

Reflective Practice Walk-Through

This resource walks through what reflective practice actually looks like as a leadership discipline — not as a vague aspiration but as a concrete, buildable habit. It connects to the Reflective Journal surface in the Leadership Hub (Charter Article 24) and gives staff the structure to begin or deepen a reflective practice that serves their professional development at DSD.

Content

What this is for

This resource walks through what reflective practice actually looks like as a leadership discipline — not as a vague aspiration but as a concrete, buildable habit. It connects to the Reflective Journal surface in the Leadership Hub (Charter Article 24) and gives staff the structure to begin or deepen a reflective practice that serves their professional development at DSD.

Why this matters in DSD work

DSD staff navigate complexity every day: decisions with incomplete information, relationships across cultural and linguistic difference, systems that are difficult to navigate, and work that touches people's most significant needs. Experience alone does not produce growth from that complexity. Reflection does.

The distinction is important: a person can accumulate twenty years of experience without ever reflecting on what that experience taught them — or failed to teach them. Reflective practice is the process that converts experience into learning. Without it, the same patterns repeat; with it, each experience becomes material for development.

DSD's commitment to continuous learning and equitable practice depends on staff who reflect — individually and collectively.

Core concepts

What reflective practice is

Reflective practice is the deliberate, disciplined process of examining your own experience, assumptions, reactions, and patterns in order to learn from them and act differently as a result. It is grounded in the work of Donald Schön, who distinguished between reflection-in-action (noticing what's happening while it's happening) and reflection-on-action (examining an experience after the fact).

Both forms matter for DSD staff:

- Reflection-in-action is what happens when you pause mid-conversation and notice that your tone shifted, that the person across from you seems to have withdrawn, that you're not tracking what's actually being said because something triggered you. Developing this capacity requires practice.
- Reflection-on-action is what happens when you debrief with yourself or a trusted colleague after a difficult interaction: What happened? What did I assume? What did I miss? What would I do differently?

The four-step reflective cycle

A useful structure for reflective practice comes from the Kolb experiential learning model, adapted for practitioner use:

1. Experience — Something happened. A meeting, a conversation, a decision, a conflict, a success.
2. Observe — What did you notice? What were your reactions? What stood out?
3. Interpret — What might explain what you observed? What assumptions were operating? What does this reveal about your patterns?
4. Apply — What would you do differently? What do you want to carry forward? What do you want to examine further?

This cycle works in brief (five minutes of journaling) or extended (a longer written reflection or conversation). The depth is less important than the regularity.

The Reflective Journal surface

The Leadership Hub includes a Reflective Journal (Charter Article 24) — a private, persistent, staff-owned space for written reflection. Its privacy protections are the strongest in the platform:

- It is not visible to the consultant, supervisors, or any other user
- It is not used for pattern detection or aggregate analysis
- It is deleted on request, completely, with no residue
- Professional Support can help with prompts and frames, but the journal belongs entirely to the staff member

The journal is available beginning Phase 6. If it is not yet available in your session, written reflection in a personal document or notebook carries identical developmental value.

Practical application

Starting a reflective practice: the minimum viable version

One question, once a day. Choose one of these rotating questions and write two to three sentences in response at the end of your workday:

- What was the most challenging moment of today, and what made it challenging?

- Where did my assumptions lead me astray today?
- Who did I serve well today, and what made that possible?
- What did I avoid today that I should have engaged with?
- What did I notice about myself in the most difficult interaction of the day?

That is a reflective practice. It need not be longer to be meaningful.

Deepening the practice

Once the daily habit is established, extend the reflective cycle:

Weekly: Review the week's reflections. What patterns emerge? What keeps recurring?

Monthly: Write a longer reflection on a specific situation from the month that still has unresolved learning. Use the four-step cycle above.

After significant events: Use the journal after a difficult conversation, a challenging assessment, a conflict resolved or unresolved, a moment of growth or failure.

Using Professional Support as a thinking partner

The Reflective Journal offers optional prompts and reflection frames — but only at your invitation. You might ask: Give me three questions to help me examine why this interaction went the way it did. Professional Support offers prompts and suggestions; it does not analyze your entries or share them.

