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**Title**

**Reflective Practice as a Threshold Concept : Implications for Teaching and Learning**

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**Abstract :**

Threshold concepts have received considerable attention in the literature since their development by Meyer and Land (2003), but while there has been some interest in relation to their applicability to management and business disciplines, this has been limited and threshold concepts have yet 'to significantly impact the field of management education (Hibbert and Cunliffe 2015). The aim of this paper is to explore the extent to which reflective practice can be considered as a threshold concept, with the scope of the study being graduate students who participated in postgraduate programmes in Human Resource Management and Development. The discussion draws on data from eighteen interviews with HR professionals who had undertaken a Masters or Postgraduate Diploma in HR at one of three participating universities. The findings show that the concept of 'threshold' is highly relevant to reflective practice and demonstrates that reflective practice in the broadest sense can offer considerable value to postgraduate management students in relation to supporting their learning of both the technical and behavioural elements of their studies. Furthermore the findings can offer deeper insights into the integration of formal teaching processes on reflective practice.

*Key words;* *Reflective practice; threshold concepts; reflexivity; critical reflection*

**Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to explore the extent to which reflective practice can be considered as a threshold concept (Meyer and Land 2003; 2005). While there has been some recent consideration of the relationship between reflective practice (in its broadest sense) and threshold concepts (see Hibbert 2009; Hibbert 2012; Wright and Gilmore 2013; Hawkins and Edwards 2015), the focus of their research has tended to be on students who are still undertaking their undergraduate or postgraduate studies. This paper draws on data from postgraduate students who have completed their studies in Human Resource Management and Development, and explores the extent to which their accounts of using reflective practice resonate with the features of threshold concepts.   Through the overt utilization of this concept, the value of integrating reflective practice into the curriculum becomes clearer, together with an increased understanding of how the development of these skills might most effectively be taught.

The paper develops as follows; first in order to position the study the underpinning literature is explored in relation to three areas: the attributes and significance of threshold concepts; the value and purpose of introducing reflective practice into the curriculum and a brief review of the debates on the activities of reflection, critical reflection and reflexivity.   An outline of the methodology is then presented, followed by a discussion of the findings and the conclusions that have arisen from these findings in relation to the teaching of reflective practice within the management curriculum.

**Understanding Threshold Concepts**

Threshold concepts have variously been described or defined as 'conceptual gateways, opening up new and previously inaccessible ways of thinking' (Yip and Raelin 2011) or  'a particular basis for differentiating between core learning outcomes that represent seeing things in new ways and those that do not.' (Hibbert and Cunliffe 2013).    Thus they go beyond basic or core concepts,  as  learners engaged with these types of concepts  need to be able to deal with and grasp

ambiguous and complex knowledge (Perkins 2005 cited in Yip and Raelin 2011) and through this process move to developing transformative changes in practice.

Since first introduced by Meyer and Land (2003; 2005) threshold concepts have increasingly been used across a range of disciplines including engineering, economics, computer science and accounting (Yip and Raelin 2011) but is still relatively unexplored in management education (Vidal et.al. 2015). The initial emphasis on what might be termed more 'practical' disciplines may be down to the view that threshold concepts are more easily identified in subject areas 'where there is a relatively greater degree of consensus on what constitutes a body of knowledge' (Meyer and Land 2003, p. 9) such as those cited above; however, Cunliffe and Hibbert (2013) have extended the debate, by explicitly arguing that threshold concepts can be identified in leadership and management studies through an examination of how students relate theory to practice. Thus discussions have moved to consider threshold concepts in the context of management education, in particular leadership practice (see Hawkins and Edwards 2015; Vidal et.al. 2015); Hibbert and Cunliffe 2013; Yip and Raelin 2013;; Wright and Gilmore 2012)

Threshold concepts are considered to contain the following attributes - they are transformative, leading to a new and different way of thinking and understanding; irreversible, once known never forgotten; integrative, in that they can enable the development of understanding patterns and connections and can be 'troublesome', as new ways of thinking can require the questioning of long-held assumptions (Meyer and Land 2003; 2005). Threshold concepts may also be 'counter-intuitive' (Meyer and Land 2005 p.373) and involve the development of new discourses. A fifth attribute, entitled 'boundaries', is perhaps harder to classify and some later commentaries have omitted this attribute from their discussions. Nevertheless, in this context this attribute has validity as it refers to the way in which one threshold concept is likely to overlap or intrude on another - gateways into gateways! Threshold concepts thus resonate with the processes and outcomes of reflective practice: the aim of reflective practice in whichever discipline it is applied, is to bring

about change at least at an individual, if not at organisational level (Rigg and Trehan 2010; McKay and Tymon 2013); however, it also acknowledged that there is considerable ambiguity in relation to the definition of reflective practice, which is considered in the next section.

