A GUIDE TO ‘PAUSE AND REFLECT’

PRAGMATIC ADVICE FOR PRACTITIONERS

THE CURVE





Elizabeth Serlemitsos
JHU

Jarret Cassaniti
JHU

Adolor Aisiri
CCSI

Purnima Mehrotra
CSBC

Helen Blackholly
MSI

About the Authors

Elizabeth Serlemitsos - Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs

Elizabeth Serlemitsos directs Breakthrough ACTION, a five-year initiative funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), to lead its social and behavior change programs around the world. Elizabeth has worked in international development and public health for more than 30 years, 26 of those while residing in Africa. She has served as Chief of Party of two USAID-funded projects in Zambia, team leader of a DFID-funded project, and regional director for the Center for Communication Programs' Health Communication Capacity Collaborative (HC3) Ebola Program in the Mano River Region.

Jarret Cassaniti - Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs

A Senior Program Officer at Johns Hopkins Center for Communication, Jarret Cassaniti has 15 years' experience working in public health and international development in Zambia, the United States, Nigeria, East Africa, and Sierra Leone.

He has experience working with community groups, health facilities, government bodies, and professional associations to bring people together to share health know-how and create new knowledge.

Adolor Aisiri - Centre for Communication and Social Impact

A Technical Advisor for RMEL at CCSI Nigeria, Adolor Aisiri brings broad and rich experience to CCSI as a public health evaluation specialist with experience in social and public health research, knowledge management monitoring and evaluation of development projects. He has worked in various public health and social development sectors including HIV/AIDS comprehensive care, orphans and vulnerable children care, education, health systems strengthening, cervical cancer prevention, malaria, and maternal, neonatal and child health.

Purnima Mehrotra - Ashoka CSBC

Associate Director, Center for Social and Behavior Change (CSBC) at Ashoka University, Purnima Mehrotra is leading the capacity building vertical and MLE across Entertainment Education projects at the CSBC. Previously she has worked at University of Connecticut, Population Council and UNICEF. She is specifically interested in bridging the intent-behaviour and in evidence-based decision-making.

Helen Blackholly

The Vice President & Director Health Systems at Marie Stopes International, Helen Blackholly has over 20 years of commercial experience from product development to sales strategy and activation and business strategy. She now uses this experience in leading the Technical Services team to deliver to contraception and safe abortion/post abortion care services, primarily in developing markets.

Purpose of this document

This document is for practitioners in the development sector who wish to learn more about Pause & Reflect, would like to practice it themselves, and would like to embed its use across their teams and organizations.

The document is designed to:

- Demonstrate the value of Pause & Reflect for learning and continuous improvement
- Explain the organizational cultural shifts needed for Pause & Reflect to take hold
- Motivate and support leaders to institutionalize Pause & Reflect as a regular practice
- Provide a concise 'how to' guide with pointers for effective use
- Make it easier to practice Pause & Reflect by explaining how to overcome barriers to use
- Provide practical tactics for finding lessons in evidence and data.

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What is Pause & Reflect?

Reflection can mean many things: from simply thinking about our experiences, to increasing awareness of thoughts, feelings, values, or actions; and considering possible alternatives to a problem. Gary Pisano, Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School defines reflection as "the intentional attempt to synthesize, abstract, and articulate the key lessons taught by experience."[1] Another useful way of defining this concept is: "the practice central to all learning processes that evaluates or challenges underlying assumptions related to an experience".

Pause & Reflect is a practice of bringing both stillness and learning into an organization in a way that becomes systematic in order to help build and strengthen organizations into the future. Critical reflection on multiple levels is an intrinsic component of learning[2] and is key to challenging prevailing thought processes.

The value of Pause & Reflect

Pause & Reflect enables focused thought about how we are performing and how we might do better. It creates time to step back from events and experience, study their meaning, and draw conclusions. Then we can return to our roles with new insight and fresh perspective. For these reasons, Pause & Reflect is an important tool for ongoing learning and adaptation through responsive feedback.

Value to Individuals

We asked current and former colleagues about the impact Pause & Reflect had on individuals. The outcomes included:

- More effective listening
- Greater ability to manage change
- Better ability to clarify arguments
- Evaluating progress better
- Monitoring and manage our own performance
- Increased self-motivation
- Keeping focused on goals
- Thinking differently about how you can achieve your goals
- Thinking about and overcoming what may be blocking your learning
- Supporting and enrich your professional practice
- Celebrating our successes.

Value to Organizations

Leaders instrumental in instigating the practice at NASA[3] identify several group benefits of Pause & Reflect. The outcomes included:

- To identify and spread local best practices
- To identify and eliminate wasted effort
- On-the-spot individual and team learning
- Building a team approach to problem-solving
- Building team morale
- Increase likelihood of project success.

1. https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/learning-by-thinking-how-reflection-improves-performance
2. Argyris & Schon, 1978
3. https://www.nasa.gov/centers/goddard/pdf/431367main_PaL%20Brochure.pdf

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Value of reflective leadership

Leadership coach Carl Robinson[4] says reflective leaders can more easily avoid misinterpretation, missing out on details and key aspects of learning curves, or repeating mistakes.

Contrary to notions that this is an unnecessary act of reminiscing, executives who set aside the time for some personal and organizational reflection in fact may well return to work with insights that enable them to perform more efficiently.

Lareua and Brice[5] argue that practices such as Pause & Reflect act as an "experience multiplier - because sharing multiple perspectives allows one member to learn from the experiences of many."

How does Pause & Reflect work?

Pause & Reflect is a practice that requires organizations to take time out from their daily activities and stop to reflect on achievements, processes and let other reflections arise without constraint.

Research shows[6] the automatic, unconscious process of learning generated by "doing" is more effective if deliberately coupled with the controlled, conscious attempt at learning by "thinking."

