Learning Journal

# Personal Learning Journal – Overview

**Reflection enables us to learn from experience**. After all, how can you learn from both *successes* and *mistakes* if you do not understand why they happened? When you engage in a project, you and your teammates will inevitably make mistakes. Often our first hunch as to why something has gone wrong is not a good guide to further action. We actually need to think about and analyse where we went wrong – and that is where reflection comes in. Similarly, when experiencing success, it is easy to overlook how it came about. We are just glad that everything has worked out well – and move on. This can be an opportunity missed. If we spend a little time and analyse what it was that went right, then we stand a much better chance to accomplish this feat again! Success can breed success when we know how we have achieved it.

**Learning, like innovation and Design Thinking, is an iterative process**. In this book, we invite you to adopt **four-step approach to learning** (as illustrated below). For this we ask you to *engage with a combination of theory and practice-based experiences* (Step 1), and then to *carry out practical and usually team-based activities* (Step 2), before you are asked to *pause and consider what you have learned* (Step 3), which will help you to benefit from *further research* into follow-up resources (Step 4).

**This journal is all about the third step, and hence key to your learning**. **Many people find that they learn best from experience. Reflective writing is a very effective method for making sense of this**. It allows you to stop and organise your thoughts, evaluate what you do and learn from this experience. Contrary to what many of our students think when they start working with us, reflective writing does not take much time. It is not like academic writing – yet it can still make you a better writer. So, it is a **win–win exercise**!



Figure : Four-step approach to learning

As part of the learning experience facilitated by this book, we thus encourage you to reflect on what you have learned by **maintaining a personal reflective journal**. You can do this digitally using the template below and/or by writing in the spaces provided in the reflection points included in each chapter of the book. **Some instructors will ask you to use a different template**, which is of course fine, too.

Like with any diary, it may be difficult at times to prioritise completing journal entries when there are so many other important and perhaps more exciting things happening. However, in our experience it is best not to put it off – and to remember, the **busier you are, the more likely you will benefit from this activity in the short as well as in the long term**! Many industry and policy leaders have told us that the successes they have achieved in their careers have been directly linked to reflecting on and learning from the mistakes they’ve inevitably made along the way. They tell us that to learn from our mistakes (and to deal with them), we must sit back and decide what we will do differently next time. At the same time, it is important to understand why something turned into a success – so that we can learn and develop our own recipes for success!

# Personal Learning Journal – Template

# Chapter 1: Reflective learning

Reflect on the questions below. Make a note of your answers below or in the space provided in the book. Typically, 1–3 short paragraphs of text and/or sets of bullets covering key points are sufficient, but you are welcome to write more.

|  |
| --- |
| **1. Reflecting on the seven skill areas described in this chapter, which skill areas do you think will be most important for your dream job and future career?** |
| **2. Which skill areas do you think you need to improve the most?** |
| **3. Have a look at the further resources listed at the end of the chapter, and engage with at least one of them. What key learning points have you taken away from this activity?** |

# Chapter 2: Defining innovation

Reflect on the questions below. Make a note of your answers below or in the space provided in the book. Typically, 1–3 short paragraphs of text and/or sets of bullets covering key points are sufficient, but you are welcome to write more.

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| **1. How would you personally define innovation in an industry context? For example, in technology, banking, government, health or music? Or some other industry or sector you are interested in?** |
| **2. What do you consider are two or three good examples of innovation?** |
| **3. Why do you think they are good examples?** |

# Chapter 2: Successful innovators

Reflecting on Bernie Meyerson’s ‘Innovate or die!’ message, think about the implications for different organisations and industries. Ask yourself the following questions:

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| **1. Which organisations do you think most successfully develop and deliver innovation on an ongoing basis?** |
| **2. What do you consider sets them apart?** |

Follow-up question after reading about types and levels of innovation:

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| --- |
| **3. What types and/or levels of innovation do you think they excel at most? Why do you think that?** |

# Chapter 2: Open innovation

Reflect on the questions below. Make a note of your answers below or in the space provided in the book. Typically, 1–3 short paragraphs of text and/or sets of bullets covering key points are sufficient, but you are welcome to write more. **Note: If you have problems with one of the questions you can look up some sample solutions on our companion website**.

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| **1. Other than the examples provided, can you think of some positive examples of open innovation? Please list below.** |
| **2. What do you think some of the challenges of open innovation may be for organisations?** |

# Chapter 3: Design thinking

Think about a ‘solution’ – a product, service, app, webpage or something else you’ve used – which has given you a poor user experience. Consider the following questions. Make a note of your answers below or in the space provided in the book. Typically, 1–3 short paragraphs of text and/or sets of bullets covering key points are sufficient, but you are welcome to write more.

