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BMSW4001
Academic and Employability Skills,
Term 2

End of term assessment:

Reflection and analysis of study material
and development of academic and
employability skills.

Lecturer's name: Shao Yuen



Introduction

The purpose of this writing assignment is to evaluate how this course, and more specifically the module itself, has helped me to achieve my academic or career goals, or how it has helped me get closer to achieving them.

In the first semester of this module we focused more on exploring systems to prioritise tasks and honour deadlines. As procrastination is a large issue for me – and most likely for many of my fellow-students – this was especially helpful in order to achieve the ability to organise my thoughts and find a structure that works to achieve combining a full time job with full time studies. It helped me get used to sticking to a routine and complete tasks I said I would do. Meanwhile I managed to also still find personal time to relax mind and body. As the latter often gets neglected, but is also essential to keep your sanity and mental health somewhat balanced. This way we can avoid running into a massive burn-out.

1. Procrastination

1.1. Eat that frog!

In this semester we've also touched on the subject of procrastination, for which we were recommended to read the book "Eat that frog!"



The author Brian Tracey named the book after a famously brilliant quote by Mark Twain about prioritising difficult or nasty tasks.

Twain said: “ *If it's your job to eat a frog, it's best to do it first thing in the morning. And if it's your job to eat two frogs, it's best to eat the biggest one first.*”

Meaning that if you have a task to do, you better just do it first chance you get and get it over with. Or you will end up shoving it back and thinking about it all day. Which will cause you to increasingly start dreading the task. And if you have several tasks to complete, try to complete the biggest or most dreaded one first.

It's a very simple thought process but it's actually incredibly effective. I found that previously I would push back dreaded tasks and leave them 'til the last minute, thinking I was making life easier for myself. But by trying out Brian Tracey's approach, I feel more calm about things. Even if I cannot fully complete the task at that time, I still started it and picking it up at a later time isn't as big of a threshold as starting from scratch. Sometimes we don't actually realise how much of a burden we put on ourselves by procrastination. I realised after trying out the eat the frog method that previously I would get very overwhelmed and anxious as I would think about the tasks ahead all day long, I would even work myself up over the fact I still had to do it. And I wanted to know why I always slipped back into the habit of doing this. Why is the urge to procrastinate so strong in certain individuals?

After browsing through what seemed to be an endless list of corny self-help books that promise to solve all of your procrastinating habits in 5 seconds or less. I noticed that procrastination is a widespread issue almost every individual deals with. If it wasn't, there wouldn't be a market trying to make money off the promise to help people get rid of it. There's almost as many anti-procrastination books as there are books on how to quit smoking. Coincidence? I think not. The sad part about these books is that the issue gets shamed heavily. Titles such as “How to stop being lazy and get things done!” won't help a single soul trying to develop new habits. It will only demotivate them further as the second they fail at keeping their promise to themselves, they will feel guilt, think they're lazy and lose their motivation to keep going.

1.2. Procrastinatory Cognitions

When researching procrastination from a psychological angle, I stumbled upon a 2003 study by Dr. Fuschia M. Sirois and Dr. Timothy A. Pychyl. About procrastination and the psychology behind it. In this study they found that procrastination is the result of the immediate need to manage a negative thought or mood. Laziness has little to do with it. The task ahead brings toward a negative gut-feeling in the person having to do the task which causes them to try and deal with the negative feelings by procrastination.

These feelings can be either brought forward by the dreaded nature of the task – nobody likes cleaning a dirty bathroom – but, it can also be related to deeper emotions such as anxiety, insecurity, fear of failure, ... Adapting a habit of chronic procrastination however is increasingly dangerous according to Dr. Sirois. There's actually an entire field of research dedicated to the self-blaming thoughts associated with procrastination called ‘Procrastinatory Cognitions’. When procrastination becomes a chronic habit, it could have increasingly destructive effects on our physical and mental wellbeing. Symptoms such as

chronic and psychological distress, low life satisfaction even depression could be traced back to the habit of chronic procrastination.

All of this brings me to the next valuable lessons the module has taught me, which was identifying and dealing with the fear of failure.

2. Realising your worth

2.1. Adapting negotiability

Apart from touching on the subject of procrastination, we've also learned the valuable insight of altering our patterned thought process. Which in my case was exceptionally useful and eye-opening.

In our society today we've been taught – whether subconsciously or not – to behave submissively towards higher ranking individuals. When going for a job interview, or even just writing a cover letter to accompany an application, we usually use a submissive vocabulary and automatically think that by hiring us, the potential employer is doing us a favour. When in reality they're in need of staff and would benefit more from someone with suitable qualities than someone who looks good on paper.

