

Reflection cycle

Turn one experience into one change in your own behaviour.



Our own four questions, after the ideas of Kolb (1984) and Gibbs (1988); not a copy of either author's figure.

WHAT IT IS

Reflection works better with structure. David Kolb (1984): a cycle of experience, reflection, a general lesson and a trial. Graham Gibbs (1988) built a six-step debrief on it: describe, feel, evaluate, analyse, conclude, plan. In our four questions, the second matters most: your **first reaction** and the value behind it, so you can choose your behaviour.

HOW IT WORKS

- 01 What happened? The facts, before any judgement.
- 02 What did I feel and do? My first reaction and its value.
- 03 Why? Look for a pattern; ask someone you trust.
- 04 What will I try next? One change, and a date to check it.

MID-LEVEL · WORKED EXAMPLE

Apply it well

The situation: A project manager leads a team of 7 on an 8-month city project to move parking permits online. She tends to propose solutions before the problem is agreed.

After each design workshop, she asks one team member: 'Did I jump ahead today?' Her change: she writes the problem on the board first and asks the team to confirm it. She checks after 3 workshops.

In the exam: Tell one real situation through the four questions, with the feedback you sought and the change you made. Say whether it worked.

SENIOR · WORKED EXAMPLE

Design and lead it

The situation: A project manager leads a 30-month city project that joins 14 online services under one login, and reports to a board chaired by her sponsor.

She keeps an early lesson: bad news goes to the board early. After each group of services goes live, her short review starts with her own actions, so her leads dare to name theirs.

In the exam: Show reflection as a leader's habit: how your behaviour affects others, and how you made reflection safe and regular for the team.

WHERE IT SITS

IPMA · ICB4	PMI · PMBOK® GUIDE 8 · PMP® EXAM	APM · BOK 8 · PMQ EXAM
4.4.1 Self-reflection and self-management: first reactions, feedback (4.4.1.1, 4.4.1.5)	Guide pp. 177–178: self-awareness and self-management, in emotional intelligence. Not an exam outline task	BoK (APM's Body of Knowledge) §4.3.4 Leadership of self; §4.6.1 reflective practitioner. PMQ (APM's Project Management Qualification) outcome 15a (CPD, the continuing professional development.)

Sources: Kolb, Experiential Learning (1984); Gibbs, Learning by Doing (1988); IPMA ICB4 (2015); PMI, PMBOK® Guide, 8th ed.; APM Body of Knowledge, 8th ed.; APM, PMQ handbook (v6, 2026)

Key: IPMA = International Project Management Association; ICB4 = IPMA's Individual Competence Baseline (4.4.1 etc.: its competence elements); PMI = Project Management Institute; PMBOK® Guide = PMI's body-of-knowledge guide; PMP® = PMI's Project Management Professional; APM = Association for Project Management. Unofficial study material for IPMA®, PMI® and APM exams. Not affiliated with, endorsed by or approved by IPMA, PMI or APM, and not an accredited or endorsed training provider. IPMA® and IPMA ICB® are registered trademarks of IPMA in Switzerland and other countries. PMI, PMP, CAPM and PMBOK are registered marks of Project Management Institute, Inc. APM is a trade mark of the Association for Project Management. Other marks belong to their owners. PMP® exam facts are from PMI's public PMP® Examination Content Outline (2026); check the current version on [pmi.org](https://www.pmi.org). APM's qualifications are its own; this series is not an APM Accredited Provider or APM Endorsed. Examples use a fictional city and its projects. Levels (this series' labels): Mid-level = moderately complex projects (IPMA Level C, PMI's PMP®); Senior = complex projects and people (IPMA Level B, APM's Chartered Project Professional).

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