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Developing your skills as an HR professional

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Introduction

This free course will help you to develop some of the skills you will need to be effective as an HR professional. In HR, as in many areas of work, there are technical and practical skills, often based on formal knowledge, which practitioners are expected to be able to demonstrate. For example, a senior HR practitioner might be expected to be able to develop, or lead the development of, HR strategies and policies in a range of areas and to have the formal and specialist knowledge to be able to do this. There are a range of skills, however, that are not peculiar to HR or to any other profession which are often seen as important, even critical, determinants of performance (CIPD, 2010). These include the ability to manage yourself and in particular to manage stress, and to work effectively in groups and teams; they also include the skill of managing your learning.

Learning may come from formal learning situations such as seminars, training courses or studying for educational qualifications. However, most of your learning is likely to be much more informal and drawn from your work and life experiences. This learning depends on your ability to reflect on and draw learning from these experiences (this is often referred to as experiential learning). For some, reflection is quite a natural process but for most of us it is a skill that has to be learned and developed.

In this course you will practise learning reflectively and you will also develop the skills of organising yourself, of managing time and managing stress, and of working in teams or groups.

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University course B863 *The human resource professional*.

Learning Outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- reflect on practices that support skill development
- demonstrate self-management skills, particularly in relation to self-organisation and managing work-life balance
- distinguish between groups and teams
- demonstrate an awareness of the skills needed to work effectively in groups and teams.

1 Using reflection to support learning

Kolb (1976) developed a theory of learning which has subsequently influenced much thinking about reflective and experiential learning. He argued that learning from experience necessarily involves four stages, shown in Figure 1, and that each of these stages draws on different skills and characteristics.

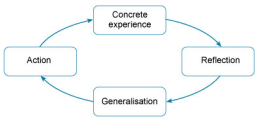


Figure 1 Kolb's experiential learning cycle (adapted from Kolb, 1984)

Kolb's learning cycle shows that learning from experience is about much more than simply acquiring experience (concrete experience) and thinking about what happened (reflection). It also means developing a more general understanding which can be applied in other situations (generalisation) and also finding ways to try out this new learning (action). In practice, Kolb argued that most of us are stronger in one or more of the stages of the cycle than in others and that this presents challenges to managers who want to learn effectively from experience (Kolb, 1976).

Later, Honey and Mumford (2006) developed a widely used learning styles inventory designed to help individuals to identify where they have the greatest strengths and weaknesses on the learning cycle (this mapping of learning styles to the learning cycle is shown in Figure 2).

Figure 2 Honey and Mumford's learning styles (Honey and Mumford, 2006)

You may, for example, be someone who spends a great deal of time thinking back and reflecting on what has happened (reflector) and trying to make sense of the reasons for this (theorist) but not so good at deciding what this means for future practice or actually trying out new and different ways of doing things based on your reflections and theorising.

Alternatively, you might be stronger at trying new experiences (activist) and, when they don't go well, trying another approach (pragmatist) without necessarily going through the process of looking back and making sense of what happened before you make a judgement about what to do next.

In Table 1 below you will see a more detailed account of the characteristics of each of the learning 'types' identified by Honey and Mumford.

Table 1 Learning styles: strengths and weaknesses

Learning style	Strengths	Weaknesses
Activist	Flexible and open-minded. Happy to have a go.	Tendency to take the immediately obvious action without thinking.
	Happy to be exposed to new situations.	Often take unnecessary risks.
	Optimistic about anything new and therefore unlikely to resist change.	Tendency to do too much themselves and hog the limelight.
		Rush into action without sufficient preparation.
		Get bored with implementation or consolidation.
Reflector	Careful.	Tendency to hold back from direct participation.
	Thorough and methodical.	Slow to make up their minds and reach a decision.
	Thoughtful.	Tendency to be too cautious and not take enough risks.
	Good at listening to others and assimilating information.	Not assertive - they aren't particularly forthcoming.
	Rarely jump to conclusions.	
Theorist	Logical 'vertical' thinkers.	Restricted in lateral thinking.
	Rational and objective.	Low tolerance for uncertainty, disorder and ambiguity.
	Good at asking probing questions.	Intolerant of anything subjective or intuitive.
	Disciplined approach.	Full of 'shoulds, oughts and musts'.
Pragmatist	Keen to test things out in practice.	Tendency to reject anything without an obvious application.
	Practical, down to earth, realistic.	Not very interested in theory or basic principles.
	Businesslike - get straight to the point.	Tendency to seize on the first expedient solution to a problem.
	Technique oriented.	Impatient with waffle.
		On balance, risk oriented not people oriented.

