



# DOOR to Reflection

Eugene Fernandez

**Trainers, facilitators and OD practitioners are critical agents in helping to challenge people's view of the world by encouraging deeper thinking and reflective processes within the organisation. The DOOR framework emerged as a result of helping managers and leaders to think and reflect on what they do, and can lead to deep learning and generative change when utilised with Action Learning.**

DOOR is used as a mnemonic, and also metaphorically and literally as a means to 'open' doorways to understanding. This article was written while on a family holiday in Fiji. It was an opportunity to use my holiday journey as a metaphor to illustrate and elaborate on the framework.

The 'D' in DOOR stands for 'Design', the first 'O' stands for 'Operate', the second 'O' stands for 'Observe' and the 'R' stands for 'Reflect'. This then forms the first iterative cycle.



Figure DOOR Cycle

At its elementary level the 'DO' stands for 'doing'. Like most organisational development and training practitioners, I am immersed well in truly in the Doing paradigm. For me 'doing' is at a most robotic and unconscious level. The 'OR' stands for 'or else' and includes divergent thinking, creativity, play, questioning, challenging, meta reflection and being present in the moment.

The open Door of the 737 aircraft was an invitation to leave behind the treadmill of Doing. Stepping inside I was met with a sun-blessed cheery face and a warm 'bula' (hello) which I followed with 'vinaka' which means thank you. Those of you that have been to Fiji know that this is an invitation to slow down and to take on board what the Fijians call 'Fiji Time'—essentially chill out and go with the flow. A Fijian bitter (beer) eased me as I settled back into the seat and reflected on the year that was.

## Observe

I have found that 'Observation' is usually a good place to start with the DOOR cycle. We are so busy bombarded with action that we rarely get the time to stand back and observe. As a trainer and facilitator of Leadership programs, I design processes to help busy executives understand more about themselves. I'm also a conduit in enabling deeper more reflective processes to emerge, thereby helping to transform the lives of many leaders. I did this for over a decade (Fernandez 1997) though found that while I enabled this for others, I rarely engaged with these processes myself. My Doctoral journey changed this through addressing the question—how can I as a leader (add facilitator and consultant to this) shift my focus from Action to Deep Reflection?

The lens that was externally focused was now firmly focused on me and the internal frame. Interestingly the old adage, "We teach what we most need to learn", was true

in my case. It helped me to see that what I encouraged in others, I needed to embody and emulate for myself.

As Trainers and Facilitators we influence people and processes at different levels. Our whole persona is integrally linked to the processes that we enable. We are influenced by every interaction and in many ways our role becomes one of co-enabling and co-creating processes with people. The old science model of the distant disconnected observer and expert plying their trade to others has had its day in the sun (Hawking & Mlodinow 2010; Kaku 2009; Laszlo 2008). If I was to enable deep change for others then I needed to observe and recognise my own mental models and filters that constructed my view of reality. I needed to work at growing and developing further as a person. Pragmatically speaking—as a Trainer/Facilitator—through self-observation I needed to understand what my own mental models and filters of the world are. How do these models and filters reinforce my view of the world? What is the breadth and depth of my worldview? What are the deeper metaphors and stories that inform my world-view? How accommodative of others' world-views am I? Observation is essential as it provides the data for reflection.

## Reflect

Breathing with excitement I snorkeled at the edge of a reef en-route to stepping ashore for a barbecue lunch at a secluded Sandy Cay. I reflected momentarily on a Sufi quote I often use

in my programs. "Deep in the Sea are riches beyond compare but if you seek safety it is on the shore". By Shiraz. The person's name not the wine, though I did indulge in a glass at the Cay!

To keep the metaphor going, there are many species of reflection. Some allow you to explore the shore, close to the surface and others enable the exploration of the depths. Like the coral reef, there are layers of interrelated, symbiotic connections: rich, colorful and imbued with meaning and purpose.

Time for 'Reflection' is scant in our busy lives. Even when we do reflect, our primary means is to reflect in the middle of action or briefly on action. This surface level process reflects back the world that you know - much like the shallow pool of water at the Cay that reflected my face and the blue sky in the background. In business, 'Review' is compensated for Reflection and even this is done in a cursory fashion. Also, review-like the 'post implementation review' within project management frameworks-sits comfortably within established business practices. It rarely challenges the status quo or the deeper underlying issues. In this context review and surface level reflection are single loop, incremental and fragmented from the context. Deep reflection on the other hand is the vital ingredient that incubates and illuminates new ideas. Deep reflection challenges current mental models or world-views and can change the game altogether. It is uncomfortable, creates dissonance and without it we are likely to achieve no more than trivial change (Fernandez 2008; Fernandez 2009).

Deep reflection does not occur by happenstance. Given the pace and demands of life, it needs to be designed, fostered and embedded systemically in organisations. Deep reflection involves the individual as both the subject and object of reflection. Also, group/team reflection sessions are a powerful enabler of high performance. Critical skills in dialogue, inquiry, advocacy and empathic listening help in developing openness, trust and camaraderie (Issacs 1999).

