

Models of Reflection

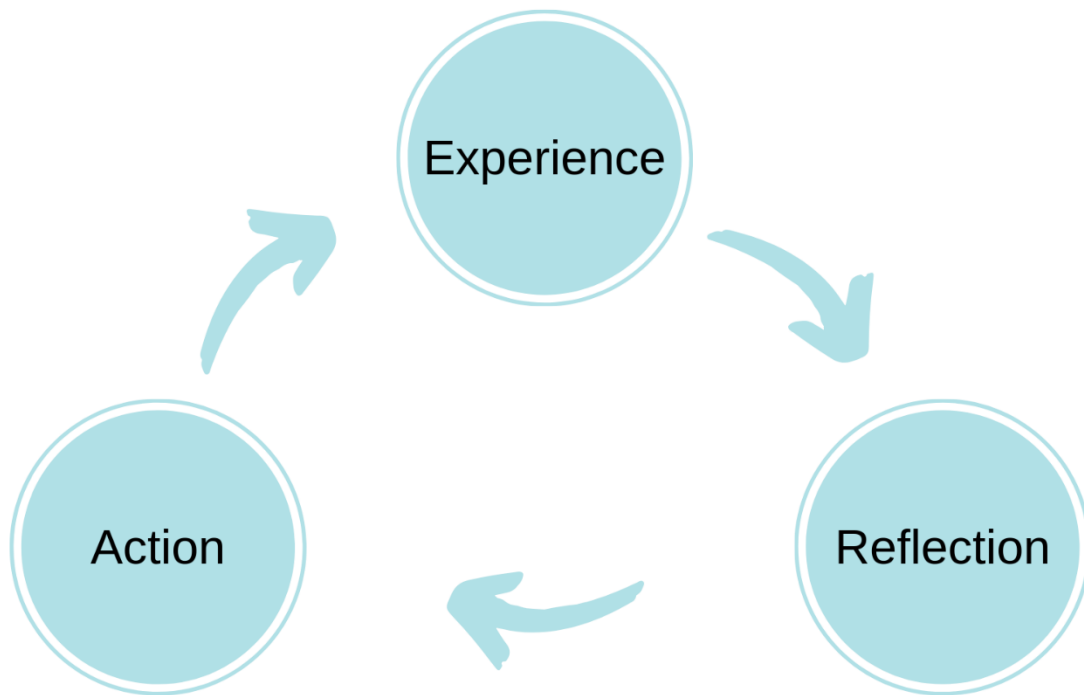
A short guide to models of reflective practice

Introduction

If you are not used to being reflective it can be hard to know where to start the process. Luckily there are many models which you can use to guide your reflection. Below are brief outlines of four of the most popular models arranged from easy to more advanced (tip: you can select any of the images to make them larger and easier to read).

You will notice many common themes in these models and any others that you come across. Each model takes a slightly different approach but they all cover similar stages. The main difference is the number of steps included and how in-depth their creators have chosen to be. Different people will be drawn to different models depending on their own preferences.

ERA Cycle



The ERA cycle (Jasper, 2013) is one of the most simple models of reflection and contains only three stages:

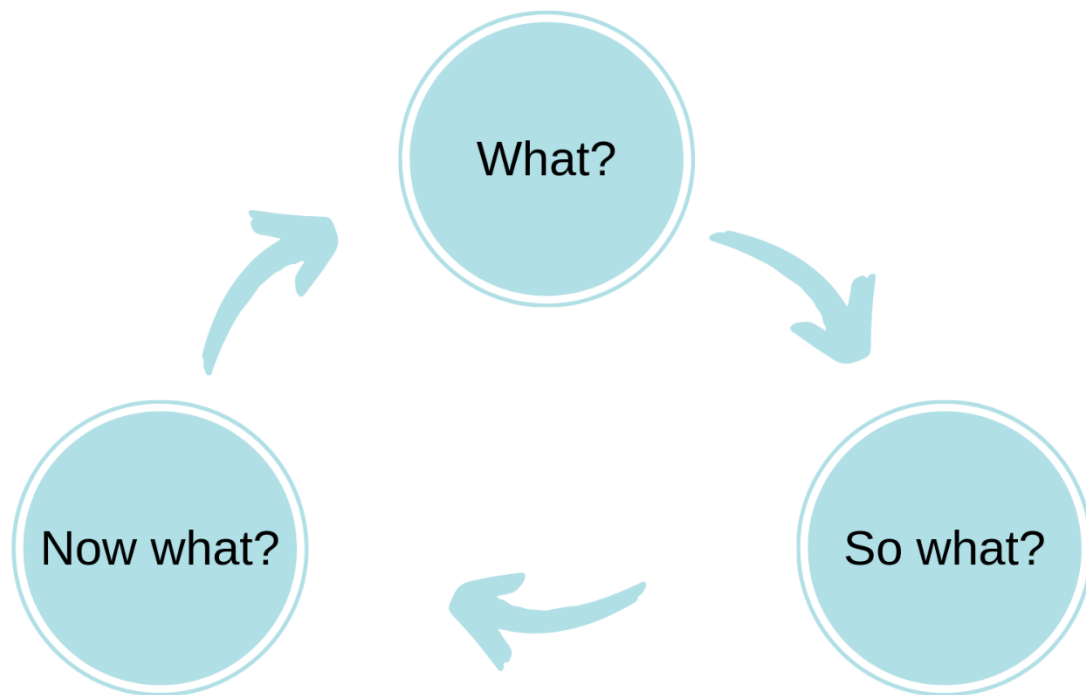
- Experience
- Reflection
- Action

The cycle shows that we will start with an experience, either something we have been through before or something completely new to us. This experience can be positive or negative and may be related to our work or something else entirely.

Once something has been experienced we will naturally start to reflect on what happened. This will allow us to think through the experience, examine our feelings about what happened and decide on the next steps. This leads to the final element of the cycle - taking an action. What we do as a result of an experience will be different depending on our own feelings and experiences leading up to it. This action will result in another experience and the cycle will continue.

Jasper, M. (2013). *Beginning Reflective Practice*. Andover: Cengage Learning.

Driscoll's What Model



Another simple model was developed by Driscoll in the mid-1990s. Driscoll based his model of the 3 What's on the key questions asked by Terry Borton in the 1970s:

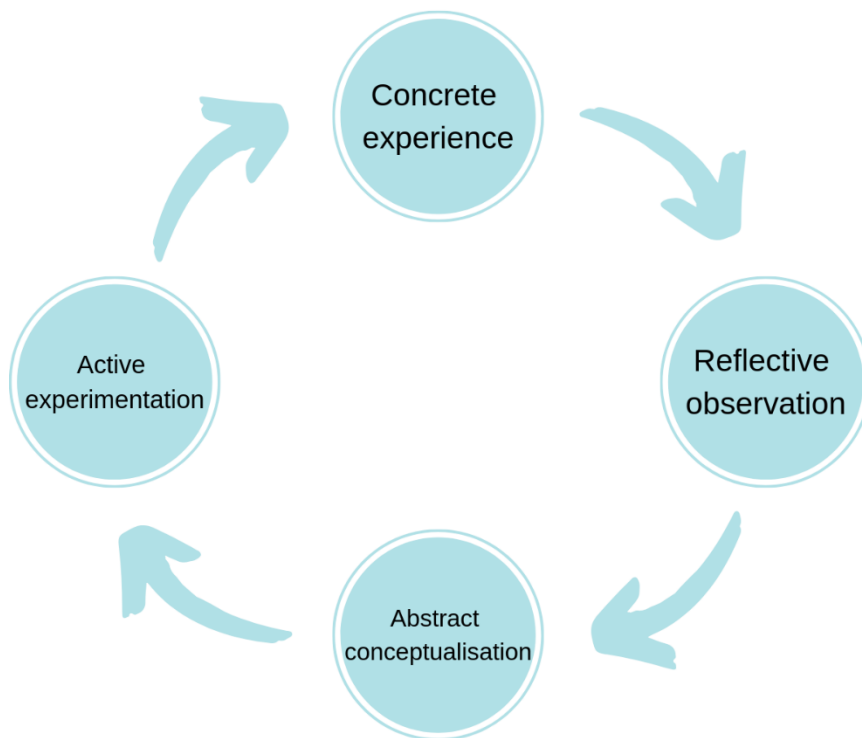
- What?
- So what?
- Now what?

By asking ourselves these three simple questions we can begin to analyse our experiences and learn from them. Firstly we should describe what the situation or experience was to set it in context. This gives us a clear idea of what we are dealing with. We should then reflect on the experience by asking 'so what?' - what did we learn as a result of the experience? The final stage asks us to think about the action we will take as a result of this reflection. Will we change a behaviour, try something new or carry on as we are? It is important to remember that it may be that nothing changes as a result of reflection and that we feel that we are doing everything we should during an experience. This is equally valid as an outcome and you should not worry if you can't think of something to change.

Borton, T. (1970) *Reach, Touch and Teach*. London: Hutchinson.