Productivity is arguably increased when the automatic, unconscious process of learning generated from experience is coupled with the controlled, conscious attempt at learning[7]. The above argument is based on dual-process theory, which suggests there are two forms of learning:

- **Type 1** which is intuitive, fast, non-conscious, automatic, associative, and independent of cognitive ability associated with experience-based decision making and implicit learning;
- **Type 2** which is slow and deliberative, reflective processes that require working memory, and are typically described as slow, conscious, rule-based, and correlated with cognitive ability.

4. https://medium.com/@carlrobinsonphd/reflective-leadership-why-its-important-55b3a82c42e9
5. http://digital.fireengineering.com/fireengineering/201805/MobilePagedArticle.action?articleId=1389831
6. https://www.sc.edu/uscconnect/doc/Learning%20by%20Thinking,%20How%20Reflection%20Aids%20Performance.pdf
7. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/46301239_Dual-Process_and_Dual-System_Theories_of_Reasoning

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What does this mean for Pause & Reflect?

By reflecting on and articulating the key lessons learned from experience, individuals may boost their self-efficacy, which in turn has a positive effect on learning. Self-efficacy has been shown to predict individuals' thoughts, emotions, and actions[8]. As a result, practices such as Pause & Reflect can enhance outcomes by:

- **Increasing dedication:** When people experience self-efficacy in an activity, they devote more time and energy to it because they believe that their effort will translate into success.
- **Enhancing productivity:** Self-efficacy is also "an essential motivation to learn." For instance, research demonstrates people with high self-efficacy select more challenging tasks, exert themselves more, and have fewer adverse reactions when faced with difficulties. As a result, people with higher self-efficacy show more productivity, such as students achieving consistently higher grades.
- **Strengthening self-efficacy:** Information that shapes one's self-efficacy belief comes from various sources and the main and most reliable source is one's own prior experiences with the tasks in question. Reflecting on one's past experience on the same or similar tasks and articulating the key lessons learned from them can strengthen one's self-efficacy by allowing them to feel comfortable and confident they can successfully perform such tasks going forward.
- **Building positivity:** Though it is often the case that one's past experience includes ambiguities and errors, individuals tend to focus on their strengths and positive aspects when evaluating past experiences so that they can maintain a positive view of themselves.
- **Increasing effort:** People often do not exert effort on tasks or problems if they feel uncertain about whether they will complete them competently and effectively. Reflection reduces a person's experience of uncertainty about being capable to complete tasks well and, as a result, the person exerts more effort in subsequent tasks.

Thinking and teaching lead to greater understanding

The role of reflection in aiding learning supports the various arguments put forward[9] on the codification of tacit knowledge.

This can be described as the process of transforming the kind of knowledge it's difficult to write down or pass on (tacit knowledge) into information that can be readily transmitted or passed on to others (codified knowledge). There is an argument that the process of passing on tacit knowledge requires a cognitive investment that generates a deeper understanding of this knowledge in the long-term.

This relates to Pause & Reflect because theories suggest the reflective effort needed to create insights to share with a colleague or organization more broadly may end up generating a deeper understanding of the problem itself.

This deeper understanding benefits the knowledge-holder in terms of improved problem-solving capacity. It is fair to expect performance to increase the most when there is an expectation that reflection is going to be shared.

The idea that thinking and teaching are coupled is a line of argument that should be familiar to those who subscribe to the adage that one learns the most by being forced to teach.

8. https://positivepsychology.com/self-efficacy/
9. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/220363484_Mystery_of_the_Unknown_Revisiting_Tacit_Knowledge_in_the_Organizational_Literature

MINDSET

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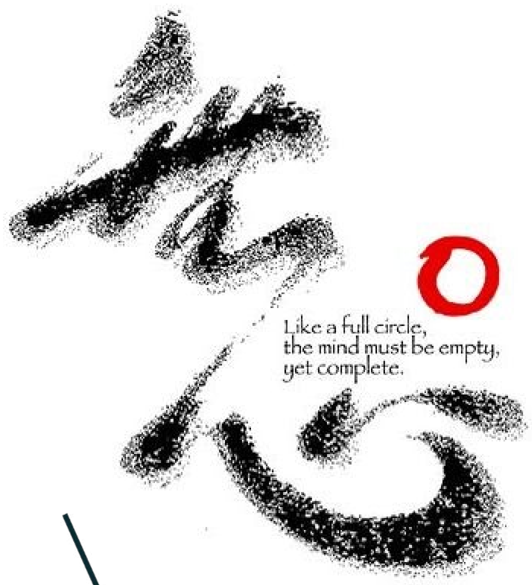
Pause & Reflect is a forward-thinking concept but for it to work, leaders, individuals and organizations must be open to change. All cultural shifts start with an alignment to a new or modified viewpoint or mental state.

In Japanese Zen Buddhism, the term "Mushin" describes a mind free of thoughts and distractions and it can be useful to think of this concept when approaching

Pause & Reflect, as it can help clear the path for the adoption of a beginner's mind.



A beginner's mind is another concept from Zen Buddhism which encourages openness, enthusiasm and a denial of pre-conceived ideas or attitudes. It is in stark contrast to an expert's mind or the notion of having expertise.

When an individual or an organization is considered to be an expert, it closes doors to possibility and may also be considered the curse of knowledge. When organizations are open to possibility and adaption, then opportunities for adaptation and for improvement are more available to them.

In approaching Pause & Reflect, it is important to appreciate the mental state that can allow individuals and organizations to adopt the practice and to guide adaptation and change.

TO CULTIVATE BEGINNER'S MIND...

- LET GO OF PRECONCEPTIONS ABOUT 'HOW THINGS WORK'
- ELIMINATE EXPECTATIONS ABOUT WHAT WILL HAPPEN
- FILL YOURSELF WITH CURIOSITY TO UNDERSTAND THINGS MORE DEEPLY
- OPEN YOURSELF UP TO NEW POSSIBILITIES
- ASK SIMPLE QUESTIONS

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How to cultivate a beginner's mind[10]

1. **Identify expectations, and flip them around**
   What have you understood to be true about this topic? Can you be 100% sure it's true? What would happen if the opposite was actually true, or also true?

