

Professional Career Development

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Introduction

I started my career at the age of 26 as an educational consultant. Ever since, I stayed in the industry and cannot think of any other job that suits my career needs so seamlessly. Currently, I work at an educational consulting firm called London Education LTD, based out of the capital city of the United Kingdom.

In 2020/21, there were about 2.66 million students at UK academic institutions (Paul Bolon, 2022), who are studying at 164 registered universities in the United Kingdom (Clark, 2022). With so many options, the decision to pursue studies is not an easy one. Academic literature (Antonoff, 1989) points out that the decision to study at a college or a university is one of the most critical decisions in one's life. For undergrad students, in particular, the moment of truth comes at a time when they are rather inexperienced to undertake such a major commitment. They are often in need of guidance to choose the best course of action and this is where my role as an educational consultant comes in. We counsel the students to understand their aspirations and motivations and match the best course and university that suits their needs. In fact, we mentor them throughout their application journey and help them get enrolled in the programs that they wish to pursue.

I am one of the lucky few who is happy with their profession. My joy doesn't come from monetary gains, but from being able to help other people achieve their dreams and ambitions.

Career Skills

Prospects (2020) claims that to become a good career consultant, one needs to be passionate about education, have good planning and organizing skills, be able to meet tight deadlines & communicate ideas clearly, and possess exceptional interpersonal & problem-solving skills. From my experience, I believe, they have provided a good summary of the required skills to succeed in the job. However, for the purpose of this reflection, I will evaluate the requirement of a few broad career skills through the lens of the Kolb's (1984) learning cycle. A simple visualization of my reflective cycle is provided in the diagram below:

