Reflection Essay

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Abstract

This paper will look at my personal, professional, and academic growth using two pieces in my electronic portfolio. In the Personal Narrative Essay and in the Job Analysis: Senior Risk Management Framework I show how my coursework in cybersecurity, my job at the IT Help Desk at Old Dominion University (ODU), and my participation in Developing Men of Color (DMC) have helped me in my growth towards being a future cyber security professional. In the Personal Narrative, I looked at how personal experiences are tied into professional identity, leadership, and career aspirations. In the Job Analysis I looked at the interpersonal and technical skills necessary for a Senior Risk Management Framework (RMF) Cyber Security Analyst role and related those skills and experiences I currently possess. In addition, this paper will highlight the role of teamwork, problem solving, critical thinking, communication, and technical writing within the realm of cyber security. Creating an electronic portfolio has allowed me to look at the role of experience and academia in applying knowledge and also to look at my personal growth in relation to my career objectives. These two products have allowed me to further solidify my desire to enter the Government Technology (GovTech) field as an RMF expert and to help secure our nation's critical information systems.

Introduction

As I pursued my degree at Old Dominion University (ODU), I have used the skills gained in areas such as technical, critical, communication, leadership, problem solving and analytical abilities to grow both as a professional and as a student. As I pursued interdepartmental studies in cybersecurity and information technology, worked at the ODU IT Help Desk, involved myself in Developing Men of Color (DMC) and created my e-Portfolio, I have become more aware of the connections between the knowledge gained in school and the corresponding work performed in the workplace. My two artifacts, Personal Narrative Essay and Job Analysis: Senior Risk Management Framework, have allowed me to explore my experiences, examine workplace expectations, and determine the competencies required in my future workplace. Additionally, I have explored the concept that cybersecurity is not only technical competency but also involves collaboration, communication, analytical skills, and a dedication to lifelong learning. I would like to work in the field of Government Technology (GovTech) as a Risk Management Framework (RMF) professional. As I created these two artifacts, I have also begun to develop an awareness of my own competencies, areas for further development, and the way my academic and work experiences are connected to my desired professional field.

Professional Identity and Self-Reflection

The Personal Narrative Essay has been useful in clarifying the role that experiences play, and the relationship experiences have to the future in one's career. Prior to this essay, my experience with DMC, my cybersecurity classes, and my experience at the ODU IT Help Desk were all seen as pieces of my college experience but not related to each other or to the future in my career. Through this narrative I was able to observe the relationships between these

experiences and to see the role my experiences played in forming my future in cybersecurity. McAdams (2001) suggests that life stories allow for meaning making as experiences can be related to the present self and to the future self. This allowed me to see my experiences as more than individual occurrences, but pieces that played a role in the formation of my future in cybersecurity.

One of the most valuable experiences to highlight in this artifact is having worked at the ODU IT Help Desk. I developed an appreciation for computer troubleshooting that extends beyond detecting and resolving issues with computers. I also learned to be patient with students, staff and faculty, effectively communicate technical ideas about computers, and be compassionate and an active listener. There were some problems that were relatively minor and could be fixed in no time while others would need more effort and extended troubleshooting. During peak hours users would often have anxiety or concerns about access to key resources and I also needed to maintain composure while dealing with users in these situations. All of these experiences allowed for stress management and troubleshooting skills to grow as well as helped to build confidence. I also gained a better awareness of the connection between common IT support tasks and information security such as identity and access management (IAM), data protection, multifactor authentication (MFA), and password management.

One other significant component of this piece includes my role within Developing Men of Color. I've become more cognizant of community, leadership and collaboration through professional development, networking and peer mentoring experiences. Wood et al. (2017) emphasize social connections and support during emerging adulthood. This relates to my personal and professional growth, not being done alone. Within DMC I have both mentored my peers as they transition into academic and professional endeavors, as well as been mentored by

other DMC participants. Leadership was also viewed not just as leading, but as providing the opportunity for individuals to grow, gain confidence, learn and be successful.

The most difficult component to this portfolio was shifting from discussing my experiences and the importance of these experiences to then analyzing the experiences. I needed to analyze what I gained from the experiences, how the experiences influenced my professional development and how the experiences related to my career. I also needed to analyze how my experiences in the community, academics, and work related to one another and then be able to put these experiences into a meaningful story. Through this analysis, I was also able to improve my analytical and reflective skills. Additionally, I became more aware of the benefits of an ePortfolio in identifying both my growth and my experiences. In my professional role, I will be able to use the components from this portfolio by actively seeking out feedback, utilizing professional obstacles as learning opportunities, and being able to interact with stakeholders and professionals. As an RMF professional, these attributes will be especially useful as I will be interacting with security, technical, and management to help mitigate risks within an organization.

