# Industry Project

# Individual Reflective Report: IBM Skills Build for Finance Project

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**Introduction**

This report critically reflects on my experience contributing to the IBM SkillsBuild for Finance project, where we collaborated as a group to deliver strategic recommendations to an external client. I have structured this reflection using **Driscoll’s (1994) model** of *What?* *So What?*, and *Now What?*, to ensure a thorough evaluation of my experiences, challenges, development, and career thinking.

**My Contribution**

I made significant contributions across different areas of the project:

* Gamification and Improvement Suggestions: I introduced the idea of a competitive leaderboard to boost engagement through gamification, which became one of our strongest final recommendations. I also proposed an additional key improvement and contributed to refining other ideas during team discussions, helping ensure our advice was practical, innovative, and well-targeted.
* RAG Analysis: I completed my assigned badges for the RAG analysis, carefully evaluating their relevance to finance students, interactivity, and practical value. This work formed a key foundation for our overall platform evaluation​​.
* Secondary Research: I led the collection and analysis of secondary research, consulting reputable sources such as the World Economic Forum. This underpinned many of our recommendations and positioned IBM SkillsBuild against trends like AI, blockchain, and ESG investing.
* Presentation Development: I created the slides for the Primary Research and Secondary Research sections and contributed collaboratively to other parts of the final group presentation, ensuring our findings were presented clearly and professionally.

**Challenges Faced**

During the project, I encountered several challenges:

* IBM Cloud Access Issue: While completing the AI chatbot course alongside a teammate, we encountered technical issues setting up IBM Cloud accounts, preventing us from building a live chatbot. Despite this, we fully engaged with the course material and reflected on its practical applications in financial services.
* Balancing Client and Supervisor Expectations: There were moments where the client’s feedback and the academic supervisor's guidance differed. I helped the team stay aligned with the original project brief while maintaining clear, professional communication with both parties.
* Time Management and Collaboration: Managing multiple academic modules alongside the project required careful planning. Our entire team faced this challenge, so we practised flexibility and regularly communicated availability to ensure we remained productive and respectful of each other's time.
* Navigating Group Dynamic: Our team dynamics followed **Tuckman’s (1965) stages of group development**. Initially, during the storming phase, we experienced uncertainty over roles and direction. Through open discussions and clarification of responsibilities, we progressed to norming and eventually performing, resulting in a well-coordinated final delivery.

**Skills Developed**

This project allowed me to develop a wide range of skills:

* Research and Analytical Skills: Completing thorough secondary research and evaluating badge content improved my ability to critically assess information and transform insights into clear, actionable recommendations​.
* Creative Thinking and Innovation: Developing the competitive leaderboard idea and proposing other improvement suggestions strengthened my ability to create innovative, user-focused solutions.
* Team Collaboration and Communication: My contributions reflected the **Belbin (1981) Implementer role**, as I focused on structured delivery of tasks like research collation and presentation preparation. However, I also demonstrated 'Plant' qualities by proposing creative ideas.
* Commercial and Digital Awareness: Researching emerging trends such as AI-powered finance, blockchain, and ESG investing helped me build a deeper understanding of how finance and technology are evolving together.

**Critical Reflection and Lessons Learned**

Reflecting through **Driscoll’s model** crystallized key learnings:

* **What?**  
  I engaged deeply with both independent tasks and teamwork, facing challenges and seizing opportunities for innovation.
* **So What?**  
  I realised the importance of combining creativity with strong research backing and understood how technical barriers (like the IBM Cloud access issue) can significantly impact project outcomes.
* **Now What?**  
  In future consultancy projects, I will assess technical feasibility earlier, advocate for clearer task definitions within teams, and incorporate greater flexibility into planning to account for unexpected challenges.

The experience made me understand Information alone is insufficient; platforms need to engage users both practically and emotionally through gamification, career relevance, and practical application. Additionally, this project demonstrated the value of proactive problem-solving, organised team communication, and stakeholder management. I also concluded Belbin claims that each person has a single primary role, however on my team, people switched responsibilities based on the situation. Tuckman claims that teams develop gradually, but in practice, even after performing well, my team occasionally regressed. Unlike the ideas, real teamwork is messy and more adaptable.

**Career Goals**

This project helped me refine and focus my career ambitions. Working closely with IBM SkillsBuild confirmed my interest in consultancy and data-driven roles within finance and technology. It also reinforced my preference for roles that combine technical expertise with client engagement.

**My two SMART career goals are:**

* **Short-term Goal (S/M/A/R/T):** Secure a graduate role or internship in data analytics, consultancy, or a related area by September 2025, focusing on developing client-facing, research, and technical skills through real industry experience.
* **Long-term Goal (S/M/A/R/T):** After gaining 1–2 years of industry experience, enrol in a Level 7 Data Science Apprenticeship by 2027 to achieve a master's-level qualification while continuing to build professional expertise in analytics and data science.

**Conclusion**

Using Driscoll's model to reflect on the IBM SkillsBuild project allowed me to assess my development as a team player and a professional. I managed secondary research, helped create client-ready results, and offered important concepts like the leaderboard gamification concept. I gained flexibility, resilience, and confidence in handling real-world consulting responsibilities by overcoming technical challenges and balancing academic expectations. In addition, the project boosted my interest in consulting and data-driven roles and has changed my point of view as a consultant and improved my skills, highlighting the value of achieving a balance between task completion, flexible communication, and analytical thinking.

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