Reflections – Supervision with Volunteer

\*Please note names have been changed to respect supervisee’s privacy.

The method of reflection used is Kolb’s (1975) experiential learning cycle. This cycle states that ‘Effective learning is seen when a person progresses through a cycle of four stages’ (McLeod, 2010). These stages are as follows:



(McLeod, 2010)

1. **Concrete Experience**

The supervision began with me asking the volunteer what they felt they had achieved since becoming a volunteer with a youth organisation. The volunteer stated that his achievements were all experiences such the multi-cultural experience, development of theoretical knowledge through the experiential learning cycle (McLeod, 2010), networking and learning to learn from peers. As Dewey (1997, p. 27) states ‘everything depends upon the quality of the experience which is had. The supervision followed by me asking the volunteer if they had experienced any difficulties as a volunteer. They responded by stating that on a specific training course they attended it was very hard to stay engaged when one of the trainers was facilitating. He said he felt she was hard to approach and sometimes made him feel uncomfortable. The volunteer seemed uncomfortable speaking at this point, however this changed when I assured the volunteer that I was only there to listen to them, not judge and that this was confidential. The volunteer also expressed they want to get into the youth centres more and set up some international projects. A future plan was made for me to sit down with the volunteer and go through the application process to apply for an international youth exchange.

I then raised a few small items they may be affecting the volunteers work and development within the organisation. Such items were reminding the volunteer that when they are a volunteer not to give so much of their opinion during the process and to reflect on their time management skills. Also, to focus on the feedback they receive from others and use it for personal development rather than just reject it. I then reaffirmed to the volunteer that I think they are an excellent youth worker who is calm, approachable and willing to work. We went into discussion about the volunteer understanding who they are working with and how to develop a workshop around that to meet learning needs. The volunteer seemed to take this quite well and was happy to listen. I tried to assert confidence in the volunteer and push him to talk more of an active role when working in a team. To which he responded well and then agreed that time management is having a big effect on the quality of his work and more practice needs to be performed on the area. The volunteer brought up his communication as an issue, especially in an international environment. They personally asserted they need to become more wary about how they are speaking, the language they are using and if the other people around them understand. The volunteer then also discussed how he feels that a lot of the time he just goes with other people’s ideas and doesn’t really assert his own ideas. I responded in agreement and suggested using this application for an international youth exchange as a platform for trying out his ideas.

The supervision finished on asserting future actions such as sitting down with other volunteers to write the application for this international youth exchange, getting him into some youth centres on Monday and Wednesday nights as well as getting involved in fundraising for the Ghana project such as a promotional / fundraising package.

1. **Reflective Observation**

Starting such a task on a positive note is always a good idea. It reminds the supervisee why they are volunteering and what they enjoy about it before entering other areas they may be hard to discuss. It was very positive for me to see that this volunteers’ achievements were based on new experiences volunteering for the organisation had provided. The volunteer was extremely happy and positive and when asked about difficulties he was still positive, if a little shy when discussing it and considered it a minor issue. The volunteer only needed a small amount of reassurance and the shyness in discussing such issues left immediately. As Thompson (1996, p. 57) states ‘supervision is an important basis for establishing and developing workplace well-being’. When relaxed the volunteer was happier to express their wants and needs which facilitated the path to set up a future plan.

Due to this relaxed environment raising small items that need addressing with the volunteer was very easy. Although this still brings a negative vibe into the dialogue, following on by reaffirming the qualities I appreciated in his work really helped the dialogue remain constructive and positive. It also lead to the volunteer actively listening, developing their own ideas on addressing issues as well as highlighting areas for development I had not mentioned.
Ending on a positive outlook for the future helps not only with the enthusiasm of the volunteer, but the development of the organisation. It motivates, energizes and generates the excitement needed to push forward with such ideas. This is true, especially when you are dealing with a voluntary environment where nobody is paid for the work that they do.

1. **Abstract conceptualisation**it can be seen from the supervision that maintaining the positivity within the dialogue is key to successful outcomes that benefit both parties. Turning difficulties into positive notes can be a challenge and requires affirmation of why you are they as well as a true belief in support for the individual. This is what paves the road to a relaxed environment in which the volunteer is happier to express themselves.

Suddenly issues can be addressed with professional, relaxed and happy dialogue. However, the negativity will still take root and keeping this our or on the edge of the dialogue is a tricky task. Again, this is down to true affirmation from the supervisor that they believe in the volunteer and appreciate them. This provides safe ground for the volunteer to express their own ideas and issues which is not only excellent for the development of the volunteer, but also the organisation.
A future plan of action is of paramount importance, Illich (1970, p. 85) states that ‘planning, incentives, and legislation can be used to unlock the educational potential’. This is where we as an organisation can use these new ideas which have been fine-tuned by addressing any issues in the process for improving the quality of work it offers.

1. **Active Experimentation**In future all supervisions I conduct are aimed at being positive and focusing on the strengths of the volunteer. Issues and items that need addressing of a negative nature will be done slowly and surrounded heavily by the positive aspects of the volunteer’s work.

All supervisions will finish with a plan of future action based around the strengths, ideas and needs of the volunteer. The action plans will be dedicated to their development in the field of youth work which in turn is of paramount importance to the development of the organisation. As ‘for co-workers, supervision is essential for working together effectively, a space in which to explore roles, styles of work, perspectives and conflicts, and to understand and develop the relationship’ (Preston-Shoot, 1987, p. 153).

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