Senior Risk Management Framework

The Job Analysis: Senior Risk Management Framework artifact allowed me to relate my educational background and job experiences to the current needs in the cybersecurity field. I performed an analysis of a Senior RMF Cyber Security Analyst position with SAIC for the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (DCSA). This position provided insight into the required skills and duties for the position I hope to pursue. I also utilized the job description to determine the technical and people skills needed for the position and related my current experience to the position.

Another key takeaway was the importance of having technical skills paired with critical thinking, teamwork, adaptability, communication, and other skills in the cybersecurity community. The job description mentioned tasks such as vulnerability analysis, system security documentation, risk management, security compliance, security controls, and vulnerability management (SAIC, n.d.). This led me to understand the role of an RMF practitioner includes vulnerability identification, risk analysis, documenting results, assisting in security authorization decisions, and providing analysis to decision makers in a manner that is easily understood. Harris and Clayton (2018) recommend the ability to acquire skills that adapt to a continually evolving work environment. This supports the idea that both technical and adaptive skills are important.

I've gained experience in user accounts, access issues, technical issues, MFA, and identity and data protection while at the ODU IT Help Desk. This experience has allowed me to gain some of the skills mentioned above. While these tasks are not exactly on par with a senior RMF position, they do provide some perspective regarding an organization's security. I also studied security controls, networks, risk and vulnerability, and cybersecurity in my Cybersecurity courses. I've been able to relate that to the job description and found how my internship and educational experience correlates to my career aspirations. I've also discovered gaps in my knowledge that I would like to bridge.

Portfolio Development

My e-portfolio has given me the opportunity to showcase various facets of my academic, career and personal growth. The personal reflection highlights self-awareness, identity and professional growth. Job analysis highlights workplace skill analysis, career and job searching.

These two pieces highlight two skills that can be attained through interdisciplinarity and how these can be applied to professional and personal growth.

Creating a portfolio forced me to think about how to use my experiences to demonstrate learning instead of just a series of assignments. I had to ask, what is the purpose of each piece? What skills does that piece exhibit and how do those skills translate to the professional world? These questions have allowed me to be more purposeful in my portfolio creation. Additionally, creating a portfolio has allowed me to understand the nature of professional identity as something that is constructed throughout one's life through education, work experiences, personal and professional relationships and self-reflection. McAdams (2001) offers a great way to look at the construction of professional identity. Linking past experiences to future goals allowed me to clarify my reasons for entering the field of cybersecurity and to show how my experiences influence my choice.

I have also found technical and non-technical skills to be intertwined because of the interdisciplinary aspects of my own education. From a cybersecurity class, I can gain insight into technical threats and safeguards. From a professional environment, I can obtain user support and troubleshooting experience. Portfolio and technical writing can improve my skills in communication and present my knowledge in an organized manner. DMC has provided me with perspectives on teamwork and mentorship. All of these experiences have provided me with a foundation to understand cybersecurity from multiple perspectives. An RMF position would expose me to technical information but also expose me to organizational requirements, stakeholder concerns and the importance of documentation.

Conclusion

By using both the Personal Narrative Essay and Job Analysis: Senior Risk Management, I have been able to assess the experiences I have had at ODU and the way those experiences have helped me achieve professional, personal, and academic goals. The Personal Narrative has allowed me to gain insight into my experiences and the work, community, and education that all contribute to my professional self. The Job Analysis has allowed me to correlate my existing competencies to those required by employers in the field of cybersecurity and allowed me to determine which competencies I should continue to develop. Both artifacts have contributed to my progress in technical problem solving, leadership, research skills, career awareness, critical analysis, communication, and technical knowledge.

I have also found that successful cybersecurity involves both technical and people's skills. I have developed problem solving and patience during my time at the IT Help Desk. DMC has allowed me to understand the value of teamwork and mentorship. The coursework has allowed me to develop skills in data interpretation, communication, and self-reflective learning. I plan to use my current coursework and skill development as I transition into a GovTech career as an RMF practitioner. I will continue to utilize education, hands-on practice, and professional growth to succeed. My ePortfolio shows not just my course work but also the relationship between my growth, the impact that I will have on government information, and the individuals that rely on those systems.

References

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