## **Self Evaluation Upon Learning**

This paper describes a process of self-evaluation, reflection upon learning, and planning for future developments. As well as considering the learning points which have been successfully internalized over the course of the semester, it will incorporate reflection on strengths and weaknesses, and begin to outline future communication with putative employers. In addition to presenting some analysis of the formal and academic aspects of the experience, it will discuss the interpersonal aspects of learning, and the development of those capacities which may have professional and vocational applications. As Stenhouse points out, ‘A curriculum is an attempt to communicate the essential principles and features of an educational proposal in such a form that it is open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice.' (1), However, negotiating the formal structures and requirements of the curriculum is only one aspect of the learning process. A perceptible process of transformation has begun in education, away from a lecture based didactic approach and towards adaptable, flexible modes of learning and teaching. Accordingly, this record of reflective learning will discuss the use of oral, listening and communication skills, considering self-management in group situations. In conclusion, it will present a flexible plan for the future, outlining the skills which need to be developed and providing some indicative targets and points for action. This piece presents my own reflections, and where appropriate, makes reference to appropriate research and analysis by published authorities.

From a purely personal perspective, undertaking the module involved a reconsideration of my own identity and purpose, and the sorting through of the multiple dimensions and preoccupations of my life. As Hall points out, ‘…no one has one identity; and indeed those identities may be in tension (one example would be the ways in which “mother” and “worker” are often understood as existing in tension.' (2) Consequently, it was important to reconfigure ones self-identity and direction in the light of new knowledge and perspectives. In this respect, it is important to be aware that personality and self-image are often key determinants in setting personal objectives, defining outcomes, and constructing the parameters within which any one of us can grow and interact with their environment. As Elliot puts it, ‘We often think of the self as primarily a private domain, an inner realm of personal thoughts, values, strivings, emotions and desires. Yet this view, which seems largely self-evident, is in contrast to the way in which sociologists study the framing of personal identity and the self.' (3) Therefore, locating oneself within a social continuum, in some ways a necessary social skill and a pre-requisite of social/group orientation, can be both limiting and damaging. It is also important to consider cultural identity and the way national, regional, chronological and even familial micro cultures are profoundly constructive of our own life politics. It has become a truism in life-politics that emotional awareness – or emotional intelligence – is a fundamental determinant of how individuals will approach, engage with, and function with regard to social structures, whether the latter are in the public or private sphere. As Goleman explains, ‘self-awareness – recognizing a feeling as it happens – is the keystone of emotional intelligence….the ability to monitor feelings from moment to moment is crucial to psychological insight and self-understanding.' (4) Some individuals may have this capacity through innate cognitive ability, whilst others must attempt to construct it using deliberately reflective techniques. However, the experience of the module has illustrated to me that it is not an option: interpersonal effectiveness basically demands that individuals exercise this facility, or develop it, as appropriate. As Bolton explains, ‘Reflective practice and reflexivity are not subjects but a pedagogical approach which should pervade the curriculum.' (5) This is not say that formally defined subject knowledge, academic skills, or the didactic position, itself, are in any way less relevant or marginal in the curriculum process. It does indicate however that the ability to manage the dynamics of learning, and to demonstrate it through interpersonal growth, has become more prominent. It is fair to argue then, as Fraser and Bosanquet have done, that ‘…Students are the receptors of the curriculum and their impact upon it varies…' (6) I found that, in the interactive learning environment, the effectiveness of the curriculum was determined and defined to a significant degree by us as learners, and in particular by our willingness to contribute new knowledge as perceptions. In this respect, the module was As Fraser and Bosanquet point out, ‘The changing nature of knowledge relevant to the discipline, and research in the discipline area, also influence the structure and learning goals of the programme…'. (7).