(adapted from Honey and Mumford, 1992)

Activity 1 Learning styles

Allow 30 minutes for this activity

Spend some time thinking about the learning styles described in Table 1. Do you recognise any of these styles as very like you or very unlike you? In either case, can you see any advantages to using the style in question rather more or rather less?

Discussion

You can read more about Honey and Mumford's learning style on Peter Honey's website where you can also complete their learning styles inventory (for a fee). Please note that these are optional activities and are not requirements of this course of study. Some commentators have questioned the validity of learning styles inventories because learning styles seem not to be stable and we are able to adapt our learning styles to different circumstances (Harrison, 2009; Gold et al., 2013). However, others argue that it can be very helpful to be self-aware about the approaches you are taking to learning, and to try out new approaches to learning more effectively.

2 Using reflection to improve performance

The ability to reflect on actions, and how effective they were, is expected of managers and, quite often, of teams. Reflection can even take place at an organisation level, for example, after a major change. Here we deal with individual reflection.

Donald Schön (1983) talks about reflection-on-action which happens after an action. When reflecting on action, you think back on what happened, why it happened, how you dealt with it and whether you could have handled it differently to obtain better outcomes. Reflection-on-action requires critical thinking, involving analysis and evaluation, without the emotional biases that can prevent clear thinking. It means going beyond the surface of things and deconstructing an event or events as rationally as you can.

This might take the form of a cycle in which you consider the action you have taken as well as the consequences, and consider what might have been done differently. In doing so you create knowledge that is new to you and which you can apply in future situations. In the process you learn more about your own thinking which enables you to improve it. For example, you might recognise that you had knowledge that you didn't apply or that you needed more knowledge or information, or that your feelings, personal beliefs or expectations influenced your thinking without you realising it. Thus, the next time you act you are much less likely to repeat past mistakes or oversights.

Kolb's learning cycle, which you met in Section 1, is an example of this approach to reflection. Pedler et al. (2001) suggest a rather different approach to reflection which takes into account the way emotions, feelings, beliefs and expectations can influence the way we act. These are often implicit, that is, we are often unaware of them. For example, we may feel fearful of a new project, or jealous of another person's good fortune. In the first instance these feelings may stem from a lack of belief in our capabilities, and in the second from an expectation or belief that life is (or should be) fair when the reality is that it is not naturally that way. Thus feelings need exploration to expose the implicit beliefs, expectations and values (and information) that give rise to them.

Pedler et al. refer to habitual ways of working (or thinking or behaving) as action-tendencies (Figure 3). These are often easier to recognise in others than they are in ourselves. Consider a person with whom you work closely: in a tense situation, how does that person behave? What is his or her usual response to a request? If it is hard to recognise your own action-tendencies, ask one or two people you trust to give you honest and non-judgemental feedback. However, try not to react negatively to what they say. Action-tendencies are not necessarily problematic or negative, but knowing what yours are can deepen your understanding of your own actions and help you to reflect on them.

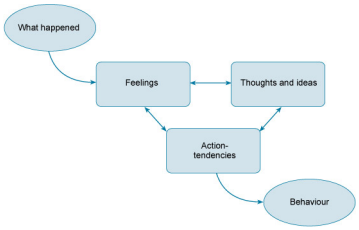


Figure 3 Bringing our feelings into reflection (Pedler et al., 2001)

In the next sections you will be introduced to self-management and team working skills and as you work through these sections you will be encouraged to reflect on your current

practice and to think of ways to improve it. At the end of this course you will return to the question of how you can use reflection to improve your performance.

3 Managing yourself

In this section you will look at three very closely related skills which will help you to manage your working life, and the balance between your working life and your social life or family responsibilities. These skills are: organising yourself, managing time and managing stress. Unfortunately, there is no universal prescription for any of these skills. However, you will consider what events make you stressed, the impact that different demands and pressures have on you, and different ways of dealing with them so that you can maximise your well-being. This means identifying the strategies that you can use not only to cope with stress, but also to prevent it and achieve a better balance between your working life and your social life or family responsibilities.

