

Recycling or Reviewing

by Justin Lowe

This article is about relating the symbol to learning processes.



Why? Because this efficient symbol, more often used for recycling materials, gives an impression of the process involved in reviewing – i.e. re-cycling learning, that just isn't as obvious in words.

Hand in hand with the symbol are the **3 - Rs Reduce/Re-use/Recycle.**

The purpose and benefits behind the symbol and these words is clear in ecological terms. Is the symbol also meaningful and plain to understand in learning and experiential terms? I have no particular expertise for writing about reviewing. I don't know if this model is inspired by ecology, anthropology or poetry, it's not innovative but it does have emphasis. A snippet of practice to share as something easily added to what most folk already do, useful in some circumstances.

The model taps into the meaning and logic of sustainability – i.e. about us having a sustainable impact on our environment, so being socially responsible can form a large part of applying this model. The whole concept of recycling can be translated into learning terms as:

- resourceful responsibility,
- always being in a position of influence,
- checking and responding to changing elements.

The recycling paradigm operates around the effects of consumerism and western experience. Whilst recycling is a partial solution to the problems of waste, there also needs to be a process of re-educating manufacturers to package sensibly or have sustainable policies and products – feedback from consumers is essential for this process. Similarly, given the growing complexity of our culture it's no wonder that reviewing experiences and developing the ability to introspect are high on the learning agenda.

The 3Rs

There are myriad ways in which these words can be interpreted, we look at two ways of translating the model in examples that work with groups

3Rs Model 1

Is based on the broad principle that groups who engage in team and personal development are aiming to:



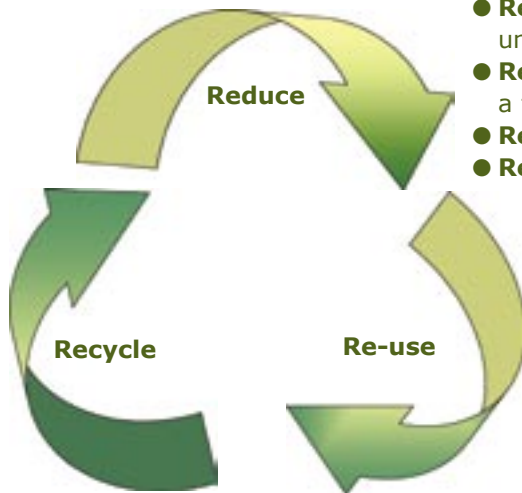
Reduce
inefficiencies,
distractions,
wasted time and
miscommunications.

Re-Use existing
designs, processes,
practices, other
people's ideas,
energy and
momentum.

Recycle experiences
to enrich perceptions
and awareness.

The symbol is a little reminiscent of Kolb's learning cycle and indeed that's how it could be used with some adaptation, changing a couple of words and the flow being represented. What's already happened is that everyone reading this will have some preconceptions of the symbol and it's this familiarity that I find useful. The three arrows are a metaphor for a process that's widely understood and similar enough to reviewing as to be meaningful.

The model can be introduced as a process at the start of a review to help groups understand the purpose of reviewing. This is especially so if the group is new to teamwork or at the beginning of an extended course. The meaning of the symbol is recognised by everyone but it's worth chatting through what it means to individuals within the group. I tend to work with 'difficult' groups so my needs are for making processes understandable and accessible – so there's no uncertainty about what we're doing, less resistance to sitting down to recycle the experiences of the day.



- **Reducing** anxiety into manageable chunks of uncertainty and questions that can be answered.
- **Reducing** the amount of time and energy it takes to do a task.
- **Reducing** challenges into efficient sequences of action.
- **Reducing** the amount of waste generated.

- **Re-Using** someone else's great idea to improve your own great idea.
- **Re-Using** your own experiences to understand other people's behaviour.
- **Re-Using** existing qualities, processes and designs.
- **Re-Using** skills we learn from other people.

- **Recycling** experience to realise achievements we have made or can work towards.
- **Recycling** decisions to imagine different choices and consequences.
- **Recycling** experiences into useful information for others.
- **Recycling** events to get a better sense of the experience and formulate questions arising from new information.

it may seem to some like an unimaginative look at the past or a frugal way of moving into the future, there is a strong undertone of reclaiming wasted time and reducing the effort it takes to move through experiences. This equates to more freedom and energy for appreciating where we are at as well as what we're about.

