

USING AI TO SUPPORT REFLECTION AND LEARNING

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In preparing for a recent quarterly aims check-in, I expected a familiar exercise: reviewing tasks completed and outlining next steps. Instead, I turned to AI tools to help me reflect on my work. I was not looking for faster outputs or automated summaries; I was trying to make sense of complex, overlapping projects. As a neurodivergent professional, that kind of reflection does not always come easily. What I discovered was that using AI as a *thinking partner* helped me externalize my ideas, organize my thoughts, and reduce the cognitive load that often makes reflection difficult.

In this article, I argue that for neurodivergent professionals, AI-supported reflection can create a cognitively accessible and meaningful learning process. In my case, this took shape within the Learning Plan Framework shared by keynote speaker Dr. Blake Naughton at the 2025 UAGC Teaching and Learning Conference. The Learning Plan Framework provided a simple structure for articulating what I had done, why it mattered, and what I was learning. Paired with AI-supported reflection, the process felt less like reporting progress and more like engaging in a learning experience. That shift is what I want to explore here, and why I believe AI-supported reflection holds promise for faculty and staff navigating complex work and competing priorities.

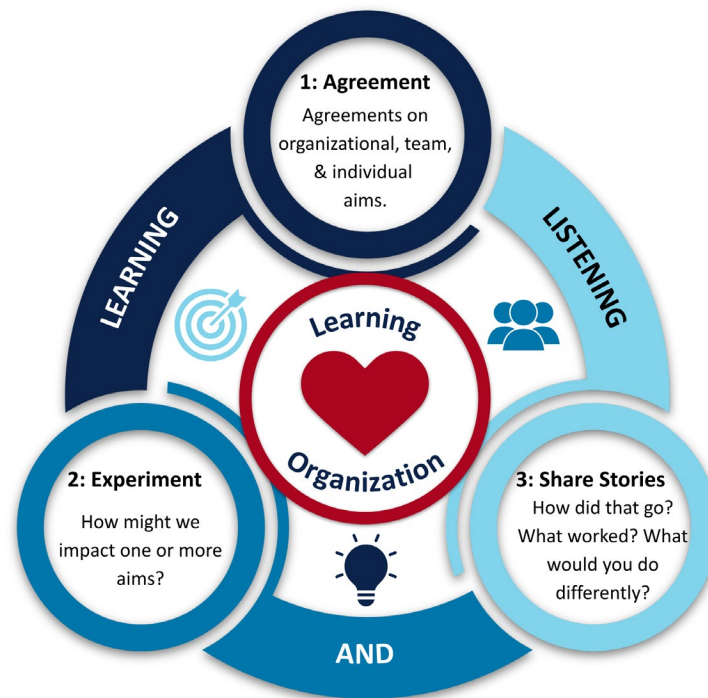
Why Reflection Matters in Complex Work

Reflection is often described as a cornerstone of professional learning, particularly in higher education. In learning organizations, reflection allows individuals and teams to surface assumptions, make sense of experience, and connect daily work to broader purpose. Peter Senge's (1990) work on learning organizations emphasizes that learning does not come from activity alone, but from the ability to reflect on that activity in ways that inform future action.

In practice, however, reflection is frequently constrained by time pressure, competing priorities, and institutional demands that prioritize documentation over sensemaking. Reflection becomes something to complete rather than something to engage in. For neurodivergent professionals, these constraints can be even more pronounced. Executive-function demands such as organizing thoughts, synthesizing information, and articulating learning often require significant cognitive effort, especially when work is complex or non-linear.

The Learning Plan Framework introduced by Dr. Naughton (2025) was designed to support reflection by offering a simple structure for articulating what was done, why it mattered, and what was learned. It provides a tangible, repeatable way to shift perspective, supporting the ongoing cultural movement at UAGC away from legacy mindsets and toward shared vision and psychological safety. A visual representation of the Learning Plan Framework is shown in Figure 1, where the learning organization is at the center, surrounded by Agreement, Experiment, and Share Stories, which together describe how

This is where AI-supported reflection became meaningful in my own practice. The combination of a reflective framework and AI as a thinking partner made it possible to engage with reflection in a way that felt cognitively accessible. Instead of holding all the pieces of my work in my head, I could externalize them, organize them, and return to them with more clarity. Reflection became less about producing a summary and more about making sense of my work as a learning process.



AI-Supported Reflection in Practice

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learned, and how my work connected to broader goals. This is where AI-supported reflection became practically useful.

Rather than using AI to generate content or automate decisions, I used it as a thinking partner. I worked iteratively, sharing fragments of notes, partial reflections, and questions, and asking the tool to help me organize themes, surface patterns, and clarify relationships between ideas. This process allowed me to externalize my thinking and reduce cognitive load, making reflection more accessible and less overwhelming.