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| --- |
| **1. What was the problem with this solution?** |
| **2. Was the solution developed with empathy for and a focus on the needs of the end user?** |
| **3. How do you think the solution could have been developed differently?** |

# Chapter 3: The importance of empathy

Reflect on the different approaches and outcomes from the two exercises and answer the two questions below. Make a note of your answers below or in the space provided in the book.

*Tips: If you know fellow students or others using this book, compare notes on what each of you have created. One of you might even come up with an idea for a new business! We’ve used this exercise many times and seen some fantastic ideas we’d never have thought of, including some very interesting ideas which had real commercial potential!*

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| **1. How different is your new idea to the vase?** |
| **2. Do you think the end user can derive more enjoyment from it?** |

# Chapter 4: Working in a team

Self-awareness is important and an awareness of your own strengths and concerns is very useful, as it will help you to shape your personal contributions to the team. Please consider the following questions. Make a note of your answers below or in the space provided in the book. Typically, 1–3 short paragraphs of text and/or sets of bullets covering key points are sufficient, but you are welcome to write more.

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| --- |
| **1. What strengths do you think you can personally bring to the team? These may include skills, experience and/or personality traits.** |
| **2. What areas of concern do you have about working in the team? These may include skill areas you wish to improve on and/or personal concerns.** |

# Chapter 4: Researching the challenge

Reflecting on the activities *Hopes and Fears*, the *Project Research Canvas* and the *Stakeholder Mapping* exercise consider the following questions. Make a note of your answers below or in the space provided in the book. Typically, 1–3 short paragraphs of text and/or sets of bullets covering key points are sufficient, but you are welcome to write more.

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| --- |
| **1. What interests you most about the challenge you’ve selected or been assigned to?** |
| **2. What areas and stakeholders would you most like to explore during the course of the project?** |

# Chapter 4: Interviewing

Reflecting on your interview, consider the following questions. Make a note of your answers below or in the space provided in the book. Typically, 1–3 short paragraphs of text and/or sets of bullets covering key points are sufficient, but you are welcome to write more.

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| --- |
| **1. What do you think went well, and what did not?** |
| **2. What would you do differently the next time you conduct an interview?** |

# Chapter 5: Understanding end users

Reflecting on the activities *End-User Persona* and *As is Scenario* consider the following questions. Make a note of your answers below or in the space provided in the book. Typically, 1–3 short paragraphs of text and/or sets of bullets covering key points are sufficient, but you are welcome to write more.

|  |
| --- |
| **1. What is most important to your selected End-User Persona(s) in the context of the challenge?** |
| **2. What do you think motivates the End-User Persona(s) in the context of the challenge (positively and/or negatively)?** |
| **3. What As is Scenario(s) have you chosen, and why?** |
| **4. What have you taken away from the analysis of pain points and opportunities?** |

# Chapter 5: Idea generation

Reflecting on the activities *Big Ideas* and *Prioritisation Grid* consider the following questions. Make a note of your answers below or in the space provided in the book. Typically, 1–3 short paragraphs of text and/or sets of bullets covering key points are sufficient, but you are welcome to write more.

|  |
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| **1. What was your personal experience (positive and negative) of using the Big Ideas and Prioritisation Grid activities?** |
| **2. How do you feel about the idea the team has selected?** |
| **3. What can you do differently next time to improve your experience and/or the outcome?** |

# Chapter 6: Why do we communicate?

Before we examine communication skills in more detail, we’d like you to reflect on your existing views and knowledge. Consider the following questions. Make a note of your answers below or in the space provided in the book. Typically, 1–3 short paragraphs of text and/or sets of bullets covering key points are sufficient, but you are welcome to write more.

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| --- |
| **1. Why do we communicate with others?** |
| **2. What benefits do you think we get from communicating with others?** |
| **3. What benefits might others get from communicating with us?** |

# Chapter 6: Active listening

Reflecting on your experience of active listening consider the following questions. Make a note of your answers below or in the space provided in the book. Typically, 1–3 short paragraphs of text and/or sets of bullets covering key points are sufficient, but you are welcome to write more.

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| **1. How did it feel to really listen?** |
| **2. Was it difficult? Where you tempted to fall back to some of the practices listed under ‘Active Listing Don’ts’ in Figure 6.3?** |
| **3. Looking at the Do’s listed in the above figure – what could you do even better next time?** |

# Chapter 6: Communications skills

Reflecting on what you have learnt about communication skills so far, consider the following questions. Make a note of your answers below or in the space provided in the book. Typically, 1–3 short paragraphs of text and/or sets of bullets covering key points are sufficient, but you are welcome to write more.

