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INTRODUCTION

This is a reflective report where I will be showcasing a portfolio of evidence demonstrating my understanding of the skills and knowledge I have acquired, which will contribute towards my effectiveness at the workplace. Based on all the skills learnt over the past year, this will look at my personal strengths, gaining a better understanding of myself and my drive towards attaining a higher level of education, great employment or also becoming successful in self employment. I will be identifying my skills and knowledge which will contribute towards working effectively for employability.

I will also be evaluating the results of some tools and techniques used in lectures to have a better understanding of my learning styles (Honey and Mumford Learning styles), and also (VAK Learning styles assessment). Also evaluate my self motivation and understand some of my qualities and strengths by using the Johari Window tool. There will also be analysis of my evaluation were there will be evidence from literature to support my understanding.

Furthermore, I will be reflecting on my understanding of the world of employment and my areas of improvement for employability. I will then conclude with an 'Action Plan' were my Personal Development Plan (PDP) will be evident.

MY JOURNEY (HOW I GOT TO WHERE I AM TODAY)

Looking back at my academic experiences from when I started nursery school to where I am today at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, studying for my 'Certificate of Higher education in Skills for the Workplace', I can definitely say that I have come a long way. My progression from infant school until I gained my 'Higher Certificate in Teaching' at a College of Education in Nigeria over thirty years ago was steady. I attended what was known as the best secondary school in Nigeria and was the only student from my Primary school who was admitted into this prestigious school.

Although, it might seem like I took a long break from academic studies, it is pertinent to add that I have been undergoing learning and development through my various work experiences in form of training, seminars and courses organised by my past workplaces. My academic experiences will be further illustrated by my lifeline which could be found in the appendix section.

According to the lifeline exercise, I attended what was recognised as the best Nursery and Primary school in Nigeria. I must mention here that from birth till age 30 years was spent in Nigeria my birth country. At age 10, I was then admitted to attend one of the best Secondary School in Nigeria as mentioned above, established by some American Scholars. This was a key event in my School life because I was the only one from my Primary School who was successful through all the admission process and this meant living away from home, at the 'boarding' school. This action was mainly instigated by me because I wanted to live away from home as I felt there were too many children living with us at home. My parents adopted a few relative's children to help educate, so my house was full and crowded.

Looking back to my experiences at my Secondary School, I count myself privileged for my parents to be able to afford to send me to a fee-paying school in Nigeria back in those days as the school had the best buildings, teachers and resources which most schools in Nigeria were not opportuned to have in those decades.

My low points during my time at Secondary School was that I became very sickly during my second year which led to repeating a full year whilst my classmates moved on to the next year. I was also made to specialise in 'Business' subjects while my favourite subjects were English, English-literature and Art.

Similarly, I had another low point after my final Secondary School examination results (known as GCSE these days) were released as I did not do well. As a result of this, between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, I was sent to a Teacher Training School where I spent another two years. The high-point for this period were the fact that I was able to study Art subjects and also, those two years equipped me with some communication and leadership skills because I was chosen to be the 'Head Girl' (Prefect) for both years, as the college was newly established and we were the first set of students to attend.

Furthermore, between the ages of nineteen to twenty one, I attended a College of Education where my subject of speciality was Fine-Arts, with the intention of becoming a Secondary School Arts teacher. After graduating from College, I spent a few years teaching Arts and sometimes would step-in to cover for English teachers as well. I should point out here that those were a period in my career that was fulfilling for me because I felt I was contributing to the journey and success of some children in their academic development.

I have concentrated on remaining in employment in the past two decades between the ages of thirty to fifty and have worked with a couple of established organisations where I have attended various training programmes suitable to my position. Within this period, I took time off to become self employed. This was a great career achievement and satisfaction of one of my goals in life achieved. Although self employment lasted for about two years, I still regarded my experiences a 'Business College' training. My low point during self employment was taking up too much I could handle which led to selling the business.

