

Reflective Commentary

Introduction

The aim of this essay is to analyse and measure the efficacy of decisions made throughout a project management task. The task was to create a campaign that would last for 3 years, whether that be a product or service within the entertainment industry. Project management is a process that involves a lot of moving parts. This is considerably more pertinent when it is being organised by one individual. As a result, it is important for marketers and anyone working in the music industry, to have a toolkit which can be utilised for these purposes. This essay will be using many of these very useful tools, to reflect on the task.

Reflective Commentary Definitions

A reflective commentary is a way in which students and professionals can analyse and try to improve their work. Stockton University defines it as such, "The Reflective Summary is a written analysis of what was discovered during the assessment process. The Reflective Summary provides valuable feedback that can be used to adjust course content, delivery mode, teaching method, and overall quality of student learning, all of which contribute to the cycle of continuous improvement." (Ctld, 2021)

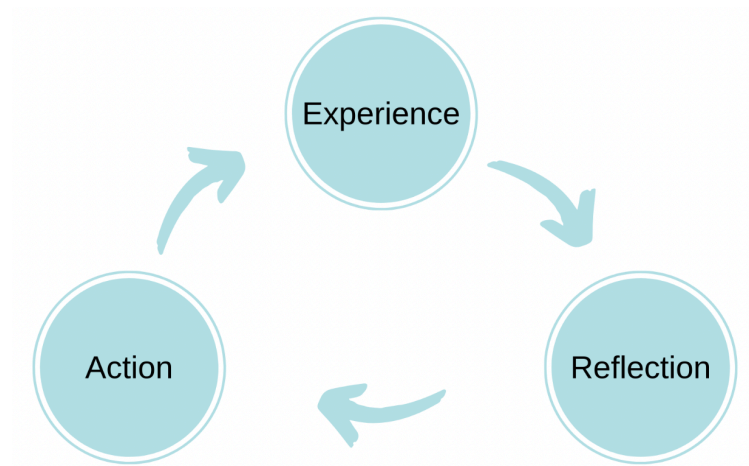
While it is important to use reflective tools once a milestone has been reached, in this case, the deadline for the reflective summary element of my final assignment, these are tools that should be used continuously throughout any process. Their effectiveness is compounded the more you use them as you are able to see where some issues in your productivity or conceptualising may lie. They are also very useful in terms of measuring how far you have come in the process, being able to look back to previous reflective summaries and comparing analysis at two different moments in the project.

I was used to using smaller-scale reflective tools such as the Deming Cycle. "The Deming cycle is a continuous quality improvement model which consists of a logical sequence of four key stages: Plan, Do, Study, and Act." (Process Street, 2017) This tool is excellent and is something that I have been using ever since learning it in my first term of the Master's course. However, I feel as if

the Deming Cycle is more inclined towards short-term analysis and therefore short-term adjustment in project management.

For larger scale analysis, I researched alternative reflective analysis tools and came across a variety of options:

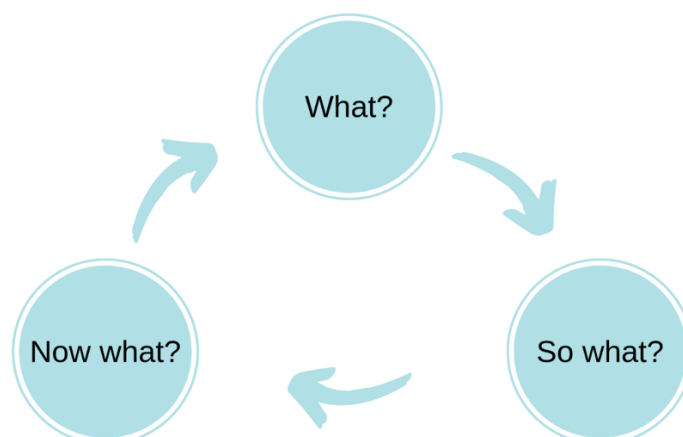
ERA Cycle



(University of Cambridge, 2021)

This model is a fairly simple one, which itself provides benefits and constraint. There are only three stages of reflection. Initially, we start the cycle with an experience, irrespective of whether or not this is a positive or negative one. Post-experience, we as the project manager must reflect upon it, reflect upon our emotions and feelings about it and put into action steps that either consolidate those feelings or steer away from them. That is the third and final stage.

