A reflective e-portfolio: enhancing theory application using Mahara
Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences | Department of Industrial Psychology

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Context
Background overview
Industrial Psychology 152 is presented in the Department of Industrial Psychology. Three hundred first year students are enrolled for this course. The students attend either Afrikaans or English lectures. These students are from various programmes, including: industrial psychology, business management sciences, human resource management and philosophy, politics and economics (PPE).

This module is entitled Occupational Psychology and covers domain demarcation, core concepts and fundamentals of the topic, individual differences and developmental psychology. After completion of Industrial Psychology 152 students will possess thorough knowledge, ability and affective orientation of Occupational Psychology in the South African work environment. Students should know and be able to apply the principles of Career Psychology at all the levels of the cognitive and affective objectives of education as adapted from the taxonomy of Bloom as well the 8 critical outcomes as required by the SAQA.

Established practice
This course is presented in the second semester to first year students in Afrikaans and English. During the third term students attend two lectures per week and during the fourth term only one lecture per week. There is also practical sessions and an online practical assessment. Students are assessed on their practical session work, tests and the examination opportunity at the end of the semester.

The challenge and possible advantages associated with the integration of technology
The module is very content-heavy, although the content is not difficult. The lecturers feel that although students can pass the module by only studying the text book, this does not allow the students to engage in deep learning. By encouraging students to actively reflect on the work and engaging in the application of theory, students are involved in deeper and more active learning. The lecturers also hoped to improve class attendance through this activity.

Other relevant role players
Industrial Psychology honours students acted as assessors for the e-portfolio entries. The fact that the honours students recently made use of the same text book for a different module enhances their ability to assess the e-portfolio entries. They received training on how to assess the entries.

The lecturer required the assistance of the Faculty's blended learning coordinator for setting up the e-portfolios on the Mahara platform, basic student training, and pedagogical and technical support.

Learning and assessment activities
Educational approach
The e-portfolio assignment was based on the principles of experience based learning and integrative learning. In experience based learning knowledge is created through reflection on and transformation of experience. In order to effectively facilitate the effective integration and understanding of career related concepts with the students' personal experiences the following criteria were adhered to;

- A theoretical base was provided through lectures on the course content and the provision of examples
- The e-portfolio reflection questions required application of the theory to the students personal experiences and was thus personally meaningful
- Students were given the opportunity to reflect on and discuss their career related learning experience throughout the process of answering the reflection questions
- The assignment required an integration of the student's whole person, including reflections on their personality, strengths and weaknesses, abilities, skills and emotions
- Their experiences and reflections were assessed and feedback was provided by the assessors

Learning and assessment activities
Every second week during the lecture students were provided with a reflective question. This question is based on the module content discussed during the past two weeks. Students create e-portfolio entries

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based on these questions. They are welcome to use images, video, audio and other resources they feel may be helpful. Assessors each had a few students whose entries they had to assess according to a rubric provided beforehand by the lecturer.

Feedback practice
The rubric used to mark the assignments was uploaded to the relevant student entry. The assessors also wrote some critical feedback for the students on their entries.

Learning environment
Learning setting
Learning started in the lectures and was continued on the e-portfolio platform. The lecturers decided to make use of the SUNLearn e-portfolio site which is run on Mahara. It was chosen because it does not require students to create an extra account and the platform is very similar to SUNLearn.

Technology resources
Students made use of Mahara, the SUNLearn e-portfolio site and SUNLearn for learning.

Support challenges
Students needed more support in the technical aspects of Mahara. Sharing e-portfolio entries proved difficult. Some students also found it difficult to master the creation of an e-Portfolio.

