

Increasing a Growth Mindset Through Writing

Mindset

 Exercise

 15 min.

 Client

 No

Reflective writing is a purposeful exercise in which one evaluates his or her experiences/practice/skills/responses in order to learn and improve.

Humans have a natural tendency to evaluate things that happen in life, good or bad. We do this by thinking about why things happen, and whether we handled them well. When done this to excess, reflecting on a past event can result in rumination and consequently negative affect; however when done appropriately and mindfully, reflection can help us identify strengths and weaknesses in our practice and learn from our experiences.

The process of reflective writing encourages one adopt a growth mindset. According to mindset theory (Dweck, 2006), individuals who believe that their intelligence or talent is dynamic and malleable hold what is called a growth mindset, and individuals who believe that intelligence is static and cannot be changed hold a fixed mindset (Dweck, 2006). People with a growth mindset see failures and challenges as momentary setbacks and opportunities for personal growth, where people with a fixed mindset view failure as a demonstration of the limits to their knowledge and ability. The benefits of holding a growth mindset has been documented in the literature, with research revealing that people work harder and more effectively, are more motivated to learn, and are less discouraged by difficulty (Cury et al., 2006). According to Dweck, a growth mindset enables one to develop resilience and a love for learning, essential components of great accomplishment.

Gibbs' (1988) reflective cycle offers a useful framework for reflective writing practice. Gibbs' model is particularly useful for helping people learn from situations that they experience regularly, especially when these don't go well. Gibbs' (1988) model has six stages: Description (what happened?); Feelings (what thoughts and feelings were present?); Evaluation (what was positive and negative about the experience?); Analysis (what sense can be made of the experience?); Conclusion (what else could have been done?); Action plan (what could be done differently next time?).

Author

Developed by LP, utilises Professor Graham Gibbs's Reflective Cycle, which can be found in his 1988 book entitled '*Learning by Doing*'.

Goal

This tool was designed to teach clients how to reflect on their own practice in an intentional and mindful way. The goal is for clients to adopt a growth mindset in order to identify the weaknesses of their process, and correct those weaknesses in the future.



Advice

- Beware of the client spending too much time on the first three stages of their reflective cycle (Description to Evaluation), as this has the potential to lead to problematic rumination. Remind the client throughout the exercise to take a step back from the situation and adopt and observer stance, so as to remain detached.
- The exercise has the potential to conjure up feelings of shame, regret, embarrassment, or other, in response to exploring alternative ways of responding. The client may experience a will to go back in time and change past regretful behaviour. It would be helpful to apply acceptance work and growth mindset theory in this instance.



Suggested Readings

Cury, F., Elliot, J., Da Fonseca, D., & Moller, A. (2006). The social-cognitive model of achievement motivation and the 2x2 achievement goal framework. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90(4), 666-679.

Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House Incorporated.

Gibbs, G. (1988). *Learning by doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods*. FEU.

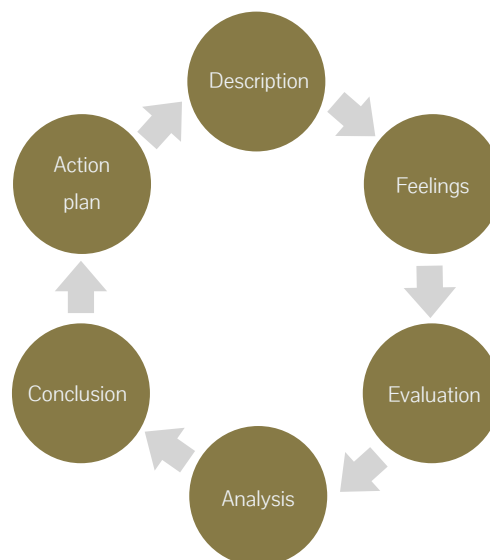
Tool Description

Instructions

'It is not sufficient to have an experience in order to learn. Without reflecting on this experience it may quickly be forgotten, or its learning potential lost.' - Graham Gibbs (1988)

This exercise is designed to help you mindfully reflect on a difficult past event and explore what could be done differently next time. On the next page, write as little or as much as you like about a difficult past event or situation. This might be a recent experience, or one that occurred years ago. For the purpose of this exercise, choose an experience in which you did not respond or behave in your ideal way. Use Gibbs' six-stage reflective cycle below to guide your writing, beginning with Description and ending with Action Plan.

Figure 1. Gibbs' (1988) Reflective Cycle



Step 1: Description

What happened? When and where were you? Why were you there? Who else was there? What did you do? What was the result of the situation?

Step 2: Feelings

What were you feeling before, during, and after the situation took place? What thoughts were going through your mind? What do you think and feel about the situation now?

Step 3: Evaluation

What was positive and negative about the experience? What went well? What didn't go so well? What did you contribute to the situation (either positively or negatively)?

Step 4: Analysis

What sense can you make of the situation? How could this have been a more positive experience for everyone involved?

Step 5: Conclusion

What else could you have done? If the situation arose again, what would you do? What skills do you need to develop so that you can handle this type of situation again?

Step 6: Action plan

What steps can you take towards improving yourself in regard to this situation?