**4 - Why did it happen to me? Reflecting on overcoming the inevitable doctoral journey speed-bumps**

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**1. Introduction**

Whilst the main objective in undertaking a Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA) is to conduct research, another key component is to critically reflect on the journey the researcher has gone on. For a researcher enrolled onto a DBA, there is ample opportunity to write, present and conduct research, notably on the topic that is being researched. However, for critical reflection, it can often be seen as a challenge amongst peers (Fook and Gardner, 2007). It is sometimes seen as an end goal or a finalisation of the doctoral research process. Whilst it is encouraged to practice reflection throughout the experience whether writing a journal or note taking following supervision (Williams et al., 2012), it can be argued that there is no defined opportune time to demonstrate reflection, in a safe environment, within academia to practice the outcomes of reflection.

Using this conference as a time to take check on the journey so far, apply reflection and to present the findings, can put the researcher in a vulnerable position. However, it also ensures a safe place to prepare for the final part of the DBA whilst being able to apply and demonstrate the tools and techniques expected in the final chapter of the thesis.

This extended abstract provides a brief overview of how reflection is applied in research, considers two reflective models in Gibbs (1988) and Kolb (1984) and applies one based on the 18 months of the researchers DBA journey. However, the element of critical reflection, when considering the development of practice following reflection (Høyrup, 2004) will be omitted until the completion of the DBA research when the data analysis and discussion has been concluded.

**2. The Application of reflection in research**

The origins of reflective practice are often disputed due to its application in varying disciplines and a person’s perspective (Hickson, 2011). However, many academics appear to conclude that work from Dewey (1910) and later developed further by Schön (1983) is where reflection had cemented its place as a concept (Fook and Gardner, 2007; Johns, 2005). Although, it is argued Schön’s work has been seen to be only seminal work and that reflective practice is yet to be underpinned as a truly defined practice (Kinsella, 2009).

Irrespective of origin and definition, it can be concluded that, traditionally, reflective practice had been seen as a theoretical concept. Whilst it provided clarity on what it means, it could be argued that it provided little direction when it comes to application. As such, models have been developed to allow people to apply reflection from their learning. A model of note is Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle (1984). The cycle highlights the need of fully immersing oneself in new experiences, reflecting on them from many angles, drawing concepts and lessons from the reflections, and using these lessons to inform future experiences for meaningful learning to take place (McLeod, 2017).

Other models have evolved from Kolb’s input. Gibb’s Reflective Cycle (1988) sought to bring more structure to reflective practice following Kolb’s model with the introduction of more stages. It also permits introspection during an event (reflection-in-action) as well as following it (reflection-on-action) whereas Schön (1984) gave more attention to the latter. As such, this extended abstract adopts Gibbs’ Reflective Cycle (1988) and follows a first person perspective.

**3. Applying Gibbs’ Reflective Cycle (1988)**

*3.1. Description*

Undertaking the DBA is a new experience for me. It is the first time I have worked academically at Level 8 which is required should I wish to pursue career progression both as a researcher or in management. The scholarly-practitioner ethos of a DBA placed this opportunity well for the progression avenues available to me in the future.

*3.2. Feelings*

I was excited to do the DBA and the excitement is still there. However, having been fixated from my idea early on in my journey left room for frustrations should any barriers occur, that would derail or halt any progress towards my self-imposed deadline for completion. When progress was good, I didn’t, and still don’t, see this as a celebration but more if “I am doing this right”. Thoughts like this are regular for me and my reflective blog often has the theme of *“imposter syndrome”* in play. This did start to ease off but then challenges regarding my data analysis methods had brought this back and had me questioning my pace of completion and therefore again me thinking “am I doing this right?” coming back into my mind.

*3.3. Evaluation*

I consider myself an open person, often seeking for help should barriers occur, and I am no different in the DBA. I am often praised for my progress and topic idea, but I have never been one to take this praise on board and dismiss it as expected in my role of scholarly-practitioner and seeking what is next to be done for my progress. This can manifest into stress if a “speed-bump” appears in the journey. I talk down stress with humour as a coping mechanism and this is a key standout in my reflective blog though my attempt as being light-hearted in my narrative and use of meme to visualise my thoughts.

*3.4. Analysis*

The route cause to many of my frustrations at being “derailed” stem from my self-imposed deadline for completion. I have always been someone to get tasks completed early to allow time for revision and reflection. However, the latter rarely occurs. I require a clear structure and plan end to end and have been guilty as seeing my DBA as another project as opposed to a new venture into research. Framing this as, indeed a journey, and not another tick in the box will relieve any stresses of barriers and see them as lessons learnt and considerations for the future.

*3.5. Conclusion*

I need to reign in my own expectations but also appreciate that I am open to feedback that has started to allow me to re-frame the critical incidents that have occurred in my DBA so far. I also need to take this reflection as a critical incident in giving me a reality check into celebrating my progress and to remain excited about what is to come.

*3.6. Action Plan*

I will be taking the opportunity to reflect in more than just the DBA to form the habit as this experience has shown me the value in it, mostly for my mindset. As my data and analysis discussion develops, I need to start taking my reflection and evolving it to critical reflection and defining the impact my research is having on practice to remove the *“imposter syndrome”* and wear the label of Level 8 with pride and appreciation that I am at the level I expect to be at.

**4. Reflecting on reflecting**

Allowing the time to reflect has given me the opportunity to take a step back and evaluate the mid-way point of my DBA journey. I started a reflective blog at the start of my DBA but only seen it as a diary. It was only when I analysed the content that I started to see the pattern I was setting myself up for; being keen and excited, but rigid in my approach and stressing about any barriers that came my way and reverting to “I am not doing this right”. Yet, all the barriers so far have been overcome and resulted with better clarity of my research. Gibb’s Reflective Cycle (1988) provided me with the structural comfort I like but gave me the prompts to go further and provide me a mechanism that is starting to challenge my default negative view of barriers and see them as pieces being put together. These pieces form a cohesive reflection of where I am now and where I plan to get to with the occasional reminder that “speed-bumps” happen and overcoming them is only beneficial and doesn’t mean “I am wrong”.

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