

COMMUNITY ALPHABET

REFLECTIVE & REFLEXIVE PRACTICE



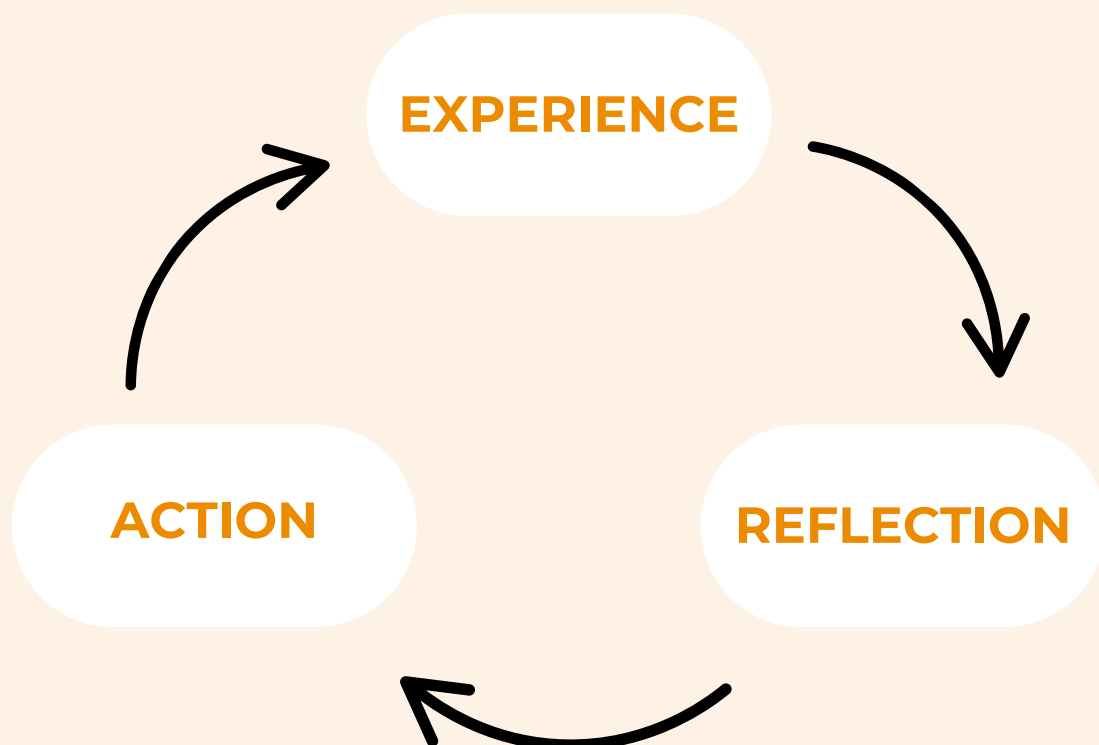
NADACE VIA

WHAT ARE REFLECTIVE AND REFLEXIVE PRACTICE?

In the following sections, we highlight two closely related but slightly different approaches, reflective and reflexive practice, to **learn from the things we do in communities** and in all other aspects of our lives. We explain both in the next sections.

Reflective and reflexive practices are a **set of soft skills and ways of operating that help us to better understand and learn from what we do and our engagement with the world.**

At their core, they involve a focus on the following cycle of:



Source: The ERA cycle. Melanie, Jasper, *Beginning Reflective Practice* (Cengage Learning, 2013).

WHAT ARE REFLECTIVE AND REFLEXIVE PRACTICE?

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Facilitators, peers and good friends can play a role in encouraging these practices in us. But both **reflective and reflexive practice start with us**, with the **individual**.



INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

Have you ever stopped and carefully reviewed for yourself something that has happened, or happened repeatedly in your community efforts, to try to better understand the dynamics of the situation?

If so, you have engaged in some form of reflective or reflexive practice.

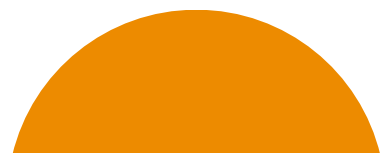
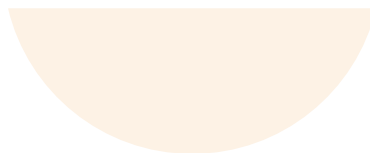
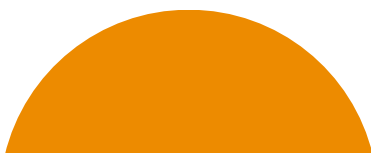
Did you realise something new or adjust your next steps after pausing and reviewing what happened?

WHY ARE REFLECTIVE AND REFLEXIVE PRACTICE IMPORTANT?

