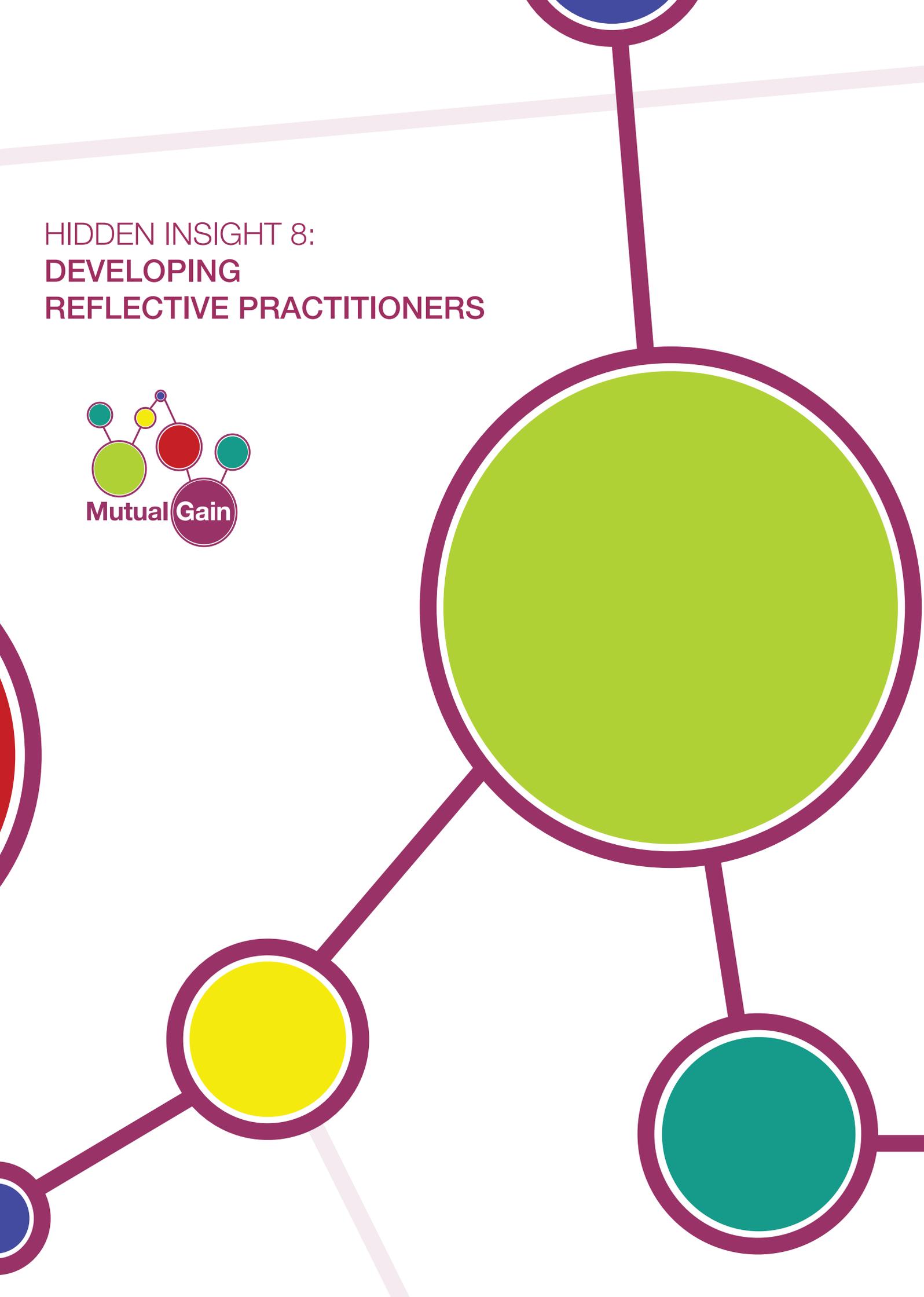


HIDDEN INSIGHT 8:
DEVELOPING
REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONERS



This Insight considers how a partnership team developed as reflective practitioners whilst developing their knowledge and skills for community engagement. It considers the principles and theory of reflective learning, how the team undertook the process and the benefits that were achieved through adopting it as a process for development.