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| **1. Who have you communicated with while working on your project so far (teammates, other stakeholders, etc.)?** |
| **2. What methods of communication have you used while working on your project so far (conversations, face-to-face and/or online meetings, messaging apps, email etc.)?** |
| **3. Have you actively listened and showed empathy for others when communicating while working on your project so far?** |
| **4. If you answered ‘No’ to the previous question, please highlight examples when you haven’t done this and what the implications might be.** |
| **5. Which methods (e.g., meetings, presentations, written reports, etc.) and techniques (e.g., empathy, active listening, storytelling) related to communication skills would you like to further develop and/or improve? Refer to the list you make when working on your project and undertaking wider activities. Seek learning opportunities to develop the items through practical experience and further reading and research.** |

# Chapter 6: Holding effective meetings

Please use this textbox to document your learning after previous and for future meetings with your team. Make a note of your answers below or in the space provided in the book. Typically, 1–3 short paragraphs of text and/or sets of bullets covering key points are sufficient, but you are welcome to write more.

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| **1. Consider the preparation of the meetings. What worked? What did not work?** |
| **2. Were the meetings well run? What worked? What did not work?** |
| **3. What were the meetings’ objectives, and did you meet them? If not, why not?** |

# Chapter 7: Hills and storyboarding

Reflecting on the activities *Design Thinking Hills* and *Storyboards* consider the following questions. Make a note of your answers below or in the space provided in the book. Typically, 1–3 short paragraphs of text and/or sets of bullets covering key points are sufficient, but you are welcome to write more.

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| **1. What was your experience of deciding on your ‘Hill(s)’? What would you do differently next time?** |
| **2. Do you think your Storyboard tells an engaging and memorable story which brings out the value of your idea?** |
| **3. How do you think the Storyboard could be improved?** |

# Chapter 8: Commercial awareness

Reflecting on your own commercial awareness consider the following questions. Make a note of your answers below or in the space provided in the book. Typically, 1–3 short paragraphs of text and/or sets of bullets covering key points are sufficient, but you are welcome to write more.

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| --- |
| **1. What commercial awareness have you gained from experience so far in your life?** |
| **2. What activities can you undertake to gain further commercial awareness and experience?** |
| **3. What actions can you take to better prepare your own commercial awareness before your next job applications and interviews?** |

# Chapter 8: Business case and value proposition

Reflecting on your business case and value proposition answer the following questions. Make a note of your answers below or in the space provided in the book. Typically, 1–3 short paragraphs of text and/or sets of bullets covering key points are sufficient, but you are welcome to write more.

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| **1. What do you consider will be the most compelling aspects of your project’s business case? Why do you think this?** |
| **2. Do you think your sponsor would be likely to invest in further developing your solution? If not or if you’re not sure, what changes could be made to persuade them?** |
| **3. Do you think your value proposition will appeal to your end users? If not or if you’re not sure, what changes could be made to improve it?** |

# Chapter 9: Analysing failure

Recall a situation where you experienced failure – at work, during your studies, at school or in another social setting. Consider the following questions. Make a note of your answers below or in the space provided in the book. Typically, 1–3 short paragraphs of text and/or sets of bullets covering key points are sufficient, but you are welcome to write more.

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| --- |
| **1. What happened? Why did you consider the situation was a failure?** |
| **2. How did you discover the problem, and how did you feel initially?** |
| **3. What did you do next?** |
| **4. Did you analyse the failure? What lessons did you ultimately take away from the experience?** |
| **5. If you experienced such a situation again, what would you do differently?** |

# Chapter 10: Presentation and pitching – Knowing yourself

Consider the following questions. Make a note of your answers below or in the space provided in the book. Typically, 1–3 short paragraphs of text and/or sets of bullets covering key points are sufficient, but you are welcome to write more.

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| **1. When it comes to presenting, what do you consider are your personal strengths and preferences?**  (For example, potential strengths may include experiences gained from previous presentations, confidence when speaking to an audience etc. Preferences may include small or large audiences, presenting on one’s own and/or with a team, generating interactions with the audience, use of humour etc.) |
| **2. When it comes to presenting, what do you consider are your potential areas for improvement and/or concerns?**  (For example, potential areas for improvement and concerns may include limited experience gained from previous presentations, concerns over confidence, answering questions etc.) |
| **3. What area(s) would you most like to be involved in when delivering your team’s pitch? Answer in order of preference, with 1 being the area you’d most like to be involved in and 10 being the one you’d least like to be involved in. (Your answers won’t mean you will, won’t, should or shouldn’t cover specific areas, but it will be useful to know when your team converges.)**   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Area** | **Preference**  **(1 high to 10 low)** | | Opening the pitch |  | | Explaining the challenge |  | | Describing the idea |  | | Demonstrating prototypes |  | | Storytelling |  | | Role-play |  | | Articulating the business case |  | | Closing the pitch |  | | Answering questions |  | | *Other item* – add a row for each |  | |  |  | |  |  | |

# Chapter 10: Reflecting on your pitch

Reflecting on your experience of delivering your pitch consider the following questions. Make a note of your answers below or in the space provided in the book. Typically, 1–3 short paragraphs of text and/or sets of bullets covering key points are sufficient, but you are welcome to write more.