We've learned to stop and think about what the company or hiring manager is actually in need of and whether we can satisfy the thirst for that need. Once we've established what they need or want and how we can fulfill and sell this, we have more power than initially thought. We were also taught to develop a brand for ourselves, a unique selling point that would draw the interest of a potential hiring manager or client. To give an example we could say "I help people feel more self-confident." Instead of saying you work in the beauty industry. It's not easy to boost about yourself as all of us have been taught that vanity is a bad trait to have. Since we were children, most of us have been conditioned to think of ourselves in an as humble way as possible. Having to now alter that to praise yourself or sell yourself is never easy. Trying to adapt a more negotiating stance when applying for a job is also scary, what if the hiring manager perceives me as vain or rude?

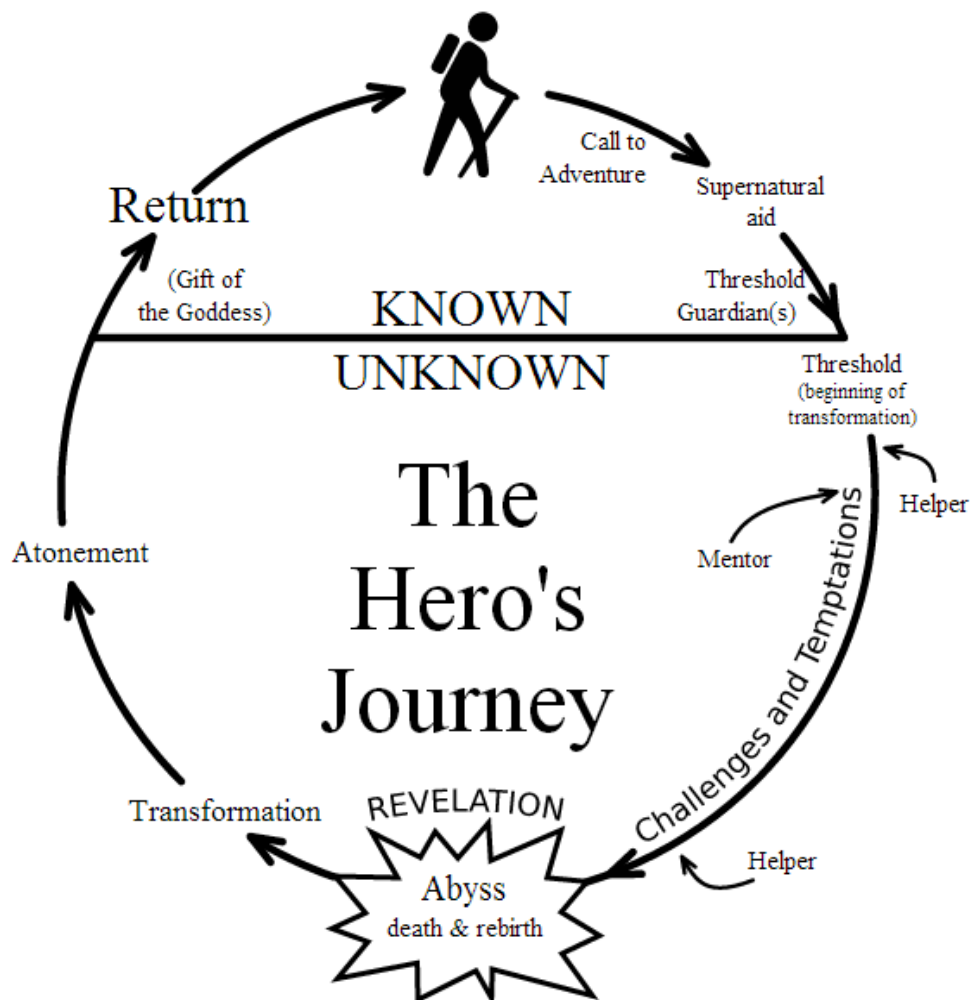
Altering your mind to think in a way it has never thought before brings out a certain fear.

In my own perception, I feel this is mainly because when applying the old approach, we could sort of guess the outcome of our words and actions. We were surrounded by a protective bubble of comfort and safety knowing we wouldn't stand out too much to make a lasting impression, thus, if we didn't get the desired outcome, it wouldn't have been as much of a personal humiliation.

But when dipping our toes into a whole different approach of which we cannot guess the outcome, the fear of failure and humiliation quickly intensifies. To quote our lecturer. "Change is scary, change hurts."

To accompany this statement she explained what is called “The Hero’s journey”.

