

# Reflecting on Reflection

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## Insight from a capstone marketing communication module

### 1 Introduction

This is the first research cycle investigating assessed reflection. We examine final year student reflections to inform future practice and the curriculum of first and second year assignments

The assignment requires 12 final year students to use a VLE journal to record 'critical incidents' associated with a group project. This is based on a live brief culminating in a pitch presentation to the client in collaboration with a senior industry professional at the offices of a global London agency.

### 2 Method

This action research employs an anti-positive approach where we are both the researcher and the researched

The assessment for the group project required the students to enter their reflections on the VLE journal visible only to them and their tutors to enable them to reflect fully. We gained students' permission to use their reflective logs. All entries were anonymised. Thematic analysis was then applied to their entries which ultimately highlighted 6 key areas of note.

### 3 Results

Six overarching themes were identified as listed here. All students used elements of Gibbs' reflective cycle, despite being taught about a range of models. Charts show distribution of comment type.

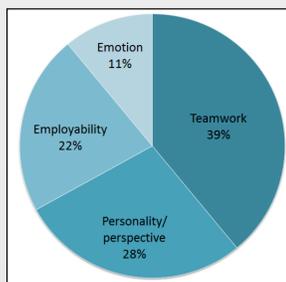
#### Asking for help

Eight students asked their tutors for help. Mainly this was for reassurance and motivation, but other areas included the structure and focus of the students' presentations, conflict resolution, reiteration of the task.

One student asked his girlfriend, a marketing graduate for assistance on the project, but no other sources of help were mentioned outside of the project teams.

#### Acquired self-knowledge

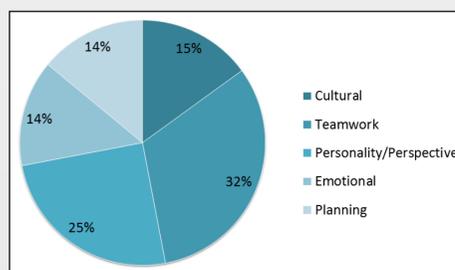
The students revealed a range of 'light-bulb moments' by the end of their projects which could be taken as recommendations for future cohorts starting their studies. The students' own role and the importance of teamwork was key here.



#### Obstacles

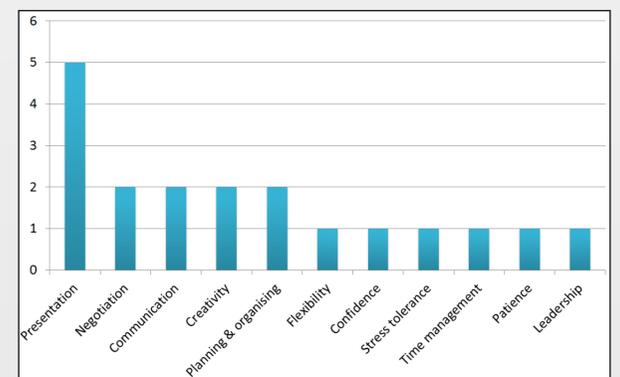
Problems within teams emerged as the biggest obstacle which comprised various difficulties in forming teams. Personality and perspective was the second biggest obstacle which drew qualitative comments around communication, not being able to say 'no' and being a perfectionist.

Although not drawing the highest number of comments, cultural differences was a major obstacle for some in terms of language barriers and differences in educational systems and industry.



#### Specific skills achieved

Students noted a range of skills that they had developed. The ability to present was the most common skill identified with 5 comments acknowledging improvements, e.g. *Diverse team set seemed like a negative at first, but actually it turned out to be a real positive*'.



#### Identified traits outstanding

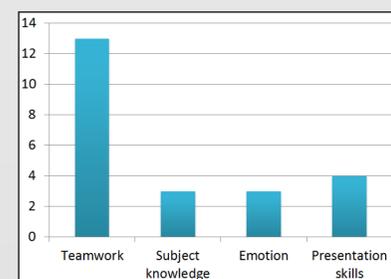
The students developed a number of strategies to varying degrees. However, there were some areas where they identified things they need to improve upon further. This represents what they are aware of, there may still be things that they have not discovered yet that will help them into the world of work.

These traits included the following:

- More confidence when presenting
- Identifying more relevant research
- Developing resilience
- Need to make ideas more realistic
- Improving time management
- Be a team worker

#### Identified strategies

Throughout the project the students needed to find ways around the obstacles they encountered, but also acknowledged good practice from the start of the process e.g. *'Don't push the team too hard, deal with emotional conflict early'*



### 4 Conclusions

We observed that students take knowledge from other modules to apply to other assignments (Gibbs). Tutors are key in supporting student learning and developing their understanding of reflective writing. Main areas of note were limitations within communication skills, emotional factors and teamwork, including the management of cultural and language differences. What students prioritised in their reflections was based on their perspectives, and did not reflect the whole scenario. What they chose to disclose was what they deemed important as part of the project. Clearly many difficulties were overcome with newly-found perspectives throughout the process, but further preparation for teamwork is being considered for the future.

### 5 References

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