

# Levels of reflection: on learning reflection

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The purpose of supervision is to set up reflective dialogues through which we learn from the very work we do. Reflection is the medium through which we learn. Not only is it the bridge between information and wisdom, it is the process that turns information and knowledge into wisdom. For a long time we have presented 'reflective practice' as an ideal to be attained. However, there is little to help us learn how to reflect or how to deepen reflection. How do we understand reflection and, in particular, how do we help coachees and supervisees to use reflection to its maximum? MICHAEL CARROLL presents six levels of reflection that deepen the reflective process, accompanied by methods to help move through the levels as appropriate. He argues that access to all six levels of reflection creates the best environment for ongoing learning.

Reflection is a key component in learning (Moon, 1999, 2004). Being able to reflect on our lives and our work is crucial if we are to not fall into mindlessness, the routine process of doing the same things over and over again.

Other animals, besides us humans, live mindless lives driven mostly by instincts with little ability to reflect on why they do what they do. My attempts to teach our cat, Cami, to reflect end in frustration for me and cat-boredom for him. He has no ability to make sense of his life or ascribe meaning to why he engages in certain behaviours—kills little birds when he is well-fed, captures and plays with mice when he has every reason for being more loving, or beats up the cat next door when a little good neighbourliness would go a long way to establishing peace. He cannot change his behaviour through a process of reflection—decide to diet when he puts on a few pounds, change his sleeping patterns and so on. Cami has no ability to hold his life up to the light and ponder its meaning. He cannot access his 'inner kitten' and work on his self-awareness. The reason he cannot reflect, of course, is that he

has a very small frontal cortex in his brain. Unlike us humans who have a much larger frontal cortex, executive or human brains as they are sometimes called, Cami is condemned to living an unreflected life. It was Socrates who remarked that such a life is not worth living, though I suspect he was referring to humans and not cats.

Reflection is our human way of making meaning in life (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). Not only is reflection the bridge between information and wisdom, it is the process that turns information and knowledge into wisdom. Through reflection, reflexiveness and critical thinking, the events of our lives are made to make sense for us and give us choice about how to infuse them with meanings we choose, rather than meanings chosen for us. We are meaning-making animals and it remains important for us to make sense of our lives by pondering on the events that make them up. Telling stories is one way to do that—we narrate our lives as a means to make sense of them for ourselves, and to communicate this meaning to others.

However, our ways of making meaning can be narrow and rigid.

Some individuals have only one way to make meaning, e.g., they interpret everything that happens to them through a victim stance. Others have diverse and multiple ways to make sense of events in their lives e.g., "Yes, I was *partially* responsible for the heart attack because of my life style. It has been a wake-up call for me and is a message about changing some behaviours in my life."

Some of our helping strategies involve supporting others to give different or new meaning to the events in their lives. Counselling is a way to change the meaning of events—clearly not the historical events themselves. What previously has been given the meaning of being a tragedy, e.g., a divorce or an illness, can be re-interpreted and given new meaning for example as a new start or a new way to appreciate life. In the same way, coaching is a way to help coachees make sense of their lives and their work, and at times, to adopt new perspectives on who they are and what they do. Supervision is strong on helping supervisees look again at their work and see it from other perspectives. This is a process about a

way of looking at what we do and how with 'super-vision'—new eyes, new perceptions, new visions—we can see things differently. Supervision is about a new way of looking, a super way of visioning. With new visions come new perspectives and new meanings. We notice new things. Supervision is always about the quality of awareness. With reflection comes meaning at different levels.

As I step outside my comfort zone and take an open stance, without judgement or shame, without blame or assumption, and am open and indifferent to the outcome, what would I allow myself to think and reflect upon? Can I look beyond, beside, beneath, above, below, against—what would happen if I looked at myself, my client, our relationship, the organisation in another way?

Supervision is about paying attention to our practice. It is the dancing partner of our work (Murphy, 2009). We stop doing, we pull back from our work, and we start to think and reflect. We move from subject, where we are identified with or attached to our work, to object where we can take a perspective outside ourselves. We move from 'reflection-in-action' to 'reflection-on-action' to 'reflection-for-action'. Supervision is a strategic withdrawal to meditate, contemplate, and think about our work. In the attention to, and the reflection on, we learn how to do our

work differently and better. This is the purpose of supervision: a 'respectful interruption' of our work to set up reflective dialogues through which we learn from the very work we do—we sit at the feet of our experience and we allow our work to become our teacher

*...reflection is the process that turns information and knowledge into wisdom.*

(Zachary, 2000). The medium we do this through is reflection—reflection becomes the method through which we learn. Reflection is the discipline of wondering about ... what if?

