Marsick, Victoria and Sauguet, Affonso. Chapter 19: "Learning Through Reflection." The Handbook of Conflict Resolution. Morton, Deutsch et al (ed) Jossey-Bass Pub.(2000): 150-156.
ISBN: 0787948225. **LTR12080205**

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Learning Through Reflection

Victoria J. Marsick
Alfonso Sauquet

Deutsch, M & Coleman, P. T. (2000). The handbook of conflict resolution: theory & practice, Jossey-Bass.

In this chapter, we introduce a model for learning from experience through reflection (Marsick and Watkins, 1990; Watkins and Marsick, 1993; Cseh, Watkins, and Marsick, 1999). We discuss its roots in adult learning theory and action science, and we draw out implications for use of the model. We then illustrate how a conflict participant can apply these ideas to effectively achieve objectives before, during, or after a conflict. Finally, we speak to implications for what a trainer or teacher can do to help a student learn to become a reflective practitioner of conflict, before drawing some conclusions about the value and limitations of this model for conflict resolution.

OUR MODEL OF LEARNING THROUGH REFLECTION ON EXPERIENCE

Many models of learning from experience have their roots in the thinking of John Dewey (1938), who examined how past actions guide future actions (Boud, Cohen, and Walker, 1993; Jarvis, 1992; Kolb, 1984; Schön, 1987). Dewey observed that if people do not get desired results, they attend to the resulting "error" or mismatch between intended and actual outcomes. He described learning as a somewhat informal use of what is known as the scientific method. People collect and interpret data about their experiences. They develop and test their hunches even though they may not do so very systematically. Dewey summed up learning from experi-

CONF 713 13

ce: "It involves (1) observation of surrounding conditions; (2) knowledge of hat has happened in similar situations in the past, a knowledge obtained partly recollection and partly from the information, advice, and warning of those ho have had a wider experience; and (3) judgment which puts together what is bserved and what is recalled to see what they signify" (1938, p. 69).

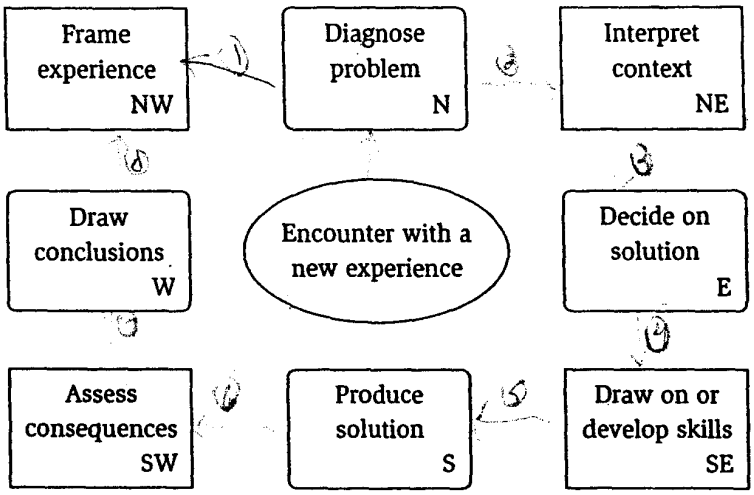
People make meaning of situations they encounter by filtering them through impressions they acquire over time from past experiences. They determine whether they can rely on past interpretations, or whether they need a new response set. They may need to search for new ideas and information, or reevaluate old ideas and information. Learning takes place as people interpret and reinterpret their experience in light of a growing, cumulative set of insights and then revise their actions to meet their goals. Learning results in new insights and a relatively new set of what Dewey called "habits" of new behavior.

Figure 19.1 depicts a model for learning through experience that Marsick and Watkins (1990) have developed, based on Dewey's work as applied to problem solving. The circle in the center represents encountering a new experience. New experiences are always potentially problematic, even though people may simplify them by emphasizing what is familiar, whether or not this is accurate. In our model, people use reflection to become aware of the problematic aspects of the experience, to probe these features, and to learn new ways to understand and address the challenge they encounter. Problem-solving steps are located at the vertical and horizontal axes and are labeled (clockwise) as N, E, S, and W—the cardinal compass points north, east, south, and west. Learning steps are located in between problem-solving steps; they are labeled (beginning clockwise just before north) with the letters denoting northwest, northeast, southeast, and southwest (NW, NE, SE, and SW).

Problem solving begins with diagnosing a problem as people encounter a new experience (north, or N). They frame the new experience based on what they learned from past experience (NW). They assess similarities or differences and use their interpretation to make sense of the new situation. People often make these judgments quickly, without much conscious reflection. Reflection slows down the diagnosis, but it also helps a person become aware of the complexity of the situation and the assumptions used to judge the new challenge.

