

Reflective Evaluation (with staff)

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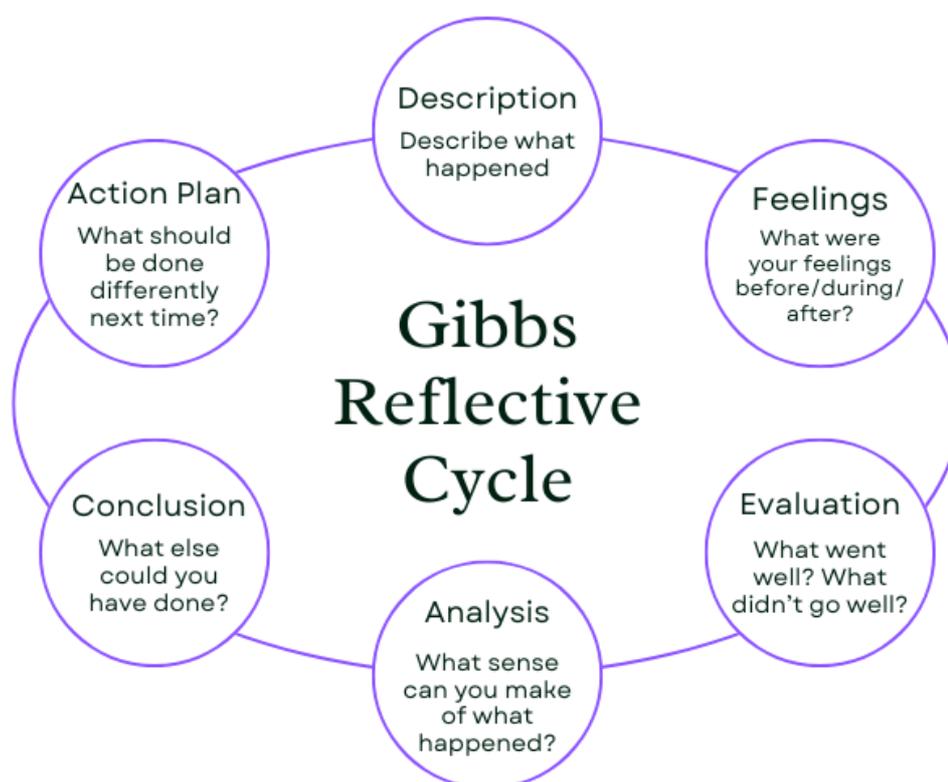
Museum evaluation often focuses on visitors or participants. The method covered in this resource is designed to get rich feedback from the people leading a programme, curating an exhibition, or delivering an event, who are an audience that are often missing in evaluation. Reflecting on museum work can empower staff, helping them to improve their practise, and give them the opportunity to feedback on projects and programmes. Reflection is a moment to think about what has taken place. This can become reflective practise when it is carried out in a more systematic fashion, taking note of responses, and learning from them. Reflecting on experiences in a guided way can be an effective method of evaluation, it can help make sense of what has happened, improve future effectiveness, and give a deeper understanding of processes (not just outcomes). This can be a useful method for projects that take place over a long period of time, you can trace the course of the work you are evaluating, from instigation to completion and beyond. It can also be responsive to changes in work, giving you moment by moment data which could be lost, especially if only summative methods are used.