You will be asked to think in a very practical way about how you manage yourself in the workplace and what works best for you in managing workplace pressures.

Self-management and well being

The business case for organisations to develop a sound well-being strategy stems from the strong research evidence linking stress to the costs of absenteeism, loss of talent through prolonged sickness absence, and the costs associated with recruitment to replace those leaving the organisation for stress-related causes (Eurofound, 2012; Foresight, 2008; CIPD, 2013). Additionally, pressures derived from tight deadlines and work intensification are leading to higher presenteeism in the workplace which can have damaging effects for both the employee and the organisation in terms of lower productivity, for example (CIPD, 2013).

As an HR practitioner, you should develop the skills involved in carrying out self-audits about the effects of your work practices on your own effectiveness and well-being (Cartwright and Cooper, 1997). You will practise carrying out self-audits in Activity 2.

Causes of stress

Various definitions of stress have been given over the years, but the individual experience of excessive pressure is common to all of them. Pressure, however, is not always negative; in fact, the right level of pressure increases productivity and motivation. By contrast, stress arises when we perceive that the demands placed on us are greater than the resources we have to meet them (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Growing trends of global competition, an ageing population and changes in the nature of work are contributing to increased levels of stress in the population. The European Working Condition Survey (EWCS) revealed that 22% of working participants experienced high levels of stress in 2005. The latest survey reports that the working conditions triggering stress have been on the increase since 2005 and 18% of people report being highly unsatisfied with their work-life balance (Eurofound, 2012). In the UK, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2013) found that over 40% of the respondents felt under increased stress compared with the previous year.

We call 'stressors' those elements that contribute to and/or trigger a stress response. You have probably noticed that some people react differently to the same type of pressures at work. What seems like an impossible task for some might be a routine activity for others. The stress an activity generates may also change for the same person at different times of the day. For instance a challenging task at 9 a.m. after a good breakfast and a good night's sleep is easier than at 6 p.m. after a hard day. The negative value of a stressor may also change with experience. For example, it might be that doing a presentation at work used to be a highly stressful event when you started your job and now, through positive learning experiences, it is something that you enjoy doing very much. In short, a variety of personality traits, values, experience and life circumstances play a part in determining what causes stress for you, and these perceptions can change over time.

It can be very helpful, as already noted, to develop an awareness of the issues that make you stressed, and in Activity 2 you will practise reviewing and auditing these issues. There are two different ways of doing this. The first is by completing standardised questionnaires or checklists which list different elements that have caused stress in other people across different professions. The other more personalised way of evaluating stress is through completing a stress diary. In Activity 2 you will conduct two stress self-audits using an example of each of the approaches just described.

Activity 2 Auditing your stress levels

Part A Self-report evaluation

Allow around 15 minutes for Part A of this activity

Go to the NHS's 'Beat stress at work' page and read about the main reasons for work stress, as well as some stress management tactics.

Discussion

Building on the scientific literature on stress, the NHS identifies six areas of work design that can potentially lead to stress:

control over the way you work

the way your organisation manages change

the support you receive from your manager and peers

the quality of relationships at work

the level of clarity in the definition of your role

your overall workload and well-being.

You will find a variety of resources about conducting stress and well-being audits in your organisation on the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) website.

In Part B of the activity you will complete a personal audit of the stressors that affect you and the degree to which they do so.

Part B Diary evaluation

Over the next three weeks you should collect information in the form of a diary under the following headings:

The date, time and place of a stressful episode

What you were doing

Who you were with

How you felt emotionally

What you were thinking

What you did.

For each episode you should record a stress rating between 0 and 10, where 10 represents the most stressed you can be.

Try to record as many events as possible, so you have a wide range of highly stressful to moderately or minimally stressful events, with a view to gaining a better understanding of your priorities when managing your stress.

Once you have completed the questionnaire and diary, try to identify whether there are common stressors, and look at the intensity and frequency of the stressful events annotated in your diary. This will give you an overall idea of your priorities for stress management.

This exercise is taken from the NHS (2012).

Discussion

Filling in a diary helps to identify different stressors and to evaluate both the intensity of the impact they have on you, and the frequency of occurrence. It is particularly helpful to acquire an awareness of behaviours that you may think are not important as they are 'one off situations'. However, the impact of stress is cumulative; hence the consequences of low intensity yet continual stressors can be harmful over time. Developing an awareness of these can help to identify changes which can prevent stress and enhance the quality of working life.