2. **Be deliberate**
   When working on things that are known or familiar, we tend to operate without deep thought. By deliberately slowing down, you can experience each step more slowly, and leave room for thought and analysis.

3. **Avoid assumption**
   When something is familiar, we think we know how it will go. Resist the temptation to make assumptions and jump to conclusions. Instead, take time to observe and see how things play out. Be conscious of when you are making assumptions and when you are making direct observations.

4. **Break things down**
   Try to distill a topic or activity into a simpler form. What are the basic elements? How do they interact? Which elements are important? Which are dispensable?

5. **Channel your inner child**
   Ask simple questions and encourage simple explanations. Instead of making an assumption, ask "Why?" and "How does that work?" and "Why do you do it that way?" and "Can you say more about that?"

6. **Swap "should" for "might"**
   Language can create opportunity and shut it down. Words like "should" can restrict outcomes, while "might" leaves room for possibility. Let go of language that leads to closed thinking and instead incorporate language that leads to open thinking and broader possibilities.

7. **Check your own bias**
   We all want to be *right*. However, being *right* is not always helpful for an individual or for an organization. For an organization to be most successful it needs to see reality as it is, without bias. We all need to take time to check our own perspective and any bias it may cause.

8. **Be present**
   When you are aware of what you are experiencing, as you are experiencing it, you are more likely to open your mind as you open your senses. Ask yourself questions: What do your senes tell you? What patterns exist? What is confusing and why? What makes sense and why?

Want to implement Pause & Reflect? Create a learning organization

The concept of a "learning organization" was first described by Peter Senge in his seminal book *The Fifth Discipline* as a place "where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, and where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together"[11].

Senge highlights the mindsets required and the core disciplines for building a learning organization:

- **Personal mastery:** An ongoing process of honest personal reflection and frank awareness of one's own viewpoints and drivers
- **Mental models:** Becoming aware of our own biases and assumptions
- **Shared vision:** A common desired future encourages staff to make a deep and meaningful investment in helping the organization learn and evolve
- **Team learning and dialogue:** Open sharing and exploration of ideas (in contrast to proposing and defending a position) makes thinking visible and helps expose assumptions and clarify challenges, while also spreading knowledge and information widely and freely within teams.

10. Adapted from: https://mindfulambition.net/beginners-mind
11. Senge, Peter. The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization". 1990. P. 3.

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Values crucial to reflection

When thinking about Pause & Reflect we can look at how personal mastery and mental models described above by Senge relate to the concept of the beginner's mind.

By practicing the beginner's mind, individuals or organizations predispose themselves to be well-suited to contributing towards a shared vision, team learning and dialogue— all values that are crucial for reflection.

What makes a reflective leader?

Anyone aspiring to lead a learning organization must model the beginner's mind and in doing so he or she must be prepared to embrace many of the principles of empathetic leadership.

Such leaders serve as catalysts, bringing together a diverse set of people to form a learning team.

These leaders need to deeply commit to examining the current reality of their organizations, to question longstanding assumptions, be ready to change old ways as new evidence emerges, to demonstrate an openness to new ideas, encourage innovation, experimentation, and to embrace transparency.

As a catalyst, the leader of a learning organization is responsible for inspiring and generating a shared vision for the team. As an enabler, this leader is responsible for creating an environment characterized by teamwork, trust, open-mindedness and shared accountability.

An effective leader lives by the mantra, "share the credit, take the blame".

Leadership or management?

Leadership and management are two sides of the same coin. Leadership is about inspiring change, leading teams to places beyond the expectations of the individuals involved.

Leaders engage others in the shared commitment to address challenges and reach higher goals. While leadership is about ensuring that *the right things are done,* management is about steering the course, to maintain operational stability to ensure that *things are done right*.

To bring about transformational change, leaders at every level need to nurture innovation and learning, serving as a catalyst in the development of a shared vision that brings together a diverse range of committed individuals.

Sharpening our questions is more important than finding the answers, because a learning organization is not satisfied by answers. Answers are merely a resting place to re-frame the questions.

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How to institutionalize purposeful reflection

Purposeful reflection is crucial to any learning organization. Pause & Reflect provides the opportunity for a standardized process for critically examining the outcome of every mission undertaken by an organization, underpinned by values that are built into the working culture.

The process of monitoring and evaluation should consist of three elements:

1. **Clear thinking:** Ensure that your analysis is based on a scientific process (make an observation, ask a question, formulate a hypothesis, conduct an experiment, analyse the data and draw a conclusion— the process should be replicable)
2. **Profound learning:** Rely on systematic reviews and reflection, questioning assumptions, making connections and contextualization
3. **Correct action:** Translating learning into new action

Like all forms of exercise, the more you practice, the easier it becomes. Regular practice of Pause & Reflect will ensure optimal benefit of the practice because "repetition will allow the team to find an operational rhythm."[12]

Want your organization to Pause & Reflect? Recruit people with learning mindsets

All staff should possess a learning mindset whatever their job title or level of seniority.

Other desirable qualities include a spirit of collaboration, a systems-thinker who can identify systems and recognize interdependencies in the workplace, someone who will value and encourage the use of data for decision-making, and individuals who will focus on impact.

The USAID guide to hiring adaptive employees[13] suggests recruiting individuals who display the following qualities:

1. Focus on impact and results
2. Facilitates learning and building relationships
3. Continuously learns and improves
4. Navigate change.

The guide describes the qualifications that can be incorporated into job descriptions to ensure it attracts suitable applicants. It also includes a set of sample interview questions to help identify and select candidates likely to be adaptive employees who will respond well to Pause & Reflect and further strengthen a learning organization.

