



Reflective Essay

A Reflective Essay Using Rolfe's

Reflection Model

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ModuleName:ProfessionalCareer Development

Module Code: BMSW4012

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Reflective Essay on Professional Career Development

Introduction

The adjustment to professional career development is both exciting and demanding, requiring the rapid acquisition of new self-assessment, employability, and career planning skills. In this reflective essay, I discuss my learning process of gaining these skills over the first term of study. I will employ Rolfe's Reflection Model as a systematic framework to help me reflect on my experiences, allowing me to critically examine my learning activities and identify areas for continued professional development.

Specifically, my reflection will focus on my development in self-awareness, employability skills, and career planning using digital tools and reflective models. These abilities have been crucial in identifying personal strengths and areas for improvement, setting realistic career goals, and enhancing my readiness for professional advancement. Throughout this essay, I will discuss pivotal experiences that have influenced my learning, reflect on how I reacted and felt about these events, and assess the outcomes. This reflective experience has not only given me a greater awareness of myself but also provided valuable insights for my future professional and personal growth.

What?

As a student with previous experience in sales, marketing, and business administration, it was essential for me to adjust quickly to new norms, particularly in self-assessment and career planning, upon resuming my studies. One experience that stood out during my first term was completing a self-assessment exercise for the Professional Career Development module.

Initially, I found it challenging to transition from thinking purely about career outcomes and immediate job responsibilities to critically analysing my personal strengths, weaknesses, and employability skills. In my professional roles, I had focused on delivering results and meeting targets rather than assessing my competencies systematically. The self-assessment activity required me to identify my

soft skills, technical competencies, and areas for further development in a structured manner, which was unfamiliar to me (Culbertson et al., 2019).

To overcome these challenges, I participated in workshops offered by the university's Career Development Centre (Oliver and Wilkinson, 2021). These sessions helped me understand models such as SWOT analysis, GROW, and Kolb's experiential learning cycle, which could guide my professional development planning. I learned to use tools like online career planning templates and digital journals to record reflections and track progress.

Another key experience was learning to develop a personal action plan aligned with my career goals. Previously, I had planned career moves intuitively, without formal strategies. However, the module required me to think in a structured, measurable way. I used Google Calendar and Trello to schedule reflective exercises, workshops, and skill-building activities, ensuring that I met short-term objectives while working toward long-term professional development (Kamila and Marzuq, 2024).

As I began these exercises, I experienced a mixture of anxiety and excitement. Having worked in Sales and Marketing, I was accustomed to evaluating others' performance and outcomes rather than reflecting critically on my own development. I initially felt uncertain about identifying my weaknesses honestly, fearing that this might expose limitations in my professional competencies.

Parallel to this, I also felt enthusiasm about acquiring skills that would enhance both my employability and personal growth. By understanding my strengths and weaknesses, I would be able to approach future career opportunities with confidence and a clear development strategy (Mdodana-Zide and Mukuna, 2023).

Adopting digital tools for career planning brought about a positive emotional shift. After initially feeling overwhelmed by the number of skills and competencies I needed to develop, I gradually became more organised and proactive. Using tools like Trello to track professional development goals allowed me to monitor progress and reflect on achievements, which boosted my confidence and motivation.

So What?

Looking back, there were several significant benefits. My self-awareness and understanding of employability skills improved considerably. I gained insights into how my prior professional experience in Sales and Marketing could be translated into transferable skills such as communication, problem-solving, and teamwork (Rapanta and Macagno, 2019). This understanding helped me identify areas for further development, including advanced digital skills, leadership competencies, and strategic thinking.

Another positive outcome was my improved capability to develop and implement a personal action plan. By applying the GROW model (Goal, Reality, Options, Way forward), I learned to set realistic career goals, assess my current situation, explore available options, and create actionable steps (Whitmore, 2017). This structured approach allowed me to visualise my professional growth more effectively and encouraged a proactive attitude toward achieving objectives.

