

University of Wales Trinity Saint David



Academic and Employability Skills (ACE) – BMSW4001

Reflection on my learning in Academic & Employability Skills module at UWTSD

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2. Introduction

This reflection is centered on my personal learning experience in the Academic and Employability Skills module at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, London. One of the main reasons for joining this study program was to utilise my time during the Covid-19 pandemic effectively, improve my skills, particularly related to business and to boost my chances of employment.

As someone who has not been on education in the recent past, and with the family and other commitments, my initial thoughts were whether I can learn in a classroom again. One thing that really impressed me about this module was that it promotes experiential learning which aligns with my learning behaviour. The critical and reflective thinking I have learned throughout this module is significant to me because it not only encourages me to reflect upon life events but also as an entrepreneur to take my business to a new level.

In this report, the topics I am going to be talking about are Academic Writing, Reflection and CV writing using the Kolb's model of reflection and I will be explaining my experience, what I have noticed, what helped me build deep, meaningful connections and conclusions throughout this learning experience and lastly how do I go about applying it to different life situations, and also my intended career as an entrepreneur.

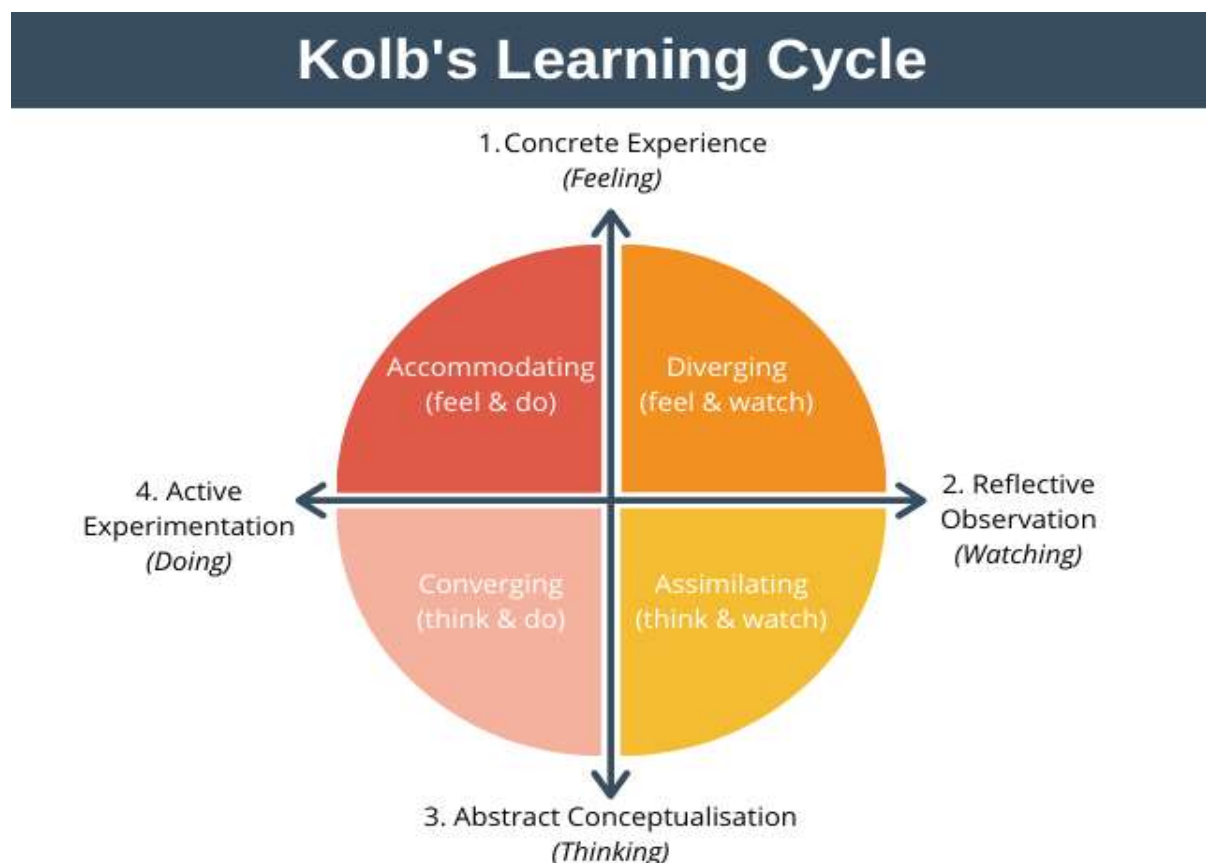


Image source: <https://expertprogrammanagement.com/wpcontent/uploads/2020/10/Kolb-Learning-Cycle.png>

