Webmaster®

Strengthen Individual Responsibility and Personal Management Skills

NOTES FOR TEACHERS

Using Webmaster to strengthen individual responsibility and personal management skills

'Webmaster' supports the development of personal management skills within the context of a complex, large group project.

Employers value the ability of an individual to contribute effectively to a group, take personal responsibility for specific aspects of a job and influence the outcome in a positive way. Many young employees find it difficult to speak up in larger groups and need to build their confidence in establishing clarity, direction and control.

Webmaster provides an ideal opportunity to build personal confidence through a staged series of exercises that make increasing demands upon the learners and allow them to move towards leadership roles.

Our suggestion is that you run the whole team version of Webmaster, which involves a group of up to 30, as described in the main manual. However, rather than simply making the rope and metal components available to the whole group, allocate one or more of the pieces to each individual participant and ask them to 'own' those components for the duration of the exercise.

The reasons for this recommendation are:

1. It highlights the need for each individual to contribute and therefore requires them to focus, concentrate and know how and where to apply effort

2. Failure to acknowledge uncertainly or confusion will prevent the wider team from succeeding

3. There is scope within the exercise to develop it from this starting point, so that learners experience working under pressure and making personal decisions that will have an immediate impact upon team performance.

One of the major challenges for young people moving into employment is the need to understand what it means to be part of an organisation that has employed you because of your specific skills, work ethic and potential to contribute to collective goals. This requires recognition of where you fit into the 'bigger picture' and how your choices, successes and failures have an impact on others.

For anyone considering self-employment or even running his/her own business, this understanding of personal responsibility is essential.

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Webmaster simulates 'organisational working' in a number of ways. It is a complex task, with considerable uncertainty in the early stages. There are a number of possible approaches to the task and a clear and agreed strategy is essential.

It requires all team members to know exactly what their roles are and to be ready and able to carry out their part of the task correctly, even under pressure.

Individual participants need to:

1. Understand the overall task and constraints and recognise the penalties for failure

2. Contribute ideas and suggestions to the strategy and be willing to suggest changes and process improvements during the course of the activity

3. Establish an agreed way of working and maintain the discipline of following this, unless a change is agreed

4. Take responsibility for identifying their own contribution and knowing exactly where and when to apply their effort

5. Be prepared to acknowledge uncertainty and error

6. Maintain focus and concentration even when not directly involved in the activity

These are the key learning points to draw out from the exercise. These can be used when supporting students in any team project, in developing their understanding of their own strengths, in building their ability to manage themselves and in taking personal responsibility for effects of their action or inaction.

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Suggested questions to use when reviewing Webmaster: a focus on individual responsibility and contribution

1. At the start of the challenge, how confident were you that you would be successful? What gave you that confidence or doubt?

2. How did you make sure that you understood the task and the rules that were in operation?

3. Did you ask any questions to confirm your understanding or to clarify the rules or constraints? If so, what was the effect of those questions?

4. How was the team (or sub-teams) organised to complete the task? Who was influential in making this happen? What did they do?

5. What do you believe you, personally, contributed to the exercise? Is that something you find easy to do or was it a challenge for you?

6. Was there any leadership in evidence during this task? If so, how did you support the leaders or challenge them if you felt their decisions were wrong?

7. What can you learn from your experience of this exercise that will help you to take more responsibility for your own learning and development in the future?

8. How did you plan, and organise yourselves, to put therope links together? Did you rehearse this? How did you improve your performance?

9. What have you learned from this exercise about being in a team? What might you, personally, do differently if you were to do a similar team exercise in future?

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When summarising the learning from the exercise, reinforce the following learning points.

1. Your personal contribution is important and you must understand how you can influence the activity around you

2. You need to be able to visualize your end goal in order to work out how to contribute most effectively to achieving it

3. No-one else will know whether you understand, have ideas or need support unless you tell them. Be prepared to speak up and be clear about what you have to offer and what you need.

4. You will only learn by experimenting and taking risks from time to time. Do not be afraid of taking a calculated risk, in a supportive environment, in order to develop

5. No-one can learn for you. You are responsible for your personal performance and for identifying strategies for your own development.

Depending upon your context, you might wish to relate these learning points to specific situations (eg. managing the first weeks of a new study programme or employment) with relevant examples.