

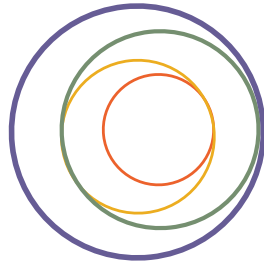
# not a toolkit!

## Fair Collaboration in Cultural Relations A ReflAction

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# WAYS OF CONNECTING- REFLECTION



# ReflAction

Reflection is deeply connected to our commitment to **decolonisation**. It has deep resonances to learning and unlearning. John Dewey, a philosopher, is considered the founding father of the current conceptualisation of reflection. He emphasised that thought and action should ideally be inextricably connected:

*'Thinking includes all of these steps - the sense of a problem, the observation of conditions, the formation and rational elaboration of a suggested conclusion, and the active experimental testing' (1916: 151).*

Reflection should always imply action. In this way there is a circularity of reflection - evaluation, action, reflection. In fact, this relationship between reflection and action has been the source of inspiration for two well-known conceptual models in management learning and management education (Kolb's Learning Cycle and Schön's 'Reflective Practitioner'). Schön's distinction between 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action' is particularly useful. 'Reflection-in-action' is about reviewing experiences as they are happening to develop new understandings and ways of acting as a situation unfolds; while 'reflection-on-action' is an inquiry process after the fact, usually in groups, to make sense of processes, form themes, identify trends and challenges in order to develop different understandings and ways of thinking and acting.

Therefore we suggest using the term *ReflAction* to underscore the need for reflection to lead to action. The Urban Dictionary provides this definition:

*Reflecting on our past to determine our future actions. (Reflect + action). After taking some time for **relfAction**, we're better prepared for the year ahead.*

Action here is a proxy for change, for altering systems or behaviours, for calling out inequality, unfairness or inequity whenever and wherever, for abandoning that which no longer serves the greater good. Thinking about fair collaboration in cultural relations requires an ongoing process of reflection on what we do, why we do it, how we do it, its outcomes and its impacts.

Reflection can be described as serious thought or consideration. The University of Edinburgh **Reflection Toolkit** suggests a helpful definition for reflection or critical reflection:

*"the conscious examination of past experiences, thoughts and ways of doing things. Its goal is to surface learning about oneself and the situation, and to bring meaning to it in order to inform the present and the future. It challenges the status quo of practice, thoughts and assumptions and may therefore inform our decisions, actions, attitudes, beliefs and understanding about ourselves".*

There is much writing about personal and organisational reflection (useful texts are included in the resource section below). The key message is that reflection is not a once-off process but integrated into everything the organisation does. It needs to become part of the organisations' culture. Reflecting for instance on fairness in cultural relations requires each person, each working unit or department, each part of the work of each EUNIC member, to do so individually throughout their working processes and also with others in the context of projects, programmes or strategic planning sessions.

However, this reflection should allow us to make suggestions on what, where, why and how to improve, what to stop doing, what to do more of, where to put our priorities and how these reflections can begin to guide further action. Without action, the reflection remains a feel good process with no real effect. This is why we suggest using the six stages of reflection proposed by Gibbs (1988) to facilitate the process of reflection.

### Description

what happened?

### Feelings

what were you thinking and feeling?

### Evaluation

what was good and bad about the experience?

### Analysis

what sense can you make of the situation?

### Conclusion

what else could you have done?

### Action Plan

if it rose again what would you do?

*ReflAction* with partners is a critical part of decolonising one's practice. It requires a clear understanding of **positionality** and acceptance of self, as well as a willingness to experience discomfort. Confronting inequalities or injustices when one is part of the powerful elite is always an uncomfortable experience but a necessary one if reflAction is going to lead to action.

# HOW DO WE USE THIS TEXT?

-----> ReflAction can be carried out by many different people, in multiple locations, in diverse ways and in any context. ReflAction is not necessarily text based and can include creative and artistic expressions through writing, podcasts, film and photographic images, illustration, craft activities, building games and role play. Senior leaders and champions can participate equally with junior staff. The more innovative and creative the group is, the more precise the questions asked, and the more honest people are encouraged to be, the more these reflections will lead to the possibility of action. Action itself requires will (of leadership, of management, of staff members), commitment (of the organisation and the individual staff) and systems (embedded into how the organisation works). Any expectation that people change behaviour without it being embedded in job descriptions, project outcomes, or KPI's will lead to implementation failure.

Questions to think about in relation to perspectives

**INDIVIDUAL** - encourage all staff to journal about their work, to note that which works well, that which doesn't and to collate evidence to bring to the attention of others.

**ORGANISATIONAL** - practice organisational reflection regularly as part of systems and processes, as essential to the day to day life of leaders and managers, rather than as an add on.

**SOCIETAL** - be informed about societal trends, discussions and issues which the organisation ought to take cognisance of, incorporate into their work, or learn more about. Some examples in the last few years include #Blacklivesmatter; #climate emergency; #intersectionality; #metoo #genderbasedviolence and #decolonisation.