Common challenges

"I start and then fall off." This is normal. The solution is not willpower but structure: tie the reflection to an existing habit (end of day, after a specific recurring meeting, before a supervision session).

"I don't know what to write." Start with the factual: what happened, in sequence. Then move to noticing: what stood out. You don't need to arrive at insight immediately. The writing itself surfaces what matters.

"I'm not sure what I'm learning." Periodically re-read older entries and ask: what do I notice now that I didn't notice then? What has shifted in how I see the situations I wrote about?

"What if I say something in the journal that I regret?" The journal is private. It is a space for honest thinking, not a performance. You can delete entries or the entire journal at any time.

Connection to DSD's six program goals

Reflective practice is the learning mechanism that makes DSD's program goals sustainable. Without it:

- Staff do not learn from errors in equity practice — they repeat them

- Cultural humility becomes a concept rather than a lived discipline
- Supervision relationships don't deepen over time — they stagnate

With it, each interaction becomes a learning opportunity, and DSD's goals are served by people who are genuinely developing, not just accumulating tenure.

Connection to other leadership competencies

- Self-Awareness as Leadership Foundation (Asset 1): Reflective practice is the primary mechanism for building self-awareness
- Seeking and Using Feedback (Asset 5): Reflection amplifies the value of feedback by creating space to process it
- Career Navigation at DSD (Asset 6): Reflective practice informs how you navigate your own development
- Personal and Professional Growth (Asset 8): Reflection is the bridge between experience and growth

Reflective questions

1. When was the last time you genuinely reflected on a significant professional experience — not just replayed it, but examined it for what it might teach you?
2. What is the aspect of your work you are least willing to examine honestly? What does that unwillingness protect?
3. Who do you know who reflects well? What makes their practice visible to you?
4. What would your reflective practice need to look like to actually fit into your DSD workday?
5. What is one thing you learned about yourself in the last year that only emerged through reflection — not through a formal feedback process, but through your own noticing?

Sources

- Schön, D. A. (1983). The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action. Basic Books.
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development. Prentice Hall.
- One DSD Program Charter v1.1, Article 24 (Reflective Journaling Privacy Floor). <https://github.com/one-dsd/charter> (<https://github.com/one-dsd/charter>)
- One DSD L08 Emotional Intelligence Library. One DSD People, Equity and Culture Program.
- One DSD L05 Inclusive Leadership Library. One DSD People, Equity and Culture Program.

Always defer to the person in front of you. Leadership is a practice, not a position.

Apply — What would you do differently? What do you want to carry forward? What do you want to examine further?

Ask: What was the most challenging moment of today, and what made it challenging?

Ask: Where did my assumptions lead me astray today?

Ask: Who did I serve well today, and what made that possible?

Ask: What did I avoid today that I should have engaged with?

Ask: What did I notice about myself in the most difficult interaction of the day?

Ask: When was the last time you genuinely reflected on a significant professional experience — not just replayed it, but examined it for what it might teach you?

For division leadership, use Reflective Practice Walk-Through to set expectations, coach the practice, address barriers, and review outcomes; set direction, allocate resources, name accountable owners, and review outcome patterns. Start by apply — What would you do differently? What do you want to carry forward? What do you want to examine further?

For community engagement staff, use Reflective Practice Walk-Through to set expectations, coach the practice, address barriers, and review outcomes; plan accessible participation, make influence visible, and close the feedback loop with community partners. Start by ask: What was the most challenging moment of today, and what made it challenging?

For facilitators learning leads, use Reflective Practice Walk-Through to set expectations, coach the practice, address barriers, and review outcomes; build the guidance into preparation, practice, debrief, access checks, and follow-up. Start by ask: Where did my assumptions lead me astray today?

Do not replace official legal, policy, clinical, supervisory, program, or Tribal authority.

Do not infer an individual's identity, preferences, needs, or experience from group-level information.

State uncertainty, use current authoritative sources, and escalate when the decision exceeds the user's role.

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