

Academic and Employability Skills

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Introduction

The Academic and Employability skills module is part of the course Certificate in Higher Education in Skills for Workplace from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. The aim of this module is to facilitate the students learning by providing the required research strategies and to develop specific skills to build the competence as an employee.

It is the course that I am currently studying and as part of our assessment we were asked to write a reflection following the learning during this module. I decided to reflect on three of the proposed topics: Time Management, Reflection and Analytical and critical thinking skills. I chose the reflection topic as it will be very useful for this report to research in depth the topic as well as the analytical and critical thinking topic. I have a busy lifestyle and I needed to develop skills related to time management that will contribute to my performance at my job, but which will also help me in my studies.

Reflection

For my reflection I will use Gibbs reflective cycle which is a very famous model of reflection that leads the reflector through 6 cyclical stages to analyse the experience. The reflective practice concept assumes individuals ability to reflect on actions and experiences in order to ensure learning. The reflection is realised by using theoretical concepts and by examining practical aspects of the experience aiming to develop insights and reflective examination. This tool of reflective practice enhances individuals learning and professional development (Gardner, 2014).

Gibbs (1988) reflective cycle gives a cycled structure to learn from experiences and it ensures the efficient examination that can be applied to repeated experiences. The reflection model has 6 stages: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion and action plan As showed in Figure 1 bellow.

Figure 1. Gibbs Reflective Cycle



Gibbs model of reflection can be applied in single experiences or to repeated experiences. The first experience to reflect on is the learning on the Reflection topic which happened during the class, when all the students participated online through Teams. The students listened to the presentation given by the lecturer on Reflection and we were able to address any concerns and observe how reflections are written by looking at samples of reflection. The outcome of the experience was according to my expectations, we were taught about different theories and we received guidance for our reflection.

The second stage Feelings, discusses about before and after feelings on the experience. Before having the class on Reflection I did not have a clear picture about the scope of the reflection, the variety of theories and reflection models. After the class I understood better how to realise a reflective writing as I was very interested in the topic considering that it was part of our assignment.

The evaluation stage, asks me to reflect on the experience on what was good or bad, what was my contribution or my colleagues contribution to the experience. I consider it was a

good experience, it offered me qualitative knowledge on the topic, filling a white canvas in regards to my knowledge on the topic.

The analysis stage requires in depth thinking on the experience, reasoning on the sense of the experience. I did not expect the topic to be so complex with a variety of approaches. I acknowledge that I need further study on the Reflection as advised by the lecturer. Researching models of reflection was the first step to undertake in understanding better the experience and selecting Gibbs model of reflection was the output of my individual learning. The conclusion stage required me to reflect on the results of this experience, what learning I achieved, what skills I learned or developed, but also what else I could have done to better the experience. This learning experience was a revelation for me regarding the process of reflection and it created the base for my perception on the reflective writing. In order to be better prepared for a similar experience I should do prior research so I would be familiar with terms and that will make easier the process of learning.

The action plan stage: When learning about something completely new is more difficult than when you are aware of the main themes and know what is the discussion about. You can be in the situation where you struggle to understand the terms used rather than visualising the theoretical directions. If I had to repeat the experience I will make my own research before the class, which is always recommended before any activity. I consider that prior preparation is the key to a more successful learning process experience, especially when the concepts are entirely new. In order to develop the skills to write reflections such as this report I had to do further research on reflective models, to understand exactly each stage of the reflection. For future reflective writings I will make use of the knowledge obtained from this experience.

Analytical and Critical Thinking skills Topic

The topic of Analytical and critical thinking skills incorporated two types of skills: analytical thinking skills and critical thinking skills. Nowadays organisations are looking for skills like that and therefore this topic was very valuable for me and my employability skills. Analytical thinking is described as the individual ability to break down comprehensive information and assess it in smaller segments. Having analytical skills is identified with problem solving skills which are required in the working environment, but also in everyday life tasks. Improving this set of skills benefits the individual development, his thinking, his creativity and levels of communications in order to solve problems efficiently. Analytical skills can cover a variety of skills such as: creative thinking, data analysis, troubleshooting, diagnosing, budgeting. Improving this type of skills increases your chances to obtain a better job as it makes the

applicant more marketable, but also it increases your chances to obtain the promotion you wanted as it means you are performing for your organisation (Bourner, 2011).

Analytical thinking skills encourage developing critical thinking skills which is the second part of the selected topic. Critical thinking is realised when the individual evaluates and assess in an objective way and forms a reasoning. This skills are applied in the working environment, but also in everyday life tasks and situations. Many times we react impulsively instead of taking time to digest and critically assess the situations occurred in our lives or in any types of situations we are confronted with. Developing critical thinking skills involves discipline, observation, analysis, synthesis, reflection, conceptualisation. With reference to the student experience, the critical thinking is required in generating own ideas and reasoning after evaluating different sources of information. This way the student learns to develop his own independent thinking and not just easily embrace a single opinion without considering other views. This method of studying gives value to their thoughts and perspectives, as it involves questioning and active implication in researching and gaining more knowledge (Bjork, Dunlosky, Kornell, 2013).

The topic Analytical and Critical thinking skills was presented to the students during the class. The feeling stage for this experience assess my high interest and involvement in the topic as I wanted to understand well the learning resources presented and I wanted to focus on the activity for this topic. I consider this skills are an ongoing process and it can only improve with time if I apply critical thinking when formulating arguments and exceed my limitations through complex research and reading.

I consider that this topic should have had two distinctive sessions because of the complexity of the concepts and importance in achieving such skills, but I consider this experience was a positive learning experience.

I am determined to develop my analytical and critical thinking skills and try to apply it to the situations I encounter in order to to enlarge my horizons and perspectives. My role in this experience was more of an observer and I consider I should have adopted a more proactive position and engage in discussions with the lecturer and my colleagues. After acknowledging the theory provided in class and through Moodle regarding the topic, I consider that the overall experience was revelatory for me and my colleagues and empowered us to develop this skills.

This experience gave me a positive boost for the person I want to become, it increased my self-awareness. It is important not to take information first hand and be easily manipulated as I realised that knowledge is power and to ensure my future development I should incorporate this skills.

I will continue my studies and apply analytical and critical thinking in my assignments, during the activities in class to demonstrate myself that I am capable to make them part of my strengths as a student, as an employee and as an individual.

Time Management Topic

The last topic Time Management I left it at the end of my reflection as it is an important skill to have in employment, but with focus and organisation is not that hard to achieve it as the previous ones. Time management is defined as the process undertaken to plan and organise the time allocation and activity prioritisation. Time management skills enables the individual to work efficiently even in high pressure situations or environment avoiding task failure (Mabey, Salaman, Storey, 1999).

The learning experience on time management was realised in week 1 when we were introduced to the module and we discussed about ways of organising our study, but also in the process of identifying our skills.

I felt confident during the session as before this experience I was familiar with the topic, but after the experience I had a more clear picture of the tools that I can use to achieve time management skills.

This was a positive experience as it gave me the exact tools and methods to achieve this skills. I needed to organise my existing knowledge on time management theory and this learning session was very concise and informative. The SMART objectives and the time management process are methods that I will put in practice to organise my study during my course at the university.

I can definitely affirm that I will know how to manage my time to work more efficiently. I learned that there are different methods to help with time allocation and prioritisation of the activities and further that how helpful is to set SMART goals model, specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-related. This way of organisation will make me be more efficient and realise the tasks on time avoiding stress.

Before starting my assignments I sat down and went through a time management process, analysing the list of the assignments for this semester, the deadlines for submitting my assignments, I estimated how long will take me for individual study and for writing the assignments, setting priorities for the oral presentations we had to have as part of our

assessment. I allocated time to give my assignments to the lecturer to obtain feedback on my work. I will monitor my results to see if I met the deadline for assignments submission. In the process of prioritizing my activities I used the Eisenhower Decision Matrix which helped me distinguish important activities from unimportant activities , urgent from non-urgent and acted accordingly choosing to *Do* the activity now or *Delegate* it to someone else, *Decide* on a schedule or *Deleting* it.

Conclusion

The reflection was a way of applying analytical and critical thinking skills. Gibbs model of reflection was very useful for my personal development as thinking about each stage made me more likely to engage critically regarding the learning experience.

Analytical and critical thinking skills are vital skills for an individual to have in the working environment but also in everyday life. Forming opinions after researching more sources and comparing them, gives the individual a more complex thinking and helps him formulate own views.

Time Management are skills that I believe everyone should have as it would improve their work and life balance.

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