

University of Wales Trinity Saint David
BA (Hons) Business Management Level 4 - Weekend
Community Engagement – Lecturer: Dr Toyin Adisa

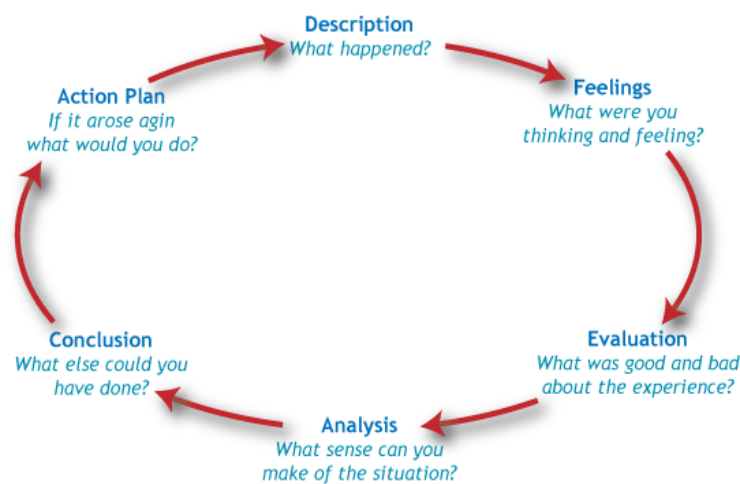
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Reflective Evaluation

When we reflect, we think in greater depth of things that otherwise we wouldn't have given much thought to. Reflection means to look at and think about our experiences, actions, feelings, and responses, and then interpret or analyze them in order to learn from them. We do this by asking ourselves questions about what we did, how we did it, and what we learnt from doing it (Boud and Walker, 1998).

There are many theories elaborated around reflective thinking and models emerged from these theories, giving us some clear representation of what reflection is, how is it used and what is the purpose of it. Starting from Boud's simple triangular model, we understand that reflection involves an experience and a present reflection time that draws some learnings (Boud and Walker, 1998). Breaking down into further stages, Gibbs reflective cycle model adds the evaluation and analysis of the events that lead to a conclusion but also to an action plan thus adding a practical component to the model (Gibbs, 1988).



Gibbs' model of reflection

Starting from this reflection model I will reflect upon my first trimester university experience. I am studying BA (Hons) Business Management, at University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD). This trimester we studied 2 modules i.e. Academic Skills and Community Engagement (CE). The CE module was a complex module and offered me the opportunity to learn about individual learning styles, organizational analysis (PESTLE and SWOT models), managers' roles and organization structures, how employees are motivated in the workplace with a focus on the role of training; operational management and project management; reflection models, time management, decision making, self-presentation and communication skills. From week 6 of our course module the teaching method changed from classroom sessions into online sessions as a result of the coronavirus pandemic restrictive measures. The

first assessment submitted for this module was an organizational analysis and I choose to do this analysis of my former employer – World Vision Romania Organisation.

Joining the university offered me the opportunity to meet new people i.e. my colleagues, lecturers, university staff. It made me feel proud that I made this decision to continue my studies although I am at a stage in life where I am juggling with multiple aspects: career, family life, social life, etc. and this is challenging and sometimes tiring and stressful. Participating in the courses discussions and exercises made me feel more confident and made me reflect more about my personal and professional development and about my future. I enjoyed meeting new people and learning a lot of things from them during our session's interactions. I also enjoyed listening to my lecturers and felt inspired by their professional and life experiences. Sharing my knowledge and helping my colleagues made me feel confident and increased my wellbeing through helping others.

Experiencing the pandemic and having to adapt to the coronavirus pandemic life have not been extremely difficult for me. I continue to work as I am classed as a key worker, but my life has changed a bit. I do worry about my health and my family and friend's health, but I don't want to let this fear control my mind. Considering adapting to the new ways of learning at the University, online teaching has the advantage of staying connected during the lockdown, not missing the courses and the schedule, being at home and not having to travel. The disadvantage of this method is missing the connection that the face to face interaction brings. Also, another disadvantage was a lack of communication from the university staff and this determined some changes made without prior consultation with the students from our group.