Working in communities is **complex** work, involving **multiple interactions** with different people, and **constant change**. Reflective and reflexive practices are the ways we learn best in and from complex situations, and can help us ensure community members are in the lead (for more on this, see the [Letting community lead thematic bloc](#)).


These practices will make you stronger facilitators of inclusive, participatory forms of community building. Specifically, they can help you:

- **consider** both single events/experiences and longer-term experiences in community building and **recognise patterns** or new facets of these efforts
- better **understand your own role** in the community, your strengths, weaknesses and uncertainties and biases
- consider what your approach is bringing and where **trying new approaches** may be useful
- **recognise what you know and don't know** about your community and your own role





WHY ARE REFLECTIVE AND REFLEXIVE PRACTICE IMPORTANT?

Here's why some CA participants find reflective and reflexive practice important to community building:



*I find the Gibbs Reflective Cycle relevant and practical in evaluating my work in community. Answering the questions will **help me see what I may have missed** initially and **what I would do differently**.*

*[Reflecting with peers] It played a big role, both in terms of motivation, and also in terms of giving ideas of different options available to us. **Important to visualize different paths**, and knowing that decisions are to be made and substantiated while planning for this journey, while at the same time **being flexible in order to integrate what we learn from the process and by doing**.*



REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

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In short, reflective practice refers to **looking back on social interactions** that we have **in and with communities**, on what went well and what could be improved.

It is a way of **deepening** and sometimes also **speeding up** the learning process by drawing on one's daily experiences.

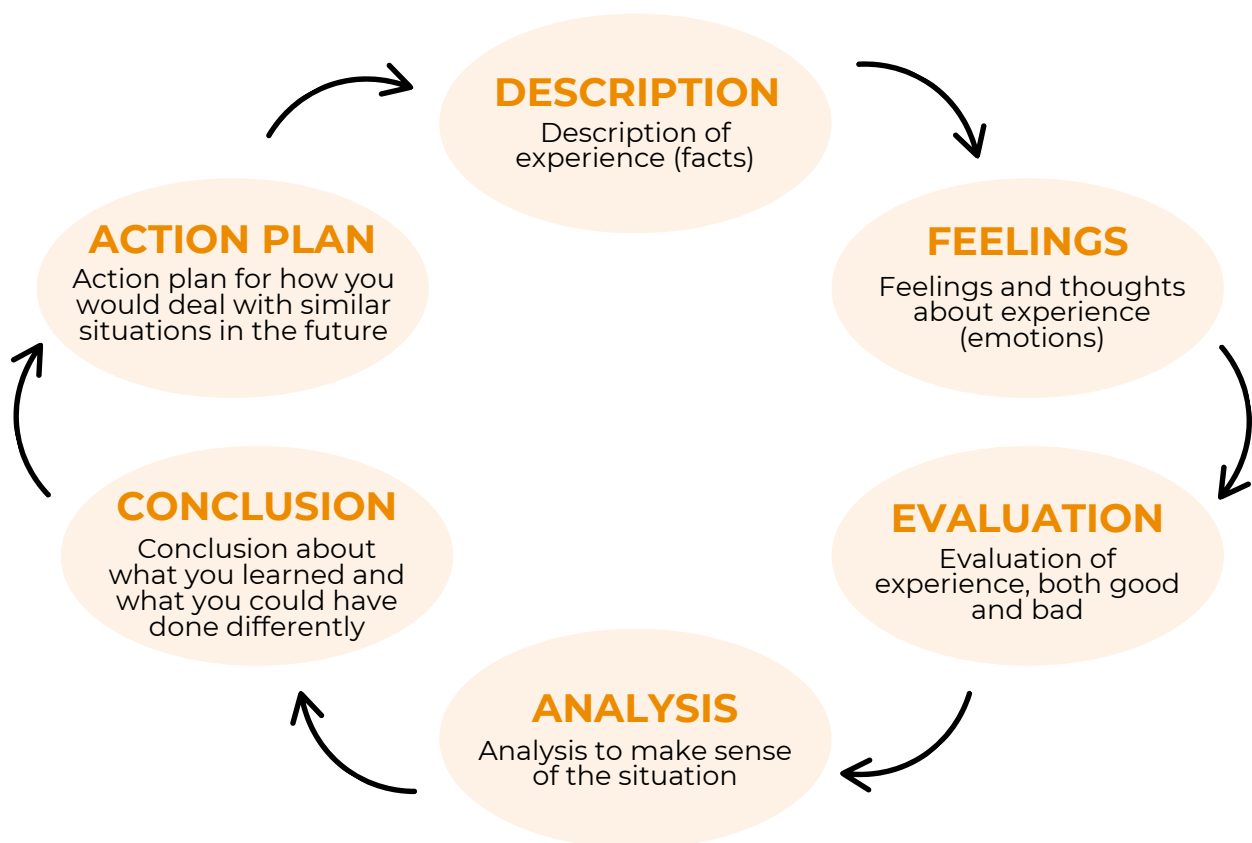


Ideas around reflective practice emerged in the 1980s from the fields of education, medicine and social work as ways of learning from real life experiences with students, patients and clients of services.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

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One model that we find useful in understanding the **process** of reflective practice is the **Gibbs Reflective Cycle**.



Source: Graham Gibbs, Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods. Further Education Unit, Oxford Polytechnic 1988), as found in [Study Skills: Reflective Practice Toolkit](#), University of Cambridge. Retrieved 21 November, 2024.


INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

Here is a [CA Reflective Questions handout](#) with some questions that can help guide you.


REFLEXIVE PRACTICE

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In addition to reflective practice described in the previous slides, we can employ **reflexive practice** (sometimes called critical reflective practice), which goes **a step further**.




*Reflexive thinking is a way of being in the world that involves **noticing patterns in your experience**. You look at patterns and influences that affect your actions as a whole — it's about noticing how you change and grow.¹*



Exploring patterns and influences means **noticing and questioning** how our attitudes, thought processes, values, assumptions, biases and habitual actions are **shaped by the world around us**, and **analysing** what we notice in order to **better understand our relationship to the world**, with **others and ourselves**.

With these insights we can make useful adjustments to what we do and how we do it.



¹Tom Barrett, "[Reflexive and Reflective Practice: What's the Difference](#)", August 22, 2022. Retrieved 30 November, 2024.

MORE ON REFLEXIVE PRACTICE

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Reflexive practice draws on the work of **Paolo Freire**, a Brazilian philosopher of education and leading figure in the field of **critical pedagogy**.

*To be reflexive is to **recognise we are active in shaping our surroundings**, and begin critically to **take circumstances and relationships into consideration rather than merely reacting** to them.²*

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

Think of a recent moment, a specific situation, in your efforts to build community. Take the time to consider...

- *Why you made the choices you made in that situation. How do they demonstrate your preferences or perhaps your fears?*
- *What personal values or assumptions influenced your choices?*
- *The power dynamics underlying the situation, and how they may have influenced your choices, assumptions and/or role. You can find more on power dynamics in the [Power dynamics & bias thematic bloc](#).*

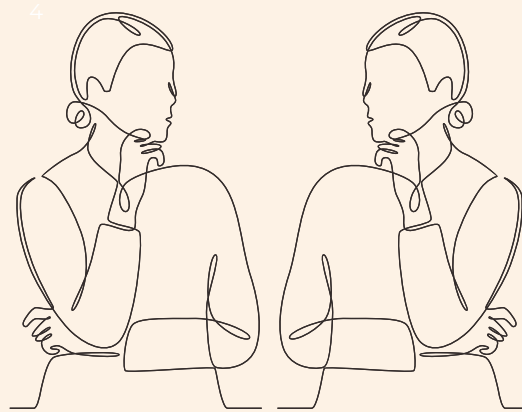
What did you discover about yourself and what motivates your actions in the community?

² Will Allen, "[Reflective and Reflexive Practice](#)", Learning for Sustainability. Retrieved 25 November, 2024.

PRACTICING REFLECTIVE AND REFLEXIVE PRACTICE

You might be thinking that you already reflect on what has happened all the time...like your head will explode!!

But reflective and reflexive practice require **conscious effort, regular practice** and **dedicated time** when you are not caught up in or distracted by other commitments.



INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

- *When have you last reflected more deeply on what you are seeking to achieve in the community and how it is (very honestly) going?*
- *How did you do so (in what circumstances, do you keep a journal, write notes, make 'quiet' time for this)? What works best for you?*
- *What made it difficult?*
- *Based on what you have read here, was it reflective practice or reflexive practice?*



RESOURCES

- [“Study Skills: Reflective Practice Toolkit.”](#) University of Cambridge. Retrieved 25 November, 2024.
A brief introduction to four reflective practice models.
- Allen, Will. [“Reflective and Reflexive Practice.”](#) Learning for Sustainability. Retrieved 25 November, 2024.
A brief review of the challenges of reflective and reflexive practice.
- Barrett, Tom. [“Reflexive and Reflective Practice: What's the Difference.”](#) August 22, 2022. Retrieved 26 November, 2024.
- Maclean, Siobhan. [“The Journey from Reflection Towards Reflexivity.”](#) YouTube, 2020. Retrieved 26 November, 2024.
A video (from the field of social work) exploring the differences between reflection, critical reflection and reflexivity.

Return to the [Useful tools page.](#)