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| **1. What did you personally enjoy about the pitch, and what was the most rewarding element?** |
| **2. Reflecting upon the experience, what would you do differently next time?** |
| **3. Reflecting upon the experience, what went well and what would you do the same (or more of) in future?** |

# Chapter 11: Learning review

Reflect on how your employability skills now compare with where you think you were when you began reading this book. Have a look through all your notes and reflection points. Note down your key learning points in each of the seven skill areas in your personal reflective journal and/or the blank space provided below. Ask yourself: **What are the key things I have learned in each skill area?**

If you prefer to conduct your learning review and personal skills profile in a separate document, please download our *Skills learning review template*.

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| **1. What are the key things I have learned in each skill area?**  *Innovation and Design Thinking:*  *Collaboration and Teaming:*  *Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving:*  *Commercial Awareness:*  *Empathy and Communication:*  *Resilience and Managing Change:*  *Initiative and Active Learning:* |
| **2. How have I learnt these things (by reading, by doing and reflecting, by watching others…)?**  *Innovation and Design Thinking:*  *Collaboration and Teaming:*  *Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving:*  *Commercial Awareness:*  *Empathy and Communication:*  *Resilience and Managing Change:*  *Initiative and Active Learning:* |

# Chapter 11: Personal skills profile

Once you have completed the learning review, it is time to develop your own personal skills profile and to identify some action points. Start by considering each of the skill areas. Think about what skills they cover. You can also download a sample list of employability skills for each section from our online resources.

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| **1. Have a look at Figure 11.3 below. The figure shows a matrix with the seven skill areas against different levels of confidence, with the crying face emoji indicating a skill area you don’t feel at all confident about, the happy face standing for a skill level where you are already quite confident but still see room for improvement and the emoji with the heart eyes standing for skills that you feel you are already really good at. We have added two more for the stages in between.**    **Your task is now to identify some specific skills for each box. Use as much space as needed below to add skills and to take notes.**  **Note:** For example, looking at the ‘communication and empathy’ skills area, you may consider that you are great at storytelling (heart eyes), and also quite strong at visual communication and perhaps active listening (happy face) – but that written correspondence is still more of a mixed bag (smiley face). Contributing to team meetings may still be a bit of a challenge (expressionless face) and presenting without reading from a script may be outright scary (tearful face). This is just an example – your skills profile is likely to be very different. Everyone is different in terms of their own experience, skill sets and in the kind of skills they wish to develop!  We also appreciate that it is not always possible to write a specific skill in each and every one of the boxes. For example, you may be a genius at teaming and have little to improve. Or you simply don’t feel very comfortable at all about your commercial awareness. That is all fine, the main point of this exercise is to reflect and obtain some deeper insight about your strengths and weaknesses when it comes to employability skills!  By looking at each skill area, thinking about what you’re already happy with and what you may want to improve, and filling in the boxes, you visualise your own personal skills profile. Such a resource is very useful to have when preparing for job applications or reviewing career ambitions! |
| **2. Finally, identify at least one action which can help you to develop further each of the skills that you wish to strengthen or improve in (as identified in your personal skills profile).**  **Note:** For example, if you cannot present without reading from a script, you may decide that you will volunteer for more presentations in future. Or if you still struggle with team dynamics, think about if there are additional resources and training that can help you to address this aspect. List your action points below and/or enter them in your personal reflective journal. The list of potential personal improvement actions is virtually endless. If you can, identify SMART targets. These are targets that are **s**pecific, **m**easurable, **a**chievable, **r**elevant and **t**ime-bound (i.e. have a deadline). This makes it more likely for you to follow up on the actions and achieve the improvements you are looking for.  Make sure to identify actions that you will follow through with and review your progress every couple of months, setting yourself some new goals and actions. Some people spend a lot of money on coaches when simple methods such as a personal skills profile and a regular progress review can already help a lot to develop one’s future career. Good luck!  *Innovation and Design Thinking:*  *Collaboration and Teaming:*  *Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving:*  *Commercial Awareness:*  *Empathy and Communication:*  *Resilience and Managing Change:*  *Initiative and Active Learning:* |