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Book Review of *The Reflective Leader: Reflexivity in Practice*, by Ian Robson. Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2022

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*The Reflective Leader: Reflexivity in Practice* is the latest book by Ian Robson, full professor at the University of Dundee (United Kingdom) and expert in strategy and reflective practice. As noted in the work's "Acknowledgements" (p. xxi), the inspiration for the book emerged from interviews conducted

by the author with the coaches of several top-flight Scottish football clubs, where the importance of the practical applications of reflection were highlighted. Appropriately, given its title and subject matter, the volume itself is structured as an extended theoretical reflection enriched with practitioner insights. As Robson states in the Introduction (pp. 1–3), his research interest in the topic is something he has pursued in his three decades as a business and management scholar, and which has also been informed by his own life experiences (including as a promising junior sportsman). Accordingly, he writes of his indebtedness to the ideas of American theorist Donald Schön, whose 1983 volume *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* was and continues to be a catalyst for much of Robson's research. Thus, he observes that the current volume aims to ask questions centring around the aims of determining whether “firstly, if leaders consciously reflect on their past decisions and, secondly, to pin down the role of reflection in the process of making decisions and investigate what potential there might be to more fully exploit it as a decision-enhancing technique” (p. 2). Indeed, this deeper focus highlights the important interrelated but discrete aspects of reflection and reflexivity, with the former outlined by Bolton & Delderfield (2018, p. 13) as “learning and developing through examining what we think happened on any occasion, and how we think others perceived the event and us, opening our practice to scrutiny by others, and studying data and texts from the wider sphere” and the latter as “finding strategies to question our own attitudes, thought processes, values, assumptions, prejudices and habitual actions, to strive to understand our complex roles in relation to others” (Bolton & Delderfield, 2018, p. 13).

The four main chapters of *The Reflective Leader: Reflexivity in Practice* each revolve around a specific facet of reflexivity within the chosen context. To briefly centre first on theoretical aspects, the first chapter, “Reflection and Learning,” details the intersection of leadership, learning, and reflective practice, examining the role of knowledge and the importance of systematising it for decision-making purposes. After delving into the linkage between knowledge and organisation learning, models for reflective practice are

introduced, including the author's relevant up-to-date pictorial adaptations of the works of Argyris (1974), Kolb (1984), and Gibbs (1998/2001).

In Chapter 2, "Professional Reflective Practice," the structure of reflective practice is outlined, including the importance of emotions, and how to respond to critical and problematic incidents, before providing pointers towards moving to the development of a reflective mindset. The third chapter, entitled "From Reflection to Reflexivity," examines epistemological and leadership perspectives and outlines the development of a "practicum" (pp. 53–55) for aspiring reflective leaders, which Robson delineates as "as a context of practice-based learning where practitioners reflectively apply formal and informal learning systematically for the purpose of incremental personal development" (p. 53).

In Chapter 4, "Reflection, Reflexivity and Creative Writing," the author turns to the potential of creativity for reflective practice and its impact for leaders in a global environment "characterised by uncertainty, ambiguity, complexity and transience" (p. 69). In this regard, attention is devoted to the important role that creative writing and particularly poetry (pp. 75–77; see also Morgan, 2010)<sup>1</sup> can perform for enhancing and developing reflective skills. The final chapter provides a concluding summary, where Robson reflects on his own reflective practice through the writing of the volume. This expertise is distilled into tabular format on page 94, which sums up the book's valuable findings.

To move on towards the practical aspects, each chapter also contains valuable practical insights from accomplished practitioners in different fields. In Chapter 1, the links between reflection and learning are underscored by the contribution from Paul Collingwood, England cricket coach and former international professional cricketer. He sums up relevant techniques utilised in his coaching practice relating to the impactful role that reflection and analysis can have on players and their performance.

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<sup>1</sup> Readers may also find this journal's recent thematic issue on "Literature, Art and Management: Insights, Perspectives and Synergies" of interest (for more information, see e.g., Lehman & Morgan, 2021).

In the second chapter, senior NHS healthcare manager Claire Copeland centres not only on how important professional aspects of reflective practice and debriefing are for her own development through her reflective blog, but also in post-qualification training for medical doctors, especially with regard to fundamental concepts of honesty and integrity. This chapter also contains a second contribution, by Martin Svensson, a Swedish management professor who offers insights based on his dual profile as a scholar conducting researching on the emergency services and as an erstwhile professional handball player. Regarding reflective practice, he highlights crucial aspects relating to memory and perception, as well as its temporal and emotional importance.

The practitioner perspective in Chapter 3 is given by Joe Lafferty. A business consultant and coach, he underscores the important role of reflection in the at-times challenging field of change management, illustrated with examples from his own experience. And with creativity the focus of the fourth chapter, the necessary input is given by two artistic professionals. In the first, the late Eddie Small – writer, poet, and former creative writing lecturer at the University of Dundee – describes how creative writing practice can be fostered and developed, as well as also mentioning the reflective implications of expressing oneself by writing in first person vis à vis in third person. In the second contribution, prize-winning author Kirsty Gunn, who is professor of creative writing at the University of Dundee, details the interlinkage of creative writing and business and its potential as a problem-solving tool, as well as how creativity can be applied to reflective writing.

Though separated here for the purposes of this review, the theoretical parts and the practitioner perspectives are in fact intricately interwoven into the fabric of this concise 128-page book. Indeed, in examining the role of reflexivity in broader decision-making, it successfully melds the theoretical, practical, and the personal, ensuring its appeal to broad audiences. In addition, mindful of busy schedules, the well-structured chapters mean that each chapter is self-contained and thus suitable for use on a standalone basis. In summary, this volume will be a welcome addition to the bookshelves of managers at all levels, undergraduate and postgraduate students of management, freelance professionals, and academic scholars from a wide

range of disciplines. Indeed, *The Reflective Leader: Reflexivity in Practice* is suitable for anyone whose work or activities invite sustained reflection on their day-to-day professional practice.

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