

**Changemakers:
Building your Personal Brand for Sustainable Employment**

**Assignment 2
Reflective Account**

Introduction

As a mature student with experience in a variety of roles and employments, I was fairly confident in both my personal qualities and in what employability skills I had to offer. I considered myself to be a well-rounded, adaptable individual with enough life experience to prove an asset to any prospective employer. Prior to beginning this module, I failed to appreciate the relevance it had to my degree, but nevertheless, took an openminded approach; and as it happens, I came to realise that building your personal brand for sustainable employment has far more relevance and is of far more importance than I first thought.

Using Gibbs cycle of reflective practice (Hargreaves and Page, 2013), I will take this opportunity to critically reflect on the process of developing my individual employability skills and my professional identity, with the main focus being to objectively enhance my knowledge of myself, to pinpoint areas of weakness, and to develop a profound action plan that will enable me to achieve success.

Description and Thoughts about the Experience

Although, admittedly, I initially had reservations regarding this module, I appreciate the importance of developing a professional identity and practically enhancing your skillset in order to be seen as a valuable candidate for employment in an oversaturated, post graduate job market. This module gave me the opportunity to embark on a journey which worked towards improving every aspect of my professional portfolio, and for that I am very grateful.

Introducing the concept of employability theoretically, this module gave me the opportunity to openly discuss alternative aspects such as theoretical and external influences, enabling me to develop a deeper understanding of what is considered to be essential to my overall employability level as an individual, and to the probability of attaining career success in my chosen field. Considering different perspectives and their contribution to the attainment of individuals led to critically evaluating Bourdieu's theory of capital and the influence of social capital on determining the chances of success (Granovetter, 2018). This critical evaluation has enabled me to develop a deeper understanding of the inequity that is present in today's society and has confirmed what I thought I already knew; that more often than not, although ambition, drive, and resilience are important characteristics to enhance the probability of succeeding, your opportunities for success are heavily influenced by your social class and your professional relationships. I now appreciate that having a higher social capital denotes an unfair advantage in gaining better opportunities and better access to a higher level of resources (Field, 2005), which in turn will provide better opportunities to acquire new skills. Discussing this theoretical viewpoint in depth gave me the opportunity to evaluate my own personal situation and encouraged me to consider why I have chosen to follow a career path in education psychology, and what it means to me. Reflecting on the unfair disadvantage many children face due to social factors out of their control, such as family situations, finances, and parental commitments to name but a few, has inspired me to want to develop my skillset to enable me to provide support

to individuals in such situations and to ultimately achieve my main objective of having a positive impact on the lives of others.

In order to develop my skillset in this way, I was encouraged to feel vulnerable, to open myself up to my peers in group discussions and to evaluate my own individual qualities with a degree of honesty and integrity. In order to develop our interpersonal awareness, we were instructed to use the Johari Window as an educational tool to reflect on our strengths and weaknesses; a tool which when utilised efficiently can provide a framework for developing effective reflective practice (Halpern, 2009). This exercise required a vulnerable honesty to pinpoint the elements of our personalities which are usually a hidden façade. I found that sharing these hidden qualities with my peers had a therapeutic element to it, as I began to realise that everyone has traits and qualities that they tend not to advocate, but if harnessed correctly, could prove to be immensely beneficial to their personal brand as they are the qualities that make them who they are.

Further independent research on the topic of developing my skillset led me to establish the importance of developing soft skills, in particular communication and teamwork. I found that, according to Development Economics, nurturing and effectively utilising soft skillsets will achieve positive outcomes for individuals, including employment opportunities, career progression, and the development of confidence and satisfaction as an employee (Development of Economics Ltd, 2015). Within my current role of senior manager in hospitality, I feel I have developed a profound set of soft skills which benefit me when working with and managing my team; qualities and techniques which when adapted, I believe will help me achieve my long-term goal of employment within the field of education psychology.

However, as well as identifying my employability skill strengths through this module, I have also taken the time to reflect on areas of weakness, of which I will need to work on to improve my portfolio for sustainable employment. One of which is time management. While I always manage to accomplish my tasks on time, I often find it challenging to balance my current work responsibilities alongside my study commitments, which often results in working against the clock to beat the deadline. This module has taught me that by organising myself and planning my days efficiently, I will be able to improve my time management skills and yearn results from my studies that will enable me to give any future employer an 'excellent demonstration of my time management, organisational and self-management skills' (Trought, 2017, pp.6). By focusing on improving both my strengths, and identified weaknesses, I believe I will be able to construct my ideal personal brand.