How to do it

- Decide on the overarching framework that you will work within

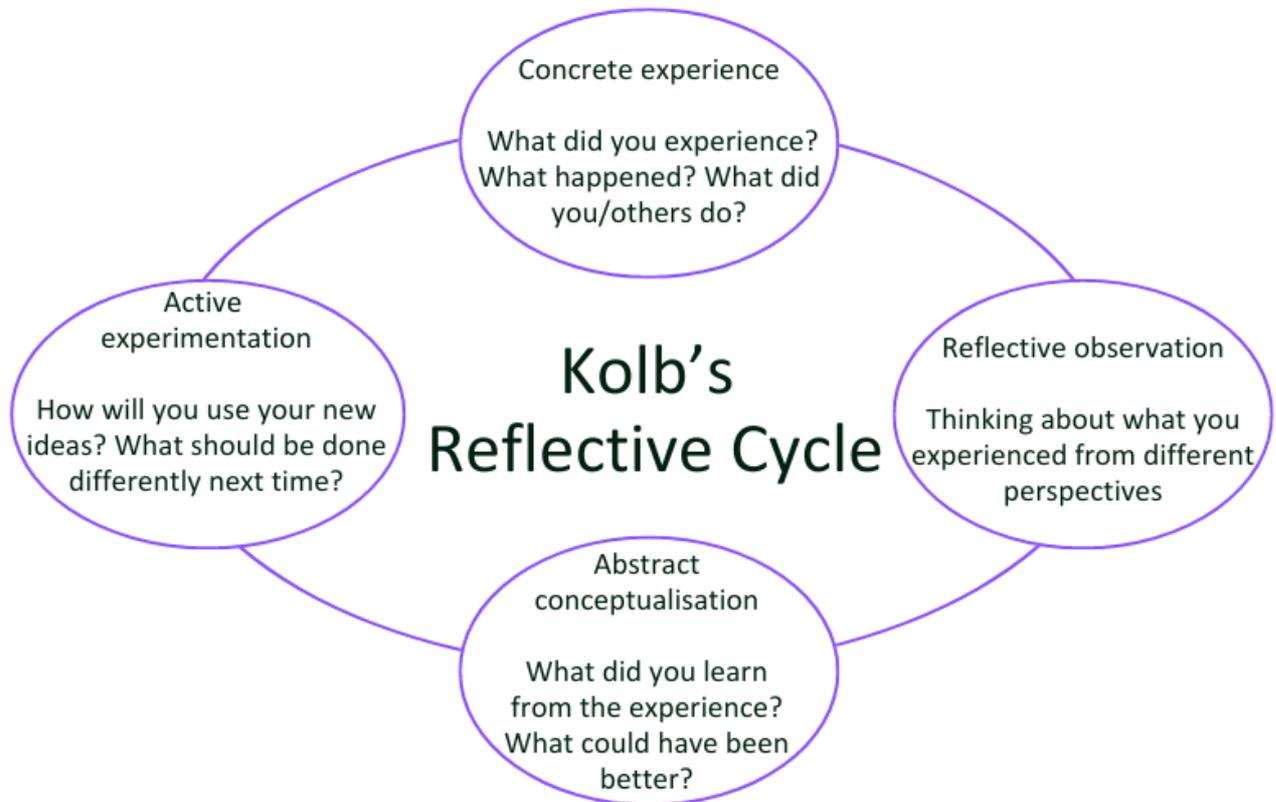
There are a few different frameworks that might help you to create the best processes for your evaluation (see references in the Further Reading section below).

The Gibbs reflective cycle breaks reflection down into six steps:



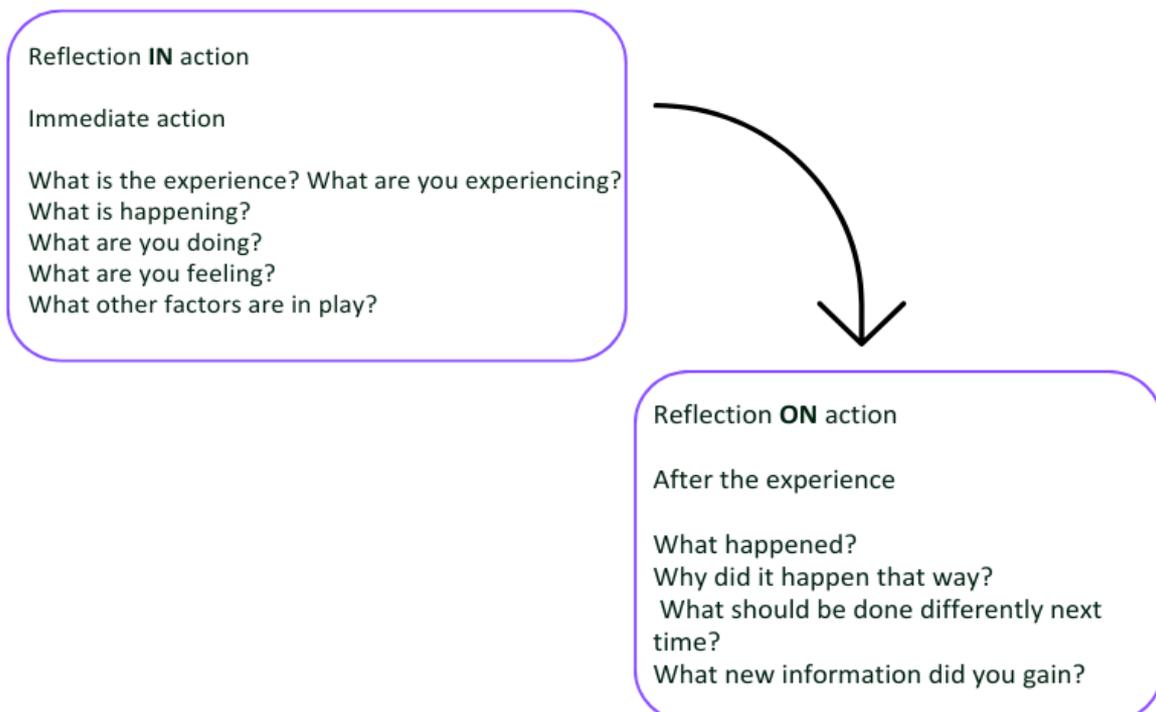
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The Kolb reflective cycle is four steps:



And Schön is just two:

Schön's Reflective Model



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- Decide on the questions you will ask and how you will ask them

Once you have thought about the framework you will work within, decide on the questions you will ask as part of the evaluation. There is a list of possible questions later in this resource. Don't try to have too many questions at each stage; you could choose to ask a couple of specific questions and a couple of bigger picture questions. Select the questions that are appropriate to the framework, your project, and the people doing the reflecting. How will people respond? Will you give each person a physical notebook, access to an online document, or via a webform or online survey? There is a sample feedback sheet based on the Gibbs Reflective Cycle at the end of this resource that you might want to adapt. Will people answer the questions on their own, or will you do this as a group discussion activity, or a mixture of the two? Decide how often you will reflect on the project you are evaluating. There is a delicate balance here: you want to ask regularly, but not so often people get tired of responding and the quality of their reflection and answers drops. Are there specific moments that would work? For example, key phases of the exhibition or programme. How will you end well? You will probably want to do a reflection immediately the project finishes, but another session a little while afterwards can be beneficial, when the dust has settled, and people have a bit of distance from the emotions (and exhaustion!). Although we are recommending this to evaluate with staff, you might decide to also use some of the same reflective questions with an external group or audience.

- Collect the data.

The time spent in planning should mean your data collection period runs smoothly.

How to analyse the data

As with many qualitative evaluation techniques with free text responses, reflective journaling can result in a lot of long form text, but having clear project or programme aims gives you something to compare your results to. The data can be difficult to analyse, so allow plenty of time to do this. You will need to familiarise yourself with what people have written, and then you could look for repeating patterns or themes. If people are answering the same questions throughout the project, or there is more than one person reflecting, look for subtle changes or any differences as the project continues. It can be easy to use reflective journaling to support conclusions that are not present in the results. You can avoid this by using several evaluation techniques with the different audiences that are involved.

Ethics, safety, and security

It is very important that the people who are reflecting know what will happen to what they write and who will have access to it. Reflective feedback could be kept for the sole use of the person who is responding, or it could be part of more formal evaluation processes. Provide clear written information to participants on how you will look after their data. Be aware of how this might affect what people write and how open they are. If you are promising anonymity, ensure that you can uphold this. It is more than likely that you will need to do more than simply removing participant names: the museum world is quite small, job titles can be very specific, and it can be fairly easy to identify people with a quick internet search.

Think carefully about how you will support participants in reflective practice. The process might bring up strong emotions or difficult feelings in relation to the experience that is being evaluated. How can you help staff that are left with negative feelings, especially when they are thinking about projects that have been hard emotionally or when things did not go as well as they hoped? This is important to plan for when people are completing reflective journals on their own, but it can also

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affect an individual who is responsible for analysing all the data and might also feel emotionally impacted by what has been written. Find information of relevant support networks or provide participants with the contact details of people or other organisations that might be able to help.

Cautions and caveats

Reflective practise does rely heavily on the motivation of the participants, so might not be suitable for everyone or for every project. It also depends on the participants remembering to do the evaluation, although you might be able to automate the process to some degree with online data collection and delayed email prompts. As there are no standard questions, it is possible that important information could be lost. Even if you use the same questions for all participants throughout the project, there will probably still be quite a lot of variation in the quality and depth of reflection. Think about how you will recognise this in your reporting. As with most evaluation, reflective journaling works best when it is part of a variety of methods you are using rather than the only one.

Further reading and other resources

References for frameworks:

- Graham Gibbs, *Learning by Doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods*. Further Education Unit, Oxford Polytechnic. 1988.
- David Kolb, *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. FT Press. 1984.
- Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Turn: Case Studies in and on Educational Practice*. Teachers College Press, 1991.