12. (Lareau & Long, 2018) http://digital.fireengineering.com/fireengineering/201805/MobilePagedArticle.action?articleId=1389831#articleId1389831
13. https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/guide_to_hiring_adaptive_employees_r.pdf

HOW TO

RUN EFFECTIVE PAUSE AND REFLECT SESSIONS

3

How To

The value and potential of Pause & Reflect is considerable, but there are certain tactics to ensure its effectiveness in your organization.

Here we provide guidance on how to encourage teams to take the time to pause, how to stimulate productive reflection and how to run effective individual and *group* reflection sessions.

The guidance is intended to assist those who would like to make Pause & Reflect a consistent habit in their organizations, but it is also relevant to those who would like to hold one-off Pause & Reflect sessions in response to specific events or emerging information.

What's the first step? Pause

Projects, teams, and individuals within organizations tend to move at breakneck speed. When pauses do occur as a natural part of the working lifecycle, they are often infrequent and unanticipated.

Intentional pauses may seem anathema in this environment, with pausing viewed as the purview of researchers and strategists. Pausing may also be seen as an unnecessary slow-down in a high-pressure environment focused on producing results.

Pause & Reflect gives us time to step back from daily activities and study our practices with a critical eye. In other words, if we spend all our time driving the train, we don't have time to stop and think about whether we're going in the right direction.

Four ways to help take time to pause

1. **Create a pause culture:** Senior leadership should explain to staff that a break in work is not just acceptable, but something that is valued and expected.
2. **Convey the value of Pause & Reflect:** Explain that the practice gives individuals and organizations the time and space they need to learn from experience. Make it clear that Pause & Reflect is not a distraction from work but rather is critical to doing good work.
3. **Trust staff to pause:** Empower staff to use their own time effectively and to pause when they need to, just as many Silicon Valley companies trust their staff to use "unstructured" time[14] to advance the broad company goals.
4. **Carve out pause time:** Consider creating a designated time in the calendar for teams to set aside business as usual and take time to reflect. During this time distractions such as meetings and emails could be suspended.

"We get so caught up in day-to-day tasks that sometimes it's hard to pause. But having this sanctioned and encouraged by the organization ensures we are take important steps back to consider some of the larger issues and big picture questions**,**"

—Member of mid-sized health and development organization that designated third Friday of each month for Pause & Reflect

14. https://www.themuse.com/advice/great-news-more-companies-are-letting-you-work-on-projects-you-actually-care-about

How To

What's the next step? Move to reflection

Once staff are familiar with the intentional use of *pausing*, introduce the deliberate use of *reflection*. You might encourage staff to reflect on the experience of pausing and feedback on what they learned. By guiding staff to think deeply about programs and deliverables and how they might be approached differently, organizations can enhance chances for success.

EXAMPLE EMAIL TO ALL STAFF

Dear all,

We've had a great [INSERT SOMETHING RELEVANT, e.g EVENT, TWO MONTHS].

We are all managing demanding workloads and rarely find time to consider experiences we may be able to learn from in the future. With this in mind, we have decided that this Friday will be a Pause & Reflect Day, from 8:30-5pm.

We have many teams and colleagues requesting our attention, keeping us from single-tasking. This day will remove distractions from single tasking and give each us time to consider our priorities. Friday's Pause & Reflect session will allow us each to broadly identify what is working, what needs adapting, and to consider the impact of changes in our operating context.

On Friday please:

1. Refrain from scheduling meetings or phone calls
2. Refrain from sending emails (queueing emails using a delayed delivery function is okay)
3. If there is something urgent, a chat message or phone call can be used to get a *quick* answer. Staff should consider what is really urgent and cannot wait.
4. Staff are empowered to say 'no' to others who schedule meetings.

From leadership the team

Many staff will never have been given the opportunity or trust to spend time reflecting, so general guidelines and prompts can be helpful in promoting purposeful reflection and in creating a culture of blame-free critical thinking.

Suggested prompts

- **Look at an email or email chain from one year ago**. Consider how far you and the team have come and what made it possible. Note the challenges, how they were overcome and how these lessons could inform future work. Have activities, roles, and expectations evolved?
- **Write a short letter to a hypothetical new staff member** about a project and where it is going. This an opportunity to step outside a project and study it with a more objective eye.
- **Draft a resume of failures and reflect on what has been learned from each one**. Then reflect on the value of failure and the role it has in making improvements to current or future work.
- **Consider offering individuals in your team a personality assessment.** This can help individuals and organizations consider how personality type enhances or hinders work.
- **Identify an upcoming activity that will take significant time and energy to plan.** Consider if others have completed a similar activity and if a peer assist (a tool that supports "learning before doing") could help stop your team from reinventing the wheel. Reach out to leadership to share your idea.
- **Ask how your actual activities differ from the ones that are planned?** Is there a deviation from what might considered ideal? Why is this and how might it affect the outcome?

How To

"I really find Pause & Reflect helpful, and I think practice makes perfect so I'll get better at the 'reflecting' rather than just 'pausing' the more we do this,"
— Member of mid-sized health and development organization that designated third Friday of each month for Pause & Reflect

Reflection on strategic questions: Once teams are familiar with the purpose and concepts of Pause & Reflect and have some experience integrating the activity into their normal workflow, consider providing detailed prompts for more granular reflection.

These prompts can help to focus reflection on key strategic questions, on issues highlighted by emerging feedback, or on lessons to be learned from recent events.

Reflect on your Theory of Change: Write down the causal chain through which your program achieves its desired goal (your Theory of Change). Are there any areas in which there are uncertainties or hidden assumptions? Are there any areas in which you might think harder about how the program truly performs – and how it might perform better?

