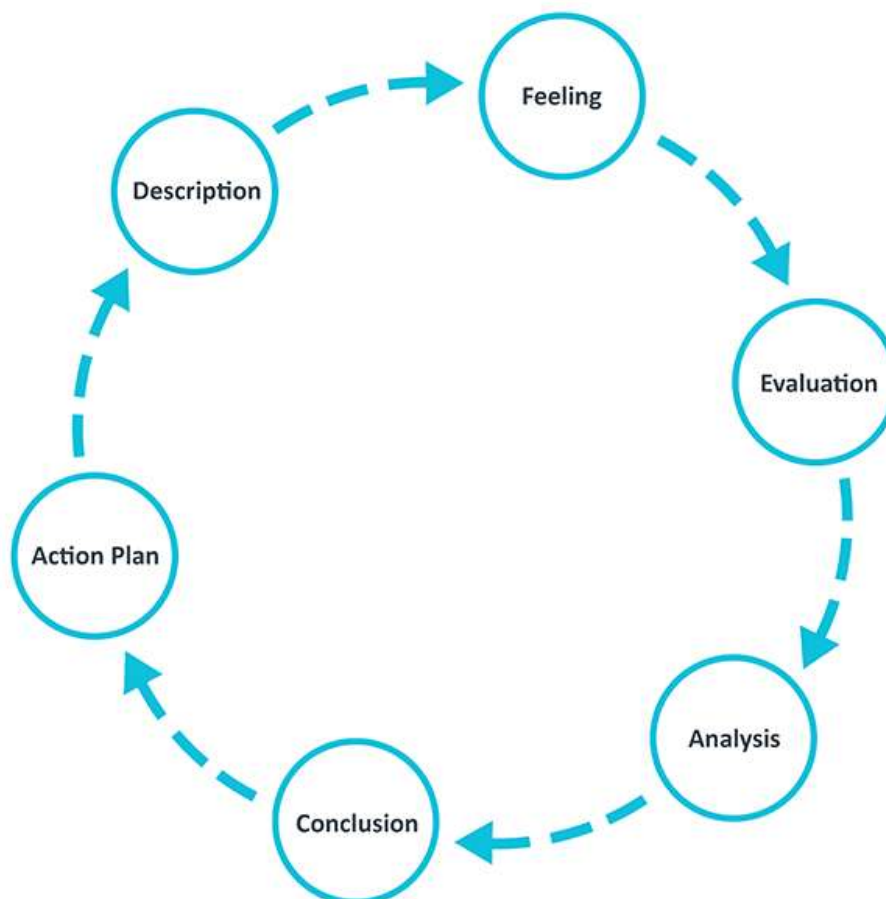


Choose an appropriate model of reflection to look back on the way that you contributed to the group activity.

This assignment will be a reflective account of team participation for a group video assessment. The reflective model utilised was developed by Gibbs (1988), and was used, not only as it is familiar but, according to the University of Edinburgh (2019), it provides a clear and detailed framework with for analysing reflections, either as repeated or stand-alone experiences.

Image 1: Gibbs' reflective cycle



Description

After the first lecture for the group video assignment, I spoke with several other students regarding forming a group. Once we had established who the four members of our team would be, I then created a social media group for the purpose of sharing ideas and information for the project. We had our first meeting on campus and I put forward the suggestion that once we had all completed our presentation content we could reserve a room on campus. This would enable us to rehearse and when ready, film our presentations on the same day so they were all filmed on the same device, from same angle and with the same lighting. We decided we would concentrate on other assignments with earlier submission dates but use the social media group to continue to share ideas, in effect acting as a diary. We established between us quite early on, that our subject would be the recent devastating floods that had been prevalent in the media and we each chose a different theme to explore within that topic. That changed however after the coronavirus outbreak, which dominated the news and resulted in the university closing.

Feelings

I was quite happy and confident about our chosen subject and began sharing links to stories and articles to the social media group. When the pandemic spread to the UK though and social distancing was introduced, everything appeared to change. I personally found it hard to concentrate on assignments and speaking to other members of the group, it was clear we were all beginning to struggle to stay focused. I tried to keep on top of deadlines but I felt as though other group members were falling behind and that was concerning, for them as students and friends but also in respect of the group project. I was thankful that we would at least be able to submit a presentation individually but also felt this would be detrimental to the overall quality of the assignment.

Evaluation

What should on paper have been quite a straightforward assignment, turned out to be significantly more challenging as events unfolded. A narrative review of academic studies and peer-reviewed journals by Pascoe, Hetrick and Parker (2019), revealed that academic-related stress can have substantially negative impact on secondary and tertiary students. The research appeared to show that academic stress exacerbated the already wide-ranging, pre-

existing normative stresses of many of those in education. Changing the topic from flooding to the pandemic probably helped to relieve some of the stress, as it embraced the very subject that had been distracting us and I personally found it facilitated my research and writing, not having to think about two separate issues. Ottens (1991, pp. 6-7) describes this type of academic anxiety as ‘misdirected attention’, where both internal (anxieties, daydreams) and external (extraneous noise, other household members) distractions hamper your ability to concentrate and study efficiently. Something that was all-too-evident, given the current circumstances.

Analysis

I always strive to be an active participant in group projects but I think my role evolved during this task. It became clear from our interactions on our social media group that some members were understandably struggling to focus on assignments. Working from home with all the extra distractions, along with the implications of the pandemic lockdown meant motivational support appeared to become as important, perhaps even more so, than merely contributing ideas. This is something Jairam and Kahl Jr. (2012) refer to as the ‘stress-buffer hypothesis’, which can be an invaluable, though not infallible, social support mechanism in education. In their study of mental health stressors of doctorate students, they concluded that in situations where multiple stressors are present (in this case; the pandemic, employment concerns and assignment deadlines), social support can be an effective way of overcoming feelings of helplessness and low self-esteem. In addition, Macaskill, A. (2012) suggests that past changes to the way university finance is allocated, means that many students rely on employment to fund their education and in doing so, exacerbate what can already be a stressful experience.

Conclusion

Without being able to support each other through social media, it could have proved extremely difficult to complete the assignment successfully, even without the pandemic lockdown measures. Having only met once as a group for the purpose of this assignment, prior to the introduction of social distancing meant our online interaction took on new significance. Group cohesion in an online environment requires a range of skills, that Brosche and Feavel (2011, p. 130) propose should include; commitment, respect, leadership and an understanding of group dynamics. The majority of us have worked as a group before and we

appear to have a healthy respect for each other and the dynamics seem to work well. We did not discuss appointing a team leader, although with hindsight this is something that may have helped us as a group when motivation for all of us was at a low point. Kozlowski, S. and Ilgen, D. (2006) argue that leadership is a key aspect of team development and enables the identification of group members strengths and weaknesses. Acknowledging that the process of team-building can be challenging, once stabilised however, common goals can then be achieved with maximum effectiveness.

Action Plan

I will explore stress management strategies for coping with the pressures that study can sometimes entail. Kassymova *et al.* (2018) argue that while academic stress is inevitable, research indicates that there are wide-ranging stress management techniques that can be effective in promoting positive mental health and even lowering biological disease indicators. Flinchbaugh *et al.* (2011) concur that the management of stress in educational settings is crucial to well-being and improves engagement. For group activities in future, I will suggest a group discussion regarding whether or not appointing a team leader would be appropriate, as I feel identifying strengths and weaknesses of individual members would have been beneficial. The creation of a social media group is something I would continue with as under the circumstances, this proved invaluable.

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Image references

Image 1: University of Edinburgh (2020) *Gibbs' Reflective Cycle*. Available at:

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