Peer support also played a vital role. Discussing employability strategies and development goals with fellow students created an environment of shared learning and motivation (Kireeti, Egitim and Thomson, 2024). Collaborative activities, such as group discussions on recruitment and selection processes, helped me understand professional expectations and common challenges in the workplace.

However, there were challenges. Time management was initially difficult, as I had to balance reflection, self-assessment, and career planning with academic commitments. My early attempts at drafting an action plan were inconsistent and lacked clarity. This taught me the importance of structured planning and disciplined follow-up to achieve professional development goals.

Difficulties also arose in applying reflective models effectively. While I could conceptually understand the SWOT analysis or GROW framework, linking these tools to specific personal experiences required careful thought and practice. Additionally, overreliance on digital tools sometimes distracted from deeper reflection, making it essential to combine technology with structured self-assessment and critical thinking exercises.

Several factors influenced these successes and challenges. My prior professional experience gave me strengths in practical skills but limited exposure to formal career development planning (Zuhra, 2024). The disparity between an intuitive professional approach and a structured reflective approach initially slowed my progress. However, using Rolfe's reflective cycle helped me systematically explore my experiences, emotions, and outcomes, gradually improving both confidence and competence (Akella, 2010).

My engagement with digital resources enhanced my skills in research and planning. Using career planning websites, personality assessments, and online job-matching platforms helped me gain a more comprehensive understanding of potential career paths. Exposure to these resources aligns with Tham et al.'s (2021) model of digital capabilities, emphasizing strategic use of digital tools for career development.

In addition, reflecting on recruitment and selection processes using realistic case studies and online simulations enabled me to evaluate my readiness for professional opportunities critically. I began to understand essential interview techniques, CV optimisation, and competency-based questioning, which increased my employability and confidence in entering the job market (Ghafar, 2023).

Now What?

Looking forward, several strategies could enhance my learning and career development. First, I plan to attend workshops earlier in the term, rather than waiting until challenges arise. This proactive approach will help establish a solid foundation in employability skills and career planning from the outset.

Second, I aim to participate actively in peer study and career development groups. Sharing experiences and receiving feedback on personal strengths and weaknesses can broaden perspectives, provide accountability, and foster continuous improvement.

Third, I intend to balance digital tools with reflective practice. While tools like Trello and online self-assessment platforms are invaluable, they cannot replace thoughtful

consideration of personal experiences and learning objectives. Incorporating reflective journals and feedback sessions into my schedule will strengthen critical thinking and decision-making skills.

Finally, I plan to align all development activities with SMART objectives to ensure measurable progress in professional career development. This structured approach will guide my continued learning and provide a clear framework to achieve both short-term goals and long-term career ambitions.

Action Plan (SMART)

Specific: I will participate in two advanced career development workshops and one session on professional skills assessment offered by the university in the next term.

Measurable: I will measure progress by comparing the quality of my personal development action plan and employability portfolio before and after implementing workshop strategies.

Achievable: These sessions are accessible through university services and fit within my study schedule, making the targets attainable.

Relevant: Improved self-awareness, employability skills, and career planning will enhance my readiness for professional advancement and provide a competitive edge in the job market.

Time-bound: I will complete all sessions, implement my action plan, and evaluate progress within the next 12 weeks.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the first term of Professional Career Development has been transformative, highlighting both strengths and areas requiring improvement. By applying Rolfe's reflective model and engaging with structured workshops, peer

learning, and digital tools, I have developed a more profound understanding of my professional competencies.

Through reflective practice, I have strengthened employability skills, enhanced self-awareness, and learned to plan career progression systematically. While challenges remain, such as time management and balancing digital tools with reflection, the experiences and strategies gained have laid a strong foundation for continued professional growth.

Moving forward, I will continue applying these skills, actively participate in career workshops, and monitor progress through structured reflection. This approach will ensure ongoing development, enhanced employability, and readiness for professional opportunities in my chosen career path.

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