Rating the degree of stress you experience also helps identify the issues which have the highest impact and you might want to concentrate your efforts on these. Please note: the tasks in this activity are designed to help you identify potential elements of your work that, if prolonged over time, could make you feel stressed. If you are already experiencing more stress than you feel able to cope with, you should consider seeking specialist help, for example from your GP or your employer.

Stressors and coping

Having a monitoring system to evaluate the presence and quality of potential stressors will put you in a better position to manage the impact these stressors can have on you, in other words to cope with them. Both the stressor and the coping strategies are closely interlinked; in fact the effectiveness of the coping strategy depends on the type of stressor you are dealing with. For example, if the stressor can be modified or even eliminated, the most effective coping strategies will be focussed on the individual stressor (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

An example of this would be to develop effective time management skills to minimise work overload and enhance work-family balance. In other circumstances, stressors cannot be changed, so trying to eliminate them can increase a sense of losing control, increasing stress. In these circumstances, the most effective approach usually involves combining an emotion-focused strategy (i.e. trying to reduce the impact of negative feelings) with social support strategies. For example, if you have been dismissed from work, you may seek emotional support from your friends and family as the most immediate coping strategy. Subsequently, effective coping might include drawing on social support, by contacting your networks and finding out about job opportunities.

Another powerful way of coping can be to change the meaning of the stressful situation or 'meaning-focused coping'. For instance, 'success' in a very complex task unlikely to be finished in the time provided might be re-interpreted in terms of a learning opportunity.

Organising yourself and managing your time

In this section you will read more about strategies for reducing stress at work through organising yourself, managing your time and developing stress prevention mechanisms.

There is an obvious need for some degree of order in the workplace; forgetting meetings or turning up late, or failing to deliver what you have promised can be guaranteed to make your own life more difficult as well as causing problems for those around you. We all vary in our need to be ordered and to plan meticulously – you can probably think of individuals who work best under pressure and who for that reason leave things to the last minute. Nonetheless, you will make life smoother and probably less stressful if you create systems for yourself which will help you to plan what you will do in the future and to record what you have done and what you have promised to do.

Planning what you will do can take the form of a schedule (or plan) which sets out what you will do and by when, and for a complicated project this is essential. You will certainly need to keep a diary, and if you keep an electronic diary which others can access you will need to think about how to keep control of it. You may also find it helpful to keep a daily to do list. If you complete this before you leave work at the end of the day, it may help you to stop thinking about work after you have left, knowing that you have a record to refer to on your return.

In a busy working life you may also need to keep records of what has been said and agreed. Many meetings will be formally minuted, but the myriad of informal meetings and snatched conversations will not be and can be very easily forgotten. A simple way to keep your own records is to type them into a portable computer. Alternatively, make notes in a daybook – this is simply a good size notebook with dated entries so you can go back and remind yourself of what has been said or agreed.

These simple techniques can also help you to manage your time. More fundamentally though, managing your time means directing your energies towards those things which matter most, rather than those which matter less. Cameron (2008) gives this advice:

> Direct your time *appropriately* i.e. towards the things which are most important.
>
> Direct your energy *efficiently* i.e. maximise your achievements for time and energy expended.
>
> Stop *wasting* time.
>
> (Cameron, 2008, p. 89)

Long hours and intensification of work are important causes of work-related stress and this trend is far from stabilising (CIPD, 2013).

Activity 3 Prioritising your workload

Allow around 30 minutes for this activity

This activity is intended to help you to differentiate between the key aspects of your role from the less important, and to evaluate whether the way you allocate your time is the most effective one. You should now consider and make notes on the following questions:

- What are your most important tasks in your current role?
- Are these the tasks which take up most of your time?

Discussion

Your answers to these questions should have helped you to evaluate your priorities at work and perhaps also suggested ideas about how to improve your time management. They may also have given you some new insights into how to address some of the stressors you identified in the self-audits you carried out in Activity 2.

Managing stress

In order to understand the harmful consequences of stress and put mechanisms in place to prevent it, it is useful to reflect on the physical changes that take place. Under the perception of a threat, our body releases hormones and glucose to help prepare the fight or flight response. While this is an adaptive response in the short term, it can drain our energy over time leading to a variety of health-related problems such as tension headaches and high blood pressure.

Amongst the most cited causes of work-related stress are excessive workload and pressure to meet targets, lack of control over the task, and poorly trained managers (CIPD, 2013). From an individual level, we can work to diminish or change some these stressors (e.g. good organisation and time management skills can help you tackle the stress caused by tight targets) but unfortunately we can do little with others. In fact, the perception that we cannot control these events is what makes them extremely powerful stressors. Our ability to reduce the negative emotions caused by these stressors, and the changes in our body, will be key to preventing accumulated stress that results in the chronic syndrome referred to as burnout.

A stream of research in the stress literature has provided very useful evidence regarding the experiences that lead to increased coping ability through psychological recovery (Sonnentag, 2001). Psychological recovery is the process that allows us to recover the energy and resources spent whilst at work. Researchers have identified four main areas that help individuals recover the energy spent on a daily basis to prevent the cumulative effect of stress. The experiences include psychological detachment from work (i.e. engaging in activities completely unrelated to work), relaxation (directed to reduce the high arousal created in the fight/flight response), experiencing mastery (i.e. enjoying learning new things) and feeling able to control how you spend your own time (as opposed to feeling under pressure to constantly work over time).

The specific activities that lead to these recovery experiences may vary for different people, but whatever allows you to detach from work on a daily basis will increase your levels of relaxation, and decrease the tension and fatigue.

4 Working in teams

In this section we will look at what we mean by teams and how they can be distinguished from groups. You will spend some time thinking about the groups and teams you belong to, how well they are working and how you can help them to work better. Finally, you will think about your own team working skills, the sorts of roles you usually play in teams and how you can work most effectively in those teams.

Groups and teams

The idea that working as a genuine team is something more than being part of a group or collection of people is a starting point in most approaches to management education. However, a team is essentially a particular type of group and, since an HR professional will inevitably work in both groups and teams, it is important to understand the dynamics of both and be able to work effectively in them. The ability to make sense of what is happening in groups and teams is made more critical by the adoption of matrix structures in many organisations to promote cross functional working across different disciplines and expertise. This means that temporary groups are brought together to achieve a particular project and disbanded; they may or may not become teams in the time their members are working together.

In practice, groups may be labelled as teams when they are no such thing. ‘Team’ is not a neutral word. As Parsloe (1981) observed, it is ‘soaked in positive values’. Teams are expected to be collaborative, egalitarian, cooperative and committed. Our images of teams are so positive that the word 'team' is often used to describe any arrangement in which staff are nominally grouped together, irrespective of whether they actually work together as a team. In fact, groups that do not work collaboratively may be called teams perhaps to hide this fact, or in the hope that greater collaboration will result. This means that you need to be careful when you see or hear the word 'team'. Just because something is called a team it does not mean that it actually works like one.

In a team, there is joint sharing of accountability for performance, and joint endeavour to achieve this, while a working group is characterised by a greater emphasis on individual responsibility and one to one negotiations on issues that overlap between the responsibilities of individuals, overseen by a leader (Casey, 1985; Katzenbach and Smith, 1993). Real teamwork involves higher levels of trust, sharing and responsibility and this means a considerable investment of time and commitment. Casey (1985) argues that this investment in teamwork is only needed when there are complex issues to be dealt with which the team members need to deal with in an interdependent way; for this reason it is important to be clear about the distinction between groups and teams and when each is needed.

Katzenbach and Smith (1993) point to the important role teams play in delivering high performance for organisations. They, like many writers, offer a way of distinguishing between groups and teams, as set out in Table 2. This list is distinctive because of its focus on the role of the leader and on the approach to measuring performance.

Table 2 Not all groups are teams: how to tell the difference

Working group	Team
Strong, clearly focussed leader	Shared leadership role
Individual accountability	Individual and mutual accountability
The group's purpose is the same as the broader organisational mission	Specific team purpose that the team itself delivers
Individual work products	Collective work products
Runs efficient meetings	Encourages open-ended discussion and active problem-solving meetings
Measures its effectiveness indirectly by its influence on others (such as the financial performance of the business)	Measures performance effectively by assessing collective work products
Discusses, decides and delegates	Discusses, decides and does real work together

Katzenbach and Smith (1993/2005, p. 164)

In Activity 4 you will spend some time thinking about groups and teams to which you belong.

Activity 4 Groups and teams

Allow around 90 minutes for this activity

Part A Working in groups and teams

Open the reading 'Working in groups and teams'.