Reflect on the organization's long-term direction: Often daily stresses keep our focus only on what's right in front of us. Pause & Reflect gives us an opportunity to lift our eyes to the horizon. We can reflect on the organization's future goals and whether current activities are aligned with them.

For example, consider reflecting on where your organization should be in the future and use this to better consider your priorities for the next five years.

- What is our organizational culture?
- How have we evolved?
- What sets us apart from others?
- Why do people want to work with us?
- What is our vision for our organization five years from now?
- Are our activities aligned with this vision?

Reflection on emerging feedback or new information: Pause & Reflect gives us an opportunity to seek lessons in new information and consider how we should respond. Examples of new information are research results, new guidance published by technical agencies, a change in government policy, or trends in popular culture. Ask:

- What is the evidence telling us?
- What should we do as a result?
- What did not go well?
- What should be changed for next time?

How to hold an effective group Pause & Reflect

You might want to start by encouraging individuals to hone their Pause & and Reflect skills before considering interpersonal and group Pause & Reflect activities.

The following prompts will help to initiate group Pause & Reflect sessions:

Prompt group reflection on recent events: Identify a significant recent event and conduct an after action review (AAR) to reflect on what worked well and what might be done differently in future.

USAID recommends[15] asking questions such as:

- What was supposed to happen?
- What was the reality?
- What went well?
- What could be done differently in a similar situation in the future?

15. https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/afteractionreviewguidancemarch2013.pdf

How To

Six tips to help you run successful group Pause & Reflect

1. **Have clear questions to answer:** Provide clear guidance on what the group is there to reflect on including questions for the group to answer.

2. **Include the right people:** Make sure people with varied perspectives are included in discussion on the issue at hand while keeping the group small enough that everyone gets to contribute. Consider who needs to be involved in order to act on conclusions reached.

3. **Choose the right format:** In many cases, a simple discussion is the right format for a group Pause & Reflect. But alternative formats can have unique benefits, such as:

- Walking meetings can foster creativity[16]
- A Hot Wash is an informal discussion immediately following an event that enables immediate, on-the-spot reflection while the event is fresh in mind[17]
- A Chalk Talk is performed in silence with communication done only through writing in chalk, encouraging a slower pace of thoughtful contemplation[18]
- In a Share Fair, participants share lessons from their work that speak to a central theme[19]
- See USAID CLA's full list of creative formats[20]

4. **Have a moderator:** The moderator should keep the conversation on-track and ensure conclusions are reached. For after action reviews and other internal discussions, choose someone who was intimately involved in the planning and implementation of the activity. Keep in mind that the internal team has knowledge about what happened "backstage" and will likely bring a more critical eye and have deeper insights than what participants see and experience "on-stage."

5. **Leave hierarchy at the door:** People at every level of seniority bring a useful perspective. Do not defer to the highest-paid person's opinion, make the session inclusive to participants across the organization.

6. **Welcome constructive criticism:** Pause & Reflect is an opportunity to look for ways that we might do things differently or better. Invite participants to be a "critical friend" who makes constructive critiques. Think of a Pause & Reflect as an appraisal–but for the organization. Ask specifically about ways you might help the organization to do better.

Pause and reflect on Pause & Reflect

After a Pause & Reflect session, consider how productive the process was: What worked well? What didn't work well? Survey staff and try to understand what impact the sessions have had.

Consider modifying the frequency of Pause & Reflect sessions, the duration and who participates. Share the survey results with staff widely and seek out opportunities to facilitate greater participation and more reflection, rather than just pausing.

If the sessions are too circumscribed and staff feel it is unrelated to their work, they may feel it is simply another item on their to-do list, so finding out if it feels relevant or helpful is important in informing how organizations may choose to adapt Pause & Reflect to suit their needs.

Pause & Reflect sessions may also backfire if staff are *required* to share their reflections. Leaders who apply the same get-it-done approach to reflection activities that they do in business as usual situations —even if their intention is to capture and spread learnings— risk alienating staff from the process.

16. https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/xlm-a0036577.pdf
17. https://www.manager-tools.com/2006/02/feb-2006-members-podcast-the-hot-wash
18. https://www.csustan.edu/404-page-not-found
19. http://www.fao.org/3/a-aq228e.pdf
20. https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/cla_toolkit_adaptive_management_faciltiating_pause_and_reflect_final_508.pdf

OVERCOMING BARRIERS

4

OVERCOMING BARRIERS

Every organization is capable of implementing Pause & Reflect and making it a key part of how they create learning environments and build goals for the future with greater efficacy. However, there are barriers to implementation that many organizations face. These might involve:

- **Immediate pressures prevent taking time to pause:** Pressures to deliver may mean pausing and reflecting is deprioritized.[21]
- **Lack of leadership:** There needs to be management and leadership in driving learning across all aspects of the organization. Leaders need to set the tone and culture. Are there people in the organization who are encouraging learning and applying past learnings?[22]
- **Lack of organizational processes to act on results:** The output of a productive Pause & Reflect session can be lost if the conclusions are simply archived and forgotten. The result is "organizational amnesia" in which learning is not remembered or acted upon.[23]
- **Reluctance to share/fear of failure:** People may naturally be reluctant to share information or views that may incur backlash, open themselves or colleagues up to criticism, be seen as failure, or jeopardize their relationships or standing. This problem can be particularly acute in strongly hierarchical organizations where more junior people may not feel confident about speaking up, or in organizations that lack "psychological safety" to share openly and frankly.
- **Benefits unclear/not a priority:** Time and resources are always finite. If people do not see the benefits of Pause & Reflect or view it as a tick box exercise, it will be deprioritized.
- **Only important when things go wrong:** There can be plenty of examination and introspection when things go wrong. But when things are going well, Pause & Reflect can seem less urgent - though it is no less valuable.
- **Unsure how:** Concern or confusion over how to hold a productive Pause & Reflect session may create less inclination to hold one, with leaders potentially worried that it will be exploited as a session to air gripes or shoot the breeze.