Driscoll, J. (ed.) (2007) *Practicing Clinical Supervision: A Reflective Approach for Healthcare Professionals*. Edinburgh: Elsevier.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle



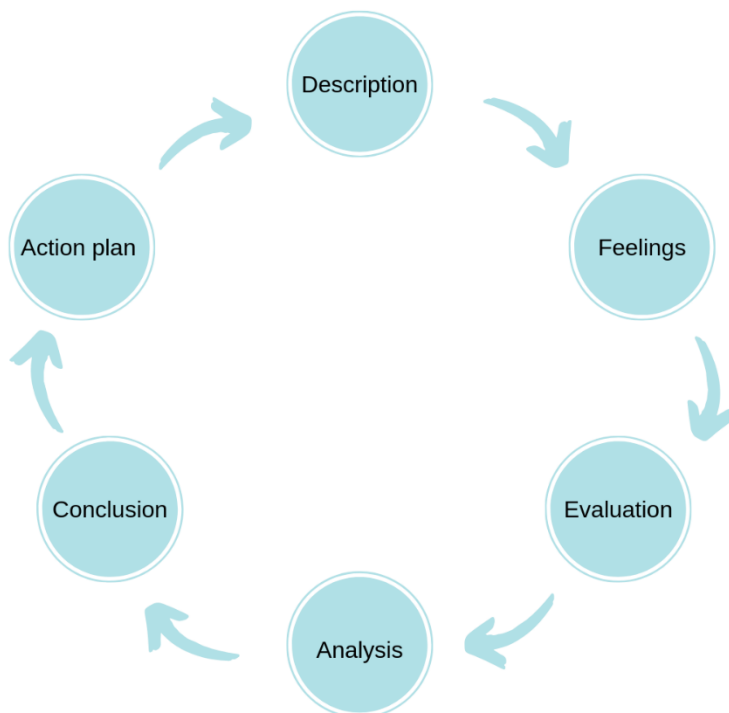
Kolb's model (1984) takes things a step further. Based on theories about how people learn, this model centres on the concept of developing understanding through actual experiences and contains four key stages:

- Concrete experience
- Reflective observation
- Abstract conceptualization
- Active experimentation

The model argues that we start with an experience, either a repeat of something that has happened before or something completely new to us. The next stage involves us reflecting on the experience and noting anything about it which we haven't come across before. Where this has happened we start to develop new ideas a result of this new experience, for example when something unexpected has happened we try to work out why this might be. The final stage involves us applying these new ideas to different situations and so learning as a direct result of our experiences and reflections. This model is similar to one used by small children when learning basic concepts such as hot and cold. They may touch something hot, be burned and be more cautious about touching something which could potentially hurt them in the future.

Kolb, D. (1984) *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.

Gibb's Reflective Cycle



The final model builds on the other three and adds more stages. It is one of the more complex models of reflection but it may be that you find having multiple stages of the process to guide you reassuring. Gibb's cycle contains six stages:

- Description
- Feelings
- Evaluation
- Analysis
- Conclusion
- Action plan

As with other models, Gibb's begins with an outline of the experience being reflected on. It then encourages us to focus on our feelings about the experience, both during it and after. The next step involves evaluating the experience - what was good or bad about it from our point of view? We can then use this evaluation to analyse the situation and try to make sense of it. This analysis will result in a conclusion about what other actions (if any) we could have taken to reach a different outcome. The final stage involves building an action plan of steps which we can take the next time we find ourselves in a similar situation.

Gibbs, G. (1998) *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods*. Oxford: Further Education Unit, Oxford Polytechnic.

Think about ... Which model?

Think about the models outlined above. Do any of them appeal to you or have you found another model which works for you? Do you find models in general helpful or are they too restrictive?

Pros and Cons of Reflective Practice Models

A word of caution about models of reflective practice (or any other model). Although they can be a great way to start thinking about reflection, remember that all models have their downsides. A summary of the pros and cons can be found below:

| Pros | Cons |
|---|--|
| Offer a structure to be followed | Imply that steps must be followed in a defined way |
| Provide a useful starting point for those unsure where to begin | In the real world you may not start at the 'beginning' |
| Allow you to assess all levels of a situation | Models may not apply in every situation |
| You will know when the process is complete | Reflective practice is a continuous process |

Conclusion

These are just some of the reflective models that are available. You may find one that works for you or you may decide that none of them really suit. These models provide a useful guide or place to start but reflection is a very personal process and everyone will work towards it in a different way. Take some time to try different approaches until you find the one that works for you. You may find that as time goes on and you develop as a reflective practitioner that you try different methods which suit your current circumstances. The important part is that it works - if it doesn't then you may need to move on and try something else.



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