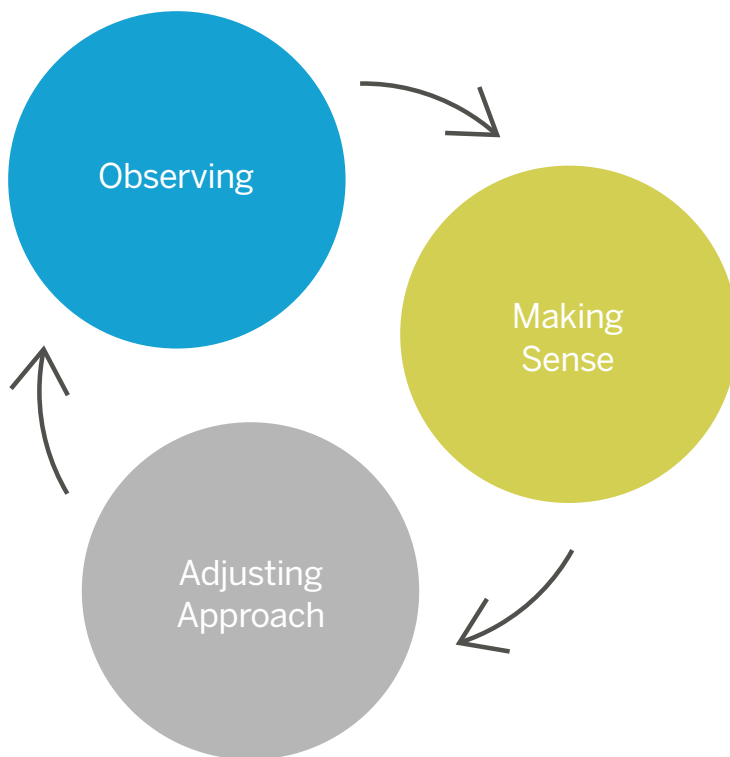


What Reflective Practice Is (and Isn't)



Philanthropy's
Reflective Practices:
a project to help you
build what you bring
to your work

Think of a time in your personal or professional life when you...

- ★ Wrote down observations before or after a challenging conversation that illuminated the bigger picture.
- ★ Made sure to explore what was going on beneath the surface of a meeting.
- ★ Paid attention to your body, breath and the thoughts running through your mind, before you weighed in on a contentious comment.
- ★ Enlisted peers to consult on a dilemma.

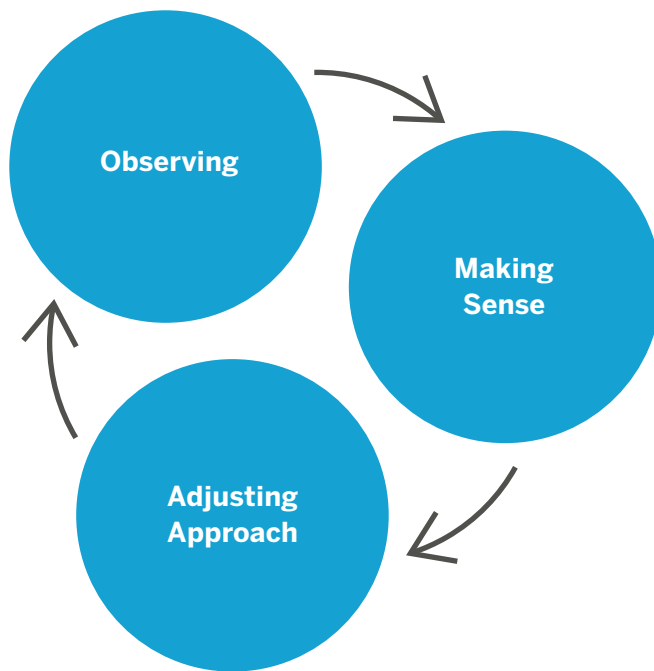
These are reflective practices.

What makes some people more effective at navigating challenging situations than others? Have you ever marveled at someone who gamely wades into an uncomfortable conversation or complicated high-stakes situation to help find the right way forward?

It's not about technical competency or natural ability. What makes these people effective in turbulent waters isn't that they have the perfect paddle stroke. Sometimes what they do even feels a little awkward—to them and others. But in they go, staying curious instead of frustrated when projects flounder, looking for the unspoken but deeply felt concerns in a conversation, helping groups use new knowledge and approaches to reach their desired destination.

Reflective practices are the methods that help you observe what is happening during challenging situations, make new sense of what you see, and adjust your approach to get to better outcomes. They generate new perspectives on challenging situations in your work. They help you find the space that neurologist and psychoanalyst Viktor Frankl described “between stimulus and response” to make choices about how you will show up. They support your own growth and your ability to contribute to transformative work.

What Reflective Practice IS NOT	What Reflective Practice IS
A Retreat From Work	A Deeper Dive Into Challenges
Navel-Gazing	Situation Navigating
The <i>What</i> of Your Work	The <i>How</i> of Your Work
Self-Care	Group Care
Technical Training	Adaptive Training
Mostly About Reflection	Mostly About Practice

**Reflective Practices n. pl.:**

Tools and techniques that can help you navigate challenging situations at work.

Every reflective practice involves three steps: observing what is happening within and around you, making sense of what you see, and adjusting your approach to get to a better outcome.

There are many reflective practices, but ultimately, all reflective practices work their magic by taking you through a three-step process.

First, you observe what is going on within you and around you. This step is needed in all situations but especially when the stakes are high. You might pause to take a mental snapshot of a moment or have a sidebar notetaking method to make observations during a meeting.

Second, you make sense of what you observe. You dig beneath the surface of a conversation to understand what may be blocking movement. You try to decipher unclear behaviors (yours and others') that you're encountering. You invite yourself and others to check in on implicitly held assumptions, beliefs and values.

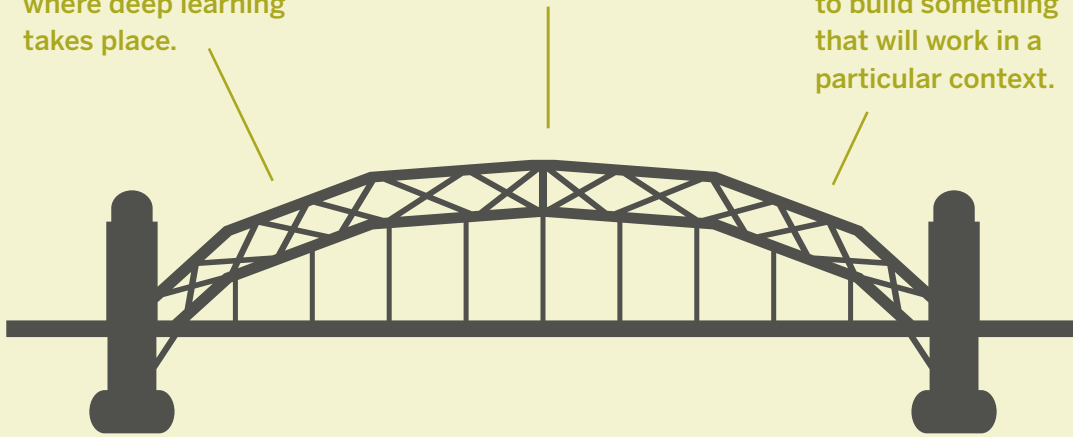
Third, you adjust your approach based on what you learn, reframing what is needed to get to better outcomes and shifting your behavior—alone or as a group. All this may happen quickly, in action. Or you might follow the cycle as you prepare for a meeting or conversation or debrief something that happened.

Think of reflective practices as mental bridges that you build to traverse challenging situations.

They help you go from known territory to unexplored territory where deep learning takes place.

They give you a perch for taking stock and getting new perspectives.

Like bridges, there is no one reflective practice. You have to build something that will work in a particular context.



Take Your Reflective Practice to Work

Methods to reflect have been part of many spiritual, religious, cultural and artistic traditions for thousands of years. For almost a century, scholars and organizational theorists have written about reflective practice methods used in education, law, medicine and business. Because there is nothing new under the sun, each reflective practice borrows from another and many are standing on the shoulders of giants, sometimes without attribution. You may have learned a reflective practice that originated in one of these traditions.

It makes sense to take reflective practices to work. We take actions big and small every day. And we react to what happens, often without reflecting on our contribution to the outcome. Absence of reflection limits us from understanding what we are creating and putting out into the world. When we don't reflect, our mind is on "automatic," leaving us vulnerable to our conditioning, which can include implicit biases as well as limited storylines about what is happening. In other words, we are not building on what we can bring to the work.

What's Your Practice?

We've been asking practitioners what they do to learn from their experiences. Add your practices, circle ones you'd like to see more of in yourself and invite your team members to do the same.

Reflection Before Action	Reflection In Action	Reflection After Action
<p>Prep by clarifying my intentions: <i>"I journal to get clear about my goals so I can be explicit about them in action. And to be accountable ..."</i></p> <p>Put a pin in reactions: <i>"When drafting an email that may ruffle feathers, I hold it in my draft folder for a day or two and make sure I still feel it is what I want to say before sending."</i></p> <p>Change the venue: <i>"I suggest we take a walk to have a conversation or have meetings in different environments out of the office."</i></p> <p>Check-ins: <i>"I always ask groups to take a moment to reflect on their current state to get ready for being fully present at the meeting."</i></p>	<p>Listen to my body and keep an eye on my behaviors: <i>"I watch for and manage my 'triggers'—anger, frustration, shutting down, having to talk, etc."</i></p> <p>Go to the balcony for a different perspective: <i>"When I feel like a lot is happening at once, I take a mental snapshot of the moment and ask, what am I noticing in the picture?"</i></p> <p>Press the pause button: <i>"I'll say, 'Hang on, I want to sit with this for a moment.'"</i></p> <p>Invite collaborative reflection: <i>"I suggest we take 5 minutes at the end of the meeting to ask ourselves: What happened? So what? and Now what?"</i></p> <p>Move into curiosity/inquiry: <i>"I try to get curious instead of frustrated with upsets and disruptions."</i></p>	<p>Use peer consults: <i>"Write up and present my dilemma to colleagues to get more clarity by listening to their thoughts without reacting."</i></p> <p>Dedicate time for thinking: <i>"Practice end-of-week reflection activity—write down experiences and conversations I had, people I met."</i></p> <p>Build in time for reflection in general: <i>"Mandatory 30 minutes of reading articles to get my head away from day-to-day grind."</i></p> <p>Checkouts: <i>"I ask my team to take 5 minutes at the end of a meeting to reflect on actions that took place—process- and contentwise—to make sure we look for what is happening beneath the waterline."</i></p>
<p>Your practices here:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>Your practices here:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>Your practices here:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Why This Project?

In philanthropy, you have two big jobs.

Your **first job** is to build deep knowledge about the *what* of the work that you are supporting. You stay current with new knowledge, find networks for ongoing learning, and grow your expertise.

Your **second job** is to put that expertise into play—the *how* of the work:

- How do you nurture generative thinking amid complicated group dynamics and power differentials?
- How do you keep learning alive among colleagues and partners?
- How do you strategize with others when there is no right answer to guide you?
- How do you contribute to the work of diversity, equity and inclusion in your organization or in a field?

Philanthropy's Reflective Practices can help you build what you bring to your second job.

Our goal is to learn and share the tools and skills used by practitioners in philanthropy to improve how they work and get to better outcomes in challenging situations.

PRP Briefs can help you start talking about the “how” of philanthropic work with colleagues, board members and partners. Each brief includes relevant examples, useful frameworks and an exercise that you can use with your team or partner to build what you bring to the work.

Want to Learn More?

Read our recent guide, browse posts from philanthropy colleagues or download the other briefs at www.reflectivepractices.org. Sign up to receive new material as it comes online. Want to build reflective practices inside your organization? Contact Jan Jaffe, project leader for Philanthropy's Reflective Practices (jan@reflectivepractices.org).