Throughout the process of developing my employability skills, I also feel as though I have developed a focus with regards to my direction post-graduation. Having now established my intent to apply for a master's degree in Psychology in Education, I relished in the opportunity to use assignment one to my advantage by choosing to write a personal statement. I believed this would give me the perfect opportunity to receive constructive criticism on my application, a method which when used effectively can increase motivation, increase competence, and promote personal development (Duffy, 2013). Upon receiving this feedback, I hope to be able to improve my personal statement to give myself the best possible chance of accreditation to the course.

Overall, despite my initial reservations towards this module, my learning experience has been that of a positive one and while I believed I already had a personal brand for sustainable employment, I must continue to recognise that there is always room for improvement.

Analysis and Evaluation

I will use this section of my reflective practice to closely analyse the content of the module and my individual development throughout the process of completing it; evaluating the challenges

and triumphs which I personally faced, with the intent to improve my personal portfolio and develop my employability skills further.

Firstly, the biggest challenge of this module for me was the lengthy, tedious independent learning section. My relationship with online learning throughout this degree has been relatively good and I have mostly enjoyed the challenge. However, I found the e-learning section of this module to be completely demotivating and personally would have much preferred physical lecture time and opportunities for interaction through social learning with my peers. While the e-learning was no doubt intended to be a successful method of collaborative network teaching, based on effective reciprocity (Loewen, 2014), as well as a useful resource to support learning, I found that it had the opposite effect. In fact, the limited lecture time we did have, along with the guest speakers, was far more impactful and beneficial to my experience of this module. This module has placed emphasis on the importance of collaboration, and communication and I feel that the e-learning has not reflected that.

Unfortunately, the lack of inspiration I felt when faced with the e-learning has resulted in me not engaging fully with this module. While I actively participated in the live lectures and discussions, I feel that my lack of engagement with the independent learning has had a detrimental impact on my confidence in completing this module to a high standard. As a determined individual, I always strive to achieve to the best of my abilities and feel that doing so this time has proved challenging. In addition to this, having had an initial negative reaction to the e-learning requirements of this module, I found my motivation for completing this reflective piece had dramatically decreased in comparison to previous assignments and modules. In order to avoid this in future, I intend to maintain a positive outlook and an open mind, qualities which will also benefit me in my chosen career path.

On the other hand, however, one of the most interesting and enjoyable parts of this module has been the challenge of writing a Zander letter to myself. The Zander letter was a completely new concept for me but one which, once I had grasped a basic understanding of, I thoroughly enjoyed writing. Although this module brought with it plenty of challenges to overcome, I have found the process of reflecting on my life experiences and the art of manifesting my future through writing a Zander letter and creating a hypothetical C.V. in application for work experience as a post-graduate student to be quite therapeutic and intrinsically motivating. Thinking of all I have achieved thus far and setting achievable goals for the future has had a positive impact on my determination to develop both personally and professionally.

Conclusion

Critically reflecting on my personal development throughout this module has given me the opportunity to pinpoint areas which need to be worked on and improved, as well as areas which are relatively strong. This module has taught me to identify potential barriers to my personal learning experience and to address them in a critically evaluative and reflective manner, at the earliest opportunity. Furthermore, accepting that barriers faced are simply challenges to overcome will allow me to develop the confidence to overcome any self-doubt and to continue to work towards building a portfolio of characteristics that lend themselves to creating an indestructible personal brand fit for sustainable employment.

Action Plan

In order to successfully achieve continuous skill development to help myself gain employment in my desired career; it is important to develop a forward-thinking action plan to help maintain my focus. In this instance, there are two main points which I feel are critical to my personal development, both of which are realistic, attainable goals:

1. Approach modules with enthusiasm and anticipation

Approaching future modules with an open mind will encourage me to maintain a focus and have an open mind as to the potential learning opportunities which I will likely discover. Reflecting regularly on what I have achieved and what I need to do to improve will help me to overcome any barriers in which I am facing.

2. Gain Work Experience

In order to adapt my skills, I must step outside of my comfort zone and commit to gaining work experience in my chosen field. Being a student who is balancing a full-time job in a field unrelated to the topic of my degree, I can often suffer from imposter syndrome. To overcome this, I will set myself targets to achieve work experience in different educational settings, either voluntarily or otherwise.

Reference List

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