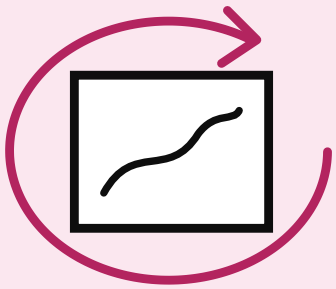
Theory

Reflective practice

Professionals handle unique cases by thinking while they act. They frame the problem, try a move, see how the situation responds and adjust.



In Spanish
Práctica reflexiva

Origin
Schön (1983)

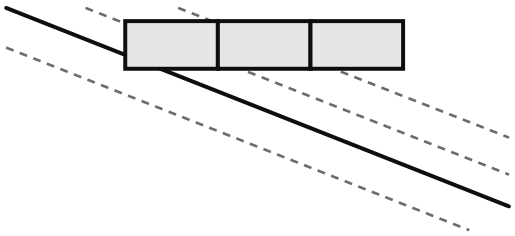
What problem it addresses

It corrects the idea that practice means applying theory to problems that are already defined. It gives design an explanation for why it thinks by sketching and testing.

An example

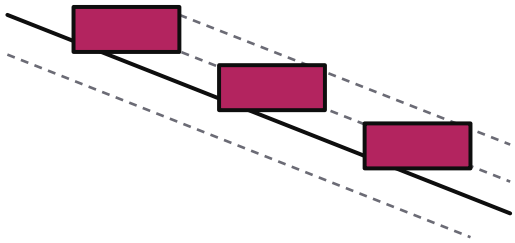
In a case Schön analyzes, an architecture student designs a school on a steeply sloping site.

Applying the plan



She keeps her layout of buildings, which doesn't fit the site. **The drawing stalls.**

Talking with the situation



Her teacher draws over it and tries stepping the classrooms down the slope. **The problem changes shape.**

For Schön, each sketch is a question to the situation. Its answer, often unexpected, forces a rethink.

Why it happens

1 

Frame: decide which problem you are solving.

2 

Move: try something, with a sketch or a prototype.

3 

Listen to the response: the unexpected forces you to frame again.

Applications in design

Use it like this

Treat quick sketches and prototypes as questions and note what surprised you in each one.

Avoid

Locking the framing early and treating every surprise as a mistake.

Don't fall for it

Doing a lot is not reflecting. If nothing you try changes how you see the problem, you aren't listening to the response.

5 fields

What the research says

Schön looked for reflection-in-action in architectural design, psychotherapy, the science-based professions, town planning and management (Schön, 1983).

●●○ **Debated evidence.** It is a theory built from case studies. A protocol study found that this view and rational problem solving each describe different moments of design well (Dorst and Dijkhuis, 1995).

Connections

Used in

- Sketching
- Design thinking
- Research through design
- Prototyping

Related to

- Problem–solution co-evolution
- Problem framing

Authors and works

1983	**Donald A. Schön**	Distinguished knowing-in-action from reflection-in-action and described design as a conversation with the situation.
1995	**Kees Dorst and J. Dijkhuis**	Compared Schön's view with rational problem solving by observing designers.
1998	**R. Valkenburg and Kees Dorst**	Used Schön's framework to describe and compare the work of design teams.

Sources

Original sources

- Schön, D. A. (1983). The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action. Basic Books.

Academic reviews

- Dorst, K., & Dijkhuis, J. (1995). Comparing paradigms for describing design activity. Design Studies, 16(2), 261–274.
- Valkenburg, R., & Dorst, K. (1998). The reflective practice of design teams. Design Studies, 19(3), 249–271. View source (https://doi.org/10.1016/S0142-694X(98)00011-8)

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