

Student name: Chloe Evans

Student ID: 2105814

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Reflective Account

I will analyse the skills that I have developed during this module and assess how these skills may assist me and my future employment. To do this, I will use the Gibbs Reflective Cycle as it is an appropriate model for reflection (Gibbs, 1988). I prioritize my employment opportunities as it sits in line with the Welsh Governments commitment to helping young people gain access to offers of high-quality work and training (Welsh government, 2022). I believe I have gained and further developed many skills during this module, and I have also been exposed to areas which need improvement.

1. Description

The module began on January 30th and as a group, we looked at different employability skills. We were handed a sheet that described different employable skills. From here, we individually highlighted the skills we thought we were good at and already had in one colour, and in another, we highlighted the skills we thought we needed to improve on. This allowed me to visualise my strengths and weaknesses.

In the same week, on February 2nd I took part in a networking activity called 'Speed Dating'. For this activity, we used Microsoft Teams and were put into break-out rooms with students from the Carmarthen campus. We were paired up in these break-out rooms, where we had only 2 minutes to each discuss our key strengths, our career goals, and a fun fact.

Another activity was creating our own personal development plan (PDP). We spent around 30 –45 minutes creating our own. I did mine by hand, using a plain piece of A4 paper, different coloured pens and a ruler. My plan was focused on the module and the assignments that I needed to complete. The idea of this was to break down the things I needed to complete and compartmentalize the different tasks into realistic time frames.

On February 9th, we played a game of I-spy from a scene of different pictures where the rules of the game were changed frequently. From this game, we used Gibbs Reflective Cycle to assess the success of the game. We had to describe the game, assess how we felt whilst playing the game from start to finish, evaluate what went well, analyse the skills we developed, draw a conclusion, and create an action plan, considering that we would do differently if we did the activity again.

2. Feelings

At the start of this module, I felt frustrated at the assignments and the module objectives. I also voiced that I dislike E-learning and felt that Changemakers activities were repetitive and not always relevant. However, I found the first task of highlighting our strengths and weaknesses to be simplistic but also useful, especially for the 'Speed Dating' activity.

At the start of the 'Speed dating' activity, I felt confident speaking to the Carmarthen cohort. However, I recognized that some of my peers were uncomfortable with the idea and so I tried to reassure them before we started and throughout the activity. During the first call I felt rushed with the time constraint of two minutes but felt determined then for the next call to be quicker. I engaged well in this activity as I enjoy speaking to new people.

I had fun playing the I-spy game and found it useful when we put into practice the Gibbs Reflective cycle. There were parts of the reflection model, like the difference between the evaluation and the analysis which we struggled with, so I was relieved to have practiced doing this on a small scale. I took the notes for the team, so at times I struggled to write the suggestions down quick enough. However, it worked out well as I could contribute too once we had slowed down.

Overall, my feelings have changed during the module. To begin with I was stubborn in my displeasure of starting the module. I would not say that I enjoyed the module as such, thus leaving my first assignment quite late as I had little interest in completing it. However, once I started, I could certainly see the skills I had learnt and therefore felt a lot better about the module which was also helped by having activities that were engaging throughout.

3. Evaluation

The PDP task was successful in that we could put something we had learnt into practice. The same can be said for the I-spy game where we used the Gibbs Reflective Cycle. These activities were successful as they allowed us to physically carry out the things that we needed to do before the assignment. This developed organizational skills as it instilled the importance of planning and preparation.

The networking activity was effective and worked well for me and my personality and I can understand how it pushed us all out of our comfort zones. From this, I developed my communication skills further by speaking to new people and sharing information using technology. I was also able to demonstrate a positive attitude towards this task as I carried myself confidently and showed a willingness to participate. However, it was clear that some really struggled with the concept and found it anxiety-inducing, which may have affected them and their participation. Despite this, everybody had to work together to make it a success and we all helped each other out through encouragement and our efforts to make each call worth it. Overall, it was a successful and relevant task which developed many skills.

The content of E-learning is not always relevant and at times it can be condescending when it is simplistic. However, I can acknowledge that the digital skills used in E-learning reflect the ever-changing technological world we live in, however, I think that the content for this module needs to be changed completely. Therefore, we have worked on adaptability, working from a range of different technologies such as Microsoft Teams and online forums. Those of us who have participated in the forums have demonstrated teamwork skills too as some questions require debate and for us to bounce ideas off each other.

