

REFLECTING ON DIFFICULTIES (RFD)

Reflecting on Difficulties is the willingness to “work through” the personal experience of having contributed to an unsuccessful outcome. It is expressed by how individuals explain problems, failures or negative events and what they have learned from those difficulties.

<i>This Means...</i>	<i>This Doesn't Mean...</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• self-evaluating and assessing for the sake of improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• accepting that something did not turn out as expected and not thinking about why
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• dealing positively with poor outcomes by learning from them and moving on	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• dwelling on past mistakes and letting them burden or hinder your outlook for improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• accepting constructive feedback regarding an unsuccessful outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• getting defensive or making excuses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• assigning oneself accountability; having a sense of ownership and responsibility for own actions and the results that stem from those actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• taking full responsibility for an unsuccessful outcome without trying to understand what other factors contributed
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• demonstrating self-assurance in own ideas and judgment and remaining positive despite having contributed to a poor outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• letting the situation or environment drive the outcome and becoming 'indecisive' for fear of making a mistake
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• collaborating with others to find solutions to problems in an effort to learn from one another	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• remaining internally focused to solve a negative situation/outcome you may have contributed to

Developmental Activities

Level 1-3 Activities

Take time to reflect on a negative outcome and journal your thoughts.

- Allow yourself time to recollect your thoughts after a negative outcome. Consider removing yourself momentarily from the situation as appropriate and do something that makes you feel good.
- Then go back and analyze the event; thinking through what you believe contributed to the negative outcome.

- Consider the items over which you had control (i.e., could have influenced but did not) and those over which you had no control. Let the ones you had no control over go. For the others:
- Ask yourself why you did not exercise influence (was it conscious or not).
- Consider what you would do differently in a similar situation. Make a point of measuring the occurrence of that behaviour should a similar situation occur and reward yourself if you accomplish what you've set out.

Reflection Tip:

- * Choose an appropriate location for this activity where you won't be interrupted.

Identify someone in your organization whose confidence you admire and who deals positively with difficult business situations.

- Work with your manager to identify a person who has a strong level of self-confidence and who learns well from past situations where the outcome has been difficult and establish a mentor relationship with that person.
- Ask how he or she feels about his or her own abilities when faced with a negative outcome to which he/she 'played a part in' while interacting with other people who may have also contributed to a negative outcome.
- Listen for the type of "self-statements" used to build own confidence.
- Commit to use any you feel are relevant to your own situation.

Consider your style in dealing with setbacks, failures or other negative outcomes.

- Do you make causal explanations for setbacks or do you generalize the blame?
- Do you try and find ways to explain or think about your past or current difficulties in a way that supports your continued efforts and success?
- Routinely structure in time to review and reflect on task performance.
- Routinely check whether you are making assumptions and what they are.

Reflection Tip:

- * Is your style changing over time or in different circumstances?

Seek out useful and informal feedback from others on how you performed on a project.

- Expect to hear both good points and points to improve upon. Acknowledge both.

- Think about the way you want to respond to the difficult points that may be brought up before you respond to them.
- Make an effort to respond using your 'planned approach' during your interaction.
- Check your basic attitude to personal feedback; regard it as a key source of improvement.

Reflection Tip:

- * Are there any themes in the feedback you've received?

Find out how other branches deal with specific problems and define solutions.

- Talk to individuals who manage themselves in a self-directed team. This will give insight to the dynamics of how accountability that is built into the organizational structure occurs.
- Learn how they reward and encourage each other in difficult setbacks and move on to defining solutions.

Reflection Tip:

- * Speak to people outside the organization to find out how they deal with difficulties.

Keep track of successes.

- Keep track of successes - things you do well and successful projects.
- Make a list of your personal strengths.
- Read your list to remind you of your positive qualities and when you are feeling badly about yourself or dealing with a difficult situation.

Reflection Tip:

- * Which of your strengths have the biggest impact on your success?

Ask yourself if you do any of the following when faced with a negative outcome:

- Do you ruminate excessively about the possible causes of past failures? Does this interfere with your concentration on current tasks or problems?
- Do you feel helpless - unable to affect the outcomes of situations or hopeless? Do you fail to take initiative?
- In reflecting on the above questions consider whether you tend to settle on explanations that are persistent over time and/or global in scope. Make an effort to refrain from drawing on these explanations and focus on the specific situation relative to what you can influence and what you cannot.

Conduct a reality check and test your own perception of a negative situation through the eyes of others.

- Keep a log of “low points” both on and off the job, with your account of the reasons for the incidents.
- Consider whether you tend toward excessive self-blame and helplessness. Use the questions and exercises in “Feeling Good” to help you develop alternate ways of understanding incidents.
- If you tend toward blaming others or the circumstances, go through your incidents and write down specific ways in which you may have contributed to the situation, ways in which you might have behaved more effectively, and things you will do differently the next time. Be sure your items are specific and behavioural (i.e., “Double-check the figures” rather than “Don’t trust anyone”).
- In either case, discuss your notes with another person (choose someone who is good at Reflecting on Difficulties themselves - the more mature and objective the better) and ask that person to help you assess your explanations and implications. Check with a trusted colleague about your weaknesses and decide how they may be improved.

Reflection Tips:

- * Look for the silver lining.
- * What did you learn from the experience? about yourself? about others?
- * How can you help others to learn from your experience?

Level 4-5 Activities

Seek out a ‘turnaround commitment’ assignment.

- Troubleshoot the performance difficulties to make a project more profitable and to sustain its future performance.
- Address people, systems and technologies.
- Research similar projects where efforts failed.
- Involve a team with varying degrees of influence on the project.

Reflection Tip:

- * Be clear about what obstacles are causing the real issues.

Analyze a difficult communication situation and seek feedback on how to best deal with it.

- Identify a difficult “information communication situation” that you feel you could effectively change with your personal involvement.

- Commit yourself to identifying the key players with the “identified situation” to understand what may be causing the problem.
- Work with a senior manager you respect to understand how they gather systematic information or feedback to make timely and effective decisions.

Seek out an assignment to create a feedback culture relative to a quality improvement project.

- Find an area that has an absence of feedback from its management and ask to serve as a consultant to help facilitate the process.
- Write and influence the implementation of a policy that would provide continuous quality feedback and improvement.
- Design with the appropriate people a continuous feedback process that addresses quality improvement within your branch/Organization.

Reflection Tip:

- * Can you apply any of their learnings to your own projects?

Progress in your efforts and the way you go about reflecting on difficult situations.

- When engaged in a difficult activity, reflect on your approach. Recognize when own knowledge or capability may not be sufficient to deal with the situation and think ahead of the next steps relative to that.
- Look back on both successful and unsuccessful events. Think of successive experiences to challenge your own assumptions of the “way things really work” and develop a deeper understanding. Consider new ways of solving problems and how you will measure these.
- Reflect on how new learnings, from attempting new approaches to solving problems, impact your current knowledge base. Integrate these linkages in an effort to deepen your knowledge base and the capacity to learn from mistakes and successes.

Study the effect of a Organization-wide political problem.

- Take an Organization-wide political problem and ask some highly credible managers to informally join you in an alliance to solve it.
- Observe the Organization’s executive team and think through what things they could do to encourage commitment to fixing the problem.
- Talk to other senior managers about any recommendations you might have.