After diagnosing a new experience (N), people learn more about the context of the problem (NE). They find out what other people are thinking and doing; they try to understand the politics of what is going on. They may gather information from other people or social groups that are affected by the problem, and they might test their thinking with others or conduct mini-experiments before they choose a course of action. Reflection can play a key role in this phase by opening up lines of thinking that would otherwise remain unexplored. Interpretation of the context leads to choice as to alternative action, guided by recollection of past solutions and by one's own search for other potential models for action.

Figure 19.1. Marsick and Watkins's Informal and Incidental Learning Model.



Source: Adapted from Marsick and Watkins, 1990.

Once a decision has been made about a course of action (E), a person develops or gathers what is needed to implement the decision (SE). Reflection might be anticipatory, and lead to developing new capabilities so as to implement the solution. Reflection often occurs while the action is being implemented over time. When people reflect-in-action (Schön, 1987), they typically do so if they are taken by surprise in the course of action. Because they are learning as they implement, they may make quick judgments based on partial information. They may also seek further information during action.

Once an action is taken (S), people assess consequences and decide whether or not outcomes match their goals (SW). Reflection after the fact allows for a full learning review. It is relatively easy to assess *intended* consequences if goals are reasonably explicit and data are available to make sound judgments. It is harder to recognize *unintended* consequences, although reflection can lead one to ask questions of a range of people and explore sources of information that might otherwise be ignored. A learning review leads to conclusions about results (W) and lessons learned that can be of help in planning future actions. Reflection at this point brings a person full circle to the new understanding (NW) drawn in preparing for another iteration of the cycle.

Reflection is central to every phase of learning from experience, although not everyone always uses reflection consciously to its fullest potential. Reflection sensitizes people to surprises and mismatches that signal the inadequacy of their prior stock of knowledge. Through reflection-in-action (Schön, 1987),

adjust their course of action and learn while they are carrying out the solution. Reflection after the fact helps to draw out lessons learned that are useful for the next problem-solving cycle.

In situations of conflict, people may be forced into making quick sense of many complex factors that influence how they interpret the context and identify unintended consequences. Studies of informal learning highlight the fact that when contexts are highly variable and surprise-rich, as is certainly the case under conditions of conflict, their interpretation assumes large significance (Cseh, 1998; Cseh, Watkins, and Marsick, 1999). Our model calls for refocusing attention on a variety of contextual factors that influence how people frame what is problematic about a conflict, think about alternative actions, and look for unintended consequences.

At the heart of this model is the dynamic interaction of action—having an experience—and reflection that helps a person interpret and reinterpret experience. The quality of reflection is central to how a person makes meaning of what is occurring. We are often guided in reflection by internalized social rules, norms, values, and beliefs that have been acquired implicitly and explicitly through socialization. These internalized perspectives can distort our interpretation of an experience. To learn deeply from experience, people must critically reflect on the assumptions, values, and beliefs that shape their understanding. To gain insight into how people engage in deep, critical reflection, we turn to work by Jack Mezirow (1991, 1995, 1997) and Chris Argyris and Donald Schön (1974, 1978).

CRITICAL REFLECTION

Adults shape their understanding of a new situation by looking through the lens of tacit, often unconscious belief systems, which Mezirow (1991, 1995, 1997) calls meaning perspectives (or, more recently, habits of mind) and meaning schemas (more recently, points of view). Mezirow defines *meaning perspectives* as "a general frame of reference, set of schemas, worldview, or personal paradigm. A meaning perspective involves a set of *psychocultural* assumptions, for the most part culturally assimilated but including intentionally learned theories, that serve as one of three sets of codes significantly shaping sensation and delimiting perception and cognition: *sociolinguistic* (e.g., social norms, cultural and language codes, ideologies, theories), *psychological* (e.g., repressed parental prohibitions which continue to block ways of feeling and acting, personality traits) and *epistemic* (e.g., learning, cognitive and intelligence styles, sensory learning preferences, focus on wholes or parts)" (1995, p. 42; italics added).

Meaning perspectives are broad, guiding frames of mind that influence development of focused meaning schemas, "the specific set of beliefs, knowledge,

judgment, attitude, and feeling which shape a particular interpretation, as when we think of an Irishman, a cathedral, a grandmother, or a conservative or when we express a point of view, an ideal or a way of acting" (Mezirow, 1995, p. 43).

Meaning perspectives or schemas are the containers that shape our experience. These containers are taken for granted and therefore hard to see, let alone question. That is why it is so difficult, for example, for a white person to see how she is racist, or a male to understand how his actions could be seen as sexist. In addition, through this questioning a person also challenges the basic assumptions of one's group and culture. Mezirow's work points to the need for critical reflection, but he does not give us much practical advice about how to probe deeply into assumptions. Action science provides these tools.