**Reflection, Critical Reflection and Reflexivity**
The concept of reflective practice has been energetically debated, and it is not the intention here to explore ground previously effectively covered (see, for example, Kinsella 2010) but, in the context of this research a consideration of the breadth of terminology that reflective practice covers is required.

Reflection involves 'thinking about past or ongoing experience of events, situations or actions so as to make sense of them, potentially with a view to informing future choices, decisions or actions' (Reynolds 2011, p.5) as well as being 'a generic term for those and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understanding and appreciation' (Boud et al 1985 p.19). Reflective practice provides opportunities for transforming experience into learning and through the questioning of previously held to assumptions lead to increased understanding of the complex and ambiguous nature of organisational life (Griggs et.al 2015; Siebert and Walsh 2013). Quinn (2013) notes that there is broad consensus that reflective practice, contains a number of key features, including, the active role of the learner in engaging in reflection; the use of reflection to make sense of new knowledge and understanding, together with relating 'subjective perception and objective analysis to gain clearer understanding of issues to enable the surfacing of underlying tensions' (p.11).

It can therefore be argued that the concept of reflection is a relatively simple one, involving little more than looking back on an event or activity which may or may not have gone well, and considering future actions. In a similar vein its value been questioned on the grounds that it is too often used as an instrumental tool for organizational development, involving little more than 'speculative rumination'

(Mackay and Tynon p.644). In addition, there are concerns that reflective practice is overly concerned with the individual rather than group perspective, thus ignoring the social context, and frequently critiqued as being too focused on individual development (ibid.), although there appears to be little explanation as to why this in itself is problematic. It is also interesting to note that Quinn (2013) suggests that that reflection includes the surfacing of underlying perceptions, whereas some commentators would argue that this is only relevant in the context of critical reflection.

It has been convincingly argued that the concepts of reflection, critical reflection and reflexivity form a continuum (Cunliffe 2004; Finlay 2008). Thus, at one end of the continuum there is the activity of reflection, that is, simply 'thinking about' something after the event; at the other end stands reflexivity: defined as a practice of *critical self*-reflection, which in turn involves the process of reflecting critically on the impact of an individual's own background, (assumptions, positioning, feelings, behaviour) while also attending to the impact of the wider organisational, social and political context (Finlay 2008).

Critical reflection lies somewhere in between, 'engaging participants in a process of drawing from critical perspectives to make connections between their learning and work experiences, to understand and change interpersonal and organisational practices.' (Rigg and Trehan 2008 p.374). Here the emphasis is on the workplace, and Van Woerkom and Croon (2008) offer a definition specifically linked to workplace practices, promoting critical reflection in the workplace as 'a set of connected activities carried out individually or with others, aimed at optimizing individual or collective practices, or critically analyzing and trying to change organisation or individual values' (p.318). They also argue that there is limited consideration of critical reflection in the workplace, and little consistency in theorising the concept; to this end provided an 'inventory' of work behaviours associated with critical reflection, which included openness about errors or mistakes, willingness to take feedback, challenging group-think and a willingness to

experiment. In addition, they include Cunliffe's (2004) term, career awareness, that is, an interest in exploring one's own career and professional identity within the workplace. Rigg and Trehan (2008) offer further conceptual clarification with their note that 'while reflection focuses on the immediate, presenting details of a task or problem, critical reflection involves an analysis of the power and control, and an examination of the taken-for-granteds within which the task or problem is situated' (p.14). This is important both in terms of its attention to organisational power and privilege (see also Lawless and McQue, 2008) to which reflection might usefully be directed and in highlighting the importance of the social lens through which reflective practice inevitably must take place.

