



GROUP ASSIGNMENT 1

CASE STUDY 2 (RELEASE 1)

IT2160-PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

Reflective Practice

Case Study reference number: A1-CS-2-R1

Between Deadlines and Decisions: A Case of Reflective Practice in a Sri Lankan Professional Journey

Background

In the final years of his undergraduate studies at a well-known Sri Lankan university, Nimal Perera found himself at a crossroads that felt both familiar and unsettling. Like many second-year undergraduates in the Faculty of Computing, Nimal had entered university with a clear sense of direction at least on the surface. He was known among his peers as disciplined, capable, and dependable. His academic record reflected consistent performance rather than brilliance, and his lecturers often described him as “steady.”

However, beneath this appearance of stability, Nimal carried a growing sense of unease. University life had become increasingly demanding, not only in terms of academic workload but also in terms of expectations—those imposed by family, peers, and the broader social environment in Sri Lanka, where education is widely viewed as the primary pathway to security and respectability. Nimal had begun to experience a gap between what he was doing and what he believed he should be achieving, although he struggled to articulate the nature of this gap clearly.

This case follows Nimal over the course of one academic year as he navigates academic challenges, interpersonal tensions, and personal aspirations. It explores how experiences alone do not automatically lead to learning, and how the absence of deliberate reflection can allow patterns of behaviour to persist, shaping habits and, ultimately, character.

Context and Environment

The university Nimal attended was located on the outskirts of Colombo, drawing students from across the island. Many, like Nimal, were first-generation university students whose families had made

significant sacrifices to support their education. This context created a pervasive sense of responsibility among students a feeling that failure was not merely personal but familial.

The academic culture emphasized continuous assessment, group work, and competitive grading. While official discourse encouraged collaboration, informal comparisons between students were common. Marks were frequently discussed, internships were quietly ranked by prestige, and students measured themselves against peers who appeared more confident or more accomplished.

Outside the university, the broader Sri Lankan employment landscape loomed large. Conversations about graduate unemployment, the importance of “industry-ready” skills, and the need to differentiate oneself were frequent. Guest lectures and career talks often highlighted the gap between academic knowledge and professional expectations, reinforcing anxiety among students who felt uncertain about their readiness for the workplace.

Within this environment, feedback from lecturers was typically brief and task-focused, leaving little room for personal engagement. Students were expected to take initiative, yet many hesitated to question authority or seek clarification, influenced by cultural norms that emphasized respect for seniority and avoidance of confrontation.

Key Characters

Nimal Perera was a second-year undergraduate specializing in software engineering. He viewed himself as hardworking and responsible, priding himself on meeting deadlines and avoiding conflict. He believed that perseverance alone would eventually lead to success.

Sachini Fernando, a close friend and batchmate, was outspoken and reflective by nature. She frequently questioned teaching methods, sought feedback, and openly discussed her doubts and ambitions. Some peers admired her confidence; others perceived her as overly critical.

Kavindu Silva, another group member, was technically strong but inconsistent in his engagement. He often missed meetings but performed well in individual tasks. His approach frustrated Nimal, who valued reliability over brilliance.

Dr. Jayasuriya, a senior lecturer, was respected for his expertise but known for his reserved demeanor. He provided structured guidance on assignments but rarely engaged in extended discussion about students’ personal development.

Critical Incidents

The first significant incident occurred during a group assignment in Nimal’s Professional Skills module. The task required students to work collaboratively to analyze a scenario related to professional conduct. Nimal volunteered to coordinate the group, assuming that leadership meant ensuring tasks were completed on time.

As deadlines approached, tensions emerged. Kavindu submitted his portion late, citing other commitments. Sachini questioned the group’s direction, suggesting they reconsider their approach

based on earlier feedback. Nimal, feeling the pressure of time, dismissed her concerns and focused on compiling the submission.

The group received an average grade. While no explicit criticism was directed at Nimal, the feedback noted a lack of depth in analysis and limited engagement with alternative perspectives. Nimal felt disappointed but attributed the outcome to factors beyond his control, including uneven group participation and time constraints.