Reflection fits within the larger picture of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). Marsick and Maltbia (2009) have used the *ORID* model—*Objective, Reflective, Interpretative* and *Decisive* data—as a way to illustrate how experiential learning works. I have added a further section to this model, an *Integrative* arm. Table 1 outlines the process under a number of headings.

The *Reflective/Interpretative* sections of this model and the reflective section of the *Experiential Learning Cycle* are the focus of this article. If reflection is so important for us, then why isn't it taught more? As far as I know, there are few lessons or training programmes on reflection—on how to reflect, how to deepen reflection, and how to use reflection to make sense of life.

Recently, I have been working on how to understand reflection (Carroll, 2009) and, in particular, how to help coachees and supervisees use reflection to its maximum. As a result, I have devised six modes or levels of reflection that allow us to look at the

same event from six perspectives and make meaning in six different ways using reflection as the medium of learning. There is no magic in having six levels, there may well be more. By adopting six possible viewpoints a 360° perspective is gained. These insights can then be used to create the best available interventions. Table 2 provides a summary of the six levels. An example from my own supervision work will follow later to illustrate how the six levels can be used.

Table 3 presents each using the same six general categories:

1. description of the level;
2. the Transactional Analysis(TA) position it tends to adopt;
3. typical statements made from this position;
4. what the end result might be;
5. the strategy that seems to characterise this reflective stance, and;
6. what blocks us from moving to the next level of reflection?

**Table 1. The Experiential Learning Cycle**

ELC	Process	Focus	Method
Action	Objective	What happened? Is happening?	Observe facts, events. Notice, give attention.
Reflection	Reflective	What am I feeling? What is my reaction?	Monitor and articulate reactions.
Reflection	Interpretative	What does it mean?	Utilise critical thinking.
Learning	Integrative	What have I learned?	Assimilate into new learning.
Application	Decisive	What do I do?	Implement decisions.

**Table 2. Levels of reflection, stances and connectivity**

Level	Ability for reflection	Stance/attitude	Connection quality
1	Zero	Me	Disconnected
2	Empathic	Observer	Empathic
3	Relational	You and Me = Us	Personal
4	Systemic	You and Me + Others	Contextual
5	Self	Me (internalised)	Incorporating
6	Transcendental	Other (universal)	Universal

