



Australian Government
Australian Sports Commission

Roadmap:

An **all inclusive** approach to governance and leadership in Australian sport



TOOL 2:

Critical Reflection

- Critical reflection is an important process for uncovering and exploring power, assumptions, biases and values at an individual and organisational level. These assumptions and biases can impact how organisations are structured and influence decision making.
- Critical reflection allows us to examine barriers that may have been created by systems and structures, and the assumptions, biases and values that underpin these.
- Critical reflection allows us all to reflect on our position of power within the broader sports system and develop ways in which we can influence and negotiate power for better outcomes to individuals engaged in our sports organisations.

What is Critical Reflection?

Most people in senior leadership roles engage in some form of reflection in their work. This might involve asking ourselves questions about how we dealt with a particular issue, and the rationale behind this, in order to build on existing knowledge and leadership practice.

Critical reflection requires us to go much deeper. Critical reflection is a process of becoming self-aware, considering our thoughts, feelings and assumptions, and examining how these impact on our work. It requires us to ask ourselves questions about:

- Our assumptions and biases
- Our values and beliefs
- Our social location or position

- Broadening our perspectives to understand how bias creates systemic discrimination
- The level of power and privilege that we bring to our professional role based on our own life experiences
- The level of power and privilege that we hold in our professional role.

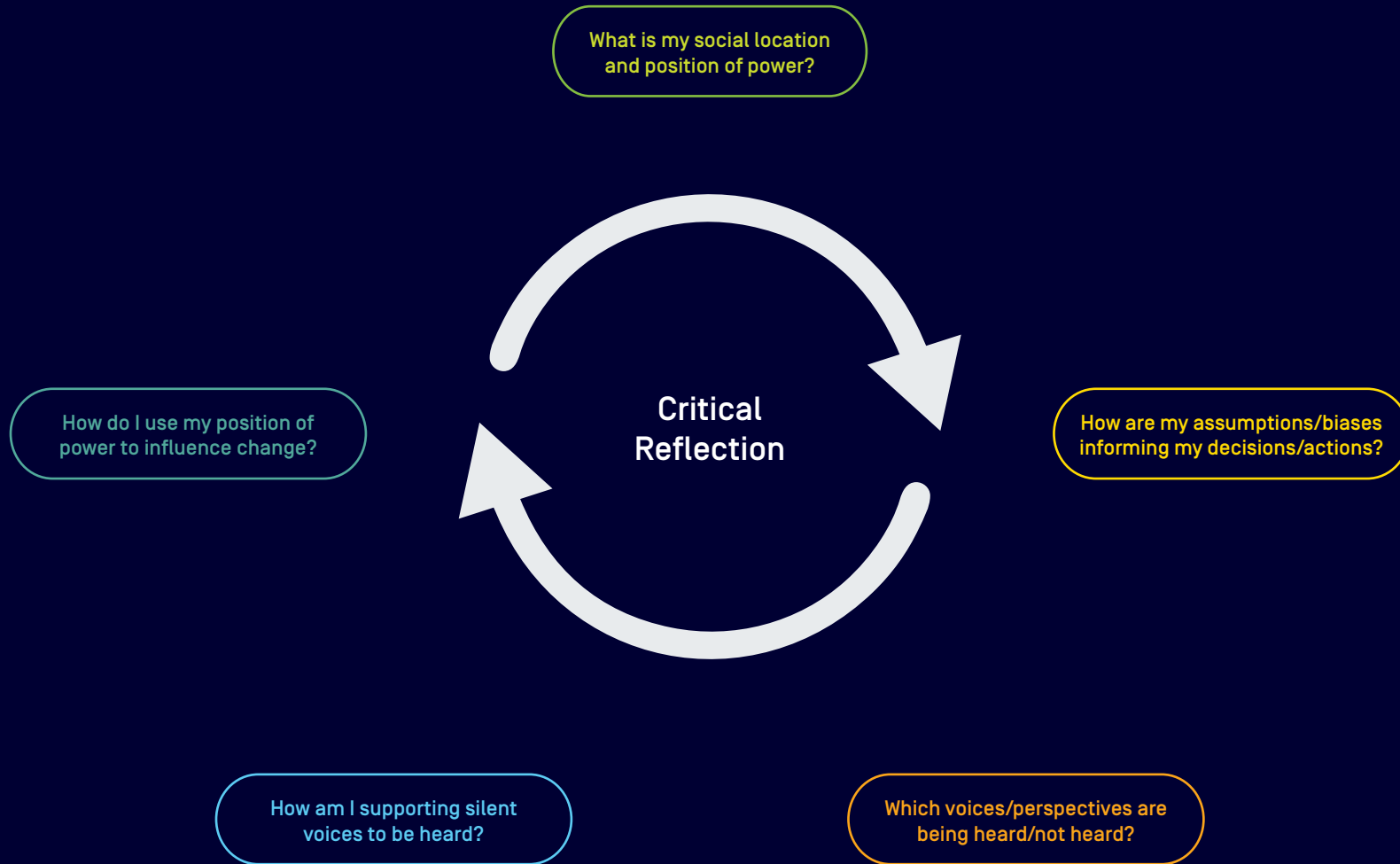
Critical reflection informed by an intersectional lens involves recognising that we are all part of structures in our organisations and society that infer power and privilege.

Sports organisation leadership should critically reflect on the organisation's biases and assumptions, and location in the broader sporting code. This can be done with input and feedback from stakeholders at all levels.

Points to consider can include:

- The sports organisation's underlying principles, biases and assumptions about stakeholders including staff, members, players and the broader community
- The sports organisation's position within the broader sports system and how it may hold a level of power and influence relative to other organisations and clubs.
- The sports organisation's role in creating and/or minimising systemic barriers to access and support for individuals who experience inequality within society.