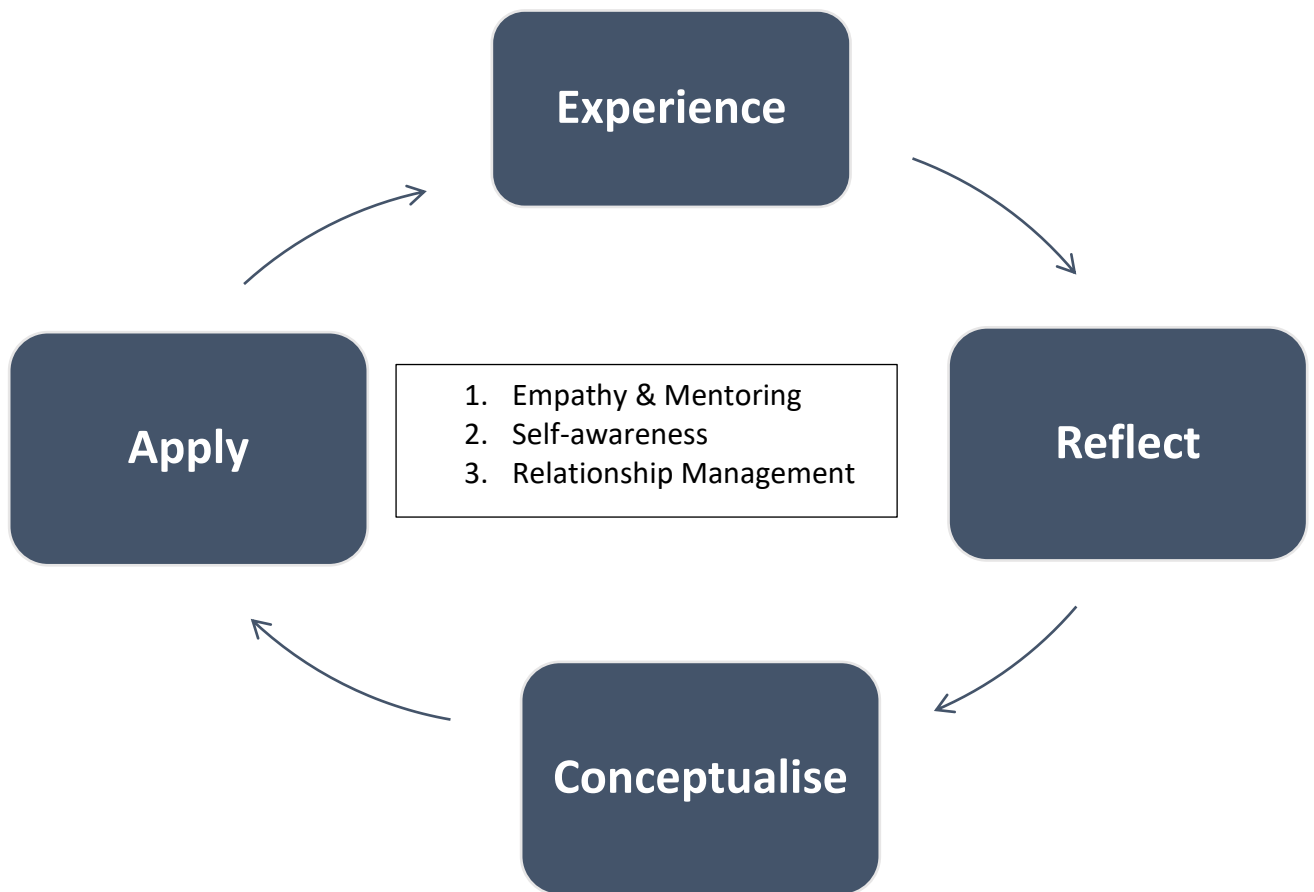


Figure: My plan to use Kolb's (1984) learning cycle for reflection

1. Empathy & Mentoring

Few months ago, an 18-year-old came to visit me seeking guidance. Sam Jones just passed his A-levels in flying colors but has no idea what he wants to study. I felt really bad as I was once in a similar situation as none of my family were able to help me choose my undergrad course. Putting myself in my client's shoes early on helped me understand his perspective. However, uncovering his underlying aspirations and motivations was not a light-hearted task. Ragins (1995) proposed that a way to increase empathy and mentoring skills is to expose oneself to situations and challenges face by individuals from diversified backgrounds. His research was later on re-established by Young et al. (2017). As I counsel more and more students with sufficient depth, I will naturally become more empathetic and develop my mentoring skills. However, I have the opportunity to expose myself to diverse background stories through investigating the 32 colleagues working at my company.

2. Self-awareness

As an educational consultant, I often have to put in more hours than I signed up for as student issues and problems do not follow my work schedule. When the going gets tough, knowing your core motivations and career aspirations help immensely. Alferaih (2022) found a strong correlation between self-awareness and job performance. A different study (Kim & Wee, 2020) found that self-awareness leads to higher job satisfaction. To this effect, I intend to self-reflect through pursuing the potent Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator (Mccauley & Martin, 1995).

3. Relationship management

From my first contact with the student to enrollment, it takes on an average two months. However, I need to maintain relationship with the students past that period. Thus, relationship management is undoubtedly one of the most crucial skills for an educational consultant. Based on the relationship-management assessment tool proffered by Lindgreen et al. (2005), I score quite high in this skill. I reckon there must be room for improvement, but it should not be a major issue for my career.

Identifying my skill gap

Based on the previous assessment, I believe I need to work on further developing my empathy, mentoring, and self-awareness skills. The relationship management skill is not something that I need to worry about right now.

Before I can solve someone else's problems, I need to have the feeling of self-content. Job satisfaction is a necessary component for that. Research indicates (Flaum, n.d.) that more self-aware individuals understand others better, enabling them to lead more effectively. Another large-scale research (Boult, Thompson, & Schaubhut, 2019) found that self-aware people had higher levels of job satisfaction. Consequently, better job satisfaction leads to better performance.

Mentoring paves a path to knowledge transfer. Educational consultants have to mentor students to equip them with the skills necessary to get into their chosen academic field. It helps the mentees to gain support and knowledge in an impactful way (Burry, n.d.) One study (Klein &

Cappelli, 2007) found that better mentoring skills lead to increase in salary and promotions, while another study (Allen et al., 2004) found that it increases job satisfaction.

Bower (2021) claimed that empathy is the most important leadership skill. But for educational consultants, it is an even more important. To provide useful recommendation, they must first understand what is being asked of them. When consultants empathize with clients, they discover the 'why' behind the project. A study by Shanahan (2018) found that 87% of the CEOs concur that empathy boots financial performance, although 90% of the same respondents feel that empathy is undervalued.

Overall, gaining all of these skills are important. However, acquiring these skills will require a systematic approach, one which starts with prioritizing.

Taking a systematic approach to skills acquisition

To prioritize the required skills, I have used the Eisenhower Matrix (Swiftson, 2021). It is a prioritization framework to prioritize a list of tasks or agenda. Below is the outcome of the exercise:

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	Do <i>Do it now</i> • Self-awareness • Empathy	Decide <i>Schedule a time to do it</i> • Mentoring
Unimportant	Delegate <i>Who can do it for you</i>	Delete <i>Eliminate it</i> • Relationship Management



Figure 3: Prioritization of skills using Eisenhower Matrix

As evident from above, my first priority is developing self-awareness. A Harvard Business Review article (Tjan, 2015) laid out ways to increase self-awareness. The first of which is meditation to improve awareness by the moment. It is more constructive to ask inquisitive questions while meditating to enquire about one's core motivations and aspirations. The second is to note down the plans and priorities through practicing journaling. I intend to journal my plans & priorities and track its change over time for reflection. The article also highlights the important of taking psychometric tests to discover oneself. Lastly, it is always beneficial to get feedback from others, particularly friends when trying to improve self-awareness.

