

## Reflection and learning in small teams

A tool to facilitate short but effective reflection processes to support iterative cycles of learning

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### In brief

#### Purpose of team reflection

- to reflect on a specific topic to foster learning
- to appreciate progress and learn from successes and failures.

#### When to use team reflection?

To generate learning events of all sizes. Team reflections are useful to conclude a task/workshop when there is desire to learn from the experiences for future activities.

#### Who should participate?

Anyone: it is important that the space created is safe so everyone can actively and openly participate in the process.

#### How long does the process take?

This depends on the team's needs. A brief reflection will usually add value and enable the sharing of important insights, even if time is limited. The real value often lies in the follow-up actions that flow from it.

### Description

There are many different ways to structure a reflective process for a small group. It is crucial that all participants feel they can speak freely honestly. Ensure you have planned a flexible process that can accommodate the unexpected. Be clear about what you are going to do (the process) and gently encourage participants to stick to it.

### Example of a short reflective process after facilitating a team interaction

1. Ask all participants to stand in a circle.
2. Share with participants why it is important to reflect on our experiences – and to appreciate what went well, while also acknowledging what did not go so well. The focus here is not blame but rather how the group can learn from the experiences and move forward in a constructive



Working in a complex resilient context requires us to effectively learn and adapt our practice as we go along. Team reflection is a corner stone to support learning in teams and organisations. (Photo: Mohamed Diop)

(and maybe even enthusiastic) way. It might be good to refer back to previously recorded expectations and objectives to guide this process.

3. Start with the question, 'What went well?' Pass a small ball around and ask each participant to share one thing that went well while it is their turn to hold the ball. The more specific the reflection the better. ('Everything was good' does not really offer much insight or learning; it is important to be specific.) Be relatively strict in allowing one point per person, and have several rounds if needed. If someone wants to share something negative, assure them there will be an opportunity to address this later, once the positive reflections have been shared.

4. Take notes on a flip chart, for all to see. Ask for clarification if you do not understand the point. Offer participants the opportunity to amend or affirm each point that is written up.

5. When there are no more positive contributions, ask, 'What did not go so well?' And repeat the process.

6. Finally, do a round asking the question, 'What could be changed next time?' And repeat the process. This last round creates the opportunity to build on successful processes and avoid problems in future.

## Materials needed

Flip chart stand and paper, pen, small ball.

## Variations

You can combine the last two rounds by asking, 'What did not go so well and should be changed in future?' This can save some time and encourages participants to think positively about the way forward. You can also choose to note down concrete action points. Be sure you refer back to the reflection notes when planning a next step in the process.

## Note

*Ensure no personal criticism is voiced in an offensive way. In order to maintain a safe space, it is important to ensure statements like, 'Person A is always so aggressive', are not made without the facilitator reminding people to be specific in their feedback by asking, 'When did you experience person A as aggressive?', to unpack these issues. This can take the focus away from the person and onto the action that caused offence, and surface some serious problems that can be particularly destructive if not addressed.*

## Relevance for BRACED

Reflection within a team allows us to improve our practice by learning from successes and failures. This is especially important when operating in a complex and somewhat unpredictable environment and can be an effective way to surface learning in the process of building resilience.

## Literature

Ayers, J., Anderson, S., Pradhan, S. and Rossing, T. (2012) *Participatory monitoring, evaluation, reflection and learning for community-based adaptation: PMERL manual for local practitioners*. London: CARE.

Mezirow, J. (1998) 'On critical reflection', *Education Quarterly* 48: 185–98.