explore their decisions and experiences to increase their understanding of and
manage themselves in practice (Anderson, et al., 2004). Reflective practice is the deliberate,
systematic, critical, creative thinking that involves is thoughtfully analyzing oneself, seeking
growth and greater understanding of the self in action; being aware of strengths, limitations, self-
interests, prejudices, and frustrations, allowing oneself to self-regulate and be most effective
(Keegan, 2016). Reflective practice is thinking about our work in creative, problem-solving

ways, that does not elicit emotional distress and allows us to take control of our thoughts in action (Winch, 2016).

In contrast, rumination is considered the greatest obstruction of our self-care and recovery (Winch, 2016). Rumination is the repetitive circulation of upsetting thoughts, stressors, and distressing things in our minds (Winch, 2016). Ruminating about mistakes or anticipating future outcomes, are unproductive and depleting (Winch, 2016). Ruminating about our work, replaying the same things repeatedly in our minds significantly disrupts our ability to recover and recharge (Winch, 2016). The more we ruminate, the more our sleep and healthy diet are disturbed, increasing our risk of cardiovascular disease, impairing our executive functioning, depleting the skills that we need to function at our best, and damaging our emotional wellness and personal relationships (Winch, 2016). Ruminating is involuntary, intrusive, upsetting, and difficult to resist, as unfinished business in our minds feels urgent (Winch, 2016). Rumination can result in greater stress and burnout, minimizing leader's and coaches' ability to address the needs of their teams, as their mental, physical, and emotional state is drained and oriented towards threat appraisals, inhibiting them from effectively acknowledging the emotional needs of their followers and making optimal decisions (Chamarro-Premuzic, 2020).

Coaches and leaders in sports contexts are subjected to complex and unpredictable performance demands that can result in stress and burnout (Chow & Luzzeri, 2019). Using reflective practices assists coaches and leaders in recognizing the demands that they face, their responses to these demands, and the impact on their own and their athletes' performance and well-being (Chow & Luzzeri, 2019). Having an awareness of these components provides coaches and leaders the opportunity to decide the most constructive actions, mitigating rumination and supporting overall well-being and performance excellence (Chow & Luzzeri, 2019).

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