**Threshold Concepts and Management Learning**

It was noted earlier that the concept of threshold concepts has to date received less attention in management learning than in other disciplines. However, that is not to say it has been completely underexplored. In particular, there has been interest in relating threshold concepts to leadership practice with a postgraduate management development programme (Yip and Raelin 2011), as well as within undergraduate programmes (Vidal et.al. 2015; Wright and Gilmore 2012).

Yip and Raelin (2011) make the point that while the concepts and attributes have been identified in business and economics (citing depreciation and opportunity costs respectively) there has been little discussion around leadership development, as it is difficult for threshold concepts to 'unfold without any attachment to practice' (p.335). This resonates with the need to contextualise or actively apply concepts if they are to be transformative but may be challenging for learners on some formal management development programmes when they are divorced from practice. We might suggest, therefore, that threshold concepts can only be considered as such if the concept can be specifically related to some form of practice. Such a position is lent support by Yip and Raelin in their consideration of the 'modalities' that work together to support the concept. They provide three different aspects - *variation* :

working with different models, learning through observation, providing a psychologically safe environment which enabled the questioning of alternative leadership models; *enactment* : experiential exercises such as role playing; action learning; and *reflection*: through the use of journaling, self-assessment and peer feedback.

Within the management development field however, it is not only leadership that has been explored as a threshold concept; Hibbert (2009) specifically explores reflexivity, rather than reflection or reflexive practice, as a threshold concept. Drawing on data from a small group of MBA students he argues that reflexivity meets the criteria for threshold concepts and should be treated as such. He makes the point that reflexivity, from initially a theoretical perspective, meets four of the five criteria for a threshold concept, that is, troublesome knowledge, irreversibility, integrative and transformative both in terms of thought and action.

In summary, this paper explores the relationship between threshold concepts and reflective practice; it also notes that the debate about the distinctions between reflection, critical reflection and reflexivity is ongoing. In order to prevent losing our way down a semantic dead end we adopt, initially at least, a pragmatic position. Drawing upon Stewart (2008) we construct reflective practice as being about 'questioning established practice and assumptions which inform it', and to a depth which leads to change. Three key points must be made in relation to this position. First it reflects a common focus - at least amongst the institutions party to this paper (though see also Griggs et. al. 2015) – in terms of the aspirations of our approach to the reflective practice curriculum and its teaching to postgraduate and professional HR management students. Secondly, and critically in the context of this paper, our position on what constitutes reflective practice and our approach to its teaching, sit comfortably with our discussion, above, on the defining attributes of a threshold concept (and see Methodology). Finally, there is value as we dig deeper into the talk of our respondents to revisit potentially important distinctions in relation to reflection, critical reflection and reflexivity in order to generate appropriately

nuanced conclusions about workplace practice in relation to 'threshold' and importantly, considered implications for teaching and learning.


**Methodology**

The paper draws on a collaborative study across three universities which sought to provide an in-depth understanding of the development of reflective practice skills. Through the use of qualitative data the research explored eighteen HR professionals' interpretations of themselves as reflective practitioners in the context of their daily and weekly HR work.   While it is acknowledged there has been considerable research on post graduate and professional students' experiences of reflective practice (see Yip and Raelin 2013; Lawless et.al. 2012; Lawless and McQue 2008 this research has tended to take place while the student participants were still engaged on the programme.  There appears to be limited research into graduate students who have completed their studies and which this research was an attempt to redress.

The participants were graduates from HR professional courses at the three collaborating universities. A purposive sample was drawn from past students who had completed a Chartered Instituted to Personnel and Development (CIPD) approved professional programme in HRM/D between six months and three years previously and who agreed to take part in the research. Importantly this ensured that participants were no longer 'students' and had had sufficient time to re-establish a full-time role in work. Participants were mixed in terms of gender, age and were drawn from the private, public and not-for-profit sector.

It needs to be noted that all the programmes were approved by the CIPD and thus learning outcomes for the programme across the three universities were aligned with the CIPD Advanced Standards, which enabled consistency of approach in relation to the data collection process as graduates of the programme would have had, broadly speaking, similar experiences in terms of both input and assessment.

Thus space was made for the teaching of reflective practice with the programme as a whole (Hibbert 2013) and a range of activities were integrated into the curriculum, such as self-assessment, coaching, feedback exercises, many of which have been advocated in the literature as a way of supporting and enabling reflective practice (see Cunliffe 2004; Reynolds 2007; Holden and Griggs 2011; Hibbert 2012).

