After action review

**Mackenzie Health Practicum**

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**After Action Review: Mackenzie Health Practicum**

**Initial Expectations**

When I started my summer internship at Mackenzie Health, I had a couple of expectations. First, I anticipated working within a large, collaborative team, with colleagues each playing specific roles in the project I was assigned to. I envisioned a manager providing close oversight of my work, along with experienced colleagues offering consistent guidance and insights. Second, given the relatively short duration of the internship, just four months, I had tempered expectations about the extent and impact of my contributions. I questioned how significant an impact an intern could realistically make within such a limited timeframe.  
  
**The Reality of the Experience**

The reality of my practicum experience diverged significantly from my initial expectations. I was assigned to the Clinical Informatics department to work on improving downtime procedures. Rather than working within a team as I had anticipated, I found myself primarily working independently. My responsibilities included creating a performance measurement framework, conducting audits with nurse educators to assess downtime preparedness, identifying knowledge gaps, and designing interventions to address them. The key people involved in my project were my manager, who acted as my sole mentor, the nursing staff I audited, and analysts with whom I discussed results and interventions.

Contrary to my expectations of constant guidance, my manager was only available for half-hour weekly meetings due to her busy schedule. This limited interaction time was challenging, as it constrained opportunities to discuss progress and seek clarification. Initially, I felt underprepared and isolated, especially when it came to hospital-specific terminologies and processes. For instance, understanding the location of downtime boxes and tipsheets was difficult without immediate guidance. I felt hesitant to ask basic questions, fearing it might affect my impression. Moreover, the lack of a team structure left me feeling less motivated and confident about my work.

Recognizing the need to adapt, I developed strategies to navigate this unexpected environment. I implemented a system to categorize my queries: general questions that could be addressed by other senior colleagues, and specific ones that required my manager's expertise. This approach helped maximize our limited meeting times and demonstrated my initiative. To address the issue of motivation, I created personal incentives, celebrating small milestones like meeting weekly goals by treating myself to a chocolate donut. This helped maintain my enthusiasm for the project.

As the internship progressed, I began to appreciate the independence I was given. I became deeply engaged in conducting audits and designing interventions, and this self-driven approach significantly contributed to my professional growth. I started to enjoy my work more, which motivated me to meet my goals. The most gratifying moment came during the second round of audits, where tangible improvements in nurse educators' performance showed that my work had a meaningful impact on the hospital's operations.

**Analysing the Differences**

Reflecting on the disparity between my expectations and the actual experience, the following factors come to my mind:

1. **People**:
   * Management Style: My manager's approach emphasized independent work, which differed significantly from the close supervision I was accustomed to in my previous research experiences.
2. **Process**:
   * Work Structure: The hospital's workflow was more autonomous than I anticipated. For example, I was responsible for scheduling my own audits with nurse educators, a task I initially assumed would be coordinated by my manager. I expected she would provide a formal introduction to all the educators, which would lend more credibility to my work and ensure the audits were treated as serious evaluations rather than random checks. This lack of formal introduction initially made it challenging to establish my role and the importance of the audits to the nurse educators.
3. **Technology**:
   * Digital Communication: The reliance on digital platforms for communication, such as video conferencing tools, was more prevalent than I expected. This sometimes led to delays in getting quick answers, as I couldn't simply walk over to a colleague's desk for immediate clarification.
   * Access to Systems: Initially, I faced challenges in accessing certain hospital systems due to my intern status. This limited access temporarily hindered my knowledge about the project and resulted in more fundamental queries. For instance, I had no access to Epic so I was not aware of how often the staff logs into the Business Continuity Access (BCA) application.
4. **Outside Factors**:
   * Cultural Differences: As an international student, I was navigating not just a new work environment but also adapting to Canadian work culture which was very different from the work culture of my country.
5. **Personal Factors**:
   * Prior Experience: My background in research settings, characterized by constant guidance and collaborative work, had shaped my expectations differently from the reality of this professional healthcare environment.
   * Skill Set: While my technical skills in health informatics were strong, I found my project management and time management skills needed rapid development to meet the demands of the role.

**Lessons Learned and Future Strategies**

This practicum experience has imparted valuable lessons that will influence my future professional endeavours. Moving forward, I will set clear expectations from the start by scheduling discussions with supervisors to clarify work structure, guidance levels, and communication frequency. To enhance self-direction, I'll develop project management skills through relevant courses and create detailed work plans with personal milestones for future roles, aligning with Where-to-Play/How-to-Win (WTP/HTW) framework (Martin, 2020). This approach will help me strategically identify where I can best contribute (WTP) and how to maximize my effectiveness (HTW) in each role.

Building a professional network will be a priority. I'll proactively introduce myself to colleagues across departments and seek mentorship opportunities (De Klerk, 2010). Embracing autonomy, I'll approach future roles as opportunities for growth, developing a personal system for problem-solving and decision-making to handle challenges independently.

Lastly, I commit to continuous learning. I'll research organizations and industries before starting new positions and create personal learning plans to develop expertise in key areas. By implementing these strategies, I aim to be better prepared for future professional experiences and maximize my contributions from the start.

**References**

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