

Assignment Guidance for Critical Evaluation and Personal Reflection

Critical evaluation and personal reflection both require critical thinking skills to evaluate our different ideas, opinions and experiences in more depth to draw out the learning gained and use this to shape and build on our continued personal and professional development. However, there are distinct differences which need to be considered when responding to assessment criterion c) and criterion d).

***Criterion C)** requires a critical evaluation of the commissioning activities undertaken during the project to demonstrate understanding of the wider impact for the service and/or the organisation. This entails deep thinking about the different activities you have undertaken and referred to in your commissioning commentary in criterion b), to evaluate what went well, less well and why. Breaking the project activity down to unpack the learning helps to gain a clearer view of the project experience and how best to harness the learning for the benefit of self, the team, stakeholders and the organisation.*

Critical analysis models can help to focus on the project activities and enable you to drill down and evaluate the effectiveness of your commissioning skills and knowledge gained.

Here are four different models which provide an analytical framework:

1. SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats)

Brief Overview:

SWOT Analysis is a technique used for strategic planning. The four elements provide a framework for evaluating the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of a project or business venture. SWOT is a useful tool for planning and evaluating change and growth to help to appreciate current strengths and identify new opportunities whilst being clear about potential threats and recognizing weaknesses.

The diagram provides an example of a SWOT Analysis for a new business being developed. A series of questions helps to focus on each element to build up an understanding of how to build on strengths, minimise weaknesses, maximise opportunities and respond to threats. This tool is flexible and can be used to analyse your commissioning activity and evaluate benefits for the organisation.



Reference: Rowe, Mason, Dickel, Mann, Mockler; "Strategic Management: a methodological approach". 4th Edition, 1994. Addison-Wesley. Reading Mass.

2. Driscoll's Model

Brief Overview:

This analytical tool provides a model to evaluate a project and draw out the learning gained from the experience. This model is based on asking three basic questions,

- What?
- So What?
- Now What?

Critical analysis requires us to set the context and describe what happened (what?) and then to consider what was learnt and what was most significant (so what?). The final stage requires us to think about the actions we will take as a result of the reflective process (so what?).



Reference: Driscoll, J. (2007) 'Practising Clinical Supervision: A Reflective Approach for Healthcare Professionals'. Edinburgh, Elsevier.

3. The ERA Cycle

Brief Overview:

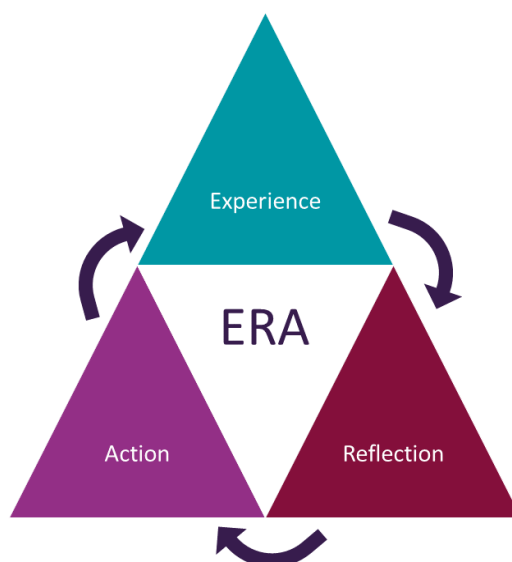
The ERA cycle (Jasper, 2013) is one of the most simple models for critical reflection, and only contains three phases:

Experience – the What

Reflection – The So What

Action – The Now What

The cycle shows that we start with an experience, which can be positive or negative. Once something has been experienced, we start to reflect on what happened. This allows us to think through the experience, examine what happened and decide on the next steps. This leads to the final element of the cycle – **taking action** - what we do as a result of this experience.

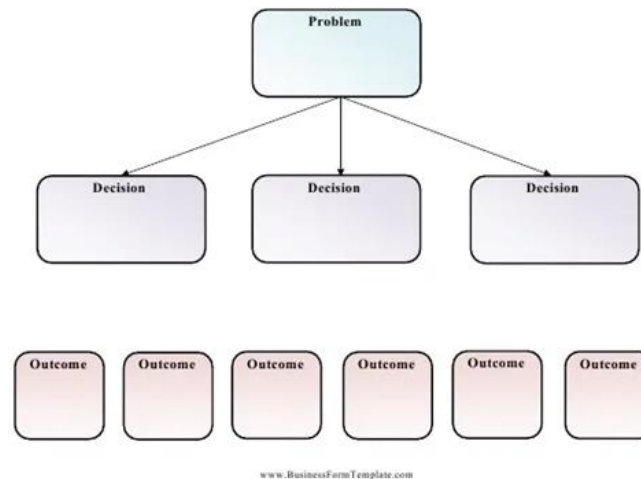


Reference: Jasper, M. (2013) Beginning Reflective Practice. Andover. Cengage Learning.

4. Decision Trees Model

Decision trees can help us to organise reasoning and analyse a problem, situation or activity. They encourage analytical thinking and can be personalised to suit the set of issues relevant to the project, situation or event. Decision trees can help to map out a sequence of stages and make connections between them to help draw out richer evaluations and deeper learning. The tree diagram will start with an overview of the event or project and will then consider what options or possible outcomes there

might be, what information may still be needed, possible consequences, pros and cons of different actions concluding with the actions and/or learning to take forward. One of the merits of this model is that every decision tree can be personalised to suit your own set of activities that need to be critically analysed.



Reference: Sage Publications Reflective Practice Resource Pack for Workplace Supervisors, Practice Educators and Team Managers 22 Information Classification: PUBLIC.

Criterion D) requires an emphasis on your own personal learning gained from the project experience and how this will impact on your ongoing learning. Reflective learning is an active learning process which is cyclical rather than linear and should lead to new insight into your own learning style, learning needs and recognizing strengths and new ways of learning. Critical analysis is also about experiential cyclical learning, although assessment criterion d) has a strong focus on you as an individual learner and reflective thinking about personal learning linked to best practice, creative thinking, and looking ahead to your own personal development. There are some reflective learning models which will provide a structure for your reflective thinking.

1. Gibbs Reflective Model

Brief Overview:

The Gibbs model is broken down into six stages to help us to deconstruct the learning experience of undertaking the project activities from a personal perspective. Starting with a brief outline of the experience being reflected on, the next stage is to think about how you felt, both at the time and afterwards. The next stage requires analysis of the experience to gain a bigger picture of what was good, bad, unexpected, which will then result in a conclusion to be reached about what actions could be taken to progress or develop the learning gained. The final action plan will focus on your personal and professional development and what skills, knowledge and experience you will take forward.



References: Gibbs, G. (1998) 'Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods. Oxford Further Education Unit. Oxford Brookes University (known as Oxford Polytechnic at time of publication)

2. Kolb's Reflective Model

Brief Overview:

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle is based on theories about how people learn from real life experience. The model helps us to reflect on our experiences and think about new ideas, solutions, and different ways of building on our learning for our continuing development.

The model starts with the actual experience, then moves on to reflect on unexpected or new ideas that we may not have encountered before. The next stage in the cycle reflects on developing new ideas based on our wider knowledge and understanding, concluding with applying our new knowledge and understanding to different situations and our future practice.

The Kolb model in the diagram has been linked with Honey and Mumford's Learning Styles model to show how people with a preferred learning style may feel more comfortable in different stages of the learning cycle.



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

3. Appreciative Inquiry

Brief Overview:

Appreciative Inquiry is an interesting model which focuses on what already works well for an organisation, a project or can be focused on an individual learning journey. Sometimes known as the '4D Model' This strengths-based approach starts with an appreciation of what already works well to then explore the strengths and successes to evaluate how changes can be transformational to move towards new ways of working based on new learning and understanding.

The model can be used as a framework to help us to identify what works well in the project and what skills and knowledge were useful (discover), imagine how this could be improved (dream), plan what changes can be made (design) and then put forward solutions and ways forward as part of continual improvement and development (destiny).



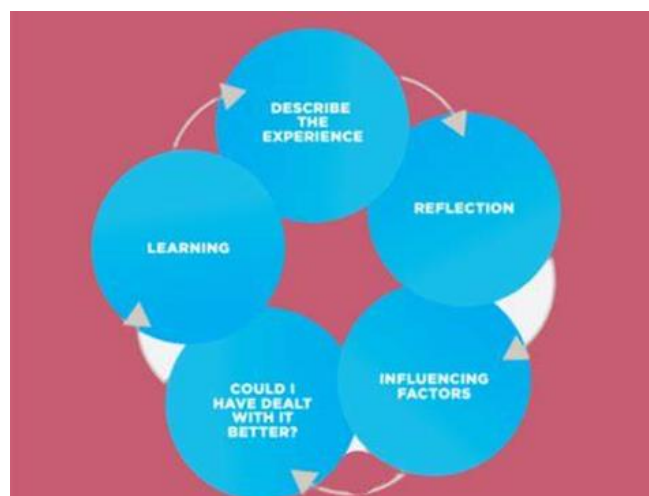
Reference: Cooperrider, D.L. & Srivastva, S. (1987) Appreciative inquiry in organizational life. In Woodman, R.W. & Pasmore, W. A. Research in Organizational Change and Development. Vol 1. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, pp. 129-169.

4. Johns Reflective Model

Brief Overview:

Johns Model for critical reflection is based on five key questions which shape and build on the concrete experience to promote further questioning and analysis.

As with the Kolb and Gibbs models, this is a cyclical analytical tool to help us to draw down and unpack our learning by considering each of the five cues in the framework to move away from description to thinking deeply about learning experiences and being honest and open about what could have been done better and what learning will be taken forward.



Reference: Johns, C (1995) Framing Learning through reflection within Carper's fundamental ways of knowing in nursing. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*. 22, 2 (226 – 234).

As you may have noticed there are similarities across all the models referred to; most start with a brief description to set the context of the activity or experience and then encourage deeper reflection and understanding of the learning gained to take forward as part of your continued personal and professional development. You may find that you prefer certain models and will be able to apply them more easily to your own learning experience. The assessment criteria c) and d) require you to apply them differently, which will guide your choice of the most suitable model to refer to and apply.