Action Science

Chris Argyris and Donald Schön (1974, 1978) developed action science to explore the gap between what people say they want to do, and what they are actually able to produce. They hypothesize that people are guided by a theory of action, which is cognitive in nature. Argyris and Schön (1978) argued against the behaviorists' belief that people act somewhat blindly in response to their external environment: "human learning . . . need not be understood in terms of the 'reinforcement' or 'extinction' of patterns of behavior but as the construction, testing, and restructuring of a certain kind of knowledge" (p. 10).

Theories of action predict that people act in certain ways under certain conditions, when guided by certain values, to achieve desired consequences. Argyris and Schön explain that when things go wrong, people first change their tactics. They call this single-loop learning. For example, if a peer rejects another employee's opinion, the employee might decide that he did not phrase his argument effectively. He might try to state the same viewpoint differently, or he might gather more information to build a stronger case. If the reasons for resistance do not lie in the format of the argument, these tactical changes do not remedy the mismatch. Instead, the employee must reconsider how he has framed the problem. Argyris and Schön (1974, 1978) call this deeper level of analysis double-loop learning about assumptions, values, beliefs, or norms that influence action. In our example, double-loop learning might take place if the employee recognizes that his definition of *effective* or of *participative decision making* is fundamentally different from that of his colleague. Single-loop learning is not, in and of itself, "bad." Learning to change tactics often yields valuable gains, but such learning may not go far enough.

People often believe that they act according to one set of beliefs (espoused theory), but because of tacitly held assumptions, values, and norms, in fact they act in ways that often contradict their espoused theories (theory-in-use). The employee in our example might believe in participatory decision making (his espoused theory), but in this case he wants to exclude some stakeholder groups that hold highly divergent views (theory-in-use).

Argyris and Schön identified a core set of values that control many of the interactions they studied. These values underlie what they describe as a behavioral-social world, or culture, that they call "Model I." Model I values lead to actions that often engender conflict. These values include the need to exert unilateral control over the interaction, a drive to win at all costs, and a tendency to act as if one is rational even when emotions run high.

Argyris and Schön describe an alternative learning culture that they call Model II. Its values include committing to valid information even if it contradicts opinions held by powerful others or oneself, ensuring that agreements are based on free and informed choice, and finding solutions based on internal commitment rather than external persuasion or coercion. Model II cultures cannot be developed without engaging in some double-loop learning. Decisions often take longer because more information is considered and people are encouraged to advocate for their viewpoint while also remaining open to contradictory information. In Model II, people probe for the reasoning that leads others to the conclusions and judgments they reach. Employees are encouraged to raise divergent views even if, by doing so, they generate controversy. Leaders in a Model II culture manage the resulting conflict because they see that this helps them avoid mistakes and generate innovative thinking.

Model I values lead people to control outcomes toward their own respective goals. In Model II, people value learning about the best solution more than achieving goals that might be incomplete, inaccurate, or inappropriate. Model I cultures encourage blaming because someone has to be right, whereas Model II cultures recognize that problems are complex and co-created. In a Model II culture, people who subscribe to action science take responsibility for finding and correcting behaviors that contribute to results not really desired even when others in the situation do not.

A Model I culture may not be supportive of double-loop learning practices, such as willingness to change an opinion if it turns out to be based on faulty reasoning, or interest in generating evidence to support alternative viewpoints that might be superior to one's own thinking. Individuals can practice double-loop learning in a Model I culture, but if they do so they are clearly going against norms they might, or might not, be able to change. Hence, double-loop learners carefully choose when and how to use these skills. (For a related discussion from a different theoretical perspective, see Chapter Fourteen.)

Experiential Learning

It is seldom possible to probe deeply into our beliefs without confronting many facets of our psychological makeup that we may find difficult to name, face, and change. Others may not want us to think or act differently either, even if the relationship is dysfunctional. For these and other reasons, engaging in critical reflection can evoke powerful feelings that seem at odds with instrumental, rational ways of learning from experience. Ironically, focusing on reflection can

lead to an exclusive cognitive emphasis. Some educators rebel against this limited focus. Boud, Cohen, and Walker (1993), for example, describe learning as a holistic process that involves thinking, feeling, and the will to action. They note that in English-speaking cultures "there is a cultural bias towards the cognitive and conative aspects of learning. The development of the affect is inhibited and instrumental thinking is highly valued" (p. 12).

Those same authors emphasize the affective side of learning from experience. Postle (1993), for example, draws on the work of John Heron (1992) on multimodal learning. The base of learning is affective, contends Heron—as does David Kolb (1984). By affective, they both mean that people learn from experience through a direct encounter with life that involves total immersion, with all its attendant sensations and feelings. The affective dimension to learning includes emotions and also a deeper, nonrational understanding of the situation.