**Table 3. The six levels of reflection**

LEVEL	DESCRIPTION	POSITIONS
<p><b>Level 1:</b> <b>Zero reflection/ me-stance/ disconnection</b></p>	<p>Level 1 is a non-reflective stance—<i>“I am right, you are way off the mark.”</i> This level of reflection finds it difficult to go internal, or to look at wider pictures or bigger systems. It has a black-and-white stance to making sense of events and is based on a theory of causality that is very simple, such as: This caused that to happen. There is no awareness of circular causality here, of where cause and effect intertwine. The answer we seek usually is straightforward: <i>“If you would change, my life would be easier.”</i></p>	<p><i>“I’m OK (could be I’m not OK), you’re not OK.”</i> A position of blame is often adopted. This easily can be a victim stance: <i>“See how badly the world treats me!”</i> I call this the ‘me-stance (external)’ because it focuses on the actor/person, but from an external perspective. There is little consideration for how I might be part of the problem or contribute to it. <i>“By and large at this stage—you are the problem, I am the solution.”</i></p>
<p><b>Level 2:</b> <b>Empathetic reflection/ observer stance/ empathic connection</b></p>	<p>Level 2 reflection sees the reflector becoming more of an observer with acknowledgement of feelings. There is a movement from event to personality. There is an awareness of some empathy for the other person’s perspective or for another perspective. A more compassionate interpretation allows for insights into what is happening to the other.</p>	<p><i>“I’m OK (could still be I’m not OK) and realising you might be OK (but not yet). You are still the problem and I am still, by and large the solution.”</i> A position of blame plus understanding (some empathy) is most common.</p>
<p><b>Level 3:</b> <b>Relational reflection/you- and-me = us stance/personal connection</b></p>	<p>Level 3 often follows a dialogue (internal or external) where we begin to share the issues and see that many of the issues or problems are relational. <i>“Now I see that it’s about you and me and how we are getting on together.”</i> Or we begin to see that the issue or the problem we are facing is, in fact, relational rather than simply part of one person. While we both bring our personal histories into this shared space there is awareness that we create a relational dilemma for which we both have some responsibility. <i>“We can work out a way of working together.”</i></p>	<p><i>“We are OK if we can talk about it.”</i> Position is one of collective responsibility. An ‘us’ stance. <i>“We have a problem and we have the solution.”</i></p>
<p><b>Level 4:</b> <b>Systemic reflection/you- and-me + others/ contextual connection</b></p>	<p>This is the systemic reflective stance that looks to the system, and the various subsystems involved. It allows us to reflect on the situation from these perspectives. It is the helicopter (or satellite) ability to see the various small and large systems that affect our lives and our behaviours. Level 4 reflection looks for the connections between the ‘you’ and the ‘me’ that create the larger ‘us’. This extends beyond our immediate dyad, team or group to the shared resources and history that shape/influence our choices and values. Level 4 can extend our reflective inquiry into ancestry, heritage, community, culture and ecosystem.</p>	<p><i>“We’re OK.”</i> Position is one of systemic responsibility. The bigger picture stance. How is it all connected and how can we see and reflect from these multiple perspectives?</p>
<p><b>Level 5:</b> <b>Self-reflection/ me (internalised) stance/ incorporating connection</b></p>	<p>This self-transcendent position means I begin to look at me and consider how I set up these situations. <i>“Gosh!, it’s actually about me!”</i> This position looks at how insight, and my awareness of myself, results in ways of working that involve changing my mindset, and my meaning-making perspectives. I can change, and if I change, then we all have the opportunity to experience ourselves and the situation differently. Thinking intersubjectively (relationality) but in a way that helps me see my part in this.</p>	<p><i>“I’m OK, you’re OK.”</i> Position is one of personal responsibility. The me-stance (internal). I have issues and problems I need to resolve. Unlike Level 1, which is also a ‘me’ position but external to me, Level 5 goes internal to articulate my own patterns and themes that contribute to the way I engage in life and relationships.</p>
<p><b>Level 6:</b> <b>Transcendent reflection/ other (universal stance)/universal connection</b></p>	<p>This is the reflective stance that sees ‘beyond’ to what makes meaning and what gives meaning to life. It transcends any particular relationship, person or situation, opening into a larger construct that is inherent in all relationships, people, or situations. For many, this can be a religious or spiritual stance that reflects a philosophy or a system of meaning that already exists (e.g. Christianity, Judaism), or one that I create (my philosophy of life). It can be seen as what gives meaning to life, people and behaviour. e.g., that God loves us, that suffering exists, that individuals have value in themselves. It adopts an existential position on life often called the ‘Transpersonal’ or ‘Transcendent’. It can be theistically-based or not.</p>	<p>There is a higher or larger perspective that helps me make sense of life and purpose (e.g., humanistic, atheistic, denominational religion, Buddhist). I find meaning by subscribing to this existential position. I attempt to live the current situation through this expanded perspective, and recognise my own personal limitations of perception. I have a clear intention to expand my ‘little self’ and embody more of the qualities of transcendence that guide, teach and inspire me. I am willing to adopt this expanded view/state of being, even though it may require me to enter a space of ‘not knowing’, and may engender a profound restructuring of my mental constructs.</p>

