

Chapter 7

MY STORY OF NANDI'S STORY

*"[Without my portfolio] I think I will be somewhere on the street,
part of the unemployed graduates"*

Nandi (pseudonym)

Personal Data

Participant:	Nandi (pseudonym)
Degree:	Completed BA Honours degree
Region:	Pretoria (Main campus)
Age:	26
Gender:	Female
Peer help experience:	48 months
Period of portfolio development:	36 months
Portfolio evaluation:	Excellent standard achieved (80 - 100%)

Nandi confirmed that she was comfortable with the interview being recorded and completed the consent form to participate in the research. She also gave her permission for copies of some of her documents to be included in this study.

INTRODUCTION

This story is based on the transcribed interview between the researcher and Nandi. In this chapter the researcher's impressions of Nandi will be described. This will be followed by a discussion of emerging themes, highlighting Nandi's experiences during the development of her portfolio. The relationship between the researcher and Nandi will also be described in terms of what was found to be helpful and less helpful about both the interview with Nandi as

well as the process of gaining an overview of how she managed the process. Finally, an overall analysis of Nandi's portfolio will be provided in the conclusion.

MY IMPRESSIONS

I know Nandi well, as we have worked closely together for four years. In line with her diligence and well developed sense of responsibility, Nandi had the venue in the registration hall unlocked where the interview was to take place, well before it commenced. Nandi's portfolio was placed on the table, and the table and chairs were neatly set out, ready for the interview. Nandi was neatly dressed in a brown and beige top with beige slacks. I know her as a kind person who is open and friendly. Our interview started in a relaxed manner with an informal discussion about her friend who was in hospital.

Nandi's portfolio created a professional image and during the interview I remarked on the neat manner in which the information was presented and managed. Most of the information was neatly typed out and filed in plastic envelopes. Nandi shared that she was glad that her portfolio arrived back in South Africa in time for our interview. Her portfolio had been taken to the University of Göteborg and the Chalmers University of Technology in Sweden by the peer help coordinator at the former Port Elizabeth Technikon as an example of what a portfolio is and what it contains. One of the Swedes who browsed through Nandi's portfolio made the following comment which was quoted in a formal letter which the peer help coordinator addressed to Nandi:

"... but this seems to be her whole LIFE of the past three years...!"

My story of Nandi's story is, however, an attempt to tell the story of significant experiences in Nandi's life, which she has reflected on and has included in her portfolio.

EMERGING THEMES

I started the interview off by asking Nandi to tell me about her experiences in developing her portfolio. The transcribed interview formed the basis from which the following themes emerged:

Theme of initial difficulty in understanding the concept and purpose of portfolios

Nandi started off by saying that initially, she struggled with the concept of developing a portfolio. She mentioned a number of reasons for this namely that (1) initially, she did not understand what a portfolio entailed; (2) she did not understand the purpose of the portfolio; (3) she could not understand what she had to compile (“... I think I struggled a lot because I didn’t know what is it that I am doing”); and (4) she felt that the main focus of a portfolio was for the project leaders to monitor her activities. She also summarised her feelings about her experiences with portfolio development in the Personal Data and Consent Form as follows:

This was not easy at first, because it was not clear to me how it is going to help me.

This clearly indicated Nandi’s difficulty in grasping the concept and purpose of portfolios and how this tool could benefit her.

Theme of taking charge of the portfolio development process

Nandi shared a number of ways in which she took charge of the portfolio development process to enable her to overcome her initial difficulties. She:

- **read the instruction brochure on portfolio management** to gain an understanding of the purpose of portfolios.

- **consulted other sources**, like the internet, for help to see "... how the portfolio has been used internationally".
- **consulted specific articles for more information**. She said: "... and the other article I have seen about employers looking at graduates who have compiled ... [a portfolio] and who can also present their experience".
- **consulted others for help**. She said: "[y]es, there were some stages that I was stuck but I tried to communicate with other peer helpers and also ... with the project leaders and then I realised that what I am stuck with, how can I do it".
- **followed the instructions** in terms of how she should compile her portfolio.

These actions linked with the **theme of self-efficacy** and the **theme of self-directedness**.