Initial data analysis was undertaken using template analysis, initially using construct or *a priori* coding, before moving onto to identify emergent or *nvivo* themes. Some of the key features which arose in the first stage of the analysis were the troublesome nature of developing reflective skills but also the transformative accounts when the concept was grasped. This led to further interrogation of the data to establish whether the attributes of threshold concepts were discernable in the narratives with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of the value of the learning and teaching approaches to reflective practice

**Reflective Practice as a Threshold Concept**
The aim of this paper was to explore the extent to which graduates construction of reflective practice resonate with the foundations of threshold concepts, that is, they have transformative potential, are integrative and irreversible, potentially troublesome, and that such concepts provide boundaries or stepping stones to alternative and possibly overlapping concepts. We also looked at the extent to which evidence supporting such a concept is firmly rooted in the workplace
It should be noted that the exploration of boundaries and reflective practice has been contained within the earlier debate of the concept.

Table 1 below provides a summary of the ways in which participants talked about reflective practice, which in turn, are linked to the components of threshold concepts. While it is acknowledged that the research draws on a limited number of cases, the data supports the proposition that reflective practice can be defined as a threshold concept; it is certainly the case that the development of reflective practice

skills led to an increased understanding of the theory and knowledge concepts that underpinned all the programmes, and this learning should not be under-estimated; as well as transformational, the reflections on the concepts enabled links to be made between the different modules, which in turn led to students understanding of how the various concepts could be related to each other.

> **....** then you start to see the benefits [of reflection], you start to understand it, you start to relate it back to the course, back to what you've learned, back to the theory and then how you can actually utilise it going forward ... (Tim)

Many of the accounts indicated that the introduction and development of the concept of reflective practice was transformative, either through believing that they had a better handle on individual relationship management or believed that they handled or managed their team more effectively. Not only did the application for reflective practice lead to a transformation of understanding key management concepts, but individual practice was also changed. Participants reported increased confidence and assertiveness; a willingness to explore issues from alternative perspectives, and a perception that this development was recognized by others, resulting in increased confidence in using their new found expertise and a providing a sense of professional identity.

A clear constraint on any assessment of the extent to which a grasp of the concept of reflection is irreversible, is problematic in relation to the development of management, leadership and HR skills without undertaking a more longitudinal approach to the research. Nevertheless, again participants commented on their 'new learning' and given the amount of attention that participants gave to their own self-development, increase in confidence, the language the participants employed and the increasing awareness of their own professional identity gave a strong indication that such change was unlikely to be reversed.

It is also worth noting that those who reported that they found reflective practice 'troublesome', were on the whole, those who also reported more substantial changes, either in relation to dealing with issues in the workplace more effectively or as noted above, an increased confidence in being able to speak up and express their point of view.

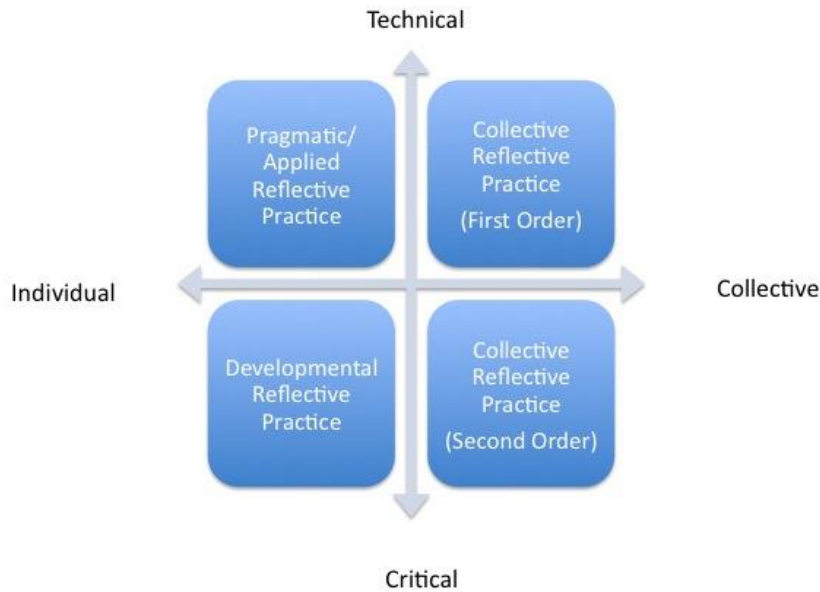**Table 1: Comments supporting reflective practice as a threshold concept**

