

MODULE FIVE: REFLECTION

After engaging in this Programme, it's now time to reflect on yourself and your progress. You have a strategy for your leadership journey, for yourself and for your future. To make the most out of the Programme, you need some time to reflect honestly – particularly as you are the truest assessor of yourself.

You need to learn to:

- Celebrate your achievements
- Work on improvements

The benefits of self-reflection

- Better development of emotional intelligence and self-awareness.
- Better understand how to control your emotions, instincts, actions.
- Learning to act with integrity.
- Discovering your true values and sticking to them.
- Knowing how people perceive you.
- Better understanding of yourself.
- Better understanding of others.
- Greater confidence in making informed decisions with accountability.

TIP: Take a look at Strengths Profiling via the Durham Inspired Award.

How do you do honest self-reflection?

Consider the famous fairy tale phrase: “Mirror, who’s the fairest of them all?” And the mirror replies: “You are, dear Queen.”

We can choose to reflect on ourselves as the Queen did, without true knowledge or recognition. But what’s the point? We won’t change for the better. You might as well cover the mirror and see nothing at all.

Here’s how you can self-reflect:

- **POSITIVE:** Know what is the ‘fairest’ in yourself. Praise yourself for standing up for what you believe in. Always remember what you have done well and how you got there. Remember when you were kind, when you praised someone else, when you motivated your team, and give yourself the chance to feel good about this.
- **NEGATIVE:** Know what is ‘less fair’ in yourself. Realise that there are times when things did not go well. Look for the things that are stopping you from moving forward. Are they making you worried? Are they influencing how you deal with others or yourself? Are you overcompensating for this or being too critical?

TIP: Never punish yourself for your mistakes or problems. Remind yourself that these were simply detours from your ultimate goal. Always make negatives into positives by seizing the opportunities these detours have offered you. Need help getting there? Look at your personal network cards.

REMEMBER: Self-reflection is a difficult process. It takes strength, maturity and practice. You need to build your resilience without losing your core values.

TIP: Reflect once every six weeks, and reflect either alone or with another person such as your mentor or people in your personal network.

Creating goals, objectives and reflective habits

Building a reflective habit and mindset typically combines at least three key elements:

- An ability and willingness to reflect on individual experiences to gain more learning from them.
- Repeating reflection over a series of related experiences, building the learning and value each time we go through the reflective cycle.
- Regularly reflecting over a longer timeframe to see patterns and opportunities for learning that we may have missed.

Further tips on reflection

- Repeating reflection over a series of related experiences adds real value. Connections can be identified between the learning points from individual experiences, which produces an impact that is greater than the sum of its parts.
- While reflection is often used to look at an individual short-term experience, it can also be applied to review an extended period such as a week, a month or a year. This can help identify relevant experiences and learning, and can ensure that valuable learning is not lost.
- Setting and reflecting on goals and objectives can help create purposeful progress and can keep your focus and energy where you want it. The act of identifying values and setting goals is a reflective process in itself.

Terms such as 'goals', 'objectives', 'habits' and 'values' can have multiple meanings and connotations. For clarity, in this section we use the following definitions:

Term	How it is used in this section
Values	Your beliefs or ideals about what is important in life
Goals	The broad main outcomes that you want to achieve
Objectives	The smaller steps you take to achieve a larger goal
Reflective habit	The ongoing practice of reflecting regularly

The ERA model: Adding value by repeating reflection over a series of experiences

The basic process of reflection follows the ERA model:

- Experience
- Reflection
- Action

REMEMBER: Try to repeat the reflective process again and again to make it effective. Identify learning and actions and feed them into future experiences and reflections. This becomes an ongoing process of reflection, which increases the learning and value each time.

This added values can include:

- Strengthening our reflective skills and habits: reflection becomes easier, quicker, more natural and more effective, and it often becomes easier to recognise opportunities for reflection.
- Producing deeper reflections that surface enhanced learning and self-awareness, and ensure less learning is lost.
- Allowing ourselves to be more purposeful about how we use our time and energy for ourselves and for others, in our studies, our careers, our communities and our personal lives.
- Using reflection to look at a longer timeframe: use this to spot things you may have missed such as patterns or opportunities for learning.

How to structure your self-reflection

- Decide on a consistent day for self-reflection, for example the last day of the month.
- Create a set of prompts for general and broad reflection. For example: 'What were my biggest challenges and highlights over the last day/week/month/year?'
- Create a set of specific topics you want to reflect on. For example: 'Situations where I had/could have had a positive impact on those around me over the last week' or 'Experiences where I used my critical thinking over the last day'.

Creating purposeful progress through goals and objectives

A reflective habit is a powerful tool in increasing your learning, development and self-awareness based on your experiences. Aligning this with a specific set of values, goals and objectives that are personally or professionally meaningful to you allows you to achieve purposeful progress.