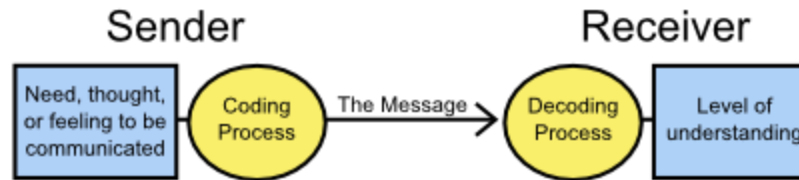
My decision to go back to studying was rather spontaneous because it was not planned ahead. I decided to take a short break from full-time

employment when I was introduced to this course. It is an action on my part to improve my learning to benefit myself and also have a sense of academic achievement with a 'Bachelor's degree' at the end of three years at this University.

SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

Different skills are needed in the workplace depending on the organisation whether large, medium or small, and self employment is taken into consideration as well. As a result of this, the importance of each skill may be different as pointed out by (Morgan, 2017, p. 177). He explained that being employed by a startup business with a small number of staff and working in a multinational organisation would require varying skills depending on their importance. Morgan further pointed out that there is a convergence between the requirements for academic skills and skills for the workplace, which covers some interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Therefore, the skills I am developing during this academic year are Communication skills, Presentation skills, Listening skills, Time management skills, Writing skills, CV writing skills, Team-working skills, Leadership skills, Problem solving and decision making skills. Some of these skills have been developed throughout my years of work however, I have realised that they will contribute towards working effectively in the workplace, thereby enabling productivity and also will be of great importance for self employment

Communication skills: According to (Maund et al. 2017, p. 47), Communication is defined as the correlative understanding between two or more people when there is an exchange of thoughts, ideas or information. This involves the sender, the receiver and the message where an idea is formed in the mind of the sender, and the message is then transmitted to the receiver who decodes the message and sends a response back to the sender for encoding as shown in the illustration below by Meek (2013).



(Fig. 1.1) (psychologytoday.com)

Communication comprises of verbal communication (speaking and presentation), nonverbal communication (body language, facial expression) and written communication (emails, memos, letters, news-letters). Written communication has also evolved in the past years with social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram and these medium of communication is being embraced by workplaces as a result of moving with the times of rapid growth in technology.

Having said all of that, my personal strength has always been in communication skills and this is evident in my past work experiences. Being part of this course in the past months has also reinforced my communication skills strength from lectures, research and learning.

Presentation skills: This is an interpersonal skill just as communication skills, relevant to the workplace as much as self employment. Morgan, P. (2017) pointed out that “In business, the ability to give a good presentation is seen as a fundamental skill and it is impossible to lead without communicating, and also presentations are a normal part of organisations, businesses and employment”. I have learnt some fundamental strategies of effective presentation from being part of presentation modules which were lacking in me before the start of this University course. I have discovered that presenting to others is not about me as the presenter but it is about my audience where I strive to satisfy their needs. I have learnt that for my presentation to be effective, I need to capture my audience’s attention within the first few seconds, get their interest and reveal my intention. The ‘lightbulb’ moment for me was discovering that mastering this skill effectively is beneficial during job interviews.

Listening skills: People in general tend to confuse listening with hearing. I have now been able to differentiate between the passive reception of

information by ears (hearing), and complete engagement with processing the information (active learning), as suggested by (Morgan, P. 2017). He explained that we do not listen very well when we think we are and that listening actively requires effort, to be effective and the implications on making effective decisions in the workplace is significant. I have also noticed some benefits during this course and one of them is getting the information I need to complete my assignments by asking questions to clarify and show my understanding. Another benefit is listening and understanding my team-mates as most of us are from different cultural backgrounds and language and we have had to work together to produce high quality presentations. Other benefits for me which is linked to the point above are understanding my colleague's ideas and mindset. All these are beneficial in the workplace. "Listening is the foundation of effective communication" (Dignen and McMaster, 2013, p. 37).

Time Management skills: Time management has always been my biggest challenge. This is not evident in my time keeping as I am very punctual and do not like to arrive late at any event and known for my good time keeping in my past work places. On the other hand, I struggle with getting specific tasks or assignments done according to planned times because I procrastinate and leave things till the last moment. This is because I feel I am at my best in productivity from working close to deadlines. I am however doing better at prioritising tasks as a result of my gained knowledge about time management since the start of this University year. I am determined not to leave assignments until the last minute.