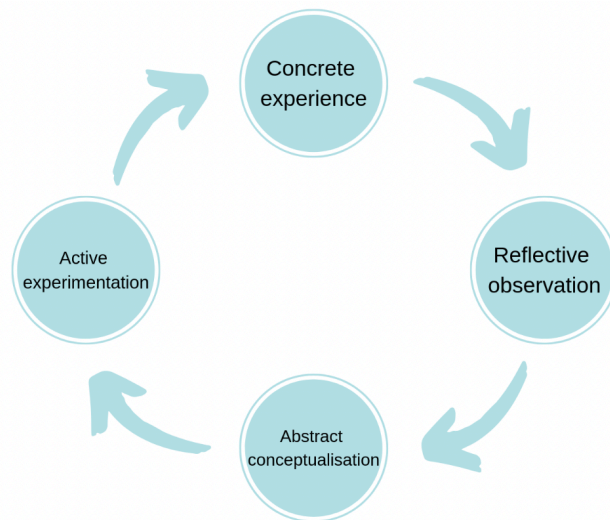
Driscoll's What Model



(University of Cambridge, 2021)

This is a very similar model to the ERA model but rephrases it using the question of “What?” In other words, what was the experience, what did the project manager learn through the experience, and what decisions will be made as a result of the experience. This model, like the ERA cycle is very simple which allows for ease of use, but does not give the user a deep reflective commentary.

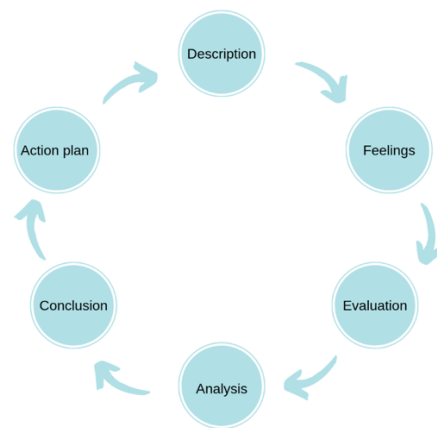
Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle



(University of Cambridge, 2021)

This model is a development of the first two models and adds an additional step. As before, we have the experience, the stage of reflection and the implementation. But in between the reflection and implementation or “active experimentation,” there is another stage. “Abstract conceptualisation” grants the project manager a whole stage and step to consider the action that will be taken as a result of the reflection before putting it into effect. This is beneficial in the sense that it puts emphasis on the consideration of how our feelings and reflections can have an impact on the project.

Gibb's Reflective Cycle



(University of Cambridge, 2021)

Gibb's cycle adds even more steps to Kolb's and is more complex with 6 stages. The project manager is asked to evaluate those feelings before analysing them, as well as a conclusion step before deciding on a route of action to take. This is beneficial as it implores the person using the tool to be constantly self-questioning and checking in on how they feel as if the project is going.

Benefits and Disadvantages of Reflective Tools

Reflective tools such as these cycles are incredibly useful for a variety of reasons. For instance, providing a framework and a structure in which to analyse how effective a project is being carried out or how well an individual is working to reach certain objectives. Furthermore, these frameworks can provide a starting place for the individual to ascertain where to begin with a project management task. Another benefit is that the reflective process is one that continues and doesn't ever end, these tools and frameworks provide stability and security within task management and give the user confidence within themselves.

However, there are some drawbacks to these tools. There is an implication that one must follow the steps in the order that they are drawn out in, when in fact, there may be scenarios where this is impossible. The process may start at the point of the "Feelings" stage as opposed to an experience, for instance. Furthermore, the likelihood of starting at the top of the cycle is not always the

case and there may not be a direct application for these tools in real life situations.

Reflective Summary

For this essay, I will be using Gibb's Reflective Cycle as it has the most stages incorporated into the tool. This seems to be the best fit for my methodology of working and thinking when it comes to project management.

Description

At this point in the cycle, it is important to define what has happened during the project as well as what the project is.

The final assignment for this Master's course was to conceptualise a 3-year campaign that incorporated all of the marketing tools and techniques learnt throughout the year. The task also provided us with an opportunity to put into practice a lot of the industry related skills we have gained through the Master's course too. The campaign I selected was something that I had been considering doing for a long time, but the confidence in my music marketing abilities stemming from my time at Tileyard Education is what made me believe achieving the campaign would be possible and successful.

The campaign and project is a record label called Stern Records that releases underground dance music, primarily Jungle, Rave, Breakbeat and Speed Garage. However, I want the label to become a hub for underground music lovers and fans. Therefore, there are additional offshoots to the company, including a magazine, an events programme and by the end of Year 3, a marketing agency that caters to independent artists and other labels to assist them in their marketing endeavours.

We can see a rise and a renaissance of dance music in popular culture at the moment. This is visible with dance records like B.O.T.A by Eliza Rose reaching the top position of the UK Charts, beating Britney Spears and Elton John there, as well as Gucci using a Dance music anthem in Out of Space by The Prodigy in their latest advertising campaign. It appears there is a hunger for quality Dance music, especially after consumers have had to endure lockdowns and social distancing during the Covid-19 era.

Some of the key decisions made when first conceptualising the product were the release of records on vinyl, the branding and iconography as well as the development of a website which can cater to e-commerce marketing techniques I have learnt at a previous employment and through my own personal studies. In particular the study of neuromarketing and using psychology to sell products to consumers.

Feelings

This stage of the cycle is where feelings about the experience or project are discussed. The process of listing and recounting one's feelings during the process is important to understand how one is affected by the project.

Initially, I was very optimistic about the potential success of this project. It is something that I had been considering for a long time and had even attempted to some capacity in the past with a now-defunct record label. There were some trepidations when it came to the new record label as a result of the unsuccessful attempt previously. However, I felt that in my last attempt, my musical scope was far too niche, focusing on one particular genre as opposed to a variety of underground dance music genres like in this project.

There were a lot of external indicators that the market was susceptible and open to new underground dance music as mentioned in the *Description* section above. This made me feel incredibly encouraged and happy to continue with the project. However, there were some cautionary thoughts given the fact that the market could well be overpopulated with other labels and companies in a similar field as well as the industry being so sensitive to an imminent economic crisis and insecurity stemming from Covid-19.

My feelings towards the use of vinyl as a medium for releasing music on the label also suffered from some level of caution due to the issues faced in my previous attempt at running a label. However, when it came to the branding of the label I felt as if my understanding of what a consumer would appreciate would be incredibly useful as the project progressed. An understanding of e-commerce marketing meant I felt particularly optimistic about turning this business into a profitable one.

As the project continued, there were some elements of the process which made me feel somewhat lacking. Particularly in regard to the execution of logo

creation and website building. While I understood exactly how I wanted both to look, learning the processes of transferring a scruffily drawn logo or homepage on a piece of paper to the high quality imagery that I wanted in order to pay respect to the process and to the label was something that was completely new to me.

Upon hand-in day for the assignment, I feel accomplished in my attempt to create a brand from scratch as well as create a base structure for how this company and record label will operate in the coming years. The forethought to create marketing assets and tools such as events and a magazine, covering live music and press, will be invaluable to the ultimate goal of creating a successful marketing agency by the end of Year 3.

Evaluation

The evaluation aspect of the Gibb's cycle allows the user to look at the experience and the feelings attributed to it and conclude what went well and what did not go as well as intended.

At the start of the project, I felt as if the planning and organising of key tasks went very well. Ideas flowed freely as the excitement to undertake the task took over. This however led to some difficulty. In the sense that I would rush over ideas and not necessarily think them through to the very end. This occurred at the beginning of the planning process, but I quickly recognised the issue and began using the "Deming Cycle" to analyse where I was going wrong and to keep everything in check.

I found that my ability to come up with imagery and branding aesthetic to be particularly useful. The research that I conducted into leaflets and membership cards from raves and parties during the 80s and 90s helped this element to the marketing. The merchandise also benefitted from research, with a decision being made to replicate a lot of the fashion and stylistic qualities of clothes worn at parties years ago. While this worked on a level of maintaining brand image, it was also in keeping with current fashion trends, with big oversized and baggy garments being popular currently. (Kaupke, 2022)

Another element to the process I found went particularly well was the search for potential brand partnerships. I wanted to partner with brands that had a direct correlation to the industry and the demographics Stern Records

attracted. Sourcing these brands was difficult at first, as it was a process of first imagining a company, and then seeing if it existed.

What was a more helpful method of finding potential partners, was simply to exist within the market. Consuming the music I wanted to release put me in front of the brands that would work best. For example, POM app, a dating app designed to connect people who have a shared love of music. Another example is Happy Tuesdays, a company that sells supplements to aid the recovery process after a big night out. These companies came to me via targeted advertisements on social media. It shows that to really have an understanding of a sector of the music industry, it is imperative to immerse yourself in it.

Analysis

This section is where reasoning comes into play. A project manager must decide here why decisions were effective or not.

The main reasons for the success and failures that accompanied this project and campaign concept primarily came down to one reason. Emotional attachment to the project was a deciding factor in whether or not correct decisions were made. As has been mentioned throughout this essay so far, I am a consumer of this kind of music, and I have also had an attempt at creating something similar in the past. The emotional jeopardy that is then involved as a result of that can be both helpful and detrimental.

Another reason why the project turned out the way it did was due to forcing myself to ask people questions, especially around specific topics such as web building and graphic design. Finding the right person to talk to was sometimes easy and sometimes difficult. For example, I have a big network of people I know who are very well versed in web development and app development. This proved very useful and assisted me in my understanding of how to create a website from scratch. However, when it came to the logo creation, I had to services such as fiverr.com to enlist the help of professionals to bring my ideas to realisation.

Another reason why the project was a success was by constantly referring to the criteria for the assignments as well as consistently re-evaluated my proposal essay. Having these to hand was paramount to the constant decision making and self evaluation.

Conclusions

This stage is where conclusions are made. In other words, a summary of what has been learnt throughout the process.

I learnt a lot through this project, both about myself and also about the actions required in order to carry out a project of this scale. This learning provided me with a greater level of confidence and is comparable to the confidence I have felt as a result of the education I have received at Tileyard Education.

I have learnt that I am able to brainstorm quickly when I have a framework around me that enables it. I have also learnt that I am able to budget adequately, these are two skills that I would have not assumed I had prior to this project.

There are some areas where I feel I could learn more though. For instance, within the playlisting and release promotion field. It is very difficult to begin the process of understanding that aspect of the industry when you do not have the tracks ready to be sent out to the key figures who curate playlists.

Action Plans

This section is where one discusses what would be done differently if the project was to be completed again. It also refers to what skills should be developed for future projects.

The skills I would like to develop as a result of completing this project are more focused towards “soft skills.” For instance, I would like to be able to feel more comfortable talking to people and asking for their help in regard to situations where their opinions could be beneficial to me. I believe this is a result of a fairly traumatic experience in previous work environments where I was not made to feel comfortable in asking questions or asking for help.

When a superior is dismissive and can be aggressive in a work environment after deeming questions to be irrelevant and a waste of time, it can taint your perception of how others will react when you ask for advice. This is something that I will have to work on constantly in order to get rid of any concerns about appearing stupid or underqualified for a role.

Personal Development Plan

After using Gibb's Reflective Cycle effectively, it is now important to do some more self-analysis and create a personal development plan that can be used in the future.

"Personal development planning or PDP is a structured framework you can use to:

- become aware of skills you have
- identify and develop skills you need
- work out what you want to achieve and how to achieve it
- focus on potential study, career and personal development options and goals
- develop a source of information for CVs, job applications, interviews and appraisals at work
- demonstrate your readiness for promotion or for development opportunities."

(The Open University, 2021)

This shows just how useful a PDP can be in a variety of situations and as a professional, I should be able to reach for a plan that highlights exactly where I want to take my career and objectives at a moments notice.

SWOT Analysis

One of the greatest ways to conduct a personal development plan is to use SWOT analysis on yourself and work out where you excel, and where you may be lacking in ability. Both of these are then compared to external forces such as opportunities for you to thrive, and threats to your success.

It is defined as Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

Strengths:

- Deep and extensive understanding of the market (participant in the industry myself.)
- The ability to create a succinct and tangible branding image for the record label.
- Vast network of DJs, artists and photographers who are able to assist with the project.
- Have experience with running a record label as well as running events.

Weaknesses:

- Initially, the project is incredibly big and it is just me working on it.
- There are multiple sections of the business that will all require budgeting and high levels of expenditure, record manufacturing, event management, magazine printing.
- Previous experience running a record label did not end well, events that I used to put on were a long time ago as well.

Opportunities

- There is a real hunger for live music and music related events post-covid.
- All facets of the business build to create a marketing machine that can assist other labels and independent artists to get their music heard.
- The project provides multiple revenue streams, from merch to ticket sales, vinyl records and digital sales.
- This project should hopefully build a community that is incredibly engaged and loyal.

Threats

- Many competitors in the field.
- High start-up costs for the record label, events and print magazine.
- Economic crisis and Covid are causes for insecurity within the industry.

SMART Goals

SMART goals can also be used as an excellent self-analysis tool in order to reflect upon what the primary objectives of each element to the business will be. I will conduct SMART Goals review for each of the elements to the business. SMART goals are defined as follows:

S – Strategic or Specific

M – Measurable

A – Achievable

R – Relevant

T – Time-bound

(O’neill, Conzemius and Commodore, 2006)

Record Label:

Specific: Release 12 Vinyl records and digital downloads.

Measurable: 12 releases, one every quarter over the course of the 3 year campaign.

Achievable: Based on production time for vinyl and campaign cycle per release, this is highly achievable and likely.

Relevant: Releases are fundamental to the operations of any label, vinyl is synonymous with dance music therefore very relevant in this instance.

Time-Bound: Goal is set across 3-year campaign, however, if Stern Records is able to release more, that is even better, budget permitting.

Events:

Specific: Launch event series towards end of Y1. These will consist of club nights, community talks as well as photography exhibitions.

Measurable: Club nights will coincide with releases, four times a year (quarterly). Additional events such as panel discussions and exhibitions will occur twice a year from Y2 onwards.

Achievable: The initial costs will be high but providing a good turnout and incorporation of merch at the events, will be profitable and help fund future events.

Relevant: Clubbing is part of the very fabric of Dance music, therefore it is very important to incorporate it into the business plan. Additional events such as community talks help build a sense of a tribe and following, increasing emotional connection with the brand.

Time-Bound: By starting the events at the end of Y1, the record label will be able to build a big enough following to ensure that the first event is a success.

Magazine:

Specific: Create a print and online magazine that highlights emerging talent in the Dance music scene as well as reviews of events, interviews, journalistic pieces on the history of club culture and much more.

Measurable: Posts on the blog/online magazine will be bimonthly in Y1. When the print magazine is created, this will be released twice a year initially, moving to a greater frequency eventually.

Achievable: Y1 work will be done by myself, and by Y2, contributing writers will be required to ensure pieces are written regularly and professionally.

Relevant: I want every aspect of the business to become almost a mecca for the fans of this music, therefore providing as much content for those fans to consume is vital.

Time-Bound: Y2 will be the start of the print magazine but blog posts will occur from Y1.

Marketing Agency:

Specific: Launch a marketing agency which will be focused on assisting other labels and emerging artists in the Dance music scene to share their music with as many fans as possible.

Measurable: The launch will take place as long as all other business endeavours have been completed and are successful long-term.

Achievable: Successful endeavours with all other elements of the business will ensure that the agency is a success. This is as a result of being involved in and learning about how to operate in the marketing field of this section of the industry.

Relevant: I believe there isn't enough importance put on marketing underground music, therefore creating an agency will assist artists and labels who do not understand marketing techniques and tools.

Time-Bound: This will occur at the end of Y3, once all other elements to the business are successful. This will be because I want to ensure I have the knowledge to execute the agency side effectively. Also, the events and magazine elements will provide marketing assets to use for future clients in the agency.

6 Working Geniuses

The final self-reflection tool I want to discuss and analyse is the concept of the 6 geniuses. This tool is useful as it can tell you exactly what part of the project management cycle you are good at, but also where you are lacking. It is defined as follows:

“6 Types of Working Genius

Each genius type and the corresponding natural gift it's likely you possess.

1. **Wonder** - you see potential.
2. **Invention** - you see ideas.
3. **Discernment** - you assess ideas.
4. **Galvanizing** - you rally others to act on ideas.
5. **Enablement** - you help to bring ideas to life.
6. **Tenacity** - you push ideas to completion.”

(www.thegrowthfaculty.com, n.d.)

We are given two to three geniuses at birth, abilities which come naturally to us. The other working genius types can either be working competencies or working frustrations of ours where we are adequate at them, or they are completely alien to us.

On self-reflection, I can see that I have the genius of Invention, Discernment and Enablement. My working competencies are in Wonder and Galvanizing, leaving my shortcomings and frustrations in Tenacity.

After using this tool, I can therefore see that I have to work on my ability to push ideas to completion, that is where I am lacking in a speciality. Once I turn that working genius into a competency, I will be able to specialise in Invention, Discernment and Enablement as well as be able to work well within the other genius types.

Conclusion

As mentioned at the start of the essay, the objective has been to reflect and analyse the decisions made throughout the project, in order to understand how I can use these skills to the best of my ability in the future. There are a multitude of project management tools that can be effective in accomplishing this analysis, with only some of them being listed in this essay. It is important to use them all and find the one that is best suited to the individual.

The ultimate objective of these tools is to provide confidence in the individual tasked with completing the project, as well as an understanding of the intricacies of the project they are working on.

When I commenced my Master's course in Music Marketing at the start of the year, I would not have assumed that project management would take such an important role throughout the syllabus. It has also taken a large proportion of the assignments, with it featured in all three modules' assignments. However, after learning about these tools over the course of the last 10 months, I can see how invaluable they are not only for someone working within the music marketing field but also for anyone working in every single professional capacity. The skills are transferrable from one industry to another, and for that, I am incredibly thankful that they have been a part of the syllabus. I can honestly say that I will be using them throughout many different aspects of my life for as long as possible.

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