Theme of having a positive attitude towards portfolio development

Nandi's self-directed research into what portfolio development entailed and how this tool is used, was a revelation to her. Through this new knowledge Nandi grasped the benefits of developing a portfolio and started viewing it as a tool that she could use for her own benefit. The actions that Nandi took, therefore, led to a change in her perspective about portfolio development. She realised that the portfolio had benefits, not only for the project leaders, but also for herself. Once she realised this, she could understand its purpose and commit herself to the development thereof. She said:

... it is all about my own tool to realise where are my weaknesses, what are my areas of development. And also to understand myself better. Then I ... realised that it is not really difficult.

This linked with the **theme of taking ownership of the process**.

The change in her perspective, therefore, allowed Nandi to commit herself, with enthusiasm,

to the development of her portfolio. She said: “Once I grasped the purpose of [the] portfolio I was excited about it because I realised that it was only through it that I can monitor my own development...”. It therefore seemed as if Nandi realised the importance of the portfolio in helping her to monitor her development - thus linking with the **theme of monitoring development**.

Nandi also stated that she felt that a positive attitude was important to the successful development of a portfolio. She stated that a person must want to understand what portfolio development entailed. She, furthermore, felt that if a person viewed portfolios only as a tool to be monitored by, it will be difficult to embrace. She felt that this would hamper a person’s internal motivation to continue developing the portfolio. Her own internal motivation, according to Nandi, was boosted once she realised that she was developing the portfolio for herself. She said: “... when I reached the point to realise that what I am doing ... it’s not really for the project, that this is for me”. Nandi’s only reservation was that the process was a time consuming task. Despite this, she remained motivated to continue developing her portfolio as she realised the importance of the process for her own development - thus linking with the **theme of intrinsic motivation** and the **theme of taking ownership of the process**.

Nandi’s attitude was also positively changed when she realised that the portfolio facilitated the communication between the project leaders and the peer helpers as it provided specific feedback on the peer helpers’ development. She said:

... also ... for me and the project leaders to be able to communicate and for them to be able to understand where do I still need help and which areas of development I must work on.

This linked with the **theme of portfolio development facilitating collaboration**.

Once Nandi realised that the portfolio was her own career tool that she was developing, she

took ownership of, not only the process, but also of her own learning and development. She said:

Also, a sense of responsibility. Who is responsible for your own growth? Who is responsible for you to do certain things? And then you realise, through [the] portfolio, that nobody is going to do something for you unless you do it for yourself. And when you do it for yourself, you enrich yourself. And when you take risks, you enrich yourself and also learn new things about yourself.

Nandi also mentioned that writing her narrative essay in the portfolio made her realise how important it was to take responsibility for her own learning. She realised that she had to work for herself and had to use opportunities that come her way to her own benefit, as this provided possibilities for learning - thus linking with the **theme of taking ownership for her own learning**.

It therefore seemed that once Nandi realised the benefit of the portfolio process and started viewing it as her own personal tool that she was creating, she committed herself, with enthusiasm, to the development thereof. She also realised that she could use this as a tool to monitor her development, that it facilitated the communication between project leaders and the peer helpers, and that the portfolio facilitated her taking responsibility for her own learning and development. This linked with the **theme of taking ownership of the process**; the **theme of monitoring development**; the **theme of intrinsic motivation**; the **theme of portfolio development facilitating collaboration** and the **theme of taking ownership for her own learning**.

Nandi also summarised her positive attitude towards portfolio development when she mentioned that she often wondered where she would have been, had she not developed her portfolio. On asking her where she thought she would be, she said:

... I think I will be somewhere on the street, part of the unemployed graduates”.

This linked with the **theme of viewing portfolio development as of critical importance to career development.**

Nandi's change in attitude had a direct impact on her behaviour. She actively started advocating the portfolio development process to others as she firmly believed in the benefits of this career tool. She recommended it to individuals that she came in contact with as a tool to ensure continued growth so “... that you don't ... stagnate in life”. Her portfolio also contained an article, which she shared with others to advocate the use of portfolios. She said:

So I have put it [referring to the article] here ... especially when you ...speak to your friends and other people ... When you talk to them about [the] portfolio and they don't understand it ... If I read this article [to them] ... most of the people ... understand ...