3R's Model 2

This advancement to the model uses the intention behind the three R's and their original meaning. In practice this is very similar to the traffic light or Stop, Start, Continue review, with added purpose.

As with the first model, at no time do you need to mention the environment but since behaviour is unquestionably associated with external, environmental conditions it's worth playing around with the idea that teams can look deeper into their ecology and individuals being aware of their impact. For simplicity I will just outline how this model can be used for groups to manage and review experiences.

The juicy creativity of this model is in the fact that as well as being a series of practical behaviours teams and individuals can do to increase momentum and potential: it's also the model used to guide the post-experience reflections.

The purpose is the same, to achieve sustainability in the growth of the team or individual practices. Whilst

Constantly recycling experience means teams distil learning more efficiently and become more capable at putting solutions into practice. Even if the questions don't centre on reducing, re-using or recycling elements of experience the model or idea of resourceful responsibility can be used by groups.

Questions could be tailored to suit any group or individual.

- With large, new teams such as The Princes Trust, questions might be about reducing the time it takes to prepare, reducing the whole process of being ready to go in the mini-bus into dedicated chunks of time and organisation.
- For rowdy groups going on a residential it might be wise to look at ways of reducing the friction and tension in the group before going away. Appreciating and being aware of personal impact and ecology means gathering feedback, understanding boundaries and being open to different interpretations.



- How can you **Reduce** the time it takes to do a certain task?
- How can you **Reduce** the effort it takes to get things done?
- How could you **Reduce** impacts on resources?
- What previous skills and knowledge can you **Re-Use** in this activity?
- What actions can you **Re-Use** to realise your aims?
- How can you make mo**Re-Use** of this opportunity?
- **Re-Cycle** experiences – find out what you enjoyed about them.
- **Re-Cycle** what you've learnt as information for other people.
- **Re-Cycle** by-products other people could use or appreciate.

- For teams focusing on communication some people could think about reducing the amount of lengthy words they use, others might benefit from reducing the volume or amount of time and energy they take to describe something.

It's helpful if the group begin exploring the idea of re-using other people's language or share ideas they heard about mirroring people's behaviour, as that can form a neat introduction to sensory predicates (how people see or get to grips with solutions).

Instead of focusing on what can be reduced maybe at times it's more appropriate to consider what activities people want to make more time and energy for. Rather than looking at what can be re-used maybe the group would benefit from re-using the challenge to explore different possibilities. Other than verbally recycling experiences it could be a game of each person writing statements and the group putting a spin on them from different perspectives.

For businesses, ecology in teams is about recognising the changing and different conditions people are working under. Reducing the impact of work means happier employees. Team efficiency and development is about creatively adapting to suit cultural and environmental conditions, being able to move smoothly from slow to quick time or global to local thinking. Corporate responsibility is a huge looming issue and triple bottom line economics (fiscal, social and ecological value) is something for the near, rather than distant future. Right here and now adding a purposeful ecology alongside the day to day activity might prove to be the added

value that people need to commit more energy and purpose to what they are already doing on behalf of the company.

This has introduced the basic principles of this model and some ways it may be used to guide group processes when reviewing or establishing a basis for learning.

I assume that people already subscribe to the recycling concept in reviewing and real terms so I haven't been too prescriptive in how you can apply the model or how far you might be able to stretch the recycling analogy. This is something for your creative genius to ponder and your curiosity to answer. I hope you feel informed and familiar enough with the model to try it out.

You will have noted there is nothing new about this model that's obviously re-using processes and meanings that already exist. It has a novel pervasiveness in that there are little reminders on most cans and plastic bottles. It also has a novel and creative depth when ecological values are a part of the application.

This is an excerpt from an extensive ecocentric model under development so I'd be interested in any comments on this article or enquiries for further information. ■

Authors Notes

Justin Lowe began working in the outdoors as a volunteer in 1992. Currently working as Coordinator for Earth Events. My earliest memories of reviewing are at school -going over events with teachers when some prank had been committed. I parted gladly from academia in my early teens and settled into a dozen or more years in the outdoors where I studied intensely and chaotically, reading, learning and applying new material to my 'clunking' reviewing style. I learnt a great deal from experience: occasionally going out of my depth and at other times reviewing subjects to death. Being part of a team that talked passionately for hours about such things, and in the position of being able to actively explore techniques, was a significant opportunity; despite the silences I inspired! Later I attended courses and began developing in-house programmes for existing and incoming staff, the testing ground for new approaches and myself.

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