Boud, Cohen, and Walker (1993) legitimate feelings as grist for the mill of reflection. They do not shrink from feelings, as might be so in a Model I world, where the value placed on rationality can leave people ashamed or embarrassed about emotions. Some experiential educators, such as Heron (1992), go a step further. Feelings precede rational explanations and therefore can point the way to fresh insights as people revisit and reinterpret these feelings.

Sometimes, experiential educators help learners get in touch with insights they normally filter out of their awareness. In essence, feelings are opened up through anticipatory reflection and learning about future possible states. People are helped to forge new experiences, and to use the feelings these situations evoke to challenge prior viewpoints. They are helped to reframe fundamental viewpoints based on new feelings that are triggered by seeing, feeling, hearing, touching, or otherwise sensing the world in new ways. They are freed from the bonds of having to name and rationally explain what they may sense but have not yet fully experienced.

Using Reflection and Critical Reflection to Learn from Experience

Our model in Figure 19.1 integrates reflection and critical reflection. We also recognize that powerful feelings often arise as people learn from experience. We recommend that feelings be recognized and used to reassess mental models, and to get in touch with new interpretations of present and future events.

Simple reflection involves reviewing attendant thoughts, feelings, and actions without questioning one's interpretation or meaning of the experience. But people can be misled by their interpretation of experience. They might frame the experience or solutions inaccurately, especially if they miss information or signals about the nature of the new challenge. Prior assumptions and beliefs can lead to partial, limited, or incorrect assessment of a situation. Simple reflection in our model is stimulated by questions such as

- What did I intend?
- What actions, feelings, or results surprised me?
- How is this experience alike or different from my prior experiences?
- What does this experience tell me about worldviews other than my own?

Critically reflective questions do more. They probe the context, or the person's assumptions, and how this has an impact on their judgments. Such questions look more like these:

- What else is going on in the environment that I might not have considered but that has an impact on how I understand the situation?
- In what ways could I be wrong about my hunches?
- In what way might I be using inapplicable lessons from my past to frame problems or solutions, and is this framing accurate?
- Are there other ways to interpret the feelings I have in this situation?

It is not easy to engage in critical reflection during a conflict, although it can be done with practice. Critical reflection demands an open mind and heart, willingness to question one's interpretations of the situation, suspension of blame, as well as the ability to slow things down and probe for alternative viewpoints. Critical reflection is more easily carried out before or after the fact, in the cooler light of day and with time to learn new skills in order to change one's customary response patterns.

ILLUSTRATING THE MODEL

What would it look like if we were to use this model of learning from experience in working through conflict? We show how a person can do so, with or without assistance from a facilitator, by introducing a hypothetical example that is a composite of situations we have seen in practice.

Let us imagine a normal work conflict that seems exacerbated by perceptions of gender difference. Although the focus in this example is on male-female relationships, it is not hard to imagine an analogous situation for race, class, or other dimensions of power. This example is set in a financial services company. Women form about 10 percent of the senior staff. They often find that they are left out of information loops, or that when they come into the room men grow quiet, ignore them, or tell jokes that the women find demeaning.

Use of Reflection During Conflict

Imagine a marketing manager, named Sue, who has been appointed as the only female on a task force put together to take certain financial services out to new markets using data-based delivery systems. Several meetings have already been

held. As Sue walks into her third meeting, she decides to take the lead in pulling things together. She summarizes what she thinks the group has agreed to, identifies where they have disagreements, and makes a suggestion about how to move forward. The roadblock is whether or not they can gain market share with their targeted group of consumers by using the commercial outlet they have selected.

Sue suggests that they use a consulting group, called ThinkRight, to gather more information. One of her team members, Bob, strongly disagrees and accuses Sue of trying to railroad a decision. He half jokes about how Sue is trying to impose her choices on the group. The other men nod in agreement. This seems a no-win situation; Sue cannot easily let their challenge to her pass without feeling as though she is giving up the ability to influence the situation. Yet any action she takes might, she thinks, appear as even more aggressive.

If Sue engages in single-loop learning about her conflict with Bob, she might reflect on the tactics she used in addressing the roadblock. She might consider that she and Bob share the same goal and simply disagree on tactics—for example, whether they need more data, whether ThinkRight is the best consultant group, or whether there is a better way to check out the group's assumptions. She might also reimmerse herself in her gut feelings about the experience, and check her intuition. She can look at her style of presentation, nonverbal cues about how her peers perceive her, and a holistic sense of what she thinks is taking place.

If Sue engages in double-loop learning, she might wonder if she has framed the problem correctly in the first place: Is there a more fundamental disagreement in the group than the choice of the delivery system for financial services? She might probe her level of comfort and skill in managing power dynamics. She can ask herself whether she is, indeed, railroading a decision. She might raise the question of her gender, perhaps also somewhat jokingly as Bob did, but not try to ignore the comment. She might throw it back on the group by stating how she feels and ask others how they feel. She might ask people to consider the way their group had been working together, and thus open up a discussion of underlying group dynamics that might be affecting their interactions.

If Sue probes into assumptions and beliefs, she opens up further avenues for discussion that others might not consider, or that they might consider to be not discussable. Doing so can open up the group to new ways of thinking about the problem, or it can exacerbate the conflict, depending on how Sue addresses the issues and how others interact with her in pursuing their analysis.

Use of Reflection After Conflict

Let us further imagine that Sue has the conversation with her team members that we present in Table 19.1. In this conversation, Bob challenges Sue. She is not happy with the conversation, so she meets with some colleagues who are using action science to develop skills in handling conflict by analyzing their experiences after they happen.

Table 19.1. Sue's Dialogue with Her Teammates.

What Sue Felt or Thought but Did Not Say	What Sue and Teammates Said
"These guys! We've been chewing on this question ever since we began meeting. Someone must know something about this situation that I don't know."	*Sue:* "So, that summarizes what we have agreed to. I think we disagree about whether we think that the people we want to reach actually shop in the kind of convenience store we have targeted. I suggest that we hire ThinkRight Consultants to do focus groups to check out our assumptions on this one."
"What's Bob up to now?! This is coming from left field."	*Bob:* "You've been pushing those people from the moment we met. What's in it for you to use these guys?"
"Here we go again. These guys are trying to make me look like I don't know what I'm doing."	*Sue:* "Huh? I'm just trying to move us forward. We've been circling around this question ever since we began meeting. I want us to move forward."
"What do I do with this one . . . he's made it look like, if I confront him, he's right . . . the jerk! He's not really joking."	*Bob (said somewhat mockingly, as if in humor):* "Yeah, yeah. I know how you women work. Give you an inch and you take a mile!" *(laughter all around from others)* "You're just trying to railroad your decision through." *(Others nod in agreement; no one else speaks up.)*

An action science consultant works with Sue by helping identify her explicit and implicit intentions for this interaction. Sue might first identify her goal as trying to get the best solution to the roadblock, but eventually she might also become aware of conflicting goals—such as to win in her confrontation with Bob. Sue might also realize that she values looking good in front of her teammates, especially in light of the gender discrimination at the company, and she wants to be respected as a professional. The consultant helps Sue recognize the mismatch between her intentions and outcomes. This mismatch may stimulate a desire to learn a new way of addressing conflict.

As they review the conflict, the consultant draws out explicit assumptions that Sue might be holding about her teammates and her interactions with them in this situation. The consultant uses the ladder of inference to help Sue see how she makes sense of the conflict. This device helps reveal the reasoning people use in coming to conclusions and taking action. Using the ladder of inference, Sue can begin to see how she uses her own meaning schemas (to use Mezirow's language) to filter and interpret what she sees in the experience. Table 19.2 illustrates hypothetical ladders of inference for Sue and Bob.

If these ladders bear any relationship to reality, we can see that Bob and Sue are on a collision course. Their respective framing of the situation makes it very

Table 19.2. Dueling Ladders of Inference.

Steps on the Ladder of Inference	Sue's Ladder	Bob's Ladder
Actions that I take	"I'll just joke a bit too, so I don't look foolish, but I'll be darned if I'm going to give this one up. . . . I'll show him I'm right!"	"I'll just put Sue in her place here . . . that should stop her from pursuing her agenda."
Conclusions that I draw	"I'd better get some data out on the table to see what's going on here so I won't get duped."	"Sue's using ThinkRight as a 'screen' to cover up her real motives."
Assumptions that I make	"I'll bet that Bob is just trying to make me look bad."	"Sue has a hidden agenda. . . . She wants to grab control here."
Meanings that I add	"This seems like a no-brainer. . . . These guys must know something that I don't."	"In my life, when women take the lead, they don't let me have any say in the matter."
Data I select from what I observe	"This decision shouldn't be so hard. . . . Maybe an outside perspective would help us get past this roadblock."	"Once again, Sue's in charge."
Directly observable data	"I suggest that we hire ThinkRight Consultants to do focus groups."	"I suggest that we hire ThinkRight Consultants to do focus groups."

difficult to look for common goals. They are each influenced by deeply held beliefs and values they have not consciously explored—and that may also bring out strong feelings sure to affect their decisions. Their choices may lead them to take action that actually creates the consequences they say they do not wish to experience.