Nandi shared this, specifically with those individuals who were working and have gained work experience. She, furthermore, confirmed that she also shared it with her brother who was working for a large mining company in a contract position. Part of the requirements, when applying for a permanent position, was the compilation of a document which seemed similar to the portfolio that Nandi was developing. She encouraged her brother to develop this tool for his own continuous personal growth.

It is therefore apparent that Nandi's positive attitude towards portfolios and her firm belief in the benefit of this tool, allowed her to advocate the use of this tool, both in formal and informal situations. This linked with the **theme of actively advocating the development of portfolios.**

Theme of reflecting on goals

The theme of reflecting on goals was apparent throughout the interview with Nandi. She compiled a section in her portfolio focusing on all types of evaluation and feedback that she had received over the years. These included formal peer help evaluation results, testimonials and letters of appreciation. Nandi shared that she felt that this feedback was important to her as it highlighted areas for development. She said: “[s]o that was important for me to realise that there is certain things that I must work on...”. Her aim with this section was, therefore, to collate the feedback on her performance, to allow her to reflect on both her strengths and weaknesses, and to set goals to improve specific areas in her life - thus linking with the **theme of facilitating on-going reflection**.

The portfolio also allowed Nandi to reflect on experiences and, in doing so, to decide what her next step or course of action should be. This goal-directedness was also highlighted in Nandi’s narrative essay, where she reflected that initially, she observed a difference between the trained peer helpers and herself, when she was appointed as an Assistant Student Counsellor. She reflected that she felt that she lacked some of the skills that these peer helpers had. This enabled her to make the decision to join the programme. It therefore seemed as if Nandi’s reflection enabled her to decide what goal she should pursue next.

Nandi also mentioned that the portfolio allowed her to, not only set goals, but also to monitor whether she was staying on track in reaching her goals. The portfolio also required from Nandi to set specific career goals. Nandi shared that she had a few options which all depended on her selection for a specific course, which was her primary goal. She also had a plan B and C that could be pursued if need be. Shortly before this interview, Nandi was informed that her selection had been successful and she decided to continue working towards reaching her primary goal. It therefore seemed as if the reflection on goals allowed Nandi to set her goals realistically and to ensure that she had a number of options available, which she ranked in order of importance.

Nandi’s goal-directedness was also apparent in her self-directed actions. Nandi shared a

document which summarised important transferable skills which are highly valued by employers. She used this list in a pro-active and self-directed manner to rate her development in each of these skills. She said:

...I have got [a document] about transferable skills which was very important to me, also to monitor myself ... to see where do I fit, what do I still have to do to improve my skills. So I have put it here ... to mark myself and rate myself.

It therefore seemed as if Nandi's reflection on goals motivated her to act in a self-directed and pro-active manner to allow her to monitor her skills development and set goals for future learning - thus linking with **the theme of monitoring of skills development; the theme of self-efficacy** and the **theme of on-going reflection**.

As the portfolio allowed Nandi to reflect on her goals, she became aware of a number of self-directed actions that she took, with the aim of reaching specific goals, namely:

- She aimed at increasing her counselling skills. To reach this goal, she volunteered to participate in answering student letters and e-mails. She described this as "... another phase of learning because ... it was a different type of counselling from face to face which I was used to". Nandi shared that she developed the ability to 'read between the lines' to determine the extent of the enquiries. She also learnt to provide a broader response to the enquiries, to ensure that she provided as much information as possible to the student.
- She accepted an invitation to present a workshop on portfolio development to fellow peer helpers in Port Elizabeth. Her aim was to broaden her presentation skills. She received the following feedback on her involvement, which she filed under the evaluation section in her portfolio as part of feedback received:

Your presentation was rated very highly by the 62 participants in the training as well as by the programme coordinators and other staff members ... Special mention was made of your free and easy style, the excellent rapport you established with your audience and your great living testimony with regard to peer helping (you indeed *helped* your peers on that day).

This tied in with Nandi's belief of opening herself up to new experiences and taking risks - thus linking with the **theme of taking ownