

Personal Case Study

By Kristian Mikhel

My name is Kristian. I'm a UX lead at Aleph and a Master's Student at Falmouth University. In this video, I will walk you through my journey throughout the first module, reflecting upon what I have learnt, analysing my progress, and exploring what I could focus on in the future.

I have always been fascinated by how design affects the customer's emotions in the context of using a product or a service, how it empowers change by fulfilling needs, and remains measurable and evaluative (*Hassenzahl 2008*). Enrolling in this course, I was hoping to grow my personal capabilities as a problem solver and transform my skills into expert knowledge. More specifically, I was aspiring to focus on exploring the ways research informs better design decisions and becoming a better research practitioner, but practising critical reflection made me seriously rethink my priorities.

I launched my critical reflective journal in September and kept it updated throughout the course. As Fook and Garnder put it in 'Practising Critical Reflection', the 'purpose of critical reflection is primarily to lead to changed (improved) professional practice' (*Fook and Gardner 2007*), so I used the journal as a space to keep track of my smart goals, challenge my pre-existing assumptions, and identify focal points for professional growth.

At the pivotal point, I challenged myself to focus on improving my interpersonal skills: reach out to peers, get more active in the community of practice. Setting a smart goal of posting comments in the forum and posts on social media related to my practice, actively participating in the events of my UX design community, as well as keeping my journal open to the public and constantly adding new entries helped me get more vocal about my thoughts, share my knowledge with colleagues, get substantially better at communicating with people. However, I was not fully satisfied with how active (or rather, idle) I was on the forum, shy to share my thoughts and uncomfortable with replies. I am planning to be more active and open during the upcoming modules.

Discovering materials on creativity and how its channelled helped me completely change my perception of creativity being a fleeting emotional state rather than a muscle that demands exercise and can be channelled and controlled (*Roberto 2019*). Learning about the methods of opposite thinking, David Bowie's cut-ups, SCAMPER and ICEDIP frameworks (*Dam and Siang 2021*) helped me understand that remediation was not a form of plagiarising, but a mean of creating new mediums, through processing the existing experiences and materials. I have finally stopped trying to reinvent the wheel every time a new project is kicked off, and started using reverse-engineering to craft my own design solutions.

In order to deliver more efficiently, I am using a Kanban board, as recommended by Kenneth Rubin in 'Essential Scrum' (*Rubin 2012*), to track my personal responsibilities, work deliverables, and learning plans. I used Kanban to work

on two rapid ideation sessions, made sure to set feasible goals and break them down into granular tasks.

Professional growth is driven not only by planning and reflecting, but by setting challenging goals and putting yourself in an uncomfortable position to empower development (*Ericsson, Prietula, Cokely 2007*). I used rapid ideation sessions to challenge my skill set and explore new technology. During the first session, I discovered a tool called Framer X, featuring rich functions, such as camera module, video embedding, and more. I was happy to recommend it to my team for usability testing. The second session challenged me to explore the world of board games. I learnt how to design the mechanics and the economics of the game, how to put together the board, used the opportunity to discover great open-source software for designers.

The latter fuelled my interest for affordable technology and open software. Researching the alternatives to popular programmes, I could barely find anything suitable for the needs of a practitioner. I went as far as writing an article on the state of open-source for designers. As someone aspired to utilise design as a source for good and advocate for affordable tech, I would love to use my skills, my controlled creativity, challenging mindset, to contribute to the development of open-source software for designers. Reaching out to the community and fulfilling my smart goals would not only help me grow as a professional, but potentially help deliver a comprehensive product experience to many users.

References

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