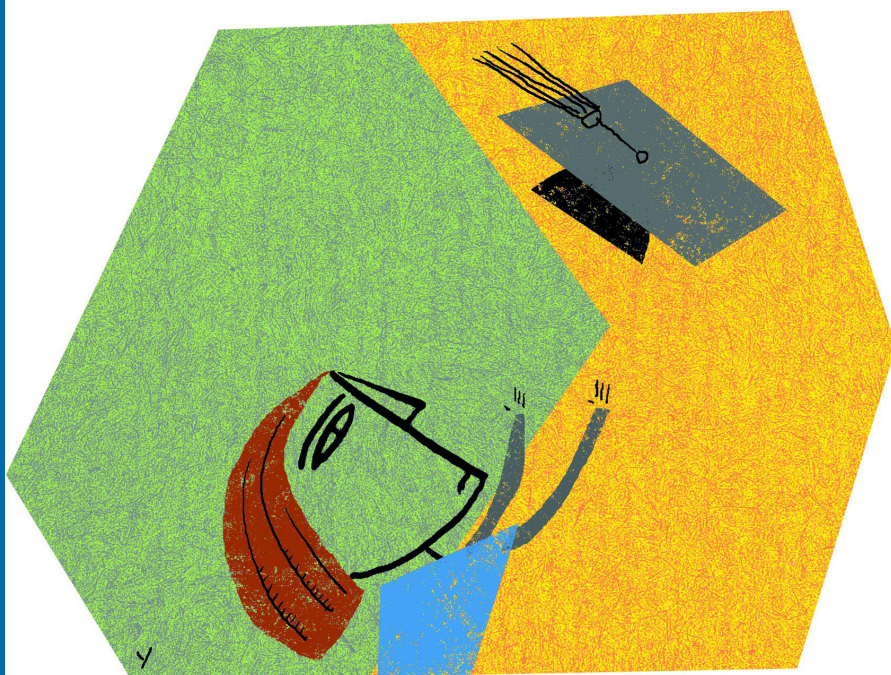




A New Method For Executive Development

Henry Mintzberg (John Cleghorn Professor of Management Studies in the Desautels Faculty of Management at McGill University in Montreal) and Edgar Schein (Sloan Fellows Professor of Management Emeritus at the MIT Sloan School of Management) share their experiences of how real learning occurs, and reflect on why a new method for executive education, developed by Mintzberg with his stepson, Phil LeNir, is proving to be so effective. The first part of this contribution is an abridged extract of an interview between Mintzberg and Art Kleiner, 'Management by Reflection', published in Strategy and Business in March 2010 and reproduced with Art Kleiner's permission. The second part is a short article by Schein in which he offers his reflections about how a group can become a learning unit which he gleaned from participating in a Human Relations workshop in Bethel, Maine in 1959.

Interview with Henry Mintzberg and article by Edgar Schein



Reflecting And Learning From Your Own Experience: an extract from an interview with Henry Mintzberg and Art Kleiner

Art Kleiner: “‘Managing’ opens by saying that management isn’t a science, it’s a practice. How much do we understand about the nature of this practice?”

Henry Mintzberg: “I think it’s amazing how few people are actively researching managerial work - empirical studies of what managers do - as their main focus. Many people are concerned with organizational issues, but because they don’t actually study what managers do, they lack insight into the essence of organizations. Even topics like the impact of e-mail on the way managers work have not been adequately studied. Some research has been conducted on the effects of the Internet on behavior - for example, the way people tend to casually shoot off e-mail messages and then wonder, “Why did I send that?” But there have been no real studies of the impact of e-mail on day-to-day management activity.

Where there is reliable management research, it doesn’t always get recognized or translated into practice. For example, we know that the most effective companies and organizations are those that embody the importance of being communities. People in these companies are committed and respected, and when you unleash that kind of energy, it’s quite remarkable.