Empathy is my second priority. Sutton (2020) suggests that curiosity is an important element of empathy. For my situation, I intend to grow curiosity to know the background story of my colleagues and walking in their shoes. I also intend to read about the psychological basis of empathy and how to attain it.

Mentoring skill is not an urgent skill, although it is important for my career. The core skills to be a successful mentor (ScottishMentoringNetwork, n.d.) are listening with a goal to comprehend, questioning for clarity & assessing alternatives, and robust planning. The best way for me to develop mentoring skill is to practice it mindfully, which I intend to do over the next 6 months.

Recruitment and Selection

This section explains the role play exercise we had to do in the class, pairing up with one of my classmates. We took turns to play the role of an interviewer and interviewee. In the planning stage, we concurred that our role play should revolve around our existing job roles. To put it into perspective, my classmate is a Oracle Database Administrator and I am a marketing professional. We gave ourselves 5 minutes before playing our respective roles.

I assumed the role of the interviewer first. To understand the communication skill and self-perception of the candidate, I started off with the classic interview question to introduce himself.

The interviewee responded impressively and showed great knowledge and interest about the job. He had bonus points as he was neatly dressed, maintained eye contact, and emanated confidence. I followed up with 3 additional job-specific questions to understand his comfortability and capacity to deal with Oracle database. I also asked what he would do for us; the interviewee fumbled in this question, but impressed me with his other responses.

Next, I played the role of an interviewee. Having put myself in the shoes of an interviewer, I knew the importance of wearing a smile and emanating confidence. Interestingly, my partner started off with self-introduction to build rapport. It made me feel more comfortable. Although our first question about self-introduction was the same, none of the other questions matched. Two of the most challenging questions that I had to answer were why the company should hire me and what difference I think I will make to their business in this role. I lost my calm during these questions, but quickly rebounded by asking three seconds to gather my thoughts. I took this time to take a deep breath and think through my answer. It helped me massively as I reassured myself that how you answer is much more important than the content of your answer. So, I mustered my courage and responded with bold and ambitious goals I set for myself. I think showing that you are bold and ambitious is important in any marketing role. The interviewer smiled at my response, which is a good sign that he will remember me. Anyway, my interview ended with the question, how long I would be with the company. I responded with a smile this time saying that I will probably staying with the company and will gain more experience.

At the end of our role play, the lecturer gave us positive feedback. But he remarked that interviews can get quite messy at times and thus we should spend a lot of time to be extremely comfortable with it.

Conclusion

Career is a marathon rather than a sprint. I need to think about my career as such. If I am to stay in the educational consultancy business over a long period of time, it is important that I focus on developing the skills required for progressing through the ranks.

Based on my self-reflection, I believe that the high priority skills that I need to acquire are self-awareness and empathy. Both of them, along with mentoring, results in increased job satisfaction. Gaining mentoring skills is a slow process that rewards with increased salary and promotion. So, I intend to pursue it over long term, while focusing on getting smaller gains

through furthering self-awareness and empathy. Like all changes, the undertaking will not be easy. But, as I love my job so much, I hope all these efforts will be worth it in the end.

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Job application form

Application for [Marketing Consultant]

Your details

Name: Habiba Khanam

Mobile: 07557868588

Email: hkhanam2014@hotmail.com

Education and training

Please give details:

Qualifications

Please give details:

Employment history

Your current or most recent employer

Name of employer: LONDON EDUCATION LTD

Job title: Marketing Executive

Length of time with employer: 4years

Reason for leaving: Not Left yet.

Duties:

My main responsibility to Counsel the students to understand their aspirations and motivations and match the best course and university that suits their needs. And also mentor them throughout their application journey and help them get enrolled in the programs that they wish to pursue.

Previous employers

Please tell us about other jobs you have done and about the skills you used or learned in those jobs.

Supporting statement

Please tell us why you applied for this job and why you think you are the best person for the job.

In the world there are three types of people one who live and love to live in dream other that face reality but I would love to find myself in third category where I would love to turn dream into reality. I always look for the opportunity where I can transform my academic skills to result based operations.

I have worked in multiple businesses in many different positions which thought me a lot about all facets of business as such Sales and marketing, HR, finance and accounting.

I obtained rigorous work experience in most important fields in business such as accounting, HR, marketing and management. I believe I have got the right attitude and enthusiasm to be the right candidate you are looking for. I highly consider I am confident, enthusiastic, and sincere enough to reach towards target I will be given and my dream successfully if I am given a chance.

Right to work in the UK

Do you need a work permit to work in the UK? Yes / No

References

Please give the names and contact details of 2 people who we can ask to give you a reference. We may ask them before an employment offer is made. We will not ask your current employer until we get your permission.

Declaration

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge the information I have provided on this form is correct and I accept that providing deliberately false information could result in my dismissal.

Name: Habiba Khanam

|

Signature: Habiba khanam

Date: 03-09-2022