| Transformational | ... you start to realise ... that everybody has an opinion and a point of view and ... it made me more aware of everybody and people's opinions more so and why people think the way that they think as well. (Sue)<br><br>But just trying and having the confidence to try a few things out and just seeing how it went ... in the past,... I'd have just thought 'oh no, I did something wrong', and I'd just leave it there. Whereas now, I might go in with a different approach and see if I can kind of fix it, or I might ask to meet with that person and take on a more assertive colleague ... (Izzy)<br><br>Because it's so hard to do – it felt like a chore, because I didn't get it, it wasn't something I enjoyed. If I could have got away without doing it; I really wouldn't have done it. But, now I've got a far more different attitude to it ... Sometimes you have to learn these things the hard way through difficult conversations. They often say you learn more, when you do mistakes. (Tim) |
|---|---|
| Integrative | We were perceiving things differently because we ... participated in a lot of discussions and research and so on that we were aware of and theories and so on and when we went back to work something triggered like, you know, someone asked me a question and I felt; oh hang on actually we talked about this in a seminar. (Marie)<br><br>… all the assignments were basically based on your experience, that's the great part here about post graduate studies; you need to have experience you need knowledge; you need to start thinking about what you're doing and how can you transfer this to your workplace |

| | |
|---|---|
| Troublesome | So it came as a bit of a rude awakening, that I had to actually do reflective statements and write about my feelings and what I felt about things. And at first that felt quite awkward, because of studying Law I think it had forced me into a position where you write opinions but you write it in the third person, so you never ... really put your own views or your own feelings, or reflect on barriers (Gary)<br><br>... the toughest parts of that course were the self-evaluation part – I'm not very great at it and not very good when it comes to ones-to-ones, I've never been great at coming out with ideas of where I can improve, or what I think I've done well. I've always struggled with that part of it ... (and) it was the worst part of the course. (Tim) |
| Irreversable | You are currently reflecting because when you hear critical thinking and reflection you couldn't really understand what that meant. Then when it was explained to us, it was like ... aahaa! (Marie)<br><br>**....** then you start to see the benefits, you start to understand it, you start to relate it back to the course, back to what you've learned, back to the theory and then how you can actually utilise it going forward, whereas it wasn't until that penny dropped that I was able to say 'right'. I'd become comfortable enough in my own skin to be able to do this, I think that's what it's got to be. (Tim) |

**Variations in Reflective Practice**

The above table does not distinguish between the different concepts of reflective practice, i.e. reflection, critical reflection and reflexivity. In part, this is because such distinctions were not part of our respondents talk and indeed we took care to avoid leading them down such a pathway. What the data does show, however, is the multi-layered nature of reflective practice, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1 : Approaches to reflective practice**



The matrix in Figure 1 above aims to provide an overview of the types of reflective practice being undertaken by participants in this research.   The top left hand side box relates to individual reflection on specific work -related activities, often 'on the hoof',  tending towards, but not exclusively, reflection in action,  thinking about what went wrong and what could be done better.  In the bottom left hand box development reflection sees reflective practice taking a more critical approach, probably relating more to behaviour than task, taking the social context into consideration and having multiple perspectives; the data clearly suggests that many of the individuals engaging in pragmatic reflection on day-to-day activities are   equally able to undertake more nuanced reflection on behaviours which might inform action.  The right hand matrix relates to the  examples of group reflection, which tended to take the form of team explorations of critical incidents. There were several examples of this activity, which is encouraging given the interest in group rather than individual

reflection although it is also acknowledged that there appeared to be little evidence of these debriefings resulting in double-loop learning.