Read from the beginning of the reading to the end of the section headed 'Some common types of teams', making notes as you go.

Part B Thinking about the groups and teams to which you belong

Spend some time thinking about the groups and teams to which you belong. Draw up a list of these, categorising them as groups (formal and informal, primary and secondary) or teams.

Team and group effectiveness

One challenge that often faces managers is the variable performance of teams – why is it that some teams seem to work very effectively whereas others have huge conflicts and problems within them? This section will look at the way teams work and the behaviours that can contribute to their success or failure. An understanding of these areas can help you to evaluate your own team performance and identify any necessary changes.

A frequent challenge for managers is the tension between rational aspects of a task, such as planning and coordinating activities, and those aspects that go beyond the purely rational into more psychological, subjective and, therefore, emotive aspects, such as creative team spirit. This tension is particularly important in considering the development of groups and teams. A team will usually have been formed to undertake a specific task, but its success in this may depend on the interpersonal dynamics within the team. Therefore, the job of developing a team and managing its dynamics requires as much attention as managing the more overt and rational aspects of the task.

While groups and teams can be extremely effective ways of organising work, the same features that make them effective can sometimes result in 'pathologies' – ways in which they can be seriously *ineffective.* In Activity 5 you will look at some ways of making groups and teams more effective and also at some of the ways in which they can be ineffective. You will also look at some challenges for groups and teams, in particular working across organisational boundaries in virtual and international settings.

Activity 5 How effective are the groups and teams you work in?

Allow around 90 minutes for this activity

Part A Effective groups and teams

Open the reading 'Working in groups and teams'.

Read from the section 'Improving group effectiveness' to the end of the section headed 'Common problems in groups and teams', making notes as you go.

Part B Thinking about the groups and teams to which you belong

Spend some time thinking about the groups and teams to which you belong and which you identified in Activity 4. Using the materials you have read in this section, make some notes on how effective you think these groups and teams are and what might need to happen to make them more effective.

Developing your own team working skills

Meredith Belbin developed his team role inventory in the 1970s following research he did on business games in executive courses at Henley Management College (now part of the University of Reading, UK). He first created a self-assessment tool that identified eight team roles, and through later research developed this to include nine roles. The focus of his team role theory is that team effectiveness is derived from a balance of abilities within a team. The nine roles he identified are: coordinator, plant, implementer, monitor

evaluator, shaper, team-worker, resource investigator, completer finisher and specialist. You will find out more about each of these roles in the reading you will study in Activity 7.

Throughout the years, Belbin has engaged in scholarly debate about his inventory, and there have been criticisms regarding its reliability and validity (Fincham and Rhodes, 2005). He has since expanded the process by which team role assessment is conducted, including feedback from critics.

Despite the controversy over its assessment process, Belbin's inventory has become one of the most popular assessment tools in contemporary management practice. Belbin runs a successful consultancy out of Cambridge, UK with his son and colleagues, and more information on team roles and a scored inventory (for a fee) is available through the Belbin website.

In Activity 6 you will read more about Belbin's team roles and use these to do some thinking about the team roles you perform in your day-to-day work. You will then read an article that critiques the model and develop some critical thinking of your own using Belbin's model.

Activity 6 Developing your own team working skills

Allow around 90 minutes for this activity

Part A Working in a team

Open the reading 'Working in groups and teams'.

Read from the section 'Working effectively in a team' to the end of the reading, making notes as you go.

Part B Your team role or roles

Spend some time thinking about a recent experience you have had of working in a team. Using the description of Belbin's team roles in the reading in Part A of this activity, identify one or more of the team roles you played on that team. You might find that parts of the descriptions (either strengths or weaknesses) apply to the role you played, and you might find that more than one of the roles applies. Use the box below to order the nine roles from most- to least-used in the specific situation based on your analysis. Place the role that you feel you played to the greatest extent at the top and so forth.

Here is the list of roles so that you can easily cut and paste them:

- coordinator
- plant
- implementer
- monitor evaluator
- shaper
- team-worker
- resource investigator
- completer finisher
- specialist

Provide your answer...

Now think of another occasion where you have worked in a team – you might want to choose a very different example from the one you used above. For example, you might have participated in an inter-organisational project, or you could use an example from your personal life, such as a sports team. Go through the team roles again to identify which characteristics apply to this team experience. Use the box below to order the nine roles from most- to least-used in the specific situation based on your analysis. Place the role at the top that you played the most and so forth.