I consider that one of the key aspects of the module was its capacity to develop interpersonal working and the ability to work within a group dynamic. The resolution of issues, coordination of effort, and maximisation of individual skills through delegation are all highly transferable skills, which added to the developmental strengths of the formal curriculum. As Davis observes, ‘Whilst there is demand for the traditional ability to analyse, think critically an work independently…', there is also a growing demand for ‘…transferable skills….communication, team working,…and problem solving.' This requires ‘careful curriculum planning, support mechanisms, teaching methodologies and assessment strategies…' (8). As discussed above, there are a range of factors which form the individual's attitudes and effectiveness within this dynamic, in terms of what they deem acceptable or effective approaches. Many of these are culturally formed, and may be interpreted within frameworks such Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Index. Within this, Hofestede projects, each culture has tolerances and behavioural norms which dictate group behaviour, as well as strategic thinking within organisations. He defines these criteria as uncertainty avoidance, power distance, long/short term orientation, gender, i.e. masculinity and femininity, and individualism/collectivism. (9). Perhaps more revealing than this scheme of wide cultural sub-groups, however, is the related idea that these are just one component in tripartite scheme which includes universal human traits, ‘learned' behaviour and values, and individual personality traits. (10) I consider that the recognition of individual strengths and weaknesses is a key factor, not only in the recognition of individual contributions, but in effective team building. I have definitely learned that assembling a team is a skill in itself. Simply pushing together a random group of individuals is not team-building.

Correspondingly, one learning point which I can take from team working on the module, is that different individuals place value upon different aspects of interpersonal dealings, and that this has to recognised, despite personal preferences. For example, some co-learners on the module – and through logical extension, some colleagues in a professional situation – placed a high value on directness within relationships, and preferred immediate action to a deferred approach. Conversely, some personalities felt far more secure with an incremental approach to issues, preferring to delay action until the maximum possible information and analysis was assembled. Some individuals placed a high premium on relationship building through personal interaction, and took this as the inception of a trust network, before moving on to the specifics of a problem or issue. Meanwhile, some individuals were comfortable with the exact reverse of this; they wanted to stay focused on the dimensions of the issue, and preferred to leave the interpersonal dimensions of team building to take their natural course. The main learning point which emerged from this for me, was that such characteristics needed to be recognised, accepted, and factored into team building, as well as its functioning dynamic. No one individual conforms absolutely to a specific personality or behavioural type: however, their dominant personality traits are likely to be those which emerge at key decision making moments. To get the best out of people and teams, the nature of their contribution needs to be taken into account. As Sonnetag observes, ‘There is relatively consistent empirical evidence for a positive relationship between specific aspects of individual well-being and....performance.' (11)

The ability to ensure this well-being and secure the related performance – in myself as well as in other learners – and eventually co-workers – is one of the key developmental points that I will take from the module as a whole. . As Murphy and Riggio indicate, ‘…complexity provides the resources (cognitive, social, behavioural) for generating numerous possible responses to a given situation. Individuals as well as organizations are healthy and thrive when they are capable of many responses to a given situation, and become brittle and vulnerable to changing conditions when they are uniform and specialized.' (12). I prefer to think of this as understanding the personal, interpersonal, and strategic implications of the psychological contract. As Williams indicates regarding this phenomenon, ‘this interpersonal aspect to fairness reminds us that there is a social basis to the exchange relationship between employer and employee and we might expect this to be part of the psychological contract.' (13) One of the key objectives that I will take away from the module is the ability to understand – through use of a reflective cycle - the development of psychological contracts between individuals, within groups, across stakeholders, and between employees and management. I recognise that this, in itself, is an objective which relies heavily on the capacity to use one's own emotional intelligence, and that this in itself is an on-going task. As Goleman has observed, , ‘…unlike the familiar tests for IQ, there is, as yet, no single paper and pencil test that yields an emotional intelligence score, and there may never be one. ‘ (14) In fact it could be argued that those with emotional intelligence as a dominant aspect of their skills set, tend to eschew formal learning situations altogether, relying on their reading of situations and interpersonal skills rather than credentialism to get where they want to be. The important point for me here is to recognize that these skills are increasingly important in the socialized workforce, and central to achievement of common goals. As Guest and Conway have indicated, ‘…built on the three pillars of fairness, trust and delivery of the deal between organizations and employees, a positive psychological contract is the best guarantee of good performance outcomes.' (15)

Here are some key points for my development, around which specific targets may be developed.

* Have I planned and managed my own workload effectively: have I consistently met deadlines, without suspending working routines, or the absorption of resources of time from other projects or priorities?
* In team working situations, was I effective in determining the roles allocated to myself and others, using prior knowledge about myself and them?
* Did I retain effective control over my role, and did my input have a discernible and measurable impact on the project as a whole?
* How will I assess whether or not I have consistently managed work relationships in an effective way?
* Assuming I can assemble such an assessment, would my co-learners' or colleagues evaluations be likely to support this?
* Is my role – or the role of others – clear to everyone concerned?

In my estimation, and with regard to the insights I have obtained about interpersonal effectiveness from the module, achievement of these objectives would go a considerable way towards making me an effective learner. They are also principles which could be deemed constructive of a learning organization as a whole, something which, in my view, we should all regard as the worthwhile outcome of our individual contributions. As Hyam and Mason point out, ‘The learning organization, argue its advocates, is one in which managers perceive their position in the organization, and their relationship with subordinates, in a radically new way, utilizing new metaphors and ways of understanding.' (16). One way to measure individual progress towards this outcome would be through the use of a reflective scheme such as Gibbs' Reflective Cycle.: Within this, the learner or practitioner can use description to visualize developments or events, subsequently evaluating their own emotional response in the ‘feelings' stage of the process. From there you progress on to the evaluation and analysis stages, seeking out any wider implications or perceptible patterns from the situation, before proceeding onto the conclusion and action plan. I consider this skill-set to be of huge importance, because wherever you go in the contemporary employment scene, you will encounter an appraisal and system, and some form of target setting regime. Being aware of one's own real situation in relation to the requirements of a professional situation, is therefore just as important as finding out about the perceptions of others. In my opinion, this is the difference between merely transactional or genuinely transformational management. As Fincham and Rhodes express it, the transactional model is ‘…simply a mutual exchange for economic or political reasons between leader or follower. In transformational leadership a deeper, more powerful process is present. Here one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise each other up to higher levels of motivation and morality.' (17). It can be argued therefore that worthwhile transactional management begins in the personal sphere.

### **Footnotes**

1.) Stenhouse, L (1975, .An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development .London: Heinemann, p.4.

2 ) Hall, S., ‘Who Needs Identity?' in Hall, S., and du Gay, P., (1996), (eds), Questions of Cultural Identity, Sage, London. p.5.

3.) Elliot, A., (2001), Concepts of the Self, Polity Press, Cambridge p.24.

4.) Goleman, (1996), Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ, Bloomsbury, London. p.43.

5.) Bolton, G., (2005), Reflective Practice: Writing and Professional Development, 2nd Edition, Sage, London, p.3.

6.) Fraser, S., and Bosanquet, A., (2006), ‘The curriculum? That is just a unit outline, isn't it?', Studies in Higher Education, 31, pp.269-284, p.274

7.) ibid.

8.) Davis, M., (2003), ‘Barriers to reflective practice: the changing nature of higher education' inActive learning in higher education 4 (3) pp. 243-255, p.247.

9.) Hofstede, G., (2003), Cultures and Organizations: Intercultural Cooperation and its Importance for Survival, Profile Business, London. p.9

10.) ibid., p.6.

11.) Sonnetag, S., (ed), (2002) Psychological Management of Individual Performance, John Wiley and Sons, Chichester, p.4110.

12.) Murphy, S.E., Riggio, R.E., (2003), The Future of Leadership Development, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah NJ, p.13.

13.) Williams, R.S., (1998) Performance Management: Perspectives on Employee Performance,International Thomson Business Press, St.Ives, p.183.

14.) Goleman, (1996), Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ, Bloomsbury, London p.44.

15.) Guest, D.E., and Conway, N., (2004), Employee Well-being and the Psychological Contract: A Report for the CIPD, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, London, p.vii.

16.) Hyam, J., and Mason, B., (1995), Managing Employee Involvement and Participation, Sage, London, p.145.

17.) Fincham, R., & Rhodes, P., (2005), Principles of Organizational Behaviour, Oxford University Press, Oxford p.345.

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