STATEMENTS WE MAKE	RESULT	STRATEGY	BLOCKS TO FURTHER REFLECTION
This client is resistant. This coachee is not committed to the process. This manager wants to get her own way. This leader cannot delegate because of his issues with power. Because it is obvious, that's the way it is.	Stuckness, strong feelings and often negative resentment. Individuals here often stay solely at the content (not process) level. Or have a simplistic answer to life.	The strategy is one of telling or asserting as if it were totally true: <i>"This is what you will do or should do."</i> The conversation is one of monologue. There can be attachment, withdrawal or defensiveness here too.	Being certain, being right, very strong feelings, fear of giving up control and power. Fear and shame are further blocks at this level.
I can understand why the person does this, though that does not excuse it. I must be more understanding but hold the line. I can be somewhat accommodating now that I understand what is happening.	More understanding and loosening of response. The certainty that comes with Level 1 has begun to unfreeze.	<i>"I still tell /force you what to do."</i> Conversation can be discussion or debate, or still be monologue.	Not believing I contribute to this. Not wanting to give control and power. Simplistic causality thinking. Still elements of being certain or right, or of having found the answer.
Let's talk about this. How do you think we both contribute to the issue/s? What can we do together to make this situation more manageable for both of us? How can I begin to see this from multiple perspectives? Where are the connections? How do we 'make' this problem together?	Movement from projecting and blaming, and seeing the problem located in another, to seeing that we co-create the issue.	We can talk honestly and openly about ourselves, our needs and our relationship. Self-awareness allows other information into the system, e.g., my need to control. Reflective dialogue (where we begin to think about and talk about the issues together) is used.	The problem is solved. No awareness of psychological patterns in my life. State of denial because of the work I would have to do if I believed there is another level of reflection. The problem is in 'the system'. Little awareness that the wider systems to which we belong impact on us and co-create the problem with us.
How do we all contribute to creating a common culture around values that may or may not be conscious, but which have immense power to influence our behaviour? Can I see patterns and themes that have an impact on me, my relationships and my life? How does our communal stance create this kind of situation?	A larger view is taken that considers the various system levels (culture, politics, values, gender, discourse and dominant narratives).	Reflect on system as affecting behaviour. What do we need to be aware of and change in order for this situation to be different? Creating external generative dialogue that results in action. Moving to upstream helping rather than downstream resuscitation—seeing the system as a problem and not just the individual.	See the big picture, but lose sight of the individual.
What is my contribution to this? Can I see patterns in my life whereby I end up here a lot? How does my way of thinking result in this kind of situation? What strategies did I develop back-there that still impact my here-and-now behaviour?	I become self-aware—aware of myself as person, myself in relationship to others, myself at work. I look for more awareness and insight into myself as agent.	Reflect on self as agent. What do I need to change in order for this situation to be different, and for a psychological pattern to be broken? An internal dialogue. I look for the assumptions I bring to life and work. I review my meaning-making processes. I change the thinking behind my thinking.	Navel gazing. So caught up in my own development that I forget others. Over-reflection that results in rumination and obsessions. Our inner defences can also become an obstacle to further reflection.
From this viewpoint (my philosophy of life), how can I make sense of this event? What are the real values that I believe in? (As Sartre would suggest: look at a person's choices and you will see their values.)	Building my behaviour on principles I believe in, and that go beyond myself and others as individuals, and even go beyond systems.	Reflect on life, people and behaviour from a spiritual and transcendent purpose bigger than we are. How do I/we reflect from a wider purpose bigger than us all? We find humility, curiosity and reverence helpful here. Finding the overarching meaning that makes sense of how I/we make meaning.	So heavenly minded that no earthly good. Get lost in philosophy or transcendental (rather than an incarnational) theology or spirituality. Get overwhelmed by the vastness of perspective, and disconnect from the ordinary delights of daily living. Level 6 can become a flight from reflection, and indeed a way to avoid reflection.

## The six levels in action: an example

The following example will illustrate how the six levels might be used in a chronological manner in a coaching or supervision situation.

Sarah, who works for *Coach Supreme*, has been coaching Edward, who works for *Maximum Investments*, a branch of *Allied Continental Banks*. The focus of their executive coaching has been Ed's lack of assertiveness at work and his skills (or lack of them to be more precise) in managing his team. Feedback to Ed has been consistent and ongoing—he needs to be more decisive and to deal with the dysfunctional elements in the team. Six months into the coaching improvement has been noted by all the players in the system. Despite this, Ed is made redundant. This has come as a shock to both him and Sarah. He has asked *Maximum Investments* if Sarah can continue to coach him during this transition time (he has been given a generous allowance for outplacement counselling). Sarah knows and has worked with the six-level model of reflection and thinks it might help Ed come to accept being made redundant, learn from it, and move with more confidence into the next job.

### Level 1: Zero reflection/ me stance/disconnected

Sarah allows Ed to vent his feelings of anger, betrayal and abandonment by *Maximum Investments*. He is very negative, very let down. "How can they do this to me", he exclaims, "after all I have done for them?". Ed focuses his feelings on the Company and blames them for not giving the coaching more time to work, for breaking their promises, and for not supporting their employees. At this time he is locked into his own feelings and his victim-stance, and is unable to reflect with a wider perspective. There is only one villain in this story—the Company and the way they deal with employees. Sarah is aware that Ed is locked into Level 1, and his strong emotions do not allow him to reflect at deeper levels. She knows also that she cannot hurry him along to a new level before he has expressed his feelings and feels heard. She listens and encourages his expression of feeling.