4. Analysis

The purpose of the 'Speed Dating' activity was to help us identify networking opportunities and recognise how my strengths could complement somebody else's. Competency has long been understood as a person's ability to do a job, however, recruitment experts find that in recent years, there is reference to competency in terms of appropriate skills and behaviors (Addo, 2020). This suggests that I need to have more than just knowledge and capability to be employable, and that I need to show willingness to learn and develop. Ultimately, I thought the activity was successful in showing us how networking can work and demonstrated how similar we all were in

terms of our skillsets as most of us had excellent communication skills and could work well in teams. Furthermore, this activity showed us more than about networking. It made me think about my personal brand and my employability because it highlighted that soon-to-be education professionals share similar traits and skills, meaning that in competitive area there will be many people just like me, and that I will need to do my best to stand out. Employment competitiveness exists among young postgraduates (Liang, Ji and Liang, 2017) and to stand out, one must create their own personal brand to stand out from the rest (Cirillon and Guarascio, 2015).

By carrying out the task on Microsoft Teams, not only did we develop our technological skills but also, it was less daunting speaking through Teams on our devices than it would have been if it were in person. Being put into break-out rooms worked because we could not control who we would be speaking to next, which meant we had to adapt to each other, communicate and present ourselves well and clearly, which are all social skills. We were able to further build our social skills by asking questions and listening to the answers (Makematic, 2021). The demand for ICT skills is now essential in recruitment, making it an employable skill (Mushi, 2020; Picatoste, Pérez-Ortiz and Ruesga-Benito, 2018). The Covid-19 pandemic showed how uncertain times can become, and most of us had to adapt and use technology to speak to friends, family, and work. Having ICT skills and being able to adapt, deal with changes, and learn new skills on a technological level makes a person more employable (Humburg and Van der Velden, 2017).

The I-spy activity was successful because we practiced using the reflective cycle needed for this assignment. By practicing, I was able to organise my time better for this assignment, as I knew what structure I needed to follow and could use my experience to execute it accordingly. A person's performance outcomes are influenced by the amount of deliberate practice that they put into it (Macnamara, Hambrick and Oswald, 2014). The practice and preparation I put into my work will be desirable to employers as my assignment results reflect my hard work and planning. Similarly, research indicates the PDPs enable individuals to make decisions and understand their learning (Zareena and Haider, 2013). This suggests that by making a PDP myself, I have taken responsibility for my own learning which will enhance my employability as I am good at decision making and follow my own initiative by planning and following it.

Unfortunately, I do not believe eLearning elements of the module were successful for me. I struggle to engage with the content of them thus lacking in motivation to complete them. Studies find that students invest more into their learning if they can see how, it will benefit them (Gilson, Beach, and Cleaver, 2018), which I could not see. However, the benefits of completing online lessons and participating in online forums are evident. Technology has allowed me to access varied sources and encouraged me to carry out research which in turn, has made me a more independent learner. Professional educators are expected to adapt their methods of teaching and presenting through different technological approaches to stay relevant and engaging (Zhang, 2022; Jones and Dexter, 2014). This is important to me as I hope to have a career in education.

5. Conclusion

From this module I have developed and gained many skills. I personally found the networking task useful and felt I could have been challenged further by having more time and more topics to talk about, even turning my camera on to feel more exposed and push me out of my comfort zone further. I think that this task has helped me grow in confidence by speaking to new people and further developed my communication skills. However, my time management still needs improving and I would have liked to do more work on this during the module.

Other aspects of the module could be modified to develop my other skills further, but overall, I am very content with what I have learned and the skills that I have used.

6. Action Plan

S - If I were to do this module again, I would continue to follow the structure of my PDP, but I would try to improve my time management and work to the deadlines that I set myself. I would be responsible for this and hold myself accountable. This would improve my personal management skills, and I could set goals and prioritize balancing my work life, personal life, and university work.

M- To make my goal of improving my time management quantifiable and easy to track, I would tick off the tasks that I have completed so that I could visualize what I have done and what is left to complete. This way I would know when I have hit my targets.

A-I would set myself more realistic timescales and break down tasks into smaller chunks so that it seems less daunting. Instead of setting weekly goals, I would set daily goals, Monday – Thursday, every week during the module. This would make time management easier for me as there would be smaller tasks to complete but more often.

R-I want to submit my assignments earlier than the day they are due. This will reduce my stress levels and leave me more time to proofread and make changes. This will hopefully improve my marks and prepare me for my future job where I will be met with deadlines to complete tasks by, at my full capacity.

T- I can put this into practice for my next module where my assignment is due on April 24th. My target is to submit my assignment on April 23rd or earlier. I will create a PDP this week and start working through the different tasks I set myself.

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