#Reflective Learning #Reflective practitioners #Community engagement #Transforming organisations

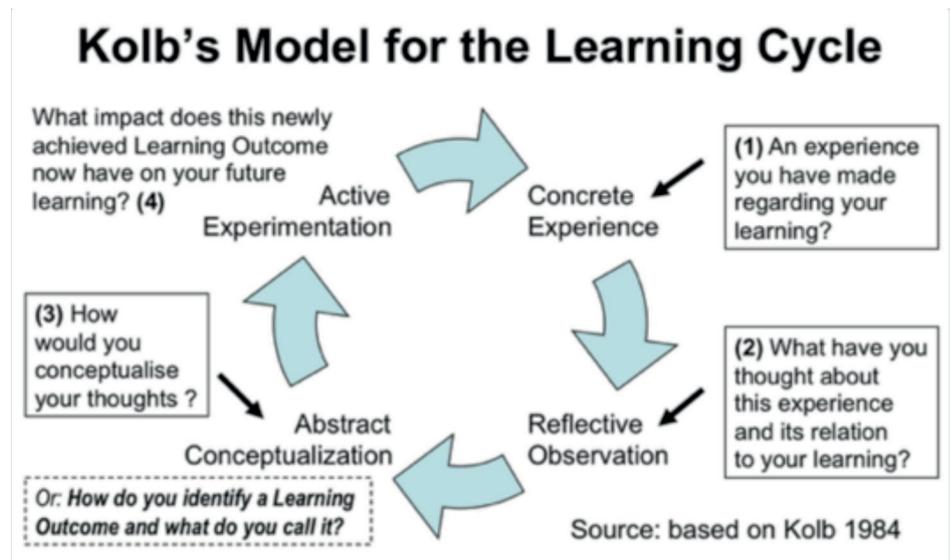
Our values and practices inform the way we achieve our aims and objectives. In many ways what we embrace and are prepared to accept; what we choose to use discretion for and what we are fundamentally opposed to are all important elements of addressing crime and disorder effectively with communities.

The MutualGain approach provided the knowledge (training) and helped participants to implement the elements of the learning (skills) that most suited their needs (experience). To do, that a programme of supported delivery and reflective learning took place over a nine-month period where participants were challenged to reflect with peers and build on what they know in order to improve the way they engage.

Reflecting helps us to:

- Understand what we already know (individual).
- Identify what we need to know in order to advance understanding of the subject (contextual).
- Make sense of new information and feedback in the context of our own experience (relational).
- Guide choices for further learning (developmental).

By doing this we can start to use a cycle of learning that helps us to understand ourselves and ultimately provide a better service. Kolb's learning cycle shows below shows how this works.



Reflection involves:

- Slowing down...
- Pausing to examine, analyse, inquire about the complexities of life.
- Making an active choice to pause and examine – rather than adopt a passive process
- Develop cognitive processes – analysis, synthesis, evaluation.

The importance of reflective practice can be found in the context of transforming organisations, something that the police and other public services are currently going through. We must become able not only to transform our institutions in response to changing situations and requirements, but to invent and develop institutions that adopt 'learning systems'.

In other words we must develop systems capable of bringing about their own continuing transformation that reflect the social reality of those they serve. Reflective practitioners enable that transformation to take place when officers have the knowledge, skills, space and opportunity to reflect with peers and supervisors.

Being a reflective practitioner can, at first, be an uncomfortable place to be. You need to allow yourself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation that you find uncertain or unique. You reflect on the situation before you, and on the prior understanding which has been implicit in your behaviour and carry out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation (Schön 1983: 68).

Bringing together the existing qualities of 'response' and 'reaction' that police do exceptionally well, with the skills and patience to reflect, was the focus of one day per month for a core group of participants. This group of participants set aside time to come together and reflect on practice so that they left with ideas and actions to help them implement their newfound knowledge.