### Level 2: Empathetic reflection/observer stance/ empathic connection

Gently and slowly (still allowing for the negative feelings to emerge), Sarah begins to ask Ed to look at why he thinks the Company made him redundant. Reluctant at first to contemplate such a stance, slowly Ed begins to put himself in the shoes of the organisation and, in particular, allows himself to access the perspectives of his boss and the HR director. He knows there are redundancies in the company. He knows his recent appraisals have been poor, and that he has been in his job for only nine months. Despite his resentments, he can understand why they might make him redundant. He still thinks it was untimely and handled badly, but he has allowed himself to view his redundancy from another position and perspective.

### Level 3: Relational reflection/ you-and-me = us stance/ personal connection

Sarah now asks Ed to see if he can reflect on what has happened (his redundancy) from within a relational perspective. She asks him to look in turn at his relationship with his boss, with the HR director, and with the Company in general. Ed notes, in particular, that his relationship with his boss, Emily, was one of dependency. He expected more support and coaching from her. On the other hand, as he reflects back, he realises that she expected him to be autonomous, independent, and only use her when problems arose. He realises they never actually talked about their expectations of each other, and never looked at how their relationship was affecting him and his work. Sarah has him roleplay how he would talk to Emily about these expectations and about their relationship in general. From this, Ed becomes aware that they have both contributed to the relationship. By not talking earlier he allowed strong and negative feelings on both their parts to develop, and it became increasingly difficult to discuss issues.

### Level 4: Systemic reflection/ you-and-me + others stance/ contextual connection

From the platform of relations at work, Sarah helped Ed look at the whole system of *Maximum Investments*. It is a fast-paced, dynamic organisation that had little time for reflection and is highly action-oriented. It worked on an unspoken rule that if you could not maintain the pace then you would fall behind, and usually drop out, with no one to carry you. It was an organisation that expected you to survive on your own and not be vulnerable. This culture permeated all departments. Ed realised that he was out of his depth in this system, not keeping up but afraid to appear to be vulnerable and ask for help. He became more aware that the organisational culture emerges in its values and choices and that all the participants are affected by it—for better or worse. He realised that this type of organisational system does not suit him well and he decided at this stage, if need be, he will give up some salary for more supportive relationships at work.

### Level 5: Self reflection/ me (internalised) stance/ incorporating connection

Ed had widened his ways of reflection and had allowed himself to move from a blame stance to understanding the system within which he had worked. Now, Sarah moves back inwards with him asking, "What have you learned about yourself from this, Ed.?" This was a difficult question for Ed, but he took it onboard and, with Sarah's help, began to look at how he contributed to what had happened. He recognised patterns in his life that emerged in his teamwork. He hated conflict of any kind (and he could see where this came from) and, as a consequence, he intervened rarely when conflict situations diverted the focus and energy of his team. He had lost two good members from that team because he had not intervened to manage the destructive team dynamics. He also recognised another psychological pattern in his life—his anxieties about making unilateral decisions and getting it wrong made him indecisive, and look tentative and unsure. Sarah remembers his words,

*"I need to work on these before I get my next job otherwise I will take them with me into the next Company". Much of the rest of the coaching centred on these deep-set themes in Ed's life.*

**Level 6: Transcendental reflection/other (universal) stance/universal connection**

In her work with Ed, it was obvious to Sarah that his Christian faith meant a lot to him. Several times he had talked about its importance in his life and work. As they neared the end of their work together, Sarah asked Ed if there were any other areas he needed to work with before moving on. Although he had been gone from the Company about three months, he said he was still angry and resentful about the way his redundancy had been handled, even though he could now see why the redundancy decision was made. In asking him how to move on from this, Ed himself suggested that there was little merit in trying to resolve it with the anonymous faces of the organisation, and mentioned that his faith asked him to forgive. Sarah considered this with him tentatively to ensure that it was not just an avoidance strategy. She then helped him reflect on what the possibility of genuine forgiveness would look like. She suggested a method developed by Enright (2001), which is based on research into the psychology of forgiveness. Ed thought this connected

well to his Christian faith, and together they worked towards his letting go and forgiving those he felt had wronged him.