3. Academic Writing

Academic writing is a clear, concise, and evidence-based structured piece of writing produced as part of academic work. In this module we learned several techniques to improve our sentence structure, note-taking, paraphrasing, summarising techniques, and reflective writing. (BMSW4001_LON, 2021)

3.1 My writing experience

As someone who is writing an academic report for the very first time, starting to write a fully referenced, structured academic report was challenging and was a new experience to begin with. I have always been a confident writer in the business language writing reports or technical specifications however, what goes into an academic style of writing was new to me.

3.2 How do I feel about it now?

Over this period my language skills improved significantly, and I am a much more confident writer than I was before. Also, I have noticed that by breaking down a topic for example, writing this report, into smaller tasks and creating a structure I was able to write it in my own phase which made it a lot easier and manageable than I initially thought.

3.3 Things I have learned about academic writing

In addition to understanding common sentence and paragraph structures, my writing skills, and my ability to deliver a message in general improved significantly. The academic essay writing not only helped me address a particular topic, but it also encouraged me to read other people's research and more importantly, taught me how to develop an argument about a topic.

3.4 How do I apply this knowledge?

Based on this experience I have changed the way I structured my writing firstly applying it to this report by breaking it down into smaller tasks to make it more manageable and writing it in my own phase over a period of time. According to the brief, we were expected to write a structured academic report of 2000 words to reflect on our own learning in this module +/- 10%, so with three topics each section approximately gets about 450 words leaving 150 words for the introduction, conclusion (200) and 300 words for the rest.

Further, I have updated my website which contained blocks of copied text from various sources. I have used the paraphrasing, summarising and referencing techniques we have learned to improve my Google search ranking. Going forward, this will change the way I structure my business reports, technical specifications, website contents or emails.

4. Reflection

Knowledge and awareness of a previous event and summarising the critical thinking you have had is a powerful and lifelong way of improving every aspect of one's life. The objective is to learn from the previous experiences and apply that knowledge to future events in order to improve your response. (BMSW4001_LON, 2021)

4.1 How do I learn?

I enjoy ideas, theories and solving practical problems. I am a natural learner and I only learn

things that are relevant and if what I learn can be applied to my life or work situations. I was hesitant at the beginning; however, I was prepared, and my mind was eager to absorb new knowledge, the topics seeming relevant and current.

4.2 How did I progress?

One thing that really impressed me about this module was that it encouraged critical thinking whether it was participating in practice exercises, analysis tasks, workshops or by learning from each other's experiences. In my opinion this not only encouraged everyone to be competitive and effective but also it cultivated a culture of reflective thinking that will change the way everyone thinks and operate in.

4.3 What is my learning style?

I am a constant learner with a genuine passion for technology and I enjoy the doing aspect. I believe I fall into the 3rd category "converging" (below). People who prefer this learning style are logical problem solvers for example, technical experts and scientists who prefer to learn by taking lectures, by having the time to think things through, apply their knowledge in a hands-on way and working with other people in teams. This probably explains why I am a seasoned software professional bringing more than twenty years of experience. David Kolb describes four Learning Styles outlining how different people prefer to learn new things (EPM, 2020):

1. Diverging (Feeling and Watching)
 - Prefer to watch than do.
 - Like working in groups.
2. Assimilating (Watching and Thinking)
 - Enjoy ideas however less interested in people.
 - Enjoy ideas but not their practical application.
3. Converging (Doing and Thinking)
 - Enjoy ideas and theory and solving practical problems.
4. Accommodating (Doing and Feeling)
 - Prefer learning through doing.
 - Prefer to use their gut feel rather than a detailed analysis.

4.4 Here is how I apply it

In essence, life is a chain of events and reflective thinking help you focus on continuous improvement through small, gradual steps. This thought process, the ability to look back and analyse a situation, be able to improve is something that I am going to adopt in everyday life.

