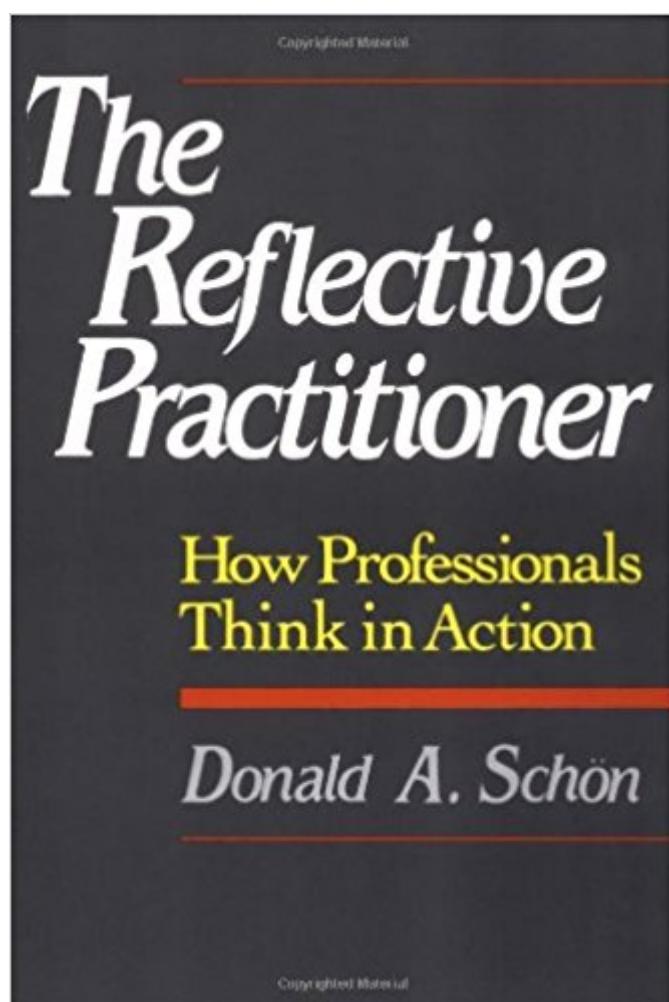


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The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think In Action



Synopsis

A leading M.I.T. social scientist and consultant examines five professions—engineering, architecture, management, psychotherapy, and town planning—to show how professionals really go about solving problems. The best professionals, Donald Schäfelin maintains, know more than they can put into words. To meet the challenges of their work, they rely less on formulas learned in graduate school than on the kind of improvisation learned in practice. This unarticulated, largely unexamined process is the subject of Schäfelin's provocatively original book, an effort to show precisely how “reflection-in-action” works and how this vital creativity might be fostered in future professionals.

Book Information

Paperback: 384 pages

Publisher: Basic Books; 1 edition (September 23, 1984)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0465068782

ISBN-13: 978-0465068784

Product Dimensions: 1 x 5.2 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.5 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.7 out of 5 stars 17 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #102,858 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #103 in Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Mental Health > Compulsive Behavior #289 in Books > Textbooks > Social Sciences > Psychology > Psychopathology #494 in Books > Business & Money > Skills > Decision Making

Customer Reviews

'An important contribution to the literature of planning theory and practice. The Reflective Practitioner offers much food for thought about how planning should be taught and practiced.' Judith I deNeufville, American Planning Association Journal, USA 'Clarifies the struggle between art and science in the professional manager's thought process. It is also well written.' Harvard Business Review --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Donald A. Schäfelin is Ford Professor of Urban Studies and Education at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

This is a unique and invaluable book on several counts:
• It very perceptively characterizes actual competent professional practice - not idealized or normative formulations
• It is ostensibly grounded in the author's personal experiences - project consultations, not mere observations, questionnaires, etc.
• It situates its thesis with ample and forceful background coverage - analysis of technical rationality
• It accords well with constructivist epistemology in multiple regards - especially Piaget's genetic epistemology
• It is to my knowledge the only book that directly and focally addresses the subject topic - authors with complementary viewpoints include: Checkland, Hammond, Klein, Piaget, M. Polanyi, Vickers. In the preface, Donald Schon explicitly sets out to explore and characterize an epistemology of professional practice that centers on reflection-in-practice. Moreover, he envisions a modus operandi that is nevertheless rigorous in composition and efficacy. As contrasted with an external infusion of supportive research products, he looks to the enrichment of such practice largely through its incorporation of associated in-service research. For background, he notes that "professional practice has at least as much to do with finding the problem as with solving the problem....(and) that problem setting is a recognized professional activity....(that) has no place in a body of professional knowledge concerned exclusively with problem solving....(moreover) the specialized use of (problem solving) knowledge depends on a prior restructuring of situations that are complex and uncertain" (pp. 18-19). In actuality then, the more formidable or crucial steps in professional practice quite often lie outside the formal or academic discipline itself. Accordingly, Schon explores academic tenets and curricula for their apartness from corresponding practice, especially in the case of engineering. Here the conscious emphasis on engineering science is seen by academe to impart status and rigor to their offerings, not to mention content that is readily teachable. Furthermore, the associated focus on problem solving is congruent with the positivist ideal of technical rationality, which has too often been uncritically presumed to be both salutary and sufficient. Alas, such touted aspiration contrasts with prevailing competent practice. Technical rationality is simply overmatched by real-world problem situations, at least until they have been tamed by expert, reflective, and intuitive professional practitioners. In short, technical rationality is suited to solving only well-formed or textbook-style problems. To illuminate these circumstances, Schon contrasts positivist epistemology with the de facto epistemology of practice:
• separation of means and ends, wherein the attendant instrumental problem solving proceeds toward a pre-established objective via technical procedure - or instead, means and ends are framed interdependently in the course of refining a tractable problem for technical solution

separation of research from practice, where the former furnishes technical methods and tools for the latter. Instead, integration of research with practice as a natural outcome of reflective practice, and in consequence more closely attuned to practitioner needs. The separation of knowing from doing, whereby the doing serves mainly as the implementation of knowing - or instead, knowing and doing are inseparable in the reflective conduct of a transaction with the problem situation. As typical of competent or experienced practitioners, reflective practice pivots around the practitioner's conversation with an evolving problem situation or work product, especially with respect to inherent or incident uncertainties. In effect, it talks back in the form of insightful observables prompted by the practitioner. This implicit dialogue proceeds as the practitioner initiates selected actions, and the examines the full import and emerging possibilities of resulting circumstances. In general, reflective scrutiny keys especially upon unanticipated outcomes, which strongly elicit reflection-in-practice. This in turn may prompt reframing of the problem at hand, or perhaps impromptu experiments (what-if) for diagnostic probing. Where remedial actions are indicated, the practitioner invokes revisions or improvisations as adjudged appropriate for the issue at hand. Here, reflection may engender

seeing-as, or recognizing similarities in a new situation resembling aspects of a previously dealt-with one. In turn, such recognition may invoke a suitable existing action scheme. Over time, moreover, a practitioner develops a repertoire of trusted schemes and constructs that can be used when indicated in subsequent situations. Then, the practitioner has to guard against precipitous or unwarranted actions due to faulty recognition. Such missteps, however, should nevertheless be detected through normal reflective practice before the introduced discrepancies propagate very far. This partially tacit repertoire constitutes professional knowledge, which is constructed and refined through reflection-in-action. This repertoire and attendant patterns of action achieve a significant degree of rigor through their: grounding in actual problem situations; confirmation via in-practice experiments; and validation through successful applications. I have not read Schon's *Educating the Reflective*

Practitioner so I do not know how such practitioner knowledge or work patterns could conceivably be explicitly taught academically. It would seem to me, however, that informal apprenticeship and trial-and-error experience during practice would be the best as well as the ordinary way to attain reflective professionalism. Schon also provides several rather revealing examples of reflective practice, and examines the proper or desired roles of professionals as contributing members of society. For me though, the ideas reviewed above were of paramount and exceptional importance. In general, his associated descriptions and analyses resonate quite

emphatically with my own reawakened experiences over several decades of professional practice. I nonetheless in no way discount formal academic course work, nor does Schon, because it is the foundational substrate of practice. But until one begins reflecting, experimenting, and improvising in actual practice, one is simply lacking in an essential dimension of professional resourcefulness.

This book was recommended to us - a PhD cohort group - excellent book - taking us right through origins of reflective practitioner - very readable- divided up very well into sections and chapters - I purchased a used book and the previous reader had underlined and highlighted parts of it which was very helpful !!!! A book that you will keep and return to again and again. Reflective practice is now much more common and this book is very insightful - the stories of cases illustrate the theories very clearly

The most compelling notion in this book is that of practitioners having a "reflective conversation with the situation." The human interlocutors are not the only participants in a consulting or decision making context. While sometimes difficult to read, this is a work of paramount importance for anyone interested in postmodern approaches to organization development and change processes. This work was formative for me in writing my own just-published book, *Relational Presence: Decision Making beyond Consensus*. Schon's work helps to shape my notion that 'relational' listening is a life-giving step forward from 'active' listening. Part of 'relational listening' is listening to the situation itself.

Good to read if you're doing your dissertation

Wonderful book. Very well written. Challenges structured institutions, bureaucracies, and the roles of professionals in society. Very fundamental and applicable to a wide range of fields, disciplines, and educational pursuits.

Great book ! It is really useful. Those who are looking for Architecture education practices theories Understanding, this book is the one.

This book discusses the history and theory of professional learning. Schon spends a great deal of time justifying what every professional knows - that framing problems is difficult and that book learning is insufficient to deal with these problems. If you are interested in positivism, technical

rationality, and the evolution of the modern professional school, then this book is loaded with meaty material. If, however, you want to apply methods built upon other epistemologies, go straight to his 2nd book, "Educating the Reflective Practitioner". The book is well thought out, but I found it a heavy read. Not for the faint-of-heart. I got a lot out of it. Recommended only for epistemology or history of professional school wonks.

This is the third time I have read this book. Along with Dewey's How We Think I always get something new. Needs to be read by anyone who teaches, especially professionals

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