Museum-related resources:

- Claire Bowen, How to develop a reflective practice, *Thinking Museum* <https://thinkingmuseum.com/2021/11/17/how-to-develop-a-reflective-practice/>

This article, also available as a podcast (episode 29 on The Art Engager podcast) is a useful background introduction to reflective practice, providing some practical suggestions about how to do it. Many of the podcast episodes cover ways for learning and visitor services staff to continue to reflect on their work and its implications.

- Barbara J. Soren, 'Museum experiences that change visitors', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 24:3, 2009, pp. 233-251.

A thoughtful article examining whether a museum visit can meaningfully impact visitors, through two case studies. The first, at the Royal Ontario Museum in Canada, explicitly uses reflective journals with audiences, but Soren's own reflective practise is present throughout, for example in the table of 'triggers for transformational experiences' created through her teaching.

- Marjoleine van der Meij, Jacqueline Broerse and Frank Kupper, 'RRI & science museums; prototyping an exhibit for reflection on emerging and potentially controversial research and innovation', *Journal of Science Communication*, 16:4, 2017, pp. 1-24.

The authors of this paper were trying to create a display in that would help visitors to reflect on responsible research and innovation in science (the RRI in the title). They worked with NEMO Science Museum in the Netherlands, testing different exhibitions and interviewing children and their parents to see what they understood by what they saw. There is a helpful analysis section, and the notes on the facilitation of the sessions could also be of use to other museum professionals.

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- Neta Shaby, Ran Peleg, Ian Coombs, 'Participatory Research with Museum Practitioners: A reflection on the process', *Research in Science Education* 54, 2024, pp 891-908.

A paper combining reflective practise and participatory research methods, the authors analyse the process of working with staff at Winchester Science Centre to create an evaluation toolkit. The details about how they apply a framework are helpful as is the section about how reflection worked as part of the research. There are many quotes from (named) members of staff, which is complemented by a final paragraph on ethical considerations.

- Bernadette T. Lynch, 'Custom-made reflective practice: can museums realise their capabilities in helping others realise theirs?' *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 26:5, 2011, pp. 441-458.

Bernadette Lynch has spent many years encouraging reflective practice in museums. This paper is the conclusions of her work examining the impact of 12 community engagement projects in museums and galleries funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. She argues powerfully for the inclusion of review and reflection on what museums do and who they do it for. Bernadette includes a variety of sources to support her deductions: the analysis of policy documents sits alongside quotes and images from participatory drama that staff were involved with.

Non-museum resource:

- The University of Edinburgh Reflection Toolkit: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/reflection>

A helpful website containing toolkits for those wanting to know more about reflection, and for those who will facilitate reflective workshops. Excellent further reading list if you want to dig further into the literature.

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Sample prompt questions

This is not an exhaustive list of questions. Neither is it a list to exhaust yourself with by going through them all. Select a few questions to answer at each stage.

At any point in the evaluated work:

Who... [Was involved? Wasn't there that should have been? Spoke most? Who might you need to draw in?]

What... [did you do? Happened? Will you change for the next step?]

When... [will you meet next? Will you contact the participants?]

Where... [will you take the project next? Will you meet next?]

How... [are you feeling about the project? Will you change what you're doing?]

Before the work starts:

Why are you doing this?

What are you most looking forward to?

What worries you about it?

What skills do you think you will learn?

What do you personally bring to this?

What will your role be?

Who do you think will come/be involved/be interested in the outcome? Who might be excluded?

During the project:

What happened today?

How are you feeling about the work?

Were there any memorable moments for you?

Did something happen, or did someone say something, that surprised or inspired you?

Were there any 'ah-ha!' moments for you or that you observed in any of the participants?

Who came today?

Who didn't come? Do you want to change that? If so, how could you do that?

What was my contribution today? What did I do too much of? What did I do too little of?

Summative prompts:

What did you enjoy most about being involved?

What did you find satisfying?

What did you find the least enjoyable?

What did you find frustrating or annoying?

What did you learn? What is your main takeaway?

If we were about to start the work again, what three things would you do to improve it? What advice would you give yourself?

What might you do differently as a result of the work? What might you stop doing? What might you start doing?

Who came? Who didn't come?

How do you feel about the work now?

What was the most valuable part of the work?

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Gibbs Reflective Cycle Feedback Sheet

Description [Describe what happened]
Feelings What were your feelings before the activity? What were you feeling during the activity? How did you feel after it?
Evaluation What went well? What did not go well?
Analysis What assumptions have you been making? What sense can you make of what happened?
Conclusions What else could you have done?
Action Plan What should be done differently next time? What would that need?