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BMSW4001 ACADEMIC AND EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

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TITLE: REFLECTION ON MY LEARNING

Abstract

To allow students to become more knowledgeable and confident in the academic and employability subjects, the University of Wales Trinity Saint David is providing them, through online virtual learning, combined with research and personal study, a set of different skills. During the academic and employability module, students are gaining more skills and abilities, that can be used in future education and employment. This assessment aims to think about my learning in this module, analyse how helpful it has been for me, compare my knowledge before the course and after the classes and my independent study, using one model of reflection.

Keywords: Gibb's cycle, reflection writing, time management, public speaking and giving presentations.

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Introduction

At the beginning of the “Academic and Employability skills” module, I believed that people always learned from the past, however, they typically think superficially about previous situations. For this assessment, we have been allowed to use a model of reflection that embraces self-awareness and critical analysis, which can help in analysing past situations through new approaches (Atkins and Murphy, 1993).

One of the most popular models is the Gibbs’ cycle (1998), which evolved the idea of motivating people to think methodically (Helyer, 2015). The assessment aims to reflect on my learning experience analysing three topics covered within this module, through one model of reflection. Hence, I decided to utilize the Gibbs’ cycle (1998), hoping this will help me get an extensive evaluation of my actions covering six stages: description (what happened), feelings (emotions I had during a situation), evaluations (positive and negative), analysis (make sense of what has happened, explaining why it went well or bad), conclusion (what I have learned), and an action plan (what would I do differently next time and what skills are required).

Using this method, I have analysed reflection, time management, public speaking, and giving presentations. At the beginning of this module, I was unsure of the effectiveness of these topics, however, I ultimately realised the importance that reflection has to my learning.

1. REFLECTIVE WRITING

Description: During a class about reflection, we undertook an activity in which we had to elaborate on one topic we have studied using a reflective method. For instance, I tried to describe what I perceived about “Reflective writing”, but because I did not know how to reflect properly my piece of work was very short and superficial. The negative outcome helped me reflect on the importance of this method in the future and taught me how to properly use reflection writing through various reflective models.

Feelings: At the beginning of this module, I was unable to perceive the purpose of studying the reflective method as I thought it was already a process, we all do automatically. Subsequently, after the activity, I felt frustrated because I understood that reflection is a complex procedure in which I need to possess proper knowledge to be able to apply it correctly to situations.

Evaluation: During the class, I described my understanding of 'reflective writing' well and I felt that I explained it clearly and concisely. However, I was unable to reflect on my actions properly and draw an appropriate conclusion because of my lack of knowledge. Consequently, after the lecturer's explanation, my understanding of the topic was much clearer.

Analysis: In the past, I thought about my previous mistakes to prevent their repetition. However, only reflecting on mistakes as opposed to what this method trains you to do. I believe that I was not able to reflect accurately, because I did simply analyse what went wrong without evaluating the situation. I went through many academic publications and articles which explore various models of reflection, and I found the Gibbs' cycle (1998) is the most extensive analysis. Even though it is hard to illustrate, I discovered that it helps to reflect deeper on different aspects of an event. Learning how to apply the reflection method may help me to act differently in future, drawing appropriate lessons from my failures or achievements. I think being aware of what has happened, could help me to become conscious of my actions.

Conclusion: I could think critically during the class activity, exploring different points of view. However, I learned that after a cause there is an effect that must be analysed to improve future actions. This topic has been very useful because it encouraged me to change the way I examine what happened, and how I might be able to develop upcoming events.

Action Plan: When I reflect next time, I will try different models of reflection and keep practising I will develop my ability to reflect properly. I will read more academic literature about this topic, and I will finally analyse my past more often to make an extensive reflection of a situation I had and learn from it.

2. TIME MANAGEMENT

Description: During a class about 'time management', the lecturer explained to us how to plan and set our goals through few techniques including, PDP and SWOT analysis. Also, during my study, I discovered one interesting technique called the "Pareto principle" (Tracy, 2017). My peers and I did an activity where we had to reflect on our time and answer questions, observing what we wanted to improve and how we could do it. As consequence, everybody noticed that we were struggling to dedicate the right time to activities such as studying and writing assessments.

Feelings: Nearly all of us felt that we were not properly managing our schedules. Although in the past I felt I managed my time perfectly, during this term I felt anxious about the assignments' deadlines. I believed that if I knew more regarding this topic, I could improve future events and get better results.

Evaluation: The positive side of that lesson is that I was aware I could organise my plans better. However, I still did not know where I exactly lost my time and how I could maximise it because I had not studied time management in enough depth. I knew I had to examine the subject and try to apply few techniques to improve my efficiency and my ability to stay focused.

Analysis: Learning about “time management” helped me to understand that I was not good at managing my time. For this, I decided to apply what I learned to my daily activities. First, I identified different mobile phone applications that I could use to track my time and see what I do during the day. According to Vilfredo Pareto’s theory (Tracy, 2017), which states that in Italy 80% of the terrain was owned by 20% of the population and established that 80% of the consequences in most outcomes come from 20% of causes, I felt that I needed to evaluate my 80-20 principle. I tracked my hours using the Notion application and tried to find the 20% of the day when I wasted my time. It was very interesting because I discovered that I lost approximately 40% of my day doing irrelevant activities such as watching videos on YouTube and browsing social media. From this, I decided to reduce that 40% to 20%, so if I could change 20% of my wasted time, I could get 80% more results. Instead of losing around nine hours of my day, I chose to use half of them to do more useful tasks. For example, I switched off my mobile for four-and-a-half hours and used this time to work on my studies and go to the gym. This technique helped me to increase productivity and the ability to organise my tasks in advance.

Conclusion: As a result, I managed to focus on my learning and my health rather than doing unproductive activities. To summarize, I can say that this technique helped me to concentrate more, for example, I was able to study even for as much as four hours per day without feeling tired or losing my concentration. Finally, I managed to complete my assessments on time.

Action plan: In the future, I will arrange my tasks using the time management skills I gained during this module and keep researching new techniques which will help me to develop my way to plan and organize activities.

3. PUBLIC SPEAKING AND GIVING PRESENTATION

Description: During the class, I made a speech about the three biggest achievements of my life, which was analysed by the lecture; even though the feedback was positive I missed an introduction which is important to give directions to the listeners. Lately, for the individual presentation, I had to talk about my skills and due to this lesson combined with my study, this time it went better.

Feelings: At the beginning, I was very excited because I heard many times about this topic, but I have never studied or applied it before. It is fascinating due you learn how to capture the attention of your listeners and how to make a great speech. The first time I was not sure how to talk and I felt

very nervous, instead the second time I felt much more confident, and I was able to get straight to the point.

Evaluation: My first talk did not work, because I did not own the capacity to give a presentation, expressing the achievements without introducing or discussing the topic. Differently, public speaking does not require only effective communication, but a combination of the right abilities: summarizing key points, captivating the listeners, keeping eye contact, and leaving a memorable message (Barnard, 2017). It was good learning about the structure that a presentation should follow because I used it as a part of my assessment (Individual presentation).

Analysis: I conducted the first presentation without proper knowledge of public speaking, therefore, I studied more and read many interesting books. For example, the “Public Speaking Kaleidoscope” book, from which I discovered that this topic is not a new finding, but it has been around for more than 3,000 years (Godhwani, 2017). I then understood the importance of a story to captivate the attention of an audience, otherwise, the listeners are not going to follow the discussion. Furthermore, I learned that a real narration helps you to believe in yourself and show who you are. It is essential to relate it to what you are going to explain to demonstrate continuity and a connection to the meaning of your presentation (Ibarra and Lineback, 2005). It is crucial to know the audience considering few factors: the trust build through eye contact, the speed of the speech, the movements, the tone of the voice, the expressions, the energy, the confidence (Ashish, 2019), the faith, and the honesty in the talk. The structure of the presentation must be clear and follow an introduction, the main body, and a conclusion (Godhwani, 2017). At this point, using the knowledge I obtained during the lesson and this study, I was confident and able to deliver a very clear presentation. Furthermore, after studying and practising public speaking my presentation went better because I was able to explain and focus on the main points and I felt secure about the message I wanted to leave to the audience.

Conclusion: At the end of this module, I gained an understanding of public speaking and the delivery of a presentation, even though I need to work more on timing and academic language to improve my future speeches. Hence, I now have the skills and knowledge I needed for public presentation to use in my future career.

Action plan: I will record myself to see what skills I need to improve, through online learning and the reading of academic literature available in the University’s library. Next time, I will make sure to practice in front of different people asking them for honest feedback, which can help me to develop my ability to communicate and present.

Conclusion

To summarise, when I started this module, I thought I already had different skills concerning Reflection, Time Management, Public Speaking, and giving presentations. Nonetheless, I have

never had the opportunity to enhance my knowledge and practise my skills as much as I did during the activities in the classes, and through my study. Furthermore, I believe that it is very important to reflect, because it helps to focus on various perspectives and develop a critical analysis by stimulating a deeper examination, leading to the formulation of an action plan. The reflection had consequences on my learning, as a result, I gained more knowledge in all the topics we had covered within this module, and I have been more conscious of my feeling and actions. I think that using the Gibbs' Cycle (1998) helped me to understand what I could do to improve a future situation as similar as the previous one, and how to use the skills I have obtained. For example, using the time management skill acquired, I will be able to organise my tasks on time and do not feel stress about deadlines, and with the public speaking skill I may be able to deliver clear presentations. Also, the reflection will be at the base of all my future actions because it will help me to reflect and understand my past to improve in future. I finally believe, that owning confidence and deep knowledge of the topics covered within this assessment, can help me to develop in my future career and life.

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