21. Stoto, M.A., Nelson, C., Piltch-Loeb, R. et al. Getting the most from after action reviews to improve global health security. Global Health 15, 58 (2019). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-019-0500-z
22. https://blog.walkme.com/7-barriers-to-organizational-learning/
23. https://hbr.org/2005/07/learning-in-the-thick-of-it

OVERCOMING BARRIERS

Organizations might address these barriers through:

Leadership support

- Set long-term goals and strategic objectives on organizational learning[24]
- Vocally support Pause & Reflect as an organizational priority and habit
- Approve the dedication of time and resources to Pause & Reflect
- Reward learning from failure and seeking ways to improve
- Promote and encourage a shift in mindset towards organizational learning

Creating a learning culture

- Set up mechanisms and structures for conducting Pause & Reflect (e.g. RTI International has an internal monitoring, evaluation, research, learning and adapting community where staff across various sectors and countries meet monthly to conduct Pause & Reflect sessions using an online platform)
- Dedicating a particular time for Pause & Reflect will promote institutionalization of the process[25]
- Create a system that involves operational, tactical and strategic staff, to ensure learning cuts across all aspects of the organization

Donor support

- Donors can call for Pause & Reflect to be built into proposals
- Plans for Pause & Reflect can be scored and weighted
- Donors can organize Pause & Reflect workshops where grantees are invited to reflect on project learnings (e.g. a similar workshop was organized for the USAID and Nepal's SEED Office worked with the Feed the Future project to conduct Pause & Reflect workshop)

Make it a habit

- Instill prompts for Pause & Reflect by attaching it to regularly occurring "moments" in the workplace. For example, some organizations may hold Pause & Response sessions on the third Friday of every month. Others may build Pause & Response into regular project check-ins
- Making Pause & Response a habit builds familiarity with the process and helps participants to see its value

Demonstrate value

- Publicize and share learnings and improvements from Pause & Reflect

Be free of a blame culture

- It is important to establish that Pause & Reflect sessions are not an environment in which to attribute blame or to punish poor performance
- When critiquing events, talk about the situation, not a specific person or group, and focus on structural factors, not individuals

Build internal capacity for Pause & Reflect

- Sensitize and build capacity of staff to conduct and utilize lessons from Pause & Reflect
- Make assessment for learning mindset a part of the hiring process
- Incorporate learning approaches e.g. Pause & Reflect as part of staff orientation for new hires
- Make learning an aspect of employees annual performance review.

24. https://www.agrilinks.org/post/usaidnepal-making-monitoring-evaluation-and-learning-mel-even-more-collaborative-and-effective
25. https://www.rti.org/brochures/collaborating-learning-and-adapting-cla

FINDING MEANING IN DATA

5

FINDING MEANING IN DATA

Pause & Reflect is about taking time to consider what data and evidence are telling us. However, turning data into insight that is meaningful is a true skill that demands a "curious" mindset.

It takes time to learn this skill and if organizations lack this then the data "treasure" remains unlocked.

Learning how to turn data into insight is not simply about training, it is about a shift in mindset. It takes lots of practice using practical examples and is about embedding a culture of asking questions.

These questions are often very basic, but can be critically important, such as:

- "So what?" What does it mean *really*?
- "Now what?" Or what are you going to do about it...

Remember the forgetting curve

The "forgetting curve"[26] is a powerful way of making people realize that training/learning should be integrated into the work that people do.

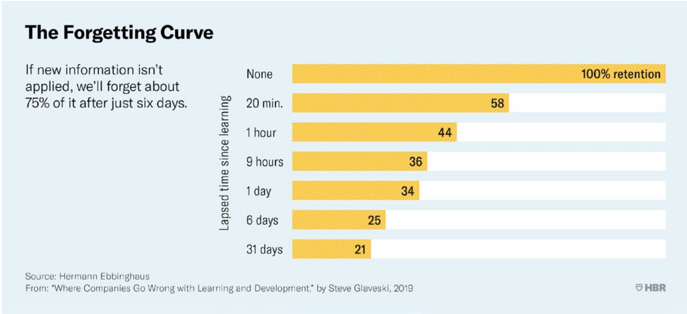
The concept of the forgetting curve suggests that if you can't apply the things you learn straightaway, after twenty minutes you've retained only 60% of the information and after an hour you'll be down to 45%.

The idea highlights the importance of using data on a continual basis with purposeful reflection. If organizations build in *nudges* and triggers for reflection, such as Pause & Reflect sessions every third Friday, helping to institutionalize learning and make it a habit.

It means new information will be actively used and the data can be turned into insight and then into action on a regular basis.

Ensure data and insight is not hoarded

Data is everyone's business, so be sure to share data across the organization. In particular, share examples of how data has been turned into insight and used to improve programs.



Benefits of organization-wide data sharing include:

- Data and data-based insight is available to all
- Creates an institutional memory of data insights and best practice
- Helps to avoid duplication of effort

26. https://hbr.org/2019/10/where-companies-go-wrong-with-learning-and-development

FINDING MEANING IN DATA

Example of how it works: Success Models of best practice

Data into insight into action at Marie Stopes International (MSI)

MSI helps to create a shared institutional awareness of data-based best practice through regular sessions with country teams sharing effective practice and tackling real problems together.

MSI provides sexual and reproductive health services in 37 countries through different channels, such as clinics, outreach teams, community- based providers.

There is a huge wealth of data and knowledge held across the organization, but five years ago it was held in a diverse range of locations and in people's heads. It was hard to find, could be inconsistent, and did not have sufficient examples behind the best practice to cater for different contexts for the different operating channels.

The solution was to create "Success Models" of best practice. Success Models are case studies of effective practice in the organization that capture institutional knowledge of everything that is required to successfully run a channel: what works, why and how. Success Models are categorized by chapters & performance areas so it is easy for MSI staff to find relevant support, tools, resources, ideas to answer real challenges.