Running this example briefly through the six levels of reflection helps us see the focus of each stage and the strategies that emerge from reflection at different levels. Figure 1 captures this and, in particular, notes that there is a transition stage and movement between levels. In this transition time, the reflector learns new skills that enable him or her to move into the next stage. For example to move from Level 1 (zero reflection) to Level 2 (empathetic reflection) needs the skill of empathy and emotional intelligence, the ability to see events from other perspectives. This can be taught and may need some practice to become fine-tuned. Moving from Level 2 to 3 and 4 requires being able to think relationally and systemically, to know how we set up systemic relationships where behaviour can be seen to be a result of those relationships. It also requires the skill of dialogue.

Self-awareness skills, insights, awareness, openness and some courage is needed at Level 5 as we begin, or continue, the journey of insight into ourselves, and our interpersonal and intrapersonal styles. Level 6 is based on a belief of something 'beyond' or 'further', and often takes place when we are able to move beyond ourselves to principles that guide and support us.

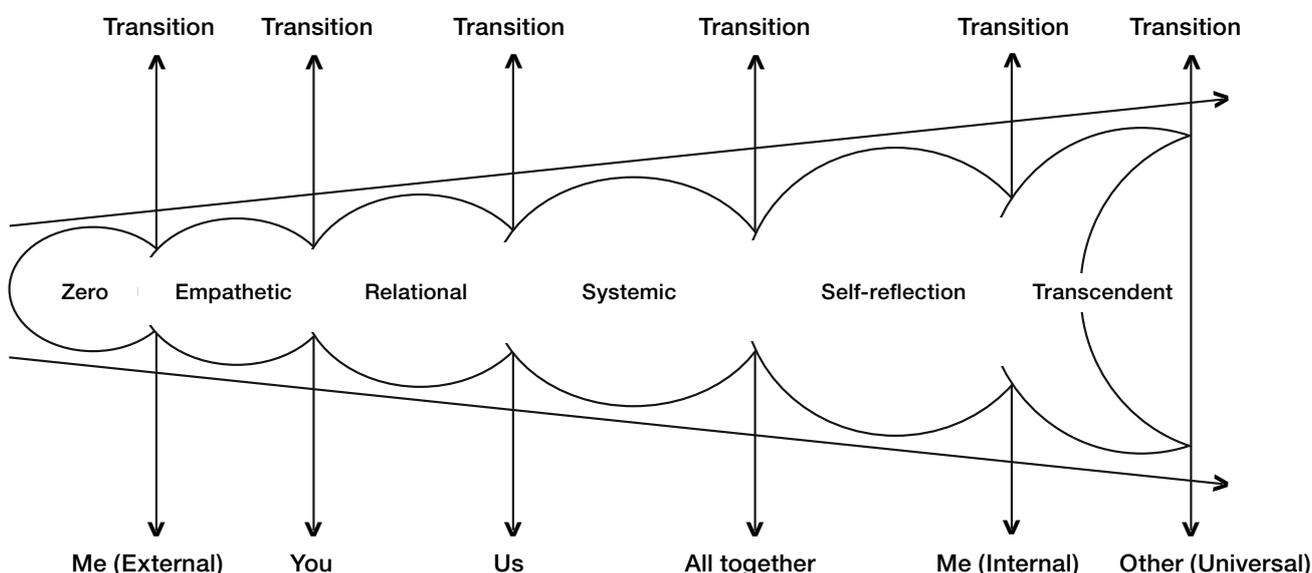
It would seem helpful to train or coach individuals and teams in the abilities needed to access all six levels of reflection.

**Discussion**

A number of factors emerge in working with the six levels of reflection. First, while we started and moved through the levels systematically from Level 1 to Level 6, it is not necessary to do so in that order. Many individuals go directly to Level 6, others move quickly to level 5 and ask: *"How am I contributing to this?"* Reflection does not have to be sequential as presented here. Second, all levels of reflection are good. While the idea of 'levels' sometimes gives the impression that the deeper I go the more valuable it is, the most helpful stance is being able to use all six levels as and when needed. There are times when I don't want to be empathetic, dialogic, and negotiable, and Level 1 is what is needed. *"That is not acceptable behaviour. I do not want to listen to you. You will need to change what you are doing"* can be a valid response in some circumstances.