Learner's Reflections

“ We don't know everything. ”

“ Community Engagement done properly yields fantastic results. ”

“ The one key message that I would take is consultation and communication with the residents of the community, listen to what they have said. ”

“ Talking at people isn't engaging with them; engaging with them is having a conversation both ways, them telling you things, you gaining information from them rather than overloading them with information. ”

“ I've learned to listen, listen to partners, listen to colleagues, listen to the public and as a consequence of that the relationship with the community is a lot more cohesive. ”

Reflection is strengthened if you have a 'critical friend' to help hold a mirror up to your practice. A critical friend can be defined as a trusted person who challenges you by asking provocative questions, provides information through another lens, and offers an honest and supportive critique of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work.

Who is your critical friend? A core group of partners engaged in Action Learning Sets (ALS) to help develop their role as a critical friend, and in doing so, improve their approach to community engagement. The confidence of individuals grew by understanding how they could help each other. Being able to receive constructive criticism with a positive mindset can be challenging, but all participants embraced it for the learning and enjoyed the time spent with colleagues to think through complex social problems.

What is an Action Learning Set? An Action Learning Set is a group of six to eight people who meet on a regular basis to explore day to day challenges, and identify actions that enable front line leaders to trouble shoot.

Action learning can maximise financial savings, improve productivity and identify new ways of working with limited resources. To achieve significant change, it is essential that independent, expertly trained facilitators are used at all times.

Action learning is more than the questions set out on the next page, but the questions are a useful aide memoire for individuals to use in their daily professional life. Try them out and see how much more you learn with genuine inquiry!

Questions to ask in an Action Learning Set The trick to getting the most from an Action Learning Set is to ask open questions. The following are examples that you may wish to consider.

- What result do you want?
- What is your biggest difficulty or problem?
- How do you feel about this situation?
- What could you do differently?
- What do you want the other person to do differently?
- What judgements are you making about the other person and/or the situation?
- How do you know this?
- What would make the situation better?
- How does the situation affect you?
- What don't you know about the situation?
- What's the most extreme measure you could take?
- What's the best possible outcome from this situation?
- What's the worst thing that might happen?
- What options are open to you now?
- What could you start to do differently?
- What action are you going to take?
- What learning are you taking from this action learning session?

For the Action Learning Sets the individuals involved divided into their four geographically based teams with partners.

The group was asked to identify the behaviours of 'trust' associated with being a critical friend. This led into a second activity whereby each group was asked to develop 'ground rules' for working together over the next few months.

After training the group was keen to ensure any future engagement was meaningful: they recognised that some of what they do must be improved or there could be the unintended consequence of wasting public money. They valued the investment the force was making and wanted to help develop a new approach from the ground up.

To this end the following rules demonstrated that commitment:

- Not getting caught up in a discussion on current policy and why it may/may not work, and instead they will do what is 'right' and share the learning for the wider force to consider at the end
- Will show courage and try new things
- Dream big and be open to challenge.

One group created a mission statement for their group:

"WE ARE A DEDICATED COHESIVE TEAM WHO ARE OPEN, HONEST AND THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX"

After discussing what success might look like one of the groups identified what they thought might be preferred short, medium and long term successes. They are shown here:

Short	Medium	Long
To ensure decision makers support the process and fully engage.	To mobilise the community in all aspects of their lives and improve engagement.	Open interaction between organisations/partners and community.
Understand the community by building on existing contacts/groups.	Working together to achieve the community VISION.	Change.
Time. Honesty. Interaction.	Confidence. Honesty (public). Trust.	Reduction in demand. Resources. Sustainable.
Open dialogue.	More community led activity.	Reduction in demand.

Challenges that the group brought to the Action Learning Set for discussion:

- Youth engagement
- Financial restraints and opportunities
- Alternative options for incentivising people to participate
- Engaging around Islamic views of Lee Rigby murder
- Changing peoples' perceptions

- Changing policy
- How to tackle apathy
- How do we get large groups of people to attend meetings and what is the best method?
- How do we know the real picture of what is going on out there?
- How do we get councillors to go on the same journey and let go?
- How do we work closer with the community?

- How do we change peoples' perceptions of homeless offenders being re-housed?

020 3887 2859
info@mutualgain.org
www.mutualgain.org

 /Mutual_Gain

 /MutualGain/