A second incident unfolded during a mid-semester presentation. Nimal delivered his part confidently, relying heavily on prepared slides. During the question-and-answer session, a lecturer asked him to elaborate on how the experience had contributed to his personal development. Nimal responded by summarizing what the group had done rather than reflecting on what he had learned. The exchange ended politely, but Nimal later recalled feeling unsettled, as though he had missed an opportunity without fully understanding why.

Emerging Problems

Over time, a pattern began to form. Nimal accumulated experiences, assignments, presentations, group projects but struggled to extract meaningful learning from them. Each task was treated as an isolated event rather than part of a broader developmental journey.

His approach to learning remained largely surface-level. He focused on completing requirements and memorizing content necessary to perform adequately in assessments. While this strategy had served him well in earlier stages of education, it now appeared insufficient for the more complex demands of university and professional preparation.

Nimal also became increasingly aware of a discrepancy between how he viewed himself and how others perceived him. He believed he was adaptable and open-minded, yet feedback, when he chose to reflect on it suggested he was resistant to alternative viewpoints. This realization was uncomfortable, leading him to avoid situations that might challenge his self-image.

Conflicting Values and Beliefs

At the heart of Nimal's struggle lay a tension between competing values. On one hand, he valued stability, predictability, and fulfilling familial expectations. His parents often reminded him of the importance of securing a stable job, emphasizing the sacrifices made to support his education.

On the other hand, Nimal felt drawn toward personal growth and self-improvement, although these concepts remained abstract. He admired peers who appeared confident and self-aware but also questioned whether such openness was appropriate in a culture that often rewarded conformity and deference.

His beliefs about success were shaped by years of exam-oriented education, reinforcing the idea that effort alone guaranteed results. When outcomes fell short of expectations, he attributed this to external obstacles rather than examining his own assumptions or behaviours.

These beliefs influenced his attitudes toward feedback. Constructive criticism was often perceived as a threat rather than an opportunity, leading to defensive reactions even when such reactions were not openly expressed.

Reflection Triggers

Several moments acted as subtle triggers for reflection, although Nimal did not immediately recognize them as such. A conversation with Sachini after class left him unsettled. She remarked that while Nimal was reliable, he rarely questioned why things were done a certain way. Her comment was not accusatory, yet it lingered in his mind.

Another trigger emerged during a career guidance session where an industry speaker emphasized the importance of self-awareness and continuous improvement. The speaker shared examples of professionals who stagnated despite technical competence, not due to lack of ability but due to unwillingness to reflect and adapt. Nimal found himself uncomfortably identifying with aspects of these examples.

Despite these moments, Nimal often returned to familiar patterns. Reflection, when it occurred, was brief and unstructured, focused more on justifying actions than examining underlying assumptions. Experiences passed quickly, replaced by new deadlines, leaving little space for deliberate reconsideration.

Unresolved Dilemmas

By the end of the academic year, Nimal faced several unresolved dilemmas. He recognized that something was missing from his learning journey but struggled to define what that was. He questioned whether his approach to university life was truly preparing him for the professional world he hoped to enter.

He remained uncertain about how to balance respect for authority with the need to question and learn. He wondered whether seeking feedback more actively would expose weaknesses he preferred to keep hidden. At the same time, he sensed that avoiding such exposure limited his growth.

Perhaps most troubling was the realization that habits formed through repeated unexamined behaviour were slowly shaping his character. The tendency to avoid discomfort, to prioritize completion over understanding, and to equate busyness with progress had become ingrained.

The case concludes without resolution. Nimal continues his studies, carrying with him a growing awareness of the gap between experience and learning. Whether this awareness will lead to deliberate reflection, purposeful change, and structured personal development remains uncertain, shaped by the choices he has yet to make.

Discussion Questions

1. **Experience vs Learning**

Nimal completes multiple academic tasks successfully, yet feels that “something is missing” in his development. Based on the case, identify specific moments where experience did not translate into learning, and explain why learning may not have occurred, using concepts from reflective practice.