Setting goals and objectives

The act of identifying your own values, goals and objectives is reflective. It requires self-awareness and an understanding of opportunities, restrictions and barriers. Setting goals gives you an ideal to work towards, and reviewing your progress reflectively can help you:

- Optimise your time, energy and performance
- Capitalise on opportunities
- Work effectively within any fixed restrictions

- Identify and tackle, or circumvent, barriers.
- Check that your values, goals and objectives are aligned with each other and with how you are spending your time.
- Re-evaluate your goals and refine or revise the strategies you have for achieving them.
- Increase your self-awareness and develop and/or strengthen your skills and abilities.
- Using regular reflection to monitor progress and revise plans

Regular, scheduled reflections are often used to:

- Increase your awareness of your overall progress.
- Identify progress, opportunities, barriers and plans for specific aspects.
- Inform and shape future actions and plans.

Example: Some people may want to increase their impact in their part-time job or volunteering role because it is a field in which they are interested in pursuing a career. In their weekly reflective check-in, they identify that they have made some progress in better supporting those they are working or volunteering with. But they may also realise that all the impact has been in a narrow area and will not help them develop the broader experience and understanding needed to build a career in this field. As a result, they may adjust their plans and next week will indicate their interest in opportunities in other areas, and over the next month will look for chances to support and learn more from people in other areas.

Approaches for reflecting on goals, objectives and values

- Identifying values and setting goals: Values and goals are not in themselves necessarily reflective, but the process of identifying values and setting goals is. The process requires self-awareness and an understanding of the opportunities, restrictions and barriers around you.
- Goals should mirror your values and therefore represent things that are personally important to you and that you want to work towards. The section on reflecting for self-awareness includes an example activity that can help identify values and another about setting goals reflectively.

Reflecting for self-awareness (within Reflection Toolkit)

If you plan to reflect on a regular basis, for example every day/week/month/year, think about how you will make the most of the opportunity. This is particularly important when reflecting on your values, goals or objectives. Two approaches often used for this, either individually or in combination, are:

- Performing a **structured review** of how your expectations and aspirations of the last day/week/month/year compared with reality, and then creating/adjusting plans for your upcoming day/week/month/year.
- Creating a **broad set of reflective prompts** to help you review your last day/week/month/year in more general terms to identify learning and then creating/adjusting plans for your next cycle.

Both approaches are expanded below. Whatever approach you use, reflect on the balance of how you use your time and energy – does it reflect your values, goals and objectives? Looking ahead, will you naturally have more or less time for certain types of activities? Should you adjust your expectations accordingly?

In more detail: Structured reviews

Structured reviews often involve setting criteria that you will use to assess how 'successful' you have been, to identify areas requiring more work and to spot strategies that are working well for you. Criteria could be based around **quantity** (e.g. how often or how much time you managed to spend with your friends/family), **quality** (e.g. how good your time with friends/family was), and/or **progress** (e.g. how rejuvenated you feel in comparison to last time). Some people like to score themselves against each of the criteria. Others use descriptions and text. The criteria are used to:

- Look ahead and specify what you hope to achieve between now and your next review.
- Look back at whether you have managed to be successful since your last review.
- Identify what you can learn as a result and what your next plans should be
- Look ahead and specify what you hope to achieve with these new plans, taking account of what you know about what is coming up.

This cycle can continue for as long as it's useful. It's helpful to sometimes review how your approach to reflecting can be improved.

In more detail: Broader set of reflective prompts

Some people use a broader set of reflective prompts to review periods of time and their values, goals and objectives. The questions asked vary from person to person, and can be adjusted over time as you find what works for you. Prompts can be used both on a larger scale looking at your process and progress, and on a smaller scale with less challenging questions, which are more easily used frequently, reviewing small periods of time.

Some **smaller scale review questions** can include:

- What were three things that went well today/this week? How do you know?
- What was a situation today/this week where I could have done better? How?
- What was your biggest challenge today/this week? How did you overcome it?
- What was the predominant feeling you had today/this week? Why?
- What made you happy/sad/frustrated/angry/etc. today/this week? Can you find some way of having more or less of the identified aspects?

Some **large scale review questions** can include:

- Am I optimising my time, energy and performance according to my values, goals and objectives?
- Am I making the most of the opportunities available to me? Am I working effectively within any fixed restrictions? Where there are barriers, am I identifying them and tackling or circumventing them where possible?
- Do my values, goals and objectives still align with each other? Is this reflected in how I'm spending my time?
- Are my goals still the right ones to deliver on my values? Should/can I refine or revise the strategies I am using for fulfilling my values and goals?

This cycle can continue for as long as it's useful. It's helpful to sometimes review how your approach to reflecting can be improved.