Learning about the 'Pareto Principle (80-20 rule)' has been a great help in helping me plan my time productively. The Pareto Law was created by an economist named Vilfredo Pareto who used it to narrate economic inequality and disparate wealth in his country, and is still being used today in workplaces to help productivity (Reh, J. 2019). I am progressing better than before in how I utilise my time, recognise current priorities, determine if my time is being used accordingly and set myself some 'SMART' objectives. These SMART objectives will be further looked into in one of the next chapters.

SELF EVALUATION

Pritchard (2014) indicates that we all learn in different ways and this is referred to as 'Preferred Learning'. He further states that "each individual will adopt an approach to learning which they are most comfortable with and in doing so, leave behind the approaches they are less comfortable". I have since discovered this is applicable to my learning style especially after the 'learning style exercise' I participated in class this term. The Neuro-linguistic programming 'VAK' learning style self assessment questionnaire developed by (Chislett, V. and Chapman, A. 2005), used a series of questions regarding a vast outlook to completing tasks and reaction to occurrences in life to arrive at a preferred learning style. There are three main learning styles and these are visual, auditory and kinaesthetic.

Therefore, what is my learning style?

I have a kinaesthetic learning style. I have always known this due to my preference in 'let's get on with it' style however, I thought I was a mixture of kinaesthetic and visual. I have since discovered, taking the result of the exercise into consideration that I am heavily tilted towards kinaesthetic. Out of thirty questions, seven answers placed me in visual, two in auditory whilst twenty-one answers placed me firmly in kinaesthetic learning style.

Gilakjani, A. (2012) explains that kinaesthetic learners prefer an active 'hands-on' approach and love to be part of the outside world. I love to touch, feel, hold, be practical, and learn as I go. Although, it is also suggested that we do not like to look at instructions first before putting things together, I have learnt that to save time, it is better to look at instructions. Having said all of the above, I also do have a little bit of visual learning style because I do enjoy aesthetics, remember demonstrations as I love to watch people do things, and I am very observant. That is why I am an artist who also loves to cook and have been self employed in the catering business in my past.

The second learning styles questionnaire we tested was 'Honey and Mumford' learning styles and these questions had to be answered honestly

without deliberating too much on the questions. There were no right or wrong answers, I just had to agree or disagree with the statements regarding different aspects of decision making and my approach to tasks. As Watson, E. (2019) comments:

Peter Honey and Alan Mumford developed the learning Styles Theory - a followup to the work of David Kolb and his Experiential Learning Theory. Honey and Mumford identified four different styles of learning: “activist”, “theorist”, “reflector”, and “pragmatist”. According to the theory, different people naturally gravitate towards a particular learning style. Therefore, to achieve optimum learning, Honey and Mumford argue that one must identify his natural learning style, understand it and find ways to learn that complement the style.

Activists are known as “do-ers”, they love new experiences, are open minded, enthusiastic and flexible in their ways. Theorists on the other hand like to think thoroughly and logically. They are disciplined, rational and objective in their thinking. Reflectors are more laid-back, they prefer to observe, cautious, love to collect data about experience and not quick to find conclusions. Whilst the pragmatists are enthusiastic in getting their ideas across, searching for new ideas and experiments too, and they are impatient to listen to long dialogue or explanations.

My scores in this experiment were quite close in numbers, ranging between the lowest being seventeen as Theorist, sixteen as Pragmatist, fifteen as Reflector and eleven as an Activist. I was surprised at this result in the sense that I thought I would score more as a Pragmatist or Activist because of how I have viewed myself in the past. On the other hand, I totally understand the closeness in score because I do have traits from all four learning styles with being a Theorist edging above the rest.

Furthermore, in this module, there were more discoveries and revelation about myself in my level of self motivation which begs the question “How motivated am I in learning, academic achievements and life in general?”