The way this approach took shape in my work was through an early prototype of the [Exploring Alignment Agent](#), an AI-supported tool designed to guide reflective sensemaking. The agent prompts users to explore how their work connects to personal aims, job responsibilities, and institutional priorities using questions aligned to the Learning Plan Framework. For example, after describing a project I had worked on, I asked the agent to help me reflect on how that work aligned with my stated aims and what I was learning through the process. The tool helped me organize my notes into themes, identify where my work supported broader goals, and surface questions I wanted to carry forward. The purpose of the AI tool is not to produce answers, but to support reflection by organizing information, surfacing connections, and encouraging deeper consideration of impact.

Use of the AI tool did not replace my reflective thinking in this process. Instead, it supported it. By externalizing information and reducing cognitive friction, the tools helped me notice patterns I might otherwise have missed. Senge (1990) describes leverage points as small, well-placed interventions that can lead to meaningful change in complex systems. For me, AI functioned as one of those leverage points by changing how reflection was supported, not by changing the work itself.

While my example draws from an annual aims process, this approach is not limited to formal goal-setting. Associate faculty, for example, could use the Exploring Alignment Agent to support reflection on teaching practice by describing a course, instructional strategy, or classroom challenge and using the guided prompts to examine what they tried, what they observed, and what they are learning. In these cases, the agent supports reflection rather than evaluation, helping structure thinking around instructional experiments, student feedback, or course adjustments. As with other uses of AI-supported reflection, the goal is not to generate answers, but to provide cognitive scaffolding that supports sensemaking within complex, human-centered work.

Research Context: AI, Reflection, and Cognitive Support

Research on learning and cognition helps explain why AI-supported reflection can be effective, particularly for neurodivergent professionals. Studies of executive functioning show that tasks requiring synthesis, organization, and self-reflection place significant demands on working memory and attentional control. For adults with ADHD and other neurodivergent profiles, these demands can make reflective work disproportionately effortful, even when motivation and expertise are high (Francisco et al., 2024).

Within organizational learning contexts, reflection is not simply a personal habit but a structural necessity. In *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge (1990) emphasizes that learning organizations depend on mechanisms that support sensemaking rather than compliance or surface-level reporting. Reflection becomes meaningful when individuals are able to externalize their thinking, examine patterns over time, and connect experience to shared purpose. Without adequate scaffolding, reflective processes often collapse into documentation rather than learning. Recent research suggests that AI-supported tools can help address these challenges by functioning as cognitive scaffolds rather than substitutes for thinking. In a systematic review of AI technologies designed to support adaptive functioning in neurodevelopmental conditions, Perry et al. (2024) found that AI tools can reduce cognitive load and support sensemaking by helping users organize information, surface relationships, and engage in reflective processes within everyday environments. Importantly, these benefits were most evident when AI systems were used interactively, in ways that supported human judgment and learning rather than automating decision-making.

This research aligns closely with how AI-supported reflection functioned in my own practice. The value of the AI tool was not in producing insights automatically, but in helping create the conditions under which reflection could occur. By supporting organization, reducing cognitive friction, and making it easier to revisit and rework ideas over time, AI-supported reflection made learning more accessible and sustained, particularly within structured frameworks that prompt intentional sensemaking.

When used thoughtfully, AI can support reflective learning by extending cognitive capacity rather than replacing it. For neurodivergent professionals navigating complex, human-centered work, this distinction is essential.

Collective Learning and an Invitation

Learning organizations grow through shared reflection. The Learning Plan Framework emphasizes experimentation and storytelling as ways of making sense of complex work, and that emphasis aligns closely with the spirit of the AI Corner, a space to pause and learn together as we explore new tools and practices. My experiment with AI-supported reflection was small, but it helped me understand my work differently. That feels like the kind of learning worth sharing.

The [Exploring Alignment Agent](#) is an AI tool designed to support reflection within the Learning Plan Framework. It offers guided prompts that help faculty and staff explore how their work connects to institutional initiatives, clarify priorities, and document learning. Rather than replacing reflective thinking, the agent is intended to support it by helping externalize ideas, reduce cognitive load, and structure sensemaking.

This AI tool is designed for anyone who has wondered:

- How does my daily work connect to institutional initiatives?
- Where is my work already aligned, and where could it grow?
- How can I capture and share what I am learning so others can benefit from it?

You are invited to explore the [Exploring Alignment Agent](#) and share what you learn. Your reflections help our institution learn together. The tool is available through a Faculty Help entry that includes brief instructions, optional reflection worksheets, and a short feedback survey. The goal is to offer a supported starting point rather than a standalone tool. Faculty and staff are invited to explore the tool at their own pace and share what they notice along the way.

AI Use Disclosure:

The following generative artificial intelligence (AI) was used in the creation of this submission: ChatGPT and Microsoft Copilot. In this text, AI was used to organize ideas, support clarity, and assist with revision. AI was used only for the reasons listed and not to produce, replace, or substitute the author's work and original thought.

References

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