The consultant helps Sue map the links between her assumptions and how they shape her actions, to see this chain of consequence. Table 19.3 illustrates this kind of mapping. The consultant knows it takes time to map causal links with any degree of accuracy. To prevent projecting meaning schemas on Sue, the consultant must test whether various interpretations actually represent Sue's viewpoint. In this way, the consultant can help Sue see that her interpretations are likely to lead her to the gap she says she wants to avoid, between her various stated intentions and the likely outcomes from the interaction.

Underlying beliefs and values—Sue's, Bob's, the other teammates', and the company's—are not easily changed even if they can be recognized as unproductive. Using Mezirow's framework, the consultant can help Sue look in greater depth at the kind of assumptions that might be influencing her action. People's responses often reflect views in the dominant culture. By mapping out responses and discussing them with others, they can identify deeper patterns that cause conflict, and they may be able to produce a change in the cultural patterns that otherwise make it difficult to act in new ways.

Recently, for example, Karen Watkins taught a graduate course in action science at the University of Georgia (Marsick and Watkins, 1999). Two individuals from different organizations had brought in cases in which sexual harassment was an underlying theme. In the group discussion that ensued, many individuals agreed that this was a significant societal concern. The class mapped the themes from the point of view of common responses, and how these responses would have to change in order to allow greater learning to occur. These maps are shown in Table 19.4. Action science can help make public many issues that otherwise cannot easily be addressed because of potential repercussions.

Table 19.3. Mapping One Possible Set of Causal Links in Sue's Case.

Sue's Intentions	Sue's Assumptions	Sue's Actions	Sue's Outcomes
To be taken seriously as a professional	"Bob's trying to make me look bad."	"I'll stick to my guns and push to hire ThinkRight."	Sue's teammates thinks she is too wedded to her own solution and thus not professional.

Table 19.4. Action Science Map of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace.

Contextual Cues	Action Strategies	Consequences	System Consequences
Individual Level			
When sexually harassing behavior occurs . . .	I make a joke of it, pretend it didn't happen, and say nothing . . .	which guarantees that the behavior will escalate . . .	and neither I nor the others affected by the behavior (i.e., perpetrators, managers, and learners) learn how to define limits of acceptable behavior in the workplace.
System Level			
When sexually harassing behavior occurs . . .	managers and others ask victims to "just handle it," tease and make light of it, and expect victims to confront it alone without upsetting the system . . .	which guarantees that the behavior will escalate . . .	and a sexually harassing culture will be tolerated or encouraged and victims are doubly victimized.
The Learning Alternative			
When sexually harassing behavior occurs . . .	I recognize that others and I are affected and ask that all concerned become involved in remedying the situation.	which guarantees that the behavior that is acceptable will be publicly discussed and consensus may emerge about what is and is not acceptable . . .	and the system will either publicly admit that it tolerates this behavior or begin to engage in explicit conversations to help both victims and perpetrators make meaning of "sexually harassing behavior."

Source: Marsick, V. J., and Watkins, K. E. *Facilitating the Learning Organization.* Aldershot, England: Gower Publishing Limited, 1999, p. 154, Table 9.2. Reprinted with permission.

Use of Reflection Before a New Conflict

The consultant can help Sue create and role-play alternative ways of addressing the situation. Sue needs to practice these alternatives to gain the skills required to address conflict differently. She probably finds it difficult to act in new ways, given that her current behavior has been shaped by past successes, and given the reality of the politics in her company. Getting all the information on the table may mean that Sue has to give up some of her beliefs. For example, other people in the group might have information about the use of ThinkRight that suggests focus groups are not the right way to test these market assumptions. Or, even though Sue might have the capability to take charge of this situation, the resistance she is experiencing might make it difficult for her to get the same results as a male executive could obtain.

By redesigning and practicing new responses, Sue can learn how to work with conflict constructively in the future. Redesigns take the form of what action scientists label productive reasoning skills. Sue can be helped to lay out her position clearly, whatever it might ultimately be, and then talk to the team about her reasoning and the actual data that support it. Sue can then ask the team what they think of her position, and if they have any information that she is missing that ought to be considered. Redesigns usually do not include saying all that is in "one's left-hand column" (of Table 19.3). However, the consultant encourages Sue to acknowledge and work through the feelings she has about the situation so that she can reassess and reintegrate them into her view about the action she should take.

An action science consultant often helps people identify signals that cause them to act defensively and create a self-fulfilling prophecy that may also be self-defeating. Oscar Mink (in Marsick and Watkins, 1990) developed a formula to help people new to action science to identify their theory-in-use patterns (see Exhibit 19.1). One begins by identifying the undesired consequences that one seems to produce. Patterns begin to emerge that show when and how one engages in behavior that produces these consequences.