The score interpretation in this experiment puts me in the top score (44-60) of forty six, where it suggests that I make a conscious effort to motivate myself, actively work towards attaining my goals, do not allow any

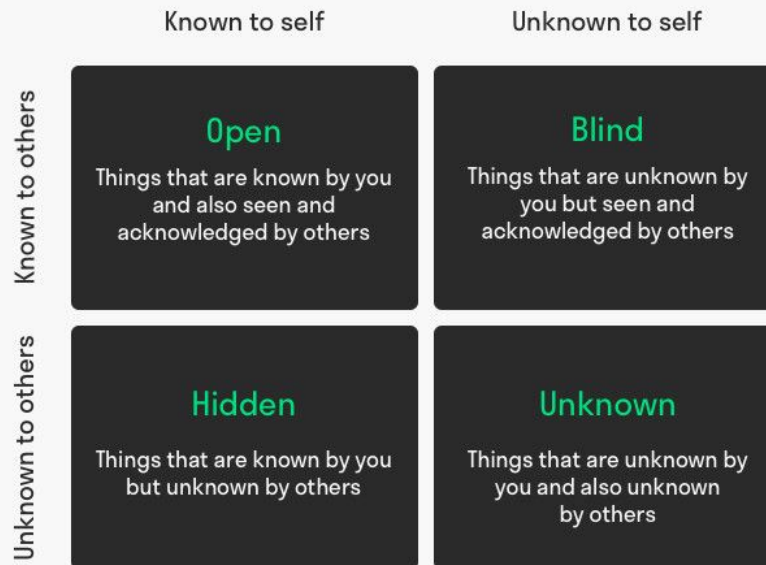
challenges to stop my progress and inspire others with my tenacity and hard work. I can definitely relate to these attributes simply because some of my friends have indicated that my going back to study have encouraged and motivated them to want to do likewise. I find that for every achievement in my life, I have been able to inspire others. I am motivated to keep pushing because I have the internal strength and desire to develop, to keep the forward moving momentum and to keep on achieving academically and in life. That is self motivation.

In essence, the two elements of motivation which are 'Intrinsic' and 'Extrinsic' drives our motivation. When we are being driven by our love to do, that is intrinsic and when we are motivated by rewards, for example, money, that is extrinsic. We have the freedom to choose what drives us or motivates us. Many a time people are motivated by external rewards like prizes, money, acclaim (extrinsic motivation), self determination theory focuses on intrinsic motivation such as yearning to achieve knowledge or gain independence (Cherry, k. 2019).

Lastly, in this self evaluation section, I was introduced to Johari's Window Model. I found the exercise very interesting and was a revelation in how I see myself and the qualities I think that I possess and how others identify me.

Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham developed the Johari Window as a psychological model which enables an individual have better understanding of themselves and relationship with others. The reason behind this model is to create and nurture trust between people. In this exercise, we had a long list of qualifying adjectives and we had to choose a few that we thought best describes us whilst our partner had to do the same. We then had to reveal in turns the adjectives that matches which goes into the 'open' box and the remaining went into the 'blind' box. If no one has the adjectives that the partner reveals, it goes in the 'hidden' box. The purpose of this exercise was to find out other people's perception of me, the adjectives i know i have and would like to show more and the blind spots. I was surprised that others think I was brave and clever.

Johari Window Model (Joseph Luften & Harry Ingham) toolshero



www.toolshero.com

(Fig. 1.1)

ANALYSIS

Having a better understanding of how my self motivation work and reasons behind my motivation, I have a clear vision of my future. I have decided to continue on an academic career path in order to challenge myself intellectually. I can therefore say that my motivation are mostly intrinsic with a view to further my studies to achieve a Master's degree in Leadership and Management. Going back to University at this period in my life as a mature student is the right time because my children are older which has enabled me time to study. I am also fortunate to have the government

assistance with financing my studies with student's loan. Looking back, my only regret is not having done this at the early stages of my life, before getting married and even before I had children. I feel that I would have had more time to reach for the highest cadre in the academic world. On the other hand, I am not sure I would have the maturity and determination that life experiences have accorded me at this current time.

However, my motivation to study has been facilitated by my previous study history in the past. For instance, through my various past work history, I have always put myself forward for most training funded by the organisation. I attended seminars, workshops and short courses, and also trained staff when I was in the managerial positions. I have a passion for training and developing others as the evidence shows in my self evaluation on motivation.

At this point, It is important to introduce my 'SWOT' analysis. This is a technique used mostly in business to understand strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that an organisation may face. This will showcase my academic SWOT analysis.