2. **Reflection as a Deliberate Process**

The case describes several moments that could have triggered deeper reflection for Nimal. Select two such moments and analyze how the absence of purposeful reflection influenced his subsequent behaviour and decisions.

3. **Self-Awareness and Blind Spots**

Nimal believes he is open-minded and adaptable, yet feedback and peer interactions suggest otherwise. Using the case narrative, discuss how mismatches between self-perception and others’ perceptions emerge, and how these blind spots affect personal development.

4. **Values, Beliefs, Attitudes, and Behaviour**

Examine how Nimal’s family expectations, cultural beliefs, and personal values shape his attitudes toward feedback, authority, and group work. Explain how these attitudes gradually influence his behaviour and begin to shape his character over time.

5. **Personal Development Planning and Missed Opportunities**

The case highlights several skill gaps and aspirations that remain unaddressed. Identify these gaps and discuss how lack of structured planning prevents Nimal from converting awareness into meaningful development.

6. **Internal and External Influences on Growth**

Drawing only from the case, distinguish between internal factors (within Nimal) and external factors (environmental or social) that influence his progress. Analyze how Nimal’s interpretation of these factors either limits or enables his personal and professional growth.

Instructions to students:

Assessment Weight

- **Total Marks:** 10 Marks
- **Presentation Group:** 6 Marks
- **Mirrored Groups (Evaluation & Critiques):** 4 Marks

Group Structure and Participation

- Each presentation group must consist of **6 members**.
- All **6 members must be present** during the assessment.
- Mirrored groups will actively **evaluate and provide constructive critiques** to the presenting group.

Presentation Requirements

- **Presentation Duration:** 15 minutes
- **Critique Session:** 5 minutes (conducted by mirrored groups)
- **Presentation Format:**
 - A **PowerPoint slide deck** is mandatory.
 - Slides must be uploaded to **CourseWeb at least ONE day prior** to the scheduled presentation date.
- All members must engage equally in the presentation.
- The presentation must be based entirely on the provided case study and Week 2 Lecture concepts.
- Presenters must answer ALL discussion questions provided at the end of the case study

Evaluation and Critique

Mirrored groups will:

- Listen to the presentation attentively
- Provide **constructive, academically grounded feedback**
- Address strengths, weaknesses, clarity, application of concepts, and engagement
- Critiques must be respectful, relevant, and based on Week 2 material

Academic Integrity

- **Plagiarism is strictly prohibited.**
- All content presented must be the group's original work.

- Any violation of academic integrity policies will result in penalties according to institutional guidelines.

Presentation Group Marking Rubric (6 Marks)

Criterion	Description	Marks
1. Content Accuracy & Use of Week 2 Concepts	Answers all six questions; integrates self-awareness, reflection, PDP, Journey Within concepts; applies theory accurately to the case.	2.0
2. Analysis, Critical Thinking & Depth	Demonstrates insight; connects case → theory → group's own experience; shows logical reasoning and reflective analysis.	1.5
3. Structure, Clarity & Presentation Quality	Clear structure; smooth flow; coherent transitions; high-quality PPT; ideas well-organized.	1.0
4. Team Participation & Equal Contribution	All six members present; equal speaking roles; coordinated teamwork; effective time management.	1.0
5. Communication Skill & Professional Delivery	Clear verbal delivery; confidence; engagement; professional tone.	0.5

- Total Marks: 6.0**

Mirrored Group Critique Rubric (4 Marks)

Criterion	Description	Marks
1. Constructive Feedback Quality	Feedback is respectful, relevant, and academically grounded; critique aligns with Week 2 concepts (Self-awareness, Reflection, PDP, Journey Within).	1.5
2. Analytical Depth of Critique	Identifies strengths and weaknesses in the presenting group's analysis; shows insight and understanding of case study concepts.	1.0
3. Engagement During Presentation	Attentive listening; takes notes; asks meaningful and relevant questions; shows active involvement in session.	1.0
4. Professionalism & Communication	Communicates respectfully; uses appropriate academic tone; delivers critique clearly and confidently.	0.5

- Total Marks: 4.0**