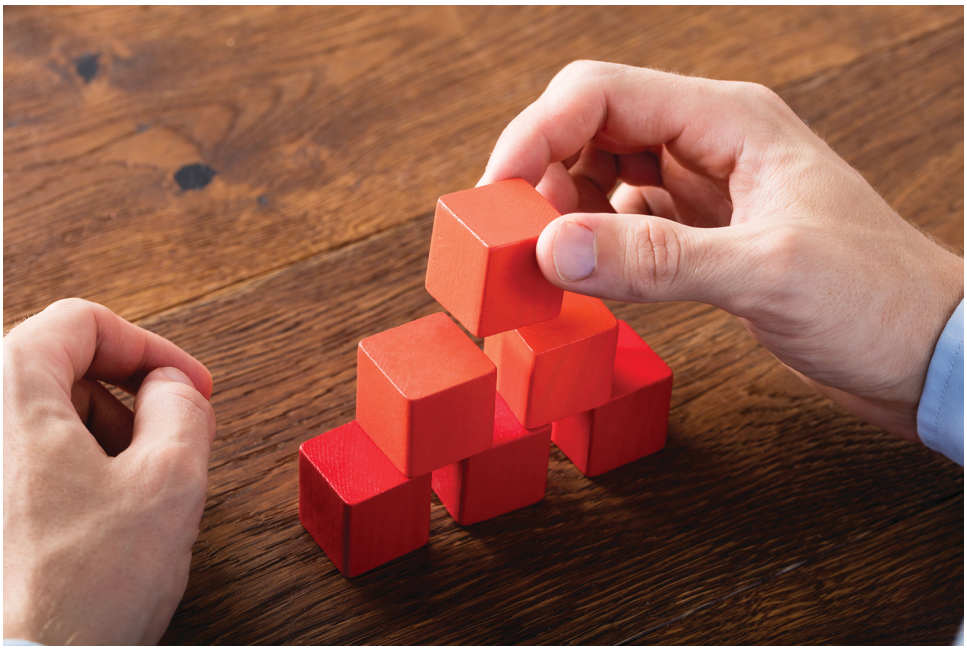
Provide your answer...

Compare the two experiences you have just been thinking about above using the questions below as a guide.

- Do you have the same team roles showing up higher and lower in the list? If so, what reasons can you think of for your role changing (e.g. situation, group needs, context, nature of project)?
- Do you agree with the descriptions provided? For example, do both the strengths and weaknesses apply to you? If not, which ones seem to apply and which ones do not? Or are the descriptions remarkably accurate? (Or are you starting to apply what is written to fit your situation in a way that you wouldn't otherwise have thought of?)
- Do you recognise other team members in the roles? What insights do the descriptions give you into their behaviours?

5 Bringing it all together

In this course you have been introduced to some of the skills you will need to work effectively as an HR professional. In the final activity of this course you will review your use of reflection to improve performance.



Activity 7 Using reflection to improve performance

Allow around 30 minutes for this activity

Spend some time now looking back over the activities you have completed in this section and make notes on your answers to the following questions. You might also find it helpful to review Sections 1 and 2 before you complete this activity.

1. In thinking about your practice, how much time did you spend using each of the learning styles you identified in Activity 1?
2. Have you identified any ‘action-tendencies’ (as outlined in Section 2) which may help or hinder your learning?

Conclusion

This free course *Developing your skills as an HR professional* has introduced you to reflective learning. You have also read about organising yourself, managing time and managing stress, and about the skills you need to work effectively in teams. You have practised using reflection to improve your performance by completing the activities in this course and you have spent some time thinking about your own approach to reflective learning.

Suggested additional resources

You may like to explore in more depth some of the ideas presented in this course and associated readings. If so, here is a list of suggested readings (these are excellent resources but are not compulsory reading for this course):

Academic journal articles and other resources

Chartered Institute of Development (2010) *Using the head and heart at work*, London, CIPD.

Chartered Institute of Development (2013) *Stress and mental health at work* [Online]. Available at http://www.cipd.co.uk/hr-resources/factsheets/stress-mental-health-at-work.aspx (Accessed 20 November 2013).

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Health and safety executive website - http://www.hse.gov.uk.

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