Success Models were (and still are) a real team effort in "co-creation". They are a mechanism to draw on collective experience and expertise across MSI from country programs and the London Support Office departments.

Each Model is broken down into key performance areas that offer clear rules or recommendations:

- A rule is a "must do" for every country
- A recommendation is what the team strongly suggests should be applied in the country. Recommendations are based on both facts and operational judgement. Recommendations are based on what has worked across MSI in many of the countries using practical questions and backed up with the data


MARIE STOPES INTERNATIONAL
Children by choice, not chance

Country focus: Burkina Faso

Theme: Youth and male involvement

Marie Stopes Evidence Brief

Human-centred design: putting people at the heart of our work

IN BRIEF

The Marie Stopes team in Burkina Faso are trialling a creative approach to get the message across, based on human-centred design.

It's all about building a deep empathy with the people we're aiming to help – and tailoring solutions to their needs.

By immersing ourselves in their lives we're able to move beyond data and demographics and unearth new ways to target those in need of reproductive health services and support real change.

THE CHALLENGE

Giving young rural women a voice

Life for teenage girls in rural areas of Burkina Faso is extremely tough. Marriage at a young age is the norm and there's huge pressure to produce a baby within the first year.

This makes running family planning campaigns tricky. We can't talk to unmarried girls because 'they aren't having sex'. And childless newly-weds HAVE to produce a first child. Sexuality is a taboo topic in Burkina Faso and the country lies at 185 of 188 on the gender inequality index. The result is that most young women find they have no decision-making power when it comes to family planning.

We can talk to them when they've had that first baby – but it's still an extremely hard group to reach. So any discussion on contraception needs to engage the broader community and be framed around the overall wellbeing of the family and household, with a focus on the economic impact, rather than health.

WHAT WE DID

Putting people at the centre of our work

The human-centred design (HCD) initiative was developed in partnership with IDEO.org with funding from the Hewlett Foundation. The team in Burkina Faso were working towards three aims:

1. Increase uptake of family planning services by rural, married 15-19 year-olds who already have one child
2. Increase family and community acceptance of adolescent sexual and reproductive health
3. Increase capacity to use the HCD process in project design and implementation – and share across MSI

Through this we were able to gather better insight into the social and cultural factors that impact family planning decisions

FINDING MEANING IN DATA

Human-centred design: putting people at the heart of our work

Burkina Faso | Youth and male involvement

WHAT WE DID

Putting people at the centre of our work

The project began with a desk review and brainstorm and progressed, through a two week design research phase involving the team becoming immersed in the target communities, using individual and group interviews and observations as well as some initial prototyping of intervention ideas.

Using insights from the design research, IDEO.org prepared initial prototypes and an approach for how to test them. During a second visit to target communities the various prototypes were tested in different settings and in various combinations – with several of the more promising ones iterated and tested again.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

We conducted in-depth, in-context, qualitative interviews and discussions with a range of community members. Through this we were able to gather better insight into the social and cultural factors that impact family planning decisions, including:

1. Children are the ultimate symbol of wealth.
2. Women are property with a depreciating value.
3. A need for change is recognised – as long as it doesn't threaten men's status.

Individual and group interviews

26 Young wives	12 Mothers & Grandmothers	08 Husbands
04 Unmarried youth	10 Community Leaders	09 Healthcare providers

WHAT WE FOUND

"Babies cry inside me. You need to let them out."

Through our initial research, interviews and testing we were able to identify behavioural 'archetypes', which help us see and understand the people we seek to serve beyond simple demographics. By focusing on people's needs, aspirations and values, behavioural archetypes unveil new, often ignored, user segments.

From all the archetypes identified, we saw the most potential to change behaviour and attitudes if we designed initiatives around these segments:

The Hindered-Female
Some understanding of the benefits of family planning but lacking support

The Novice-Female
Engaged with the benefits and open to family planning use with a husband who is on board

The Conflicted-Male
Positive about the benefits but unsure about next steps

The Silent-Male
Accepting of his wife's use as long as it stays between them

These four archetypes also highlighted the importance of getting the whole community on board. We wanted to get people talking, empower people – both men and women – to think about their future, and create family planning advocates.

WHAT THIS MEANS

La Famille Idéale

Marie Stopes' global adolescent engagement strategy has been mostly targeted at young women. To create the change we want to see in Burkina Faso, we need to widen the conversation. Demand for family planning is already bubbling under the surface there. Many young women understand the benefits, but their husbands, the gatekeepers, and the broader community remain barriers to access. Inviting Burkinabe men into the conversation paves the way to greater gender equity.

During 2018 we began live prototyping with a human-centred design initiative: La Famille Idéale. We learned that couples barely talk to each other about sex, and wives often could not articulate the benefits of family planning to their husbands. We made space for conversations at multiple levels—from a game in public forums to a facilitated private dialogue between husband and wife. We brought in a trusted figure, a Community Based Mobiliser (CBM), to moderate these conversations.

In our initial pilots, the strategy worked! Many couples decided to take up services after the conversation. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of this initiative will show us the longer-term impacts.

La Famille Idéale celebrates the beauty of every Burkinabe family and each couple's potential to shape their own lives. This human-centred design system paves the way to service uptake.

Where can I find more information?

For more information on Marie Stopes International and the work that we do please contact:

T +44 (0)20 7636 6200 • evidence@mariestopes.org

Alternatively, visit our website: www.mariestopes.org

Registered charity number: 265543

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Pause & Reflect on the available data

When the Research, Monitoring and Evaluation **(RME)** team at your organization focuses on data USAGE and APPLICATION, not just data generation, then you can make data & insights truly valuable and effective at delivering your organizational goals.