But most conventional management practice and education has gone in completely the opposite direction. It’s becoming more mercenary, more individualistic, less community oriented, and less nuanced.”



Art Kleiner: “Talk a bit about your own efforts to create this kind of leadership development and bring it to scale.”

Henry Mintzberg: “Since the mid-1990s, I have been part of a group of colleagues - academics, consultants, developers, and managers - who are engaged in and committed to the idea of rethinking the management classroom. We began with management education in the McGill business school. Then I began to question the flagship program, the MBA. This led to an embarrassing question that should never be asked of an academic: “What are you doing about it?” I had thought academics were not supposed to do anything about anything.

But the question kept coming up, so a group of us decided to act: to rethink business education in a master’s degree program for practicing managers engaged with their jobs and committed to their companies.

We put managers at round tables where they could reflect on their own and others’ experiences. We deliberately designed this to contrast with the traditional MBA approach of studying other people’s experiences through cases or theories in a U-shaped classroom. Anchoring the learning to their experience at work was the key. I argue that if you’re a student sitting in that class, you’re not there primarily as an individual to be developed, but as a representative of your organization. You’ve got a team of people that you work with at your company. And you should carry what you’ve learned back to them. Then you might come to the next class and say, “Look, we worked on this issue at my company and this was the result. This worked, this didn’t work.” So you’re going back and forth between the workplace and class.

Art Kleiner: “In CoachingOurselves, you removed the instructor from the equation altogether.”

Henry Mintzberg: “In 2004 I got a call from Phil LeNir, my stepson and the director of engineering in the Montreal branch of a high-technology company at the time. His engineers had become managers, he said, because their programming was outsourced to eastern Europe, and they were struggling. “What should I do?” he asked. “And, by the way, I have no budget!”

I suggested that he get them around a table periodically, in a quiet atmosphere where they could at least share their concerns and reflect on their experiences in dealing with them. Phil took this up with a vengeance. He established a small group of managers who met every second week or so, for about 75 minutes at lunch. It had to be fun, he said, or they wouldn’t keep coming. They did, for two years. Soon Phil had another group, this time of peer managers on site, and then a third.

In the sessions, Phil introduced the equivalent of morning reflections, which he called “happenings.” He even used field studies: in one session on culture, they all went into the hall to interview whoever they found there about the company’s culture, and then reported to the group.

From this, a self-teaching program evolved. For any given session, we have a leading management thinker provide materials and exercises on a particular theme.”

Art Kleiner: “How open have managers been to the idea of ‘coaching ourselves’ rather than learning directly from the experts?”

Henry Mintzberg: “We now have more than 50 topics, in six languages. Management is not like surgery; you can’t try performing surgery unless you’re something of an expert. But we’re all trying to manage, all the time. And if you’re a manager, the most powerful way to learn is by reflecting on your own experience with colleagues.”

If you wish to read more, see the full interview of Henry Mintzberg with Art Kleiner, ‘Management by Reflection’, published in strategy+business in March 2010. See also “Managing” Published by Financial Times/Prentice Hall (2011).

CoachingOurselves - The Best Way To Learn by Ed Schein

As a psychology major I learned that the most important work in psychology was research on how learning actually happens. The basic model is simple - you learn from experience. You have some kind of goal, you try something and then you get feedback on whether or not you are closer to your goal. If you are, you try that again. If you are not, you try something different. What you decide to try is determined either by so called “trial and error” or some kind of imitation of a role model. Sounds simple enough, but all the elements are in fact complicated.

First, it is not always obvious what your goal should be, so setting a goal is itself a learning process which requires input and feedback from others. That is one reason why more learning occurs in groups, there are more sources of feedback to give you clues as to what you need to learn. Second, once you have a goal, you will discover that there are many things you can try to move toward it. Here it helps to have others as role models or to test ideas on others before you commit to a course of action. And, finally, the feedback we need when we learn something relatively complicated is best if it comes from multiple sources.

I found all of this out when I first went to a Human Relations workshop at Bethel, Maine in 1959. My Ph.D. in Social Psychology had taught me all that research had uncovered about group dynamics. Then in this workshop I encountered something called a T-group (T for training later called “sensitivity training”) and discovered that in the unstructured meetings I learned all sorts of things I did not know. In fact the premise of the workshop was to have experiences first, then lectures and readings.

In these workshops I also learned that groups have to learn how to learn. You can’t just tell someone “you need



to be a better communicator” because he or she either might not know what you are talking about or be really offended. So we learned in the group about creating a climate in which we could gradually become more open with each other and, once we achieved some mutual acceptance, we could give each other feedback which helped set learning goals and learning processes.

The group was important because different members had different perceptions of what was going on which taught us a lot about perception and communication. Individual coaching can help once we have a clear focus, but when we try to learn more complex social processes and new ways of managing, learning how to become a learning group is critical. I think of a group as a “mutual help society” in which the learning is enhanced by our recognition that we are there to help each other to learn.

I think the greatest potential of CoachingOurselves is the potential in the group process of Helping Each Other to Learn. Should you have a group process coach? Yes, but each member can play this role from time to time. You don't need an outsider, you only need to identify the role and rotate it around the group. Most of us have the skills if we accept the role of helping the group to become a learning unit.

In conclusion, CoachingOurselves as a group process always has a double agenda:

1. Learning the content of a given module; and
2. Learning how to learn as a group.

In my view it is this double agenda that makes CoachingOurselves especially relevant to organizations today.

If you wish to read further go to my books:

Schein, E.H. (1999). *Process Consultation Revisited*. Prentice-Hall.

Schein, E.H. (2009). *Helping: How to offer, give and receive help*. Berrett/Kohler.

BIOGRAPHIES:

Henry Mintzberg is Cleghorn Professor of Management Studies in the Desautels Faculty of Management at McGill University in Montreal. Professor Mintzberg earned his doctorate and Master of Science degrees at the M.I.T. Sloan School of Management and his mechanical engineering degree at McGill, working in between in operational research for the Canadian National Railways. He has been named an Officer of the Order of Canada and of l'Ordre national du Québec and holds honorary degrees from fifteen universities in ten countries. He also served as President of the Strategic Management Society from 1988-91, and is an elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada (the first from a management faculty), the Academy of Management, and the International Academy of Management. He was named Distinguished Scholar for the year 2000 by the Academy of Management.

Ed Schein was educated at the University of Chicago, at Stanford University where he received a Masters Degree in Psychology in 1949, and at Harvard University where he received his Ph.D. in social psychology in 1952. He was Chief of the Social Psychology Section of the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research while serving in the U.S. Army as Captain from 1952 to 1956. He joined MIT's Sloan School of Management in 1956 and was made a Professor of Organizational Psychology and Management in 1964. From 1968 to 1971 Schein was the Undergraduate Planning Professor for MIT, and in 1972 he became the Chairman of the Organization Studies Group of the MIT Sloan School, a position he held until 1982. He was honored in 1978 when he was named the Sloan Fellows Professor of Management, a Chair he held until 1990. At present he is Sloan Fellows Professor of Management Emeritus and continues at the Sloan School part time as a Senior Lecturer. He is also the Founding Editor of “Reflections” the Journal of the Society for Organizational Learning devoted to connecting academics, consultants, and practitioners around the issues of knowledge creation, dissemination and utilization.

Phil LeNir, is co-founder of CoachingOurselves. Created with Henry Mintzberg, CoachingOurselves is based on the belief that organizations are communities of human beings, not collections of human resources, and managers learn through reflection on natural experience in light of conceptual ideas. Prior to CoachingOurselves, Phil spent 15 years in management positions in IT companies. Phil holds a Masters of Management and Honors Engineering degree from McGill University in Canada.

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