

Reflective Practice Guide

Research shows that our experiences are the most effective development interventions, but only if we take the time to process the learning from them. Every day we are presented with opportunities to learn, we just need to take advantage of them. Reflective practice is an extension of reflection; while reflection may lead to thinking about an event in detail and gaining new knowledge, this will not improve your practice. It is only when this new knowledge is directly used to make improvements that reflection becomes reflective practice. Appendix 1 lists some of the benefits of reflective practice and Appendix 2 details the different types of reflective practice.

You may be thinking, well that's all well and good but who has the time? If you do any of the following, you are already spending some time reflecting:

- Using the journey to and from your workplace to reflect
- Talking with a trusted and honest colleague over lunch
- A group discussion with several colleagues at the beginning or end of the week – maybe at a team meeting
- Jotting down notes in a journal to reflect on when you have time later in the week

Now it's just about putting a bit more structure around it, so you capture the learning and put it into practice. Otherwise, your reflecting is wasted.

Reflective Areas

There are three areas you may want to reflect on:

Reflective questions – Event

- What were you happy about/pleased with today/this week?
- What were you unhappy/angry with today/this week?
- What did you want to happen?
- What did happen?
- Where were you?
- What were you doing?

- Who else was there?
- What were they doing?
- What was the context of the event and what had led up to it?
- What happened?
- How did you respond? How did other people respond?
- What was the end result?
- How successful was it? What criteria are you using to judge success?
- How would you deal with the situation next time?

If you consider the event in detail, you may pick up on aspects of the situation you did not consider at the time. These details could have affected your response or the responses of other people and may help you when you consider how you would approach the situation if it arose again. It is important to reflect on a situation objectively; that is, you need to take a step back and consider what the situation would have looked like to an outside observer.

Reflective questions – Skills/knowledge

- What did you learn today/this week? About yourself? About other people?
- Did you identify any gaps in your knowledge this week? What will you do about this?
- Did you identify any skills you found difficult to master this week? What could you do to improve your skills?
- What feedback did you receive this week? What did you think/feel about the feedback?
- Have you received any feedback this week which contradicts what you have been told before? Can you think of any reason for this?
- What are you going to do differently?

Reflective questions – Feelings

- Why was this situation/event important to you?
- How were you feeling when it started?

- How were you feeling when it ended?
- What were you thinking about at the start and end of the situation/event?
- Who have you enjoyed/not enjoyed working with? Why?
- What do you feel about the whole experience?

Your emotional state can influence how you act and behave at the time of a situation or event. By considering how you felt, you can examine what impact your emotional state might have had on the situation/event.

Across all three areas – events / skills and knowledge / feelings – the most important questions are around how you are going to use what you have learnt from your reflecting and how you are going to change what you do for the better.

How to reflect and then put it into practice

- Schedule 15-30 mins per week
- Select at least one event from your week that you feel you learned from, or it could be an upcoming event you would like to reflect on
- Choose some reflective questions to help you capture your learning
- Note your learning in a journal – this could be online or on paper
- If there are any actions you can take, plan them
- Once a month, go back over your journal to refresh yourself of your learning and see how your development is progressing

Role Model

It is important that your direct reports either see or hear about you engaging in reflective practice so that they also start to make it part of their ongoing development. Remember actions speak louder than words. It is not enough to promote the benefits of reflective practice; you have to demonstrate it. A good place to discuss this would be at a 1:1 meeting.

If you require this report in an alternative format, such as large print or a coloured background, please contact TalentandDevelopment@ed.ac.uk or Hrhelpline@ed.ac.uk

Appendix 1 - Benefits of Reflective Practice

The original definition (Schön, 1983) defined reflective practice as thoughtfully considering your own experiences in applying knowledge to practice. Reflective practice involves learning from experience.

- It can improve the quality of your work
- It is cost effective
- It can be done anywhere and at any time
- It can help to build resilience and maintain wellbeing
- It enables you to view events objectively
- It enables you to transfer what you do well to other similar situations
- It improves your professional judgement
- It helps you identify where you can make changes or improvements in what you do
- It helps you to plan for the future
- It helps you respond more positively to change
- You can learn from the experience of others
- It makes you more confident and competent
- It encourages you to take ownership of your learning
- It can help to identify where efficiencies can be made – cost and time
- It can show you the difference between what you say you do and what you do

Appendix 2 - Different types of reflective practice

Reflective practice enables you to analyse an event and evaluate how a different response might have brought about a different outcome. There are three main ways of doing this:

- retrospective reflection
- reflection in action
- prospective reflection

Retrospective reflection or reflection on action involves looking back at important events or situations and considering what happened and what you could have done differently to improve the outcome for next time. This information can then be used as a tool for understanding what happened and how to develop skills and practice.

This method has the advantage of taking place after the event or situation, when the emotional impact has lessened. This might enable you to be more objective about what happened and your part in it.

It is worth highlighting that retrospective reflection can sometimes lead you to imagine aspects of the event that you did not notice or consider at the time. It is important to be as honest and critical as you can about the situation in order to gain the most benefit and improvement from it.

Reflection in action is a more dynamic approach to reflection as it happens while you are in the event or situation itself. It is especially useful with a situation you have not encountered previously, or you are not familiar with. The action you take in these ‘thinking on your feet’ situations will depend largely on the knowledge you can apply without notice to a practical situation.

The advantage of this method is that, as you reflect while the situation is still ongoing, it allows you to adjust your practice as the event progresses.

Depending on the type of event, you may not have the time, space or clarity to reflect well at that moment, but if you are assessing on an ongoing basis what is working well and what areas need more development, it is possible to make improvements during the event.

Prospective reflection involves looking at potential situations and considering what you could do to improve your response to them even before they occur. You may have encountered a particular situation in the past and need to plan what you are going to do the next time it arises. Or you may know an unfamiliar situation will arise shortly and, in order to reduce your anxiety and improve your performance, you want to plan how you are going to deal with it.

This technique has the advantage of preparing you ahead of time for a potential situation. The disadvantage is that the situation may not be as you envisioned it, meaning you have to implement reflection in action during the event and retrospectively.