RME teams must understand how colleagues across the business will use the data, and what data and insight is missing. With this in mind, RME teams should package the data to be of most use to those individuals, translating it into actionable recommendations. In other words, "one size does not fit all" audiences. It does take time to tailor, but the effort is worth it as adoption and usage significantly increases around the insights and actions. If someone does not recognize this, then they need help to understand that their hard work is being wasted because it will not be absorbed and adopted.

This requires RME teams to act in partnership with groups or individuals within the organization, supporting their work to discover insight as part of a reflection process.

FINDING MEANING IN DATA

Know what question you need to answer

Too many data analysis projects get underway only to find the project is asking the wrong question, or teams did not check to see that information was already available. This is frequently because data, insights, reports or often inconsistently stored, hard to find. So, whilst most people might find the topic of information storage, boring, it is not! It will save, time, money and improve outcomes if you instigate a logical, disciplined filing system.

To get maximum insight from data in a systematic way, apply the DRIVE technique:

D = DEFINE. What question are you trying to answer?

R = RESEARCH - Do we already have information on this? Have we asked others first if they have it? Have we checked in the "Insights library"? If, Yes. Stop and read it. It may save time and money. If No, then do the data analysis/gathering.

I = Insight. What does the data tell us. Ask, "So what?" Insights are where data triangulation and pulling together of outputs, crystallizes into an "Aha moment."

V = Visualise What is the story that goes with this data?

E = Execute Put the data and insight into action. Make sure the "Now what?" is clear.

Then check to see that the solution worked or did not work.

Apply a framework to the data to turn data into insight into action

FINDING MEANING IN DATA

Make it easy to understand data and its implications

Get to the point quickly

Forget the methodology! Go straight to the insights and conclusions. How you reached those insights and conclusions (e.g the methodology) can be explained in the appendix, not on slide 1. Most non-RME audiences care about the "so what" not the methodology so don't lose them in the first 5 minutes.

Use visuals

Most people find it easier to understand a bar chart than a list of numbers. Visualization helps:

1. **To explore and find information:** Good tools include scatter plots and line graphs.
2. **To explain and convey a message:** Charts, maps and fact sheets are easy to understand.
3. **To provide direction and detect anomalies:** Good tools include real-time monitoring dashboards and Key Performance Indicators (KPI).
4. **To be attractive and engaging:** Infographics are great, but watch out for meaningless infographics or random pictures on a page that say nothing relevant.

Make it easy for the reader

Data doesn't have to be complicated. Good clear writing and layout go hand in hand when communicating key findings and messaging from data insights. Tips include:

1. Guide attention to reduce effort and working out the "so whats"
2. Show everything within one eye-span
3. Label chart elements directly (no jumping back and forth to a legend)
4. Provide a strong headline
5. Use a familiar or intuitive visual language

Compare data from multiple sources

Data from a single slice is only one perspective and there is almost always something to be learned from triangulating your analysis with another data source—even if you find that they contradict each other!

Simple questions can help you interpret the bigger picture, such as:

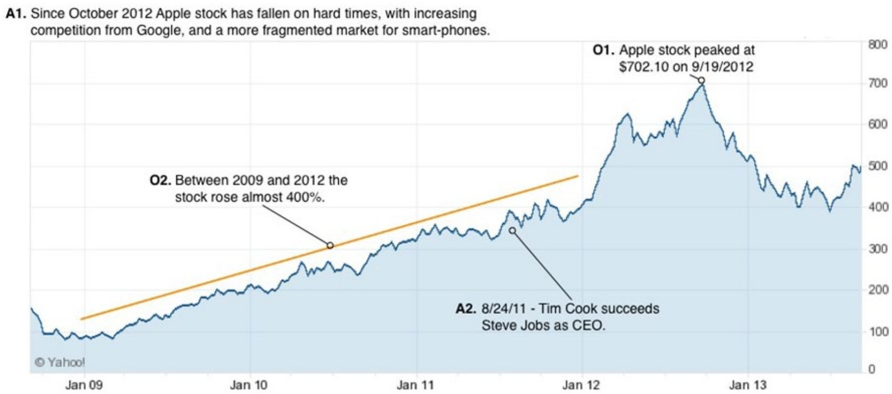
1. Is this part of a trend or a "blip"?
2. Is this a good number or a bad number?!
3. Would other data points point to the same conclusion?
4. What do other data sources say?
5. Does the data source provide context on the chart?

Multiple data sources can together enable stronger conclusions:

FINDING MEANING IN DATA

Here is an example of bringing together quantitative and qualitative data to get a fuller picture:

Data trend & context (on the chart)



Real life rarely provides perfect conditions for data analysis

We rarely have perfect experimental conditions in the real world. This is particularly true of measuring marketing activities.

It is possible to influence the roll-out of programs to maximize your chances of experimental conditions, and sometimes even retrospectively there's still opportunity. But if it's not possible to have true experimental conditions, take this into account in your analysis.

It can help to make sure:

1. **The intervention period is clearly defined/ fixed:** Marketing is nimble and adaptive
2. **Control is unaffected by an intervention:** Spillovers happen in behavioral change
3. **Everything else is constant:** Confounders are common

Recruit a leader with a learning mindset

An action orientated leader who understands the importance of gathering data through Pause & Reflect and then interrogating that data to find relevant insights will set the tone for the whole organization.

They will lead by example, challenging the status quo and driving for action by asking the hard questions, such as "Why now?" and "So what?" and "Now what?"

Sources to reference:

Cole Nussbaumer Knaflic: *Storytelling with Data: A Data Visualization Guide for Business Professionals*

Stephen Few: *Information Dashboard Design: The Effective Visual Communication of Data*

Examples of good websites

https://datavizcatalogue.com/

http://www.vizwiz.com/

http://www.storytellingwithdata.com/

https://www.datavisualizationsociety.com/

http://seeingdata.org/developing-visualisation-literacy/

THE CURVE