2.2. The Hero’s Journey



The hero’s journey was popularized by Joseph Campbell, a literature professor that wrote about this particular cycle in his book “The Hero with a Thousand Faces (1949)”

The Hero’s Journey explores a certain pattern that is found in many stories. A protagonist goes on a journey, encounters roadblocks, runs away, then gets motivated to try again by friends or by a specific event, is victorious and comes home a changed person. It sounds like a Disney-film doesn’t it? Well, the message she wanted to transmit by giving us this example was: If we want to be the hero of our own life, we mustn’t get discouraged once we face the first roadblock. ‘Cause there will, most likely always be roadblocks and dead ends. Even after we run away and hide back into our comfort zone, it’s never too late to try again and become your own hero.

This lecture in particular was incredibly motivating for me personally. I hold myself back quite a lot due to the fear of failure or humiliation. I find myself having a very concrete and achievable goal, but I wave it away and push back taking steps to actually achieve that goal, find myself hiding behind the usual excuses such as time or financial means.

After this lecture and after reflecting on my own life as compared to the hero's journey, I've realised I have taken the first step towards the journey by enrolling in University studies, However, that was the easy part. Actually putting myself out there and taking steps towards starting a new career from scratch is frightening. Even though I badly want to achieve the goal, I push it back 'til "someday".

As with the underlying reason behind my procrastination, I wanted to figure out the underlying cause of my fear of failure and who I am actually afraid of failing.

2.3. Fear of failure

For this I started reading a study that was conducted by Dr. E. Conroy at the The Pennsylvania State University, researching the cognitive links between fear of failure and perfectionism. In short, a number of college students were subject to a physical activities test for which they completed the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale and Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory after every session. This test resulted in the researchers determining that only socially prescribed perfectionism was strongly related to the fear of failure. This means the fear of upsetting important others or embarrassment towards important others.

In other words, if we have based our fear of failure and humiliation on the above research, we aren't afraid to fail ourselves but rather our significant others, friends or family members. We are holding ourselves back because we fear how we'll be perceived by our social circles should we not succeed in achieving the goal we set out for ourselves.

When reflecting upon this study as opposed to the hero's journey cycle earlier, I would say that when leaving your comfort zone to attempt a new career or a different life goal, we need to distinguish our allies and our enemies first. Not every person in your social circle wants to see you succeed or will be there to help you reach the goal when it gets hard. Stay away from posting anything about your journey on Facebook or other social platforms, as this only adds extra anxiety and fear of humiliation. Trust those that want to see you succeed and accept their help. If you fall, they will be the ones motivating you to get back up and try again. We share too much of our lives with the online community these days and sometimes forget that it only adds to the burden of having to perform. It creates subconscious performance anxiety and fear of failure or humiliation.

3. Conclusion

In the past two semesters I've learned some valuable insights about my own behaviour. On an academic level but also on a personal or employable level. Being able to identify behavioural patterns that I now know hold me back from achieving my actual goals, and also researching the underlying thought process behind why I slip back into these behaviours, have helped me to better understand ways of changing this pattern and attempting to make a behavioural change for the better.

4. References and appendix

4.1 References

Literature:

B. Tracey (2001) Eat that frog!, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, USA

J. Campbell (1949) The Hero with a Thousand Faces, Pantheon books, USA

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4.2 Appendix

In-class exercise: Individual front-of-class-presentation.

Mini-presentation Feedback Form						Date: 19/12/19
Student presenting: <u>Yana</u>						
SCORE: 5= Excellent, 4=Very Good, 3= Good/Average, 2=Poor, 1= Very Poor <u>Media literacy / Thinking critically</u>						
Topic:	5	4	3	2	1	Comments
DELIVERY						
The presenter delivered the material in a clear and structured manner	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	Strong intro. + Slides to sup Confident delivery Slow down in places where aud. needs time to take in the info. Well researched V. interesting topic
The presenter was knowledgeable about the topic and any related issues	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	
The presenter maintained my interest during the entire presentation	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	
The presenter was enthusiastic about the topic	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	
The presenter was well organised and prepared	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Eye contact was maintained	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Body language was appropriate	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Time for presentation used effectively	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	
The presenter was able to present the material without excessive dependence on notes	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	
The volume was appropriate	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	
The presenter spoke clearly	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	
The pace of speech was natural	☒	☒	☐	☐	☐	
There was a clear introduction	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	
There was a clear conclusion	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	
CONTENT						
The topic was interesting	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	
The presentation was concise and informative	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	
The presentation contained good examples	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Content was relevant to the topic	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Relevance to the module	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	
OVERALL PREPARATION						
POINTS AVAILABLE 100	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	LECTURER: PLEASE SIGN AND DATE IN THIS BOX TO CONFIRM COMPLETION OF THE PRESENTATION. <i>[Signature]</i>
POINTS EARNED 90						
GRADE <u>A-</u>	%					

Please note the above grade is for general feedback purposes only; you still need to reflect on this presentation in your written assignment and attach the scan of this page as an appendix.