Each level of reflection brings valuable information pertinent to its own stage. At Levels 1 and 2, a supervisor can learn how the other person (a supervisee) impacts on people in the outside world. The reflections of Levels 1 and 2 give valuable information on the interpersonal

**Figure 1. Levels of reflection**



world of the other (their interpersonal schema), and will also help you (as coach or supervisor) see how you react to their interpersonal schema dependent on your own history (e.g., take up a persecutor, rescuer or a victim stance). Level 2 will give you an idea of how people can be empathetic to others, but still remain at a relationship distance. Level 3 is important for the reflector to achieve if they are to do good work with the other person. Level 4 gives good insights and information on the organisational and systemic contexts in which we work and sometimes ignore to our peril. Our own learning comes in Level 5, which we can feed back into Levels 3 and 4. It is important not to get fixated at stage 4 or 6 where we can over-reflect or become disconnected from the more grounded aspects of life.

As mentioned above, being able to move back and forth through all six levels (when appropriate) is the most mature response. It is not helpful to conversations or relationships when someone is stuck in one level and cannot reflect from within other levels. Difficulties arise when there are different levels of conversation and reflection in the same room, e.g., someone at Level 1 can be certain of what they say and it will be difficult to have an open conversation if someone else is coming from Level 4. However, it is difficult to work with someone, as a coach or a supervisor, if I cannot allow myself, or am unable, to reflect in some of the areas they need to move into, e.g. some coaches/supervisors would find it difficult to allow religious belief into the coaching/supervision room since they themselves do not believe.

The skill of moving amongst these different levels of reflection is not just

an individual competency, but applies to couples, teams and organisations. It is legitimate to ask: “*At what level of reflection is this team? This organisation?*” Individuals, couples, teams and organisations have characteristic levels of reflection they move towards automatically and, under stress, often revert to lower levels.

These levels of reflection can be used in both life and work. Decision-making can rely on one level or another, or indeed on only one particular level. Ethics and religion can be seen from within each level, and the types of ethics practiced (e.g., ethics of duty, ethics of trust, relational ethics, systemic ethics) can differ radically depending on which level is used to access it. There can also be blocks to reflection that are particular to each level. Sometimes we need to ask at what level of reflection we need to be, in order to resolve a particular problem we are facing. Perhaps problems don't get faced or resolved because we are not looking at them from an appropriate perspective, e.g., environmental issues and problems often need a systemic viewpoint and collaboration, rather than an individualistic response.

The positive and negative stances at each level are summarised in Table 4.

At times some levels may not be appropriate to use. For example, to ask someone who has been bullied or harassed at work what contribution they make to being bullied (Level 5) would be insensitive and could make them feel responsible for something outside their control.

These levels of reflection can be connected to different levels of learning (single, double and treble loop learning). As we move through the levels we move away from content (Levels 1 and 2), into process (Levels

3 and 4). Issues of how power is used (*'power over', 'power with', 'power through', and 'power within'*) can also be applied to different levels. For example, *'power over'* is more a Level 1 feature, while *'power with'* is more focused on Levels 3 and 4. *'Power within'* can come with Levels 5 and 6. The movement through levels is not simply a cognitive one, but a fully emotional one that involves the body as well as the mind (Carroll, 2009).

Moore (2008) is working on reflective processes that involve enhanced and deepening self-awareness, or what he calls *'emotional knowing'* as part of supervision reflexivity. Individuals often reflect in and through their bodies. Consciousness-raising takes place as we are able to access deeper levels (Kegan, 1994).

We can ask, “*What is the appropriate level of reflection to use with this person (coachee/supervisee) that best connects to where they are and challenges them to move towards their next level of learning?*”

## Conclusion

For a long time we have presented *'reflective practice'* as an 'ideal' to be attained. We not only work, but through reflection on our work we learn how to do it better. However, there is little to help us learn how to reflect or how to deepen reflection. Six levels of reflection that deepen the reflective process, and methods to help move through the levels as appropriate, have been presented. Access to all six levels of reflection creates the best environment for ongoing learning.

## References

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**Table 4. Positive and negative stances at each level**

Level	Positive	Negative
1	decisiveness, non-negotiable stances	being locked into one way of seeing or acting
2	seeing other perspectives	collusion with others
3	taking <i>relational</i> responsibility	not taking <i>personal</i> responsibility
4	big pictures	missing individuals
5	increasing self-awareness	over-introspection
6	deep principles and communal values	remoteness from life and people

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## AUTHOR NOTES

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Michael will be offering training in Australia with PsychOz Publications in March 2010. See [www.psychotherapy.com.au](http://www.psychotherapy.com.au)



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