Strengths: I am confident, ready to learn new things, a positive thinker, focused in my ambitions, and have strong goals. I am also open minded, enthusiastic and welcome new experiences.

Weaknesses: Sometimes my enthusiasm can be overwhelming to others, cautious in some new environment and overthink things which is close to being a perfectionist. My time management is 'work-in-progress'.

Opportunities: Children are older so I have time to study and I have the student finance to fund my education in-form of a loan.

Threats: I am older so I feel time is against me to fulfill all my academic goals and dreams.

As Cottrell comments:

Your level of motivation will affect your success, especially in slow or difficult patches. It is likely that there will be times when you get bored, frustrated or anxious. You may feel as though you cannot be bothered with a piece of work, or that you are struggling with your studies. You may even

feel like giving up altogether. You will need clear motivation to keep yourself going even through such tough times (Cottrell, S. 2008).

As further suggested by Cottrell, to keep the momentum going and keeping my self motivation going, I will need to celebrate my successes, write down my achievements as they happen. Also move the bar of my goals higher every time one is achieved and find someone who will always be at hand to encourage me at every step of my journey.

REVIEW / REFLECTION

One of the main advantages and benefits of this course is to understand employability, what it takes to be employable and also self employed. Employability can be defined as the circumstances where capability, preparedness for the workplace and the relevance of the two to the current job market (Cottrell, S. 2015).

The expectations of employers are different and vast depending on the job, which makes it essential to research the job being offered in the job market. A few points from Cottrell are that not all employers want experience as some will employ new graduates to join their graduate schemes so they can be trained into the culture of the workplace. Also, some companies would hire people with specific behaviours, values and attitudes and an example of such is The Pharmaceutical company, 'GlaxoSmithKline' and these values and attributes can be found on their website, whilst charities would emphasise on values and Law firms would emphasise on passion (Cottrell, S. 2015). I feel this is good because it gives everyone with different qualities and skills a chance in the job market, depending on what motivates the individual.

Different organisations also have different recruitment and selection process. I must note here that there is a difference between recruitment and selection. Recruitment is choosing from a pool of people whilst selection is choosing from the those who came through on recruitment.

Whether the recruitment is internal or external, it must be done efficiently and effectively. There is a general consensus with employers that they would select people who have a 'can-do' attitude by being always ready to take on tasks, going the extra mile professionally, manage their time productively and being punctual, are efficient on the job and also show their helpfulness in willing to be flexible when needed (Cottrell, S. 2015). Furthermore, the United Kingdom is guided by Employment Laws and legislation which are reviewed to fit into the current situation of the country.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

My areas for improvement having gained a better understanding of who I am and what keeps me motivated to learn would simply be to keep on learning and developing my ability to use my time effectively.

Although, CV writing is one of the skills learnt so far, I however feel there is more work and effort for me to put into making my CV standout like a red box amongst several grey ones. There is so much competition in the world of employment and I do realise that I need to 'stand-out' and that call for improvement.

ACTION PLAN

Using the 'SMART' objectives to set my goals becomes important. SMART is an acronym which can be used in ensuring effective goals and objectives are set. SMART stands for specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. When using the SMART tool, goals can be added or subtracted as circumstances change, they are not static and can be developed by the target activity, the support needed, quantification of performance and the time period to achieve the desired state.

Shown in my PDP below:

Personal Development Plan (PDP)

Goals:

- (short term) complete CHE in skills for the workplace (Level 4).
- (midterm) Part-time employment in a leadership role.
- (longterm) Attain BA Leadership and management Skills for the Workplace.

Skills and knowledge to be learned:

- (short time) Time management and Critical thinking skills.
- (midterm) CV writing skills and look into self employment.
- (longterm) Use skills and knowledge gained to complete Master's degree.

Next steps:

- (short time) career advice, continue to level 5 and 6.
- (midterm) seek P/T employment whilst in University.
- (longterm) Work towards a Master's degree and self employment.

Resources:

- (shorterm) Books, Journals, Internet.
- (midterm) Funding for level 5 and 6.
- (longterm) Seek funds for a Master's degree.

Time Schedule:

- (shorterm) Within the next year.
- (midterm) 2-3 years.
- (longterm) 3-5 years.

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APPENDIX

Fig 1.1 (Johari window model)