The data shows that reflective practice encompasses a number of activities, ranging from, at one end, relative simple individual reflection (what might be called the 'pragmatic reflection') through to more critical reflection being undertaken as a group activity; in addition, reflection was also related to changing behaviours as well as reflection on the tasks undertaken.    Thus while the focus of reflective practice by our participants appears to be more on the task rather than behaviours, the data indicates that nevertheless reflective thinking at any level has value in the organisational context; thus  it is recognized that at times, pragmatic reflection is needed, and at other times, a more critical perspective needs to be taken whether on an individual and group basis:

> So we would talk about technical, almost physical elements. So sending out letters, timescales, whatever. So in a sense what we do is... what do we do…? we ask factual questions, first and foremost, "What happened, when did it happen?" blah-blah, and we analyse that, and so on and so forth, and then we go on to ask the more difficult questions  to answer, which are probably the whys and "How did we get to that position and did we do it right? Could we have done it in a different way?" and almost an evaluation of modes of dealing with the case. (Gary)

Nor should it be assumed that those undertaking or talking about pragmatic reflection  will not undertake more in-depth or  'developmental reflection';  however, in relation to the approaches to reflective practice there was limited evidence of reflection being undertaken which met with Reynolds' (1998) criteria,  in particular, 'paying attention to power relations' and 'concerned with emancipation' (p.189), although there was the occasional glimpse of this which related to real attempts to perceive issues from alternative perspectives, and recognize the role that individuals have impacts on their perceptions:

'what I'd missed is do they actually want to be a team….I had to re-think what I wanted and what my perception of these people was before we started….it was a proper shift' (Jackie)

What was clear from the discussions was that participants placed a high value on the content of the programme - it again needs to be noted that across the three universities, the content and learning outcomes of the taught modules would have been similar in order for all of them to be approved by the CIPD.  It is also probably fair to say that the majority of the  graduates interviewed were relatively instrumental in their approach to the programme, and adopting a highly strategic approach to their studies, given that they had undertaken their course to obtain their CIPD qualification.  Thus the initial part of the interviews with the participants suggested that where there had been any transformation of practice, this  was mainly due to the development of their knowledge and understanding of HR and management concepts,  with the research project being a key part of this development..  However, as the discussions continued, there emerged  a significant relationship between the theoretical part of the programme and the use of reflective practice in that participants were using their new-found knowledge to change their understanding of a given situation, either through the research project or through discussion in class during the taught part of the programme.

(The course) gave me an armoury, or a toolkit I think, is what I would say, and a range of techniques and a range of initiatives I could try and apply, models that I could try and say, "Well does this fit here?"  (Gary)

Well I think obviously the work you had to do in terms of your assignments and the research project most definitely. You're having to reference and back up and do your reading and do your research and everything ...  it was very much about your justification as to what you thought (Jackie)

These comments show that reflective practice is used to integrate the different strands of knowledge on the programme into a coherent whole, suggesting that the link is not necessarily or simply a functionalist transfer of some 'best practice' technique, but a deeper understanding of HR generally.  Thus for a number of the participants, while the responses to the questions around the value of the programme tended to provoke reference to the knowledge development,  for example, talent management or people resourcing,  it was the introduction to reflective learning and practice that characterised their lasting impressions of the course.

**Discussion**

Responses from the participants in this research provided evidence for reflective practice to be conceived as a threshold concept; given the importance placed on threshold concepts as 'gateways' to higher knowledge and understanding (Meyer and Land 2003)  these findings provide support for the continued emphasis on its value in the management and business curriculum, at least at post-graduate level, given that threshold concepts offer ''a particular basis for differentiating between core learning outcomes that represent 'seeing things in a new way' and those that do not.'' (ibid. p. 412).  It is worth noting that much of the literature on threshold concepts focuses on the application of the concept to practice; in management studies this is difficult to achieve with students who have limited knowledge of the workplace.    However, for professional part-time postgraduate students on management programmes, there is an important relationship between the programme as a whole, the professional knowledge base, and formal reflective practice teaching;  this relationship impacts on the way the knowledge is interpreted and applied within the work setting, while supporting an emerging sense of professional identity.   Indeed, the research undertaken by Yip and Raelin (2011), show that the use of reflective practice is key to understanding the threshold concepts of situational and shared leadership, suggesting the need for reflective practice to run alongside the teaching and learning of management theory and practice.