For example, it might be that the person acts in a certain way only with authority figures, or when he feels he is not given choices, or when he feels judged. By paying attention to these circumstances, the person can anticipate a likely response and change his behavior accordingly. A theory-in-use proposition for Sue, for example, might read like this: "When I'm confronted with a man who makes light of my contribution, I'm afraid that I won't be taken seriously as a professional; so I dig in and hold on to my position, even if I was not initially wedded to it, which guarantees that I won't be taken seriously as a professional."

Theory-in-use propositions often speak to values and beliefs that are particularly significant to a person. This also means that, in conflict situations, people find it difficult to set them aside in their negotiations and responses.

Exhibit 19.1. Mink's Formula for Constructing Theory-in-Use Propositions.

When _____ happens, I am afraid that
(triggering situation)

_____ will happen, so I
(what I don't want to happen)

_____, which guarantees that
(what I do)

_____ will happen.
(what I don't want to happen)

Source: Marsick, V. J., and Watkins, K. E. *Facilitating the Learning Organization.* Aldershot, England: Gower Publishing Limited, 1999, p. 151, Figure 9.3. Reprinted with permission.

USING THE MODEL TO FACILITATE LEARNING THROUGH REFLECTION

Facilitators can help people reflect on both the cognitive and noncognitive dimensions of conflict. The challenge may be greatest when conflict emerges unexpectedly. On the one hand, the element of surprise makes working with conflict challenging. On the other hand, the impact of any such work is great because need is so apparent and results so immediately tangible. Learning from past experience can help facilitators build skills to better address conflict in the moment.

Facilitating Reflection During the Experience of Conflict

One step that can help people address conflict in the moment is to put in place a learning review process that becomes routine, as well as a structure to assist in reflection. Learning reviews help people become aware of goals, outcomes, contextual factors that influence how they understand a situation, assumptions that influence actions, and feelings that they cannot articulate but recognize are operative. Facilitators can identify ways to do such learning reviews, help people gain skills in carrying them out, and encourage them to articulate their viewpoints and discuss them openly with others. They can create a culture where conflict is expected and recognized for the value it brings to results.

The U.S. Army, for example, developed the after-action review (AAR) for this purpose (Sullivan and Harper, 1997). AARs are typically held in battle environments, but they are also being used in noncombat situations. The learning review is guided by four questions: What did we intend to happen? What happened? Why did it happen that way? How can we improve what happened? AARs focus attention on goals, which in itself can increase conscious learning. Data are collected to track actions and results so that the discussion can be based on what

is called "ground truth," that is, accurate data-based reports of what took place on the battleground. Ground truth in the army is collected by using computer-based technology for detailed information on moves that were made. About 75 percent of the time spent in an AAR involves focused reflection on why things occurred and how people can improve their actions next time. Ground rules are set for dialogue and reflection, which include freedom to speak up, regardless of one's rank; a norm of honesty rather than sugarcoating or holding back for fear of reprisal; and strict avoidance of blame.

After-action reviews are being adapted by corporations for use in noncombat situations, where the enemy may not be as easily identified, the motivation for working together not as clear, and the consequences of a mistake not as obvious. Conflicts in civilian life also might not resolve in a clear-cut win-loss outcome. The four steps of reflection, however, are similar to steps in our model and show how this framework can be made operational.

Facilitators can also help people attend to the noncognitive dimensions of conflict. Perhaps the most powerful first step for doing so is to make space for naming and working with feelings. Shame and stigma are often associated with showing feelings, at least with Model I cultural values. The facilitator can help to create a respectful, safe environment for feelings to be expressed. She may well have to stand tough if others wish to avoid feelings or, even worse, "punish" someone else for showing feelings. To do so, she often needs to use double-loop learning skills to identify and address the underlying values and beliefs that influence cultural norms.

Facilitating Reflection Before or After Conflict

People are often blind to their own views. Mezirow (1991, 1997) recommends discourse as a means of identifying and considering preferred ways of acting. The conditions for discourse seem to be an unattainable ideal at first glance, but action science dialogue groups show that they can be created: "those participating have full information; are free from coercion; have equal opportunity to assume the various roles of discourse (to advance beliefs, challenge, defend, explain, assess evidence, and judge arguments); become critically reflective of assumptions; are empathic and open to other perspectives; are willing to listen and to search for common ground or a synthesis of different points of view; and can make a tentative best judgment to guide action" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 10).

It is easier to help a person identify, name, and vent powerful feelings before or after a real or perceived threat occurs. The facilitator can more easily create a safe environment in which to extract and address fears, separate real from imagined consequences, and help a person develop both single-loop and double-loop approaches to working with the conflict.