Observation and reflection are linked to our worldviews and the Meta models we hold in our head. Leaders with myopic self centered worldviews who are non-reflexive impact disproportionately on the lives of individuals.

## Design

Our Observations and Reflections provide the data and critical thinking that helps us in designing something new. Design incorporates a creative forward-looking process. It can be, intentional and unintentional, planned and emergent. Design plays a key part in transforming our lives and in developing solutions that go beyond what we currently do and know. Leaders, who spend time designing and planning for the future, intentionally create better outcomes. Recent research on the brain (Carr 2010; Fine 2007; Levine 2002; Siegel 2007) also highlights the critical need to engage the forebrain in designing and creating the future. If we don't, this part atrophies and we get locked into the daily grind.

Some time ago, I facilitated a leadership program for the Ratus (chiefs of Fiji). There were significant insights and learnings for me and I valued the cross-cultural immersion.

For my children, this was a holiday where I wanted them to have a similarly immersive cultural experience apart from the orchestrated one at our resort.

While waiting in the foyer, the valet David enquired about our trip. I briefly provided the highlights and commented that I was also hiring a car so my children could see the real Fiji. He open-heartedly invited us to his house for dinner in a village amongst small sugar cane plantations. We took up the offer, exchanged phone numbers and agreed to meet at the car park of a local supermarket in town and then follow him in our car.

We decided to bring a bottle of Australian wine along with an envelope containing money as our gift. With David in tow we also bought some nibbles and chocolates for his son plus a couple of bottles of

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Fiji bitter. David had two bags of ice, apologising that they had no light or fridge due to a recent cyclone. He asked us to follow him. I was glad that I had hired a large all terrain vehicle with plenty of clearance at the bottom as we had to take a longer route through boggy tracks due to the bridge being damaged by the cyclone.

We left the highway and entered a dirt road. After some time David left his car at a friend's place and hopped in our car. He did this so that he could come back with us for the more dangerous part of the ride. It started to rain, the terrain was boggy and hilly, we forded two bridges, and one made of timber had my hair on edge. My rather limited driving in boggy terrain skills were also tested. A little later the rain had cleared and we entered lush green countryside. Farmers waved at us as we passed. David commented that due to the hilly terrain and the high cost of fuel most work was done by ox and spade. The mixed community (Fijian and Indian) helped each other out during the cutting season and for other communal activities.

We arrived at a small house tucked away amongst giant Neem, Mango and Tamarind trees. There were herbs, vegetables and flowers around it, and chickens and goats in separate pens. The house was clean and tidy; food was cooked in an annex kitchen that was fired with timber and charcoal. Water was drawn from a boar, though the pump was not working due to the electrical wires coming down. Dinner was served in the courtyard, as the house was too hot. We had a feast of crab and fish that David and his extended family had caught the day previously on his day off from work. He stated that we were lucky as the full moon meant fleshier and plump crabs.

We explored a range of environmental issues including global warming and its impact on his community. He commented that he was paid \$3.90 per hour, as was most of the service staff at the resort. He said that this was not sustainable and equitable given the amount the resort charged their guests. His income was supplemented by what they grew. For example, he bartered some herbs for the lettuce in our salad. David and his wife saved \$20 a fortnight for the

education of their son. We discussed the traits and strengths that their son was already demonstrating and we talked about their aspirations. David and his wife had hope for a better future for their son. They were realistic, optimistic and intentionally and purposefully made plans for a brighter future.

My children were privy to all that was said and done during this time. We had a great conversation on the trip back about our experiences, about the deeper pervading issues in society, about the future and its potentiality. I also had an opportunity to look up at the night sky; it appeared like every star was visible and twinkled.

The story captures many aspects of the design and planning process. My intention for a deeper cultural experience met the warmhearted opportunity offered by David. We are all designers of our life, making choices along the way that create and bring to life a future drawn from many other possible futures (Inayatullah 2008). Awareness of this is critical for if we are not willing to actively engage in this design, then we may be unconscious of the influences around us and have a future imposed on us.

## Operate

'Operate' is the final frame of DOOR and many of us are very good at this. In fact our whole life is engineered for this to occur; our very cortical architecture primes us for pattern and predictability. Neuroscience recognises that this pattern making approximates 96% of what we do and this is mainly unconscious. The 4% is working memory and our window to consciousness (Langer 1989; Rock 2009). The DOOR's iterative process enables us to meaningfully and intentionally work with the 4% and to understand the patterns and processes that drive us. The beauty is that when you deeply think and reflect, your 'Doing' also becomes more present. I was present and enjoyed my time with David and was alive to the journey. I had trust in the future that was unfolding around us.

We are constantly experiencing something through our senses. It is when we place this 'DOing' through the filter of Observation and Reflection that we add meaning to it. Meaning which is individualised, constructed and context bound, gains significance

and power through a process of Dialogue with others. Trainers, Facilitators and OD practitioners who are reflexive practitioners can, with their whole being, 'Be the Change they want to see in the World'. ■

## Resources

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