As power and privilege at an individual and organisational level can shift across time and different settings, it is important for critical reflection to occur as a continuous process and be embedded in practice. Critical reflection contributes to ongoing learning, growth and practice development.



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Critical reflection is different to thoughtful action.¹²

Thoughtful action	Reflective practice
Is instantaneous – one decides what to do next, thinking about it for only a split second.	Requires one to take time out to reflect. It involves a conscious attempt to plan, describe, and reflect on the process and outcomes of the action.
There is no cycle of clearly defined separate phases. It is an unpredictable sequence because one responds to events in the situation itself.	It is a clear cycle of separate moments in which one engages in completely different activities.
There is no describing moment, because one is engaged in acting.	As reflection occurs after action, one creates an observational record and describes the results of the action.
One is not aiming at an improvement to the practice. One is thinking about how best to do what one always does.	The major aim is to produce an improvement to the practice.
There is no element of inquiry and one is not deliberately setting out to learn something from experience.	One designs and uses inquiry strategies to find out more about one's practice.

12. Handbook for Learning-centred evaluation of Computer-facilitated learning projects in higher education, R. Phillips, J. Bain, C. McNaught, M. Rice and D. Tripp, Committee for University Teaching and Staff Development Project, Murdoch University. Teaching and Learning Centre 2000





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Why Use Critical Reflection?

Critical reflection is an important tool in adopting an intersectional approach.

Individuals across all levels of an organisation who engage in critical reflection are likely to be more aware of their own assumptions, biases, beliefs and position of power, and therefore more likely to change practices to ensure they are inclusive.

Engaging in critical reflection allows all of us to understand:

- how power is present in our interactions with others (peers, colleagues, players, members)
- the ways in which we hold positional power
- how to negotiate our power to positively benefit people
- how to balance and manage power in order to create partnerships
- how to consider ways to use one's power in conscious and non-oppressive ways
- how structural and systemic discrimination and inequity influences individuals sense of safety, trust, personal influence and control

Shared reflective practice can promote collaboration between leaders from diverse professional backgrounds to ensure better organisational responses around access, inclusion, equity and belonging. It helps consider what else might be influencing access and expectations. This can result in removing barriers that limit those people who have been systemically marginalised in our society from accessing sport.

A practical way to critically reflect

A practical way to apply critical reflection includes 4 key stages: Describe, Reflect, Implement, Evaluate.

Each stage involves asking a series of questions in order to 'unpack' a leadership decision and understand it from a range of standpoints, including your own and others'. It challenges you to think about your assumptions and identify any underlying issues that may have impacted on the decision. It acknowledges that it is okay to make mistakes as long as we learn from them.

Ongoing reflective practice helps leaders bring forward ideas to help improve and enhance leadership practice. It can be a powerful tool for building individual and organisational capabilities.

Critical reflection is a key component of embedding intersectionality into practice.

This tool will support you to:

- undertake critical reflection as individuals and groups
- engage in self-awareness, critical analysis and assessment
- overcome assumptions and bias
- understand power and privilege
- engage in ways to address systemic discrimination and barriers

Reflective Practice Exercise

This reflective practice exercise is a suitable starting point for people to identify and address your own power and privilege.

This activity can be completed on an individual basis or within a group setting. If completing this activity in a group, ensure that there is enough time to discuss these questions and allow space for people to sit in the discomfort.





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Addressing Power and Privilege

Addressing our privilege can create discomfort which is both predictable and necessary in terms of unsettling our relationships to power and opening us up to accountability. The following reflective questions provide a frame for beginning to address our access to power and responding accountably in relationships of power.

- What are the connections between my own power and privilege with disadvantage?
- How can I hold myself accountable for unearned privileges?
- How can I hold myself accountable to my biases?
- How do I resist centring myself in my experiences of disadvantage when working with others?
- How am I responding to power both moment to moment and within interactions?
- Am I naming privilege, but doing nothing to lessen it? Such as naming my own privilege, and then dominating the space.
- How can I sit in the discomfort required to accountably address positions and access of power?
- Who else is in solidarity in making space for discomfort, accountability and repair of power relations? What ideas, practices, and lived experience helps me/us?
- How are we holding ourselves as professionals, our teams, organisation and our professions to account for misuse of power?
- How are others invited in safe and trustworthy ways to name the misuse of power?
- What structures and practices are in place to make this naming possible, and useful consistently and predictably across time?

Adapted from: Reynolds, V. & Hammoud-Beckett, S. [2018]. Social Justice Activism and Therapy: Tensions, Points of Connection, and Hopeful Scepticism. In Audet, C. & Pare, D. [Eds.] Social Justice and Counselling. NY: Routledge

Reflective Practice Activities for Groups

Initial questions

- How do we respectfully keep each other accountable when we have enacted power imbalances within our interactions?
- How do we challenge each other respectfully?
- How will we support each other to feel safe when owning our mistakes?
- How can we create an ongoing culture of collective care?
- What is one step/action that can be taken to create or strengthen a culture of critical reflection within the organisation?

Ongoing Questions

- How do we support and promote a sense of community within our team?
- How do we ensure that all voices are heard and considered in the work we do?
- How do we acknowledge and appreciate the strengths and experiences that our colleagues bring to their work?
- How do we create space for those who generally do not have a voice to be heard?
- What changes have resulted from reflecting on and in practice?
- How can we negotiate our power?
- How can we influence changes in our service system to ensure that people are receiving inclusive and equitable access?
- How can we consider how to use our power in conscious and non-oppressive ways?





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