Student experience
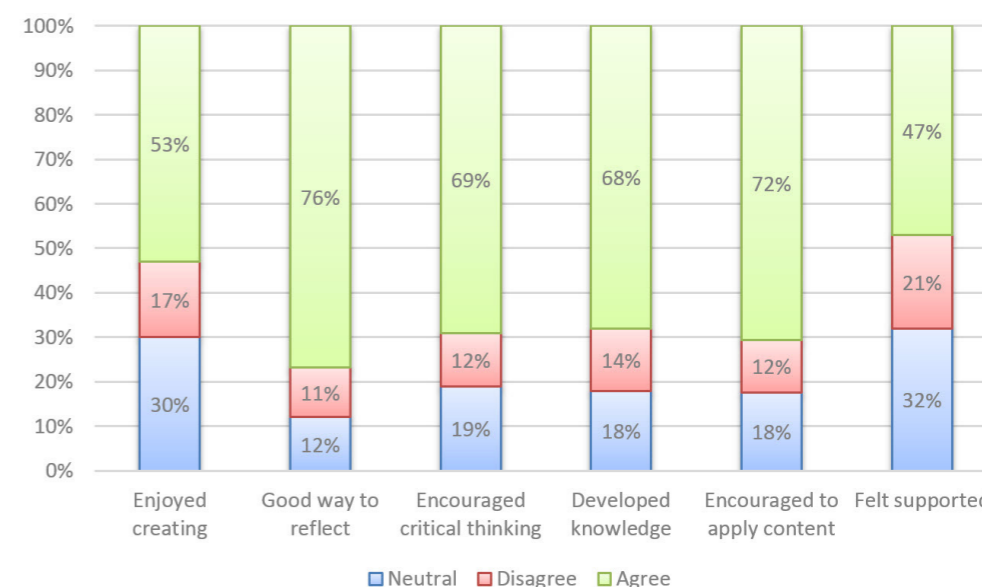### Student feedback on learning experience
As part of their last reflection students had to complete a survey on SUNLearn regarding the feedback on the e-portfolios. Overall, the student feedback was positive. Students felt that they were granted the opportunity to apply the module content, develop their knowledge and critical thinking skills. Most students (76%) argued that it is a good way to reflect.

The qualitative feedback was also largely positive. The following student quotes give an overall reflection of the positive feedback:
- "not only have these reflections been helpful in learning the course

material, but have been a life changing tool allowing me to explore my skills and abilities."
- "It wasn't just another task I had to finish, but I benefitted as well. It taught me to better write and organise my assignments."
- "The reflections were also a good point of discussion between classmates as we all did bounce off ideas from one another. This improved learning and interest through peer-to-peer interaction."
- "The reflections have taught me how to apply the work I have learned in the week in everyday situations. I often find myself sitting in a lecture wondering where will I ever use the work discussed and by doing these reflections I have managed to apply the knowledge to practical situations."

On a smaller scale, students also gave some negative feedback. They raised points that lecturers were also aware of. This included the need of more technical support and more interactive feedback from assessors.

Assessment impact
To accommodate the e-portfolio entries, the assessment weights were slightly altered. The e-portfolio assignment was both summative and formative in nature. However, the value derived from the assessment was most evident in the formative/developmental opportunity provided. The assignment provided an alternative form of learning and grade attainment

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for students who did not fare well in the formal assessment (semester test). The assignment contributed 20% to the final class mark (predicate) and a lower number of students were disqualified from the final assessment compared to the previous year.

General
Opportunities
Encouraging students to reflect on the module content and apply it to real-life situations proved valuable to the students' learning. Class attendance also increased even when there were no reflection questions scheduled.

Challenges
Students and assessors need to understand exactly what a reflection entry is and the purposes behind it. The training session for students and assessors must be extended in the future. The assessors were also a bit unsure about the rubric and the lecturers decided that the rubric will be adapted with the assessors in the future, giving the assessors ownership and a better understanding of the rubric.

The feedback that assessors gave was sometimes a bit short. This feedback will have to satisfy minimum requirements as set up by the lecturer in the future. More feedback will also engage the students in an interactive conversation on their entries. Students will also get access to each other's e-portfolio entries and be able to comment.

The e-portfolio project came with a big administration load. In the future, the lecturer wishes to appoint an administrator to run the project.

Advice
It is vitally important to assess the affordances of the tool as well as the expected challenges as outlined above. A clear link should be made between the assignment and the learning outcomes. The required support should be identified in advance and effective communications channels set up between the students and the support staff, assessors or lecturers. Clear timelines should be communicated to assessors for feedback on the students work in order to ensure that effective experiential learning takes place.