



# Reflecting on Experience

## Participant Guide

### What's the purpose of this exercise?

The purpose of this exercise is to give you practice in reflective thinking. You will spend time reflecting on a recent experience that went differently than expected, answering progressively deeper and more critical types of questions.

Specifically, you will practice:

- Using reflection to promote continuous learning.
- Considering different types of questions to achieve progressively deeper levels of learning.
- Using reflective thinking to identify connections and inter-relationships that may not otherwise be apparent.
- Considering when and how you can engage in reflection in daily operations, to support learning and improve strategic thinking.

### Why is this skillset important?

Reflective thinking promotes progressively deeper insight into situation dynamics and how your actions and assumptions influenced what happened. Reflective thinking supports continuous learning and the transfer of that learning to shape future experiences.

### Brief tutorial

Reflective thinking is the process of “stepping back” from a situation to think critically and deeply about the experience. Reflection allows you to gain greater insight into the dynamics of a situation, and your role in it. It enables you to consider connections and inter-relationships that may not be immediately apparent.

Reflective thinking is most valuable when it is ongoing and iterative. Many people think of reflection as something that happens at the end of an event. In fact, it can be useful *before* and *during* an event as well as afterward.

### Tips

You can gain insight from any of your experiences and apply that learning to help improve the future:

- ✓ Ask yourself different types of questions (e.g., What?, How?, Why?, What if?, How might?).
- ✓ Use reflection iteratively and in an ongoing manner. Reflect *before* and *during* an event, as well as *after*.
- ✓ Reflect *before* an event to help you think ahead, mentally rehearse, and anticipate problems.
- ✓ Reflect *during* an event to help identify problems, re-plan, make decisions, and solve problems.
- ✓ Leverage different perspectives in your reflection. Record your reflections, and share and discuss them with others.
- ✓ Work reflection into your everyday routine. Reflect on both personal and work experiences. Practicing reflection by yourself and with others will promote your ability to learn continuously and transfer your learning to future experiences.



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### Why is reflection challenging?

Using and fully benefiting from reflection is challenging for a number of reasons. For example:

- Reflective practice requires time, which means taking time away from other activities. It also requires practice to refine your skills.
- When reflection is done, people tend to focus on *what* happened (content reflection) rather than thinking about *how* it occurred (process reflection), or considering *why* it occurred (premise reflection). By focusing only on the superficial description level, or only on one type of questioning approach, it can limit the learning possibilities and the insights you discover.
- Individuals often work alone when they reflect on an event, which means they miss out on valuable reflection through group discourse.

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### Contents of Participant Guide

This Participant Guide contains a set of questions and prompts for your reference during the skill-building exercise. Your instructor will direct you to the relevant sections during specific points in the exercise.

As you work through the exercise, keep in mind that the questions in this exercise are not intended to be completed like a worksheet where you read a question, write your answer, and go on to the next question. Instead, they are here to prompt your thinking as you work through the exercise activities. Feel free to use the white space to jot notes and ideas as you progress through the exercise.

#### **Contents:**

- Pre-Exercise Reflection
- Starter Questions
- Exercise Debrief



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### Pre-Exercise Reflection

**Instructions:** Today we are going to work on reflective thinking skills. Before we start the exercise, take a few minutes to think about the following questions. After we think about them individually, we will discuss them as a group.

1. When are you most likely to engage in reflective thinking? Why?
2. How do you engage in reflective thinking?
3. Think about times when you engage in reflection. What helps you move into a reflective mode?
4. Is there a particular person (or more than one person) who helps you think reflectively—someone you tend to use as a sounding board? What is it about that particular individual?
5. How do you expect reflective thinking to help you? What will you gain from reflective thinking?



**USE THE SPACE BELOW TO JOT DOWN YOUR THOUGHTS.**



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### Starter Questions

**Instructions:** After you have identified and recalled a situation that did not go as you expected, take 15-20 minutes to reflect on the *what* (content), *how* (process), and *why* (premise) of the event.

Use the starter questions below to prompt your thinking, but do not feel limited to only these questions. If other ideas occur to you, feel free to explore them.

#### Starter Questions

<b>Content Reflection</b> (describe what happened)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. When did this happen?</li><li>2. Where did it happen?</li><li>3. What happened?</li><li>4. Who were the key players in the situation?</li><li>5. What was the environment within which this situation took place?</li><li>6. What situational factors were at play?</li></ol>
<b>Process Reflection</b> (explain how the event unfolded)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. How did you/your unit's actions influence the outcome of the situation? How did your actions (or your unit's actions) influence the actions of others?</li><li>2. What was the nature of the surprise? How is what happened in this situation different from what you expected?</li><li>3. What did you look for to give you a sense of how your approach was working?</li><li>4. What questions does the outcome raise for you?</li><li>5. What might you (your unit/your commander/the Army) have done differently in this situation?</li></ol>
<b>Premise Reflection</b> (consider why the event happened and the assumptions you held about the situation)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Why do you think things unfolded the way they did? What makes you think that?</li><li>2. Are there other ways of interpreting the situation? Other perspectives to consider?</li><li>3. Going into the situation, what were your assumptions about the situation and the actions you needed to take? What led you to those assumptions?</li><li>4. Were you expecting a different outcome than the one you experienced? If so, describe the outcome you expected, and why you expected that.</li><li>5. How might you have tested or verified the assumptions you held?</li><li>6. How did your personal characteristics (such as your background, your experience, your point of view) affect your decisions and the outcome?</li></ol>



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### Exercise Debrief

**Instructions:** Consider the following questions either individually, or with others who have participated in the exercise:

1. How has your understanding of the situation changed?
  - Are there particular aspects of the situation that you now understand more clearly?
  - What have you learned or become aware of that hadn't occurred to you before?
  - Are there particular points of view that you hadn't previously considered or appreciated in the same way you do now?
  - Are there alternative actions you hadn't previously considered that you now realize you could have?
  - Are there certain connections and inter-relationships at play in this situation that you hadn't previously recognized that you do now?
  - What else have you gained from reflecting on the situation?
2. Think about the different types of questions (content, process, and premise questions) you considered. How might different types of questions contribute to deeper insights?
3. Do you see any drawbacks to reflection? I.e., can a person be *too* reflective?
4. In what ways do you anticipate using reflective thinking in your daily operations? What might get in the way of reflection? Do you have ideas for how you might address those obstacles?
5. Do you think you engage in enough reflective thinking?
  - If not, how might you engage in reflective thinking more often?
  - How might you balance quantity vs. quality of reflection?



**USE THE SPACE BELOW AND ON THE NEXT PAGE TO JOT DOWN YOUR THOUGHTS.**



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