

A Guide to Decision-making through Principled Innovation

Facilitation Guide

What is it?

This guide outlines one possible process to integrate Principled Innovation into decision-making through the use of what are called “generative” and “reflective” questions. The questions help users to explore their own Principled Innovation scenarios from different perspectives and to anticipate intended and unintended consequences prior to taking action.

How does it support Principled Innovation?

In Principled Innovation, we work with other people—such as students, other educators, parents, colleagues, or other members of our communities and organizations—to take each other’s perspectives and seek to empathetically understand them (Practice C2). We work inclusively to understand the challenges that children or adults are facing in these contexts (Practices C1 and I1) and to design creative solutions that could solve those problems.

But the final step of decision-making (PI Practice M2)—picking the best course of action based on the best of our knowledge—is one of the hardest practices to enact, because the future is uncertain. Navigating that uncertainty takes courage, but that courage needs to be balanced with careful planning to attempt to minimize the unintended consequences from our decisions and actions (Practice P2).

The questions in this decision-making tool are designed to help innovators to bring together the fruit of this PI process into a practical wisdom that helps them reflect on the course of action they are about to make.

How do I use it?

Starting a new reflective practice can be challenging. Try to continue moving through the process without getting stuck on one specific step.

1. **Immerse.** Immerse yourself in the challenge and clearly state the facts. What is the dilemma or challenge you are facing? Describe the challenge as if you are an observer. Focus on the relevant facts, removing opinions and emotions from the equation.
2. **Reflect.** Reflect using the questions in the decision-making guide to prompt your thinking about the dilemma or challenge. These are suggested questions to get you started. Frame the questions in the context of your situation and reflect either individually or as a team. Try journaling to deepen your reflection.
3. **Act.** Make the decision that feels like the right fit and take action. It’s better to try a solution than be paralyzed by the fear of making a mistake.
4. **Examine.** Examine your choice... How did it go? What have I learned from this specific situation? What would I do differently next time? Reflection is a continual process and key to the development of practical wisdom as we learn from our experiences.

Why does it work?

Critical reflection, whether individually or in group contexts, plays a central role in learning ([Mezirow, 1990, 1998](#)). Critical reflection facilitates meaning-making by exploring lessons learned in past experiences, a process which triggers our moral imagination ([Johnson, 1993](#); [Cook-Sather & Baker-Doyle, 2017](#))—our vision for how the future *could* and *should* be—and guides future action ([Mezirow, 1990](#)).

Reflective practices using tools such as journaling or questioning, support the ongoing development of PI character assets. Reflective techniques such as these have been linked to the development of a wide range of character assets in college-aged young adults, including PI assets [humility, altruism](#) ([Brooks et al., 2019](#); [Lamb et al., 2021](#)), empathy, fairness, perspective-taking, critical thinking, and the practices of systems-thinking ([Rodríguez Aboytes & Barth, 2020](#); [Shor et al., 2017](#); [Van Beveren et al., 2018](#)) and moral and ethical decision-making ([Astin et al., 2006](#); [Rockenbach, 2020](#)). Within teacher preparation, critical reflection has been specifically linked to the development of critical consciousness and multicultural competencies ([LaBelle & Belknap, 2016](#); [Sharma et al., 2011](#))—important teacher dispositions which build on the PI character assets of empathy, humility, and perspective-taking. When practiced in teams, critical reflection can lead to change within entire organizations, bringing organizational practice into alignment with institutional values ([Gray, 2007](#); [Henderson, 2002](#)).

The reflective questions in this exercise press us to question our assumptions and enter into discourse with taken-for-granted beliefs ([Mezirow, 1997](#)), triggering the meaning-making metacognition that has been linked to personal transformation ([Kolb & Kolb, 2009](#)). They are “generative” in that they engage our moral imagination and cause us to look ahead to what the outcomes could be from a range of possible actions today. By drawing across the spectrum of PI character assets, the questions help us access the practical wisdom needed to align actions with values and mitigate the unexpected consequences of our decision-making.

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