Furthermore, the data highlights the continuing issue of what constitutes 'valid' reflective practice; the data from this research suggests that the pre-occupation with critical reflection may have resulted in the value of more 'applied' reflection being under-estimated, which in turn has implications for teaching and learning. It is also worth noting that the activity of applying theory to practice has not always been considered to be part of the reflective practice discourse; the data suggests that from the practitioner perspective the increase in confidence and the development of their professional identify is a result of both the learning of theoretical concepts, the sharing of ideas with other professionals, supported by opportunities to reflect in a structured and meaningful way and it is also worth noting that the most interesting changes seem more about a way of thinking rather than applying a sequential model of reflection.

However, it is also suggested that teaching reflection requires more engagement with critical thinking and concepts of reflexivity as well as the more traditional sequential models of reflection (Lawless and McQue 2012), but it is worth noting that there is little evidence of the 'taught' techniques being used in the workplace which demonstrates a need to provide a more varied and flexible approach to supporting reflective practice in the classroom. Approaches might include validating both written and oral reflection, as well making provision for the development of both individual and group reflection.

Taken as a whole, the discourse of the participants did not indicate any strong adherence or commitment to moving from performance driven reflection to taking a more questioning stance, through, for example, challenging underlying assumptions or going beyond the presenting problem. Nevertheless, taking Cunliffe's (2004) point that critical reflection does require engagement with the concept of career awareness, there was considerable evidence, as noted previously, of reflective practice having a role to play in support of professional development - and it is probably not a co-incidence that of the eighteen participants, thirteen had changed

job roles at least once since completing the either in the same or a different organisation.

**Conclusion**

The findings from this paper supports the proposition that reflective practice should be considered as a threshold concept;   furthermore, the value of this paper lies in the engagement with professional postgraduate students who have completed their studies, enabling us to explore the extent to which the use of this important concept is integrated into workplace practice.

While the evidence that our participants engage at the deepest level with reflective practice, nevertheless the requirement to actively participate in reflective practice appears to be a crucial part of the graduates' professional development emphasising the need to continue to provide opportunities not just to link theory to practice, but also enable reflections on those real-life situations as well as encourage students to engage in more in-depth reflection.   While noting the concerns regarding both the teaching and the assessment of reflective practice (Bourner 2003),  it is unlikely that the impact of reflection would have been as strong if students did not have any requirement to undertake it.

Reflection has been described as a 'stepping stone' to reflexivity and critical reflection (Cunliffe 2004)  with the implication that the core concept of reflection needs to be understood first prior to taking a more critical perspective. In relation to reflective practice 'scaffolding' (Meyer and Land 2003) may be an appropriate way of encouraging and enabling students to move from using reflection as a sense-making activity, focussing on the  application of  theory to practice, to  developing a more reflexive position.  Given that reflective practice can encompass a range of dimensions, in relation to both level and focus (Roberts n.d.)  it would seem appropriate to integrate reflective practice across the full range of learning and teaching activities.  However, while Meyer and Land (2005) posit that the use of building blocks or 'scaffolding' can be of value in developing understanding of key

concepts, they note the need to ensure that the concept is not over-simplified as a result.

It has been suggested that reflective practice has particular issues for HR professionals, given that they may be seen as the guardians of responsible practice within organisations and their role is  often marked by 'change, uncertainty and ambiguity' (Griggs et. al. 2015 p.204).  In addition, to effectively engage with critical reflection, there is a need to provide input on, for example, power and politics in organisations (see Lawless and McQue 2008). However, while the CIPD espouses the importance of reflection, in its efforts to align itself more explicitly to business strategy, those areas most closely related to critical management have been downplayed in the current curriculum.   Furthermore, an issue that constantly arises in critical reflection, particularly for students new to the concepts and / or holding relatively junior positions in organisations, being encouraged to challenge senior management and question the status quo is likely to result in considerable dissonance (Griggs et.al. 2015). The acknowledgment of the affective and emotional,  as well as the academic elements of reflective learning (Boud et.al. 2006)  is important here; the potential for reflective practice to generate powerful emotions, may  be overlooked by educators with more interest in the technical aspects of reflection (Boud and Walker 1998) and needs to be carefully managed (Cunliffe and Hibbert 2013).  The identification of reflective practice as a threshold concept in the context of professional postgraduate management programmes is a useful step in moving towards a more integrated and discursive approach to the integration of reflective practice into the curriculum.

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