Having weekend courses is a great advantage that allows me to study individually during the week, working on my assignments while also having a job, family and social obligations. Having said that, it is fair to add that this was one of the biggest challenges - struggling to maintain my motivation to study while also having to perform well in other aspects of my day to day life. I am confident that I am going through a process of adjustment and that I will learn to prioritize and accomplish all these tasks just as I learned from the Time Management course. Working on my first CE assignment was a pleasant and stimulating experience. I recollected memories and information from the time that I was working for World Vision Romania and it made me feel proud that I had the great opportunity to grow in such a diverse, stimulating and full of opportunities environment. At the same time, it made me sad reading the recent reports and statistic and realizing the socioeconomic situation of Romania is not getting better but on

the contrary poverty, corruption and social injustices are more and more prevalent in Romanian citizens' lives.

Analysing on the aspects mentioned so far, some of the positive things related to the first trimester at the university was the actual existence of this experience. I feel grateful being able to study in UK, being part of this large university that has such a historical experience and vast campuses. I am fascinated by how many things I could discover on the online university library and how accessible these resources are. I learned how to find the needed literature, how to conduct a literature review and how to do the Harvard referencing, as the accepted referencing system by UWTSD. I am also fascinated and motivated by my lecturer's professional and life experiences and I intend to use their proximity as a great opportunity to learn and get inspiration from them.

For the Academic Skills' module second assignment we had to do a group work, even if the lockdown made communication and traveling more difficult. I learned that I prefer working by myself because I can get a lot more done and I do not have to worry about keeping people on track with their part of the project or not following the rules. I also had some difficult conversations with the members of the group I was supposed to work with and I realised that I am too rigid and sometimes I like things to be done my way. But in the end, we would have been able to work as a group if my colleagues showed up for meetings, contributed with ideas and work and showed they were trying to improve their English academic writing. None of these happened so I had to ask permission to work individually on the assignment even if that meant more work done by me. I think group work involves time, supervision, negotiation, roles division, and many more attributes and is in general a time consuming and complex task to achieve and the published literature has documented examples that lead to the successful completion of this task (Yunjeong, C., Brickman, P. and Tanner, K., 2018). Overall, for me this was a learning experience and I am very pleased that I was able to finalise a research and incorporate the results in a report. I also learned that working gradually at my assignments helps dividing the assignment load and setting small targets lead to work being done on time and at a desired quality. I also learned that mapping out my ideas for my assignments was very helpful in organizing a complete report and research. From the discussion groups during class, I have learned to be more open to sharing my opinions but also learning from others. Not least, I found that the first two courses that I attended at this university have opened a great path for me to progress and develop professionally and personally and at the same time having offered a great foundation for what I will build upon during the next semester and next university years

In retrospect, in my first trimester in university I learned:

- ✓ that I am a determined, intelligent and ambitious individual;
- ✓ some great academic skills and knowledge e.g. referencing, reflective models, time management and decision making;
- ✓ we can adapt in difficult circumstances and life follows its course even during the pandemic.

What I probably would have done differently would be to stimulate more conversation in order to create a group cohesion when working on group assignments.

Concluding, in the future I would like to increase my stamina by focusing on the important aspects of my life, investing more time in them and obtaining motivation every time I would get the wanted results. I also want to improve my practical academic skills of writing good reports, conducting relevant research and present my work in a professional manner, considering we haven't been able to practice group presentations in an assessment situation due to the lockdown measures. In future, I will make sure to build up more of a relationship with my colleagues.

In terms of training, I am pursuing a Project Management methodology course as this will give me an advantage in looking for a better job while building experience for a future Manager role.

Conducting this reflection exercise on my academic performance I was able to identify the way my personal beliefs, expectations, and biases influence my development, relationships and interactions with others. By understanding these aspects, I will be more aware of my thinking and behavioral patterns as these influence the way I will carry out my studies successfully.

References

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Yunjeong, C., Brickman, P. and Tanner, K. (2018) 'When Group Work Doesn't Work: Insights from Students' *CBE Life Sciences Education*, 17(3). DOI: 10.1187/cbe.17-09-0199