

Professional Career and Development

Reflective Essay Using Rolfe's Reflective Cycle

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1. Introduction

Professional career development is important for each individual because it ensures that one always has somewhere to grow their skills, knowledge and make them more marketable in the ever-changing job market. Career development is not just mastering technical skills (Hirschi, 2018), rather it includes a lifelong learning, adaptability and resilience for career transition. In the context of modern workforce built on rapid technological progress and Fourth Industrial Revolution, it is imperative for people to continuously develop professionally to remain effective and competitive (Price & Reichert, 2017). Nowadays, employers are willing to hire professionals not only with the best technical skills but also with best soft skills like communication, problem solving etc. (Yarbrough et al., 2017).

In order to be able to reflect on the skills and knowledge gained throughout the professional career development lectures, this essay uses Rolfe's Reflective Cycle as a guiding framework. The model consists of three stages, What? So What? Now What? which facilitates the highly structured analysis of learning experience and its effects on professional development (Guan et al., 2019). It will reflect key theories and models which are present in lectures like Kolb's Experiential Learning theory, the Johari Window, and boundaryless career (Stahl, Miller & Tung, 2017). In this essay, I will critically review how these concepts have influenced preparing for one's career, decision making and long-term professional aspirations through personal examples and theoretical insights. Necessary (Stambulova, Ryba & Henriksen, 2020), it is developed through the reflective process in order to gain a thorough understanding of the career development strategies to formulate a course of action of future growth.

2. Rolfe's reflective cycle

2.1 What? – Description of Learning and Experiences

Professional career development is important for individuals to acquire important skills needed in present day industries for employability. With the rapid technological development and changing workplace dynamics, there is a need for workforce adaptable, innovative and predisposed to continuous learning (Hirschi, 2018). Employers value highly in employers what is known in Ph.D. studies as employability skills, consisting of communication, teamwork, problem solving,

adaptability and leadership as they help individuals as well as organisations to success (Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017). The skill is emphasised as crucial in professional career lectures and were present to serve as a medium in career progression and an effective operation in the workplace.

Different models and theories are introduced through the lectures to help one understand career development and self-improvement. The experiential learning theory was one of the theories that were discussed apropos of Kolb (2019), it tries to explain how individuals learn through experience, reflections, abstraction and experimentation. This model helped me realise how important the experience and skills were, and I began learning how to learn from experience and applying knowledge in professional life. For example, I was able to take a theoretical understanding and apply it to practice by speaking out and participating in group discussions as well as presentations.

Then, another important model that is discussed in the article was Gibbs' Reflective Cycle, the Gibbs' Reflective Cycle that helps complement Kolb theory that involves systematic reflection on experience (Stambulova, Ryba & Henriksen, 2020). The model of this paper includes six steps: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and an action plan. This gave me a set way of considering my experiences, identifying areas where I am lacking, and making the needed changes. Using this, I was able to analyse my performance in groups projects and deal with the barriers of communication, and then form strategies to enhance communication among individuals.

Furthermore, the Johari Window model was presented to highlight the importance of self-awareness and feedback in terms of a professional development (Vondracek, Lerner & Schulenberg, 2019). Helped me to understand, how important is the contribution of the feedback from peers and mentors to discover blind spots in my skills and behaviour. In self-assessment exercises I figured that I was good in terms of technical skills but that I need to upskill and practice in interpersonal communication as well as my adaptability to new situations.

In professional career development activities which are like workshops, networking events, internships, these theories have applications in real world. For example, at a team-based workshop at first, I feel balanced assertiveness and cooperation. I used Kolb's experiential learning approach and Gibbs' reflective cycle to find out that I was good at problem solving but also required

improvement in how I handled conflict. Like, feedback from the mentors during an internship helped me to improve my leadership skills by improving my knack to work in delegation and team collaboration skills (Powell & Bodur, 2019).

And these experiences certainly proved how imperative it is to keep improving on oneself and to be flexible throughout your career. It taught me about employability skills as well as professional growth theories allowing me to understand my strengths and weaknesses, which was very helpful in deciding my future career paths.

2.2 So What? – Analysis of Learning

Looking back, I have developed a wealth of knowledge on these theories that provide understanding in professional development. It had one of the most drastic impacts on how I viewed career success and how employable I was. The first thought I had was that technical proficiency was enough to advance my career. Although there are such career development lectures and practical applications, I've come to realise how crucial soft skills like adaptability, collaboration, and self-awareness (Price & Reichert, p. 2017) are. This was reinforced by the boundaryless career concept that understood the need for continuous learning and flexibility in surviving dynamic job markets (Stahl, Miller & Tung, 2017).

These theories have practical applied use and I have been able to determine key strengths and weaknesses in my employability skills. For instance, analytical problem solving was an area where I recognised my strength, but not so much my effectiveness with ideas during groups. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory was applied to learn from different communication strategies, including active listening and structured articulation, to gain confidence in public speaking (Hirschi, 2018). In addition, according to the Johari Window, feedback from peers and mentors was used to understand hidden strengths and ones that needed more work (Guan et al., 2019).

However, those theories were tested in real life, so to say, in professional settings. When we were working on a group project, at the end of the day I struggled to consolidate and come to a common solution from different perspectives. I analysed the situation, identified communication gaps, applied active listening techniques and applied Gibbs Reflective Cycle to foster constructive

dialogues (Yarbrough et al, 2017). The takeaway from this experience is that adaptability and emotional intelligence are essential skills to apply it to teamwork, and are key to career success.

Just like this, I participated in an internship and gained a better knowledge about leadership strategies and progress in careers. During a project, I failed to delegate tasks in the right way. At first, I thought that the more I took on of everything myself, the more competent I would be perceived to be. But through my response to my supervisor and the application of the Johari Window model, I learned that the effective leadership is the one which includes trust and delegation (Powell & Bodur, 2019). This realisation helped me fine tune my leadership approach and as a result fewer team members were working towards a better team efficiency and collaboration.

A valuable learning was in the role of lifelong learning on career development. Changes in workplace expectations during the Fourth Industrial Revolution have accelerated and the expectations are that continuous professional development is necessary for career sustainability (Hirschi, 2018). Through reflective practise by using Gibbs' Cycle I was able to set actionable strategies to make myself more adaptable and more resilient. In addition, I realise the importance of learning transference skills in order to be able to work in any industry (Stahl, Miller & Tung, 2017).

The experiences have reaffirmed my intention to carry on with self-improvement and career planning. Through the integration of theoretical knowledge with practical experience, I have come to understand and appreciate better what my career interests are and what steps need to be made to attain them.

2.3 Now What? – Future Applications and Action Plan

Moving forward, I will remain committed to refining my professional skills as well as take the step of continuous learning path to improve my career prospects. My leadership skills are one key area that needs improvement. I have done the work in team collaboration and delegation, but remain in need of developing strategic decision-making skills. In order to tailor this, I am going to enroll and take continuing course on leadership development as well as join a mentorship programme which offers practical experience of leadership (Zepeda, 2019). I will also look for ways to take on

leadership roles in academic and professional spaces in a way that will allow me to put my learning into practise in real world settings.

Adaptability is another domain for development as it's necessary to accommodate the typical trends of the modern career landscape. Given that digital skills are more and more used today, and because of remote collaboration, I plan to follow professional workshops that deal with new industry trends and technological developments (Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017). I will further expand my digital skills, data analysis and project management skills by engaging in online courses related to this (Hirschi, 2018).

Networking and mentorship will also be very important in my career development. Finally, research indicates that professional networks are crucial to having opportunities in your career as well as knowledge in the industry (Price & Reichert, 2017). For that reason, I will attend networking events, network with industry people, and seek out guidance from those with experience in order to expand my career opportunities.

In the long run, I want to establish a career where I can have a role of transition, which will enable me to switch between roles and industries while learning more new skills (Stahl, Miller and Tung, 2017). I will integrate reflective practices like Gibbs' Reflective Cycle as I plan my career, and to achieve this. I will be regular self-assessing and have feedback mechanisms which will help me to track my progress and the strategies of my professional development (Vondracek, Lerner & Schulenberg, 2019).

In reality, the best professional development is never done: it's something that you need to commit to, be very conscious of yourself, and be flexible. With the learning lessons from my personal growth, I believe I'm going to be able to maneuver through my future career problems and be a successful individual after a long time. I will continue to live my career strategy by practicing lifelong learning such that I stay competitive and capable to thrive in a changing professional landscape (Stambulova, Ryba & Henriksen, 2020).

3. Conclusion

The thought of reflecting over my professional career journey has made me realize that they are all about continuous learning, being able to adapt, and self-improving. Having employed Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, Gibbs Reflective Cycle and the Johari Window to deepen my understanding of how learning can take place through experience, reflection and feedback, I have. By using these models, I learned even the key strengths, like problem-solving and also rated the weaknesses, in particular, leadership and communication (Guan et al., 2019). This coincides in the notion that the job market is evolving and one must have a lifetime learning and a boundaryless career to ensure continued professional growth (Stahl, Miller & Tung, 2017). I have engaged in structured frameworks of self-reflection which have taught me to plan for the future through clear action of leadership development, networking & adaptability (Hirschi, 2018). After integrating these strategies in my career, I am sure that I can face any challenge a professional face in a proper way. In the end, in order for a career to progress, the ability to reflect and learn continuously is essential as one needs to be relevant and competitive in such a changing career environment (Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017).

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