

Steps for Virtue Reflection (version 2.0)

This version was developed by Victor van den Bersselaar.

Virtue Reflection is a narrative form of reflection in which the reflector retells their story on the basis of a virtue proposed by the facilitator or the participants. Virtues are consistent character traits. Not every trait is a virtue: virtue is the right balance between two extremes. The right balance is not fixed. This reflection is about finding out what that right balance is. Virtue Reflection is an ethical version of Point Reflection. Virtue Reflection can be carried out with two people or in small groups.

INPUT

Step 1 The reflector describes a situation or case in which an ethical question or dilemma was involved. The situation is described, using only one or two sentences, the trigger in one or two more sentences, and then a question is formulated in one sentence. The trigger can be a positive experience or a problem.

Step 2 The other participants ask the reflector a few open, non-directive questions to clarify the input, such as 'who, what, when, where and how' questions.

IMPLEMENTATION

Step 3 The other participants spend two or three minutes in silence deciding on a virtue which could help to clarify this situation. They look at the situation bearing in mind the character of the reflector.

Examples of virtues:

- Cardinal virtues (Aristotle):
Prudence, courage, temperance, justice (see appendix).
- Care virtues (Tronto):
Attentiveness, responsibility, competence, responsiveness (see appendix).
- Self-determination (Foucault):
Carefulness, spiritual courage, willingness to learn, self-discipline.

VARIANT I The virtues are on post-its. The situation is written briefly in the middle of a flip chart. The reflector orders the post-its around the situation on the flip chart. The virtue which is most recognisable is placed closest to the situation. The virtue which is least associated with the reflector is placed furthest away.

VARIANT II Virtue Reflection with two people (reflector and facilitator): The facilitator chooses a virtue.

Step 4 The reflector tells their story again and describes their own actions in the light of the chosen virtue. The other participant(s) listen closely and encourage the reflector by asking questions which help him or her to identify the chosen virtue in their actions.

CONCLUSION

Step 5 The reflector evaluates the reflection session: what has he or she gained from it? Does he or she now look differently at the dilemma? Will he or she now act more consciously or differently?

APPENDIX TO HAND-OUT ON VIRTUE REFLECTION

Four Cardinal Virtues

- Prudence
- Courage
- Temperance
- Justice

Prudence

is the practical insight which is needed to choose the right path or attitude in life, an episode in life, in one's relationship to others etc.

Courage

is necessary for sticking to a chosen path under all circumstances and withstanding opposition and bad luck.

Temperance

is needed to avoid being carried away by feelings, emotions or passions and to withstand these.

Justice

is needed to avoid reaching one's goal in life at the cost of others.

Four Care Virtues (the Ethics of Care)¹

- Attentiveness
- Responsibility
- Competence
- Responsiveness

Attentiveness

is the ability to suspend one's own goals, ambitions and cares in order to be able to show interest in and pay attention to others.

Responsibility

is providing care when you see that there is a need for it and there is no other way in which that need can be met.

Competence

is the complex ability which is needed to guarantee that the intended care and acceptance of the responsibility for it will lead to meeting the need for care.

Responsiveness

means that you can deal with your own vulnerability and inequality when *receiving* care and, conversely, can deal with the vulnerability and inequality of others when *providing* care.

¹ Definitions taken from J. Tronto *Moral Boundaries*