An action science consultant facilitates dialogue about a situation, or a "case," in which a person charts both what was said (in the right column of the

case), and what was thought or felt but not said (in the left column). The consultant helps the case writer identify mismatches between intentions and actual consequences, drawing up a ladder of inference, identify assumptions, and map links between assumptions and actions. The case writer and the consultant design and role-play alternative actions.

Facilitators can also engage people in anticipatory reflection of alternative worldviews, to step outside of current mental models that restrict new insights and skill development. Some examples might illustrate this approach. Richard Leachman (1999) uses abstract paintings along with word descriptions to help people create, populate, visit, and experience new worlds. He then invites people to revisit a problem through the lens of experience created by their foray into this new world. Other experiential educators engage people in dance, poetry, metaphor, guided imagery, or painting. Bruce Copley designs learning that uses all of the senses. He devises exercises that connect people to their physical world and then enable them to see how this connection opens up new points of view. He helps people learn from other humans, animals, plants, and inanimate objects: "through this 'whole person' involvement the mind, the body, the feelings, the spirit, the experience, the idea and the meaning become one" (1999, pp. 4–5).

CONCLUSION

We have introduced, described, and illustrated a model for learning through reflection on experience that we believe holds potential for those who help others address and learn from conflict. The value of reflection is that it is available to everyone. At the same time, as Ellen Langer (1989) observes about a similar capacity for mindfulness, its very availability may make people discount its usefulness or take it for granted.

To learn from experience, people have to slow down their thinking process so that they can critically assess it. They need to get in touch with deeper feelings, thoughts, and factors that lie outside of their current mental and sensory models for taking in and interpreting the world they encounter. They have to step outside of the frameworks by which they understand experience, which can be disconcerting and at times difficult to do. Reflection can lead to new insight, but it can also cause frustration because people then have to develop new capabilities for double-loop learning and skillful conversation.

References

Argyris, C., and Schön, D. A. *Theory in Practice: Increasing Organizational Effectiveness.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974.

Argyris, C., and Schön, D. A. *Organizational Learning: A Theory of Action Perspective.* Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1978.

Boud, D., Cohen, R., and Walker, D. (eds.). *Using Experience for Learning.* Briston, Pa.: Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press, 1993.

Copley, B. "Cogmotics: Breathing Life into Education and Learning Through the Fine Art of Holistic Animation." Presentation at the annual conference of the Management Institute, Lund, Sweden, May 1999.

Cseh, M. "Managerial Learning in the Transition to a Free Market Economy in Romanian Private Companies." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia, Athens, 1998.

Cseh, M., Watkins, K. E., and Marsick, V. J. "Reconceptualizing Marsick and Watkins' Model of Informal and Incidental Learning in the Workplace." In K. P. Kuchinke (ed.), *Proceedings, Academy of Human Resource Development Conference.* Vol. 1. Baton Rouge, La.: Academy of Human Resource Development, 1999.

Dewey, J. *Experience and Education.* New York: Collier, 1938.

Heron, J. *Feeling and Personhood: Psychology in Another Key.* London: Sage, 1992.

Jarvis, P. *Paradoxes of Learning: On Becoming an Individual in Society.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992.

Kolb, D. A. *Experiential Learning.* Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1984.

Langer, E. J. *Mindfulness.* Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1989.

Leachman, R. "Experiential Simulations of World Views and Basic Assumptions." Presentation at the annual conference of the Management Institute, Lund, Sweden, May 1999.

Marsick, V. J., and Watkins, K. E. *Informal and Incidental Learning in the Workplace.* New York: Routledge, 1990.

Marsick, V. J., and Watkins, K. E. *Facilitating the Learning Organization: Making Learning Count.* Aldershot, England: Gower, 1999.

Mezirow, J. D. *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991.

Mezirow, J. D. "Transformation Theory of Adult Learning." In M. R. Welton (ed.), *In Defense of the Lifeworld: Critical Perspectives on Adult Learning.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.

Mezirow, J. D. "Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice." In P. Cranton (ed.), *Transformative Learning in Action: Insights from Practice.* New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, no. 74. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997.

Postle, D. "Putting the Heart Back into Learning." In D. Boud, R. Cohen, and D. Walker (eds.), *Using Experience for Learning.* Briston, Pa.: Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press, 1993.

Schön, D. A. *Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Toward a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987.

Sullivan, G. R., and Harper, M. V. *Hope Is Not a Method: What Business Leaders Can Learn from America's Army.* New York: Broadway Books, 1997.

Watkins, K. E., and Marsick, V. J. *Sculpting the Learning Organization: Lessons in the Art and Science of Systematic Change.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993.