# WHAT KEY/OPEN QUESTIONS DO WE STILL NEED TO ASK?

- ? Are we able to surface, criticise, or test our intuitive understanding of experience?
- ? Are we aware of how our emotions, prejudices and preconceived notions affect our reflections?
- ? Do we regularly have reflective conversations with peers and leaders in the organisation?
- ? Do our reflActions affect decisions and choices? If not, what are the obstacles?
- ? Are our reflActions as an organisation transparent?
- ? Do they lead to changes in policies, or activities or even the politics and emotions associated with them?



# RESOURCES FOR FURTHER READING

- **ANNOTATED TEXT**

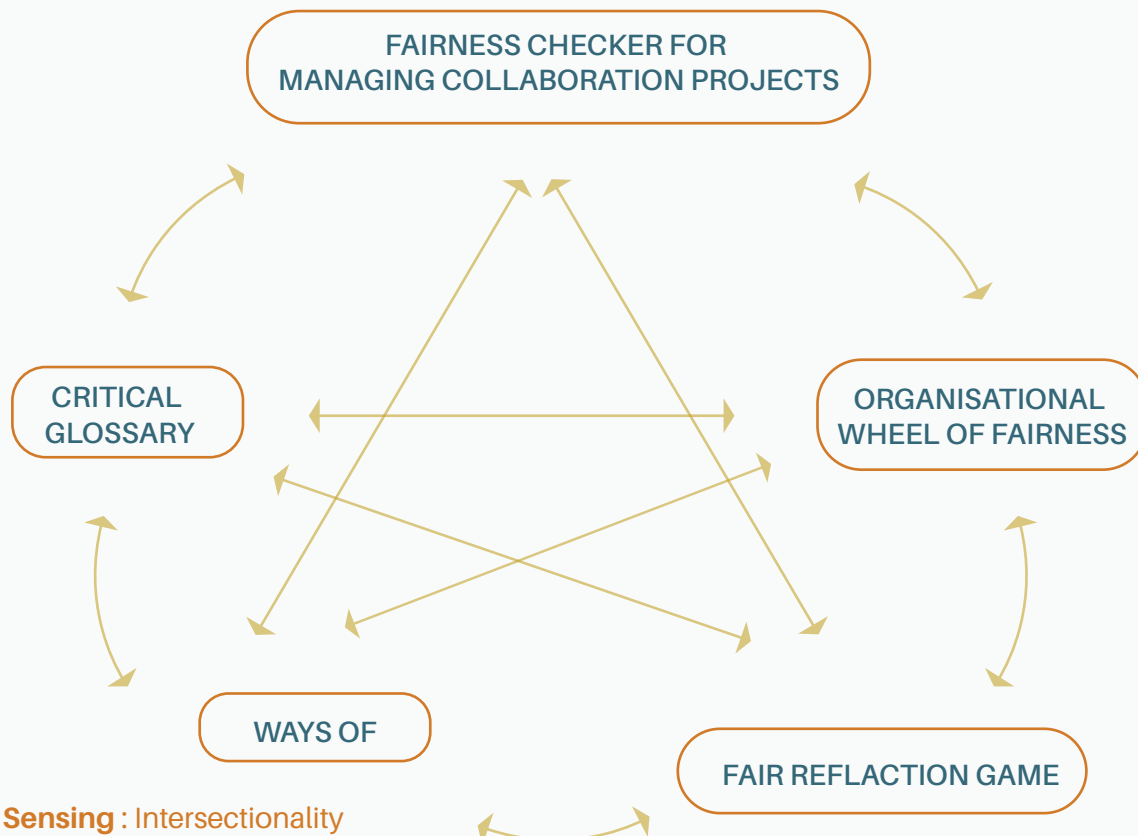
RussVince (2010) '*Organizing Reflective Practice*'  
Researchgate

This paper discussed four approaches to reflection that we have referenced in the text. It conforms most closely to our view of questioning everything in the context of deep inequalities, power imbalances and **decolonisation** and puts the responsibility not only on the individual, but on the organisation and its ability to be transparent or public about its systems and processes.

# OTHER REFERENCES TO ENGAGE WITH

- The **Reflection Toolkit** produced by the University of Edinburgh
- Blog post **Why-you-should-make-time-for-self-reflection even if you hate doing it**, Jennifer Porter in the online Harvard Business Review
- **The Role of Cultural Reflection** Human Rights Dialogue 1.7 (Winter 1996): "New Issues in East Asian Human Rights" 1996 Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs
- Antonio Damasio's **Descartes Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain**, 1994

Each component of the *Not a Toolkit! Fair Collaboration in Cultural Relations - A ReflAction* is connected to all other components. After finishing your reflAction journey in this section continue journaling in the next part.



**Sensing** : Intersectionality

**Thinking** : Decolonisation & Racism

**Doing** : Fair Evaluation

**Connecting** : ReflAction

**Sensing** : Injustice

**Thinking** : Climate Emergency