5. CV Writing

Curriculum vitae, often shortened to CV, is a short-written summary of a person's career, qualifications, and education. Aimed at convincing a potential employer to offer you a chance to move forward in a formal selection process. (BMSW4001_LON, 2021)

5.1 My job search

With many restaurants, shops and businesses closed at the beginning of the year, as the UK entered lockdown to fight the pandemic the unemployment soared to 4.9%. According to statistics, around 22% of the UK's working-age population (9mn), had been furloughed. At

least 1% of businesses ceased to trade permanently or had their staff laid off (BBC News, 2021; Office for National Statistics, 2021).

I have been applying for jobs since I lost my job in July 2020 due to COVID. Job agencies are currently experiencing an extremely high volume of applications, and unfortunately only 0.2% of candidates that have applied for jobs in the last 3 months have gone on to receive job offers according to the job market information.

Surprisingly, I was contacted by various job agencies for the jobs that I have not applied for and not relevant to the skills and the experience as laid out in my CV.

5.2 Why was I unsuccessful?

The employability skills I have learned throughout this module for example, academic writing and reflective thinking changed the way I think and operate in. Based on this lecture I realised that my CV lacked objectivity, the use of powerful words and I asked myself the following questions which helped me change the way I structured my CV.

1. Is my CV easy to read?
2. Has it got the appropriate key words?
3. How does my CV compare to the competition?
4. What are my achievements? - do I quantify my experience enough?
5. What are my unique selling points?

5.3 What did I do to change it?

In this lecture we were asked to make lists and categorise them into Knowledge, Skills, Attributes, and other things that are relevant to each of us. This helped me identify my key strengths (see appendix) which I subsequently added to my CV. The list not only give a snapshot of my skills to potential employers but also, I realised that it helps it pass through Application Tracking Software that picks up the key words and matches them with the application requirements improving my chances.

5.4 How do I know if the new CV works?

I sent my CV to a consultant to get a free and impartial assessment and the feedback I have got was worth sharing. The new CV was given an overall score of 61% which a remarkable improvement from the previous score 41%.

Please see your scoring (1 – 10 being the highest), below;

- Employability: 8 based on your current job title and industry
- Usability: 7
- ATS Optimisation: 8
- Comparison: 5
- Achievement: 7
- Unique Selling Points: 6
- Introduction Statement: 5
- Qualifications: 10
- Terminology: 5 as it is missing sector specific terminology

Once my new CV was uploaded, I had many specialist IT recruiters calling me to discuss potential job opportunities and many said that my CV is well structured, and everything was well laid-out. I have finally had an interview after going through a series of rejections nearly for a year.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, I find writing in academic context develops a thought process that help you take a deeper understanding of the context and by breaking down a piece of academic writing into smaller tasks makes it more manageable and allowing the author to write it in own phase over a period of time.

The reflective way of thinking is a powerful tool that focus on continuous improvements through small, gradual steps. By being able to look back and analysing situations, it provides a better outcome, and the learning is much more likely to retain.

In my opinion, having a snapshot of key skills and attributes at the beginning of your resume not only helps potential employers to shortlist but also, it helps it pass through an Application Tracking Software that picks up the key words and matches them with the application requirements improving your chances.

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8. Appendix

KEY SKILLS

Leadership and management
Project management
Solid SDLC, Full life cycle ownership
Product management and Delivery
Technical architecture, decision making
Design specifications & UX
ERP, SaaS, development projects
System migrations and integration

Comfortable with new technologies
Sales and marketing activities
Global team engagement
Strategic planning & analysis
Product roadmap/ prioritisation
Process and system improvement
Complex problem solving
Risk management and mitigation

Commercial awareness/acumen
Stakeholder Management
Teamwork and collaboration
Training, mentoring & coaching
Communication / Negotiation
Change Management
Organisation and Planning
Compliance and governance

TECHNICAL EXPERTISE

E-commerce (B2B /B2C)
CMS platforms (Joomla, Drupal, WP)
Web design patterns
Object orientated programming

Hands-on HTML, CSS, Bootstrap, jQuery
Familiar with C#, ASP.Net, and Laravel
SQL Server, PostgreSQL, Sybase, MySQL
Building AWS/ Serverless applications

SOAP /RESTful, REST API's
Analytics, SEO, Social media
Familiar with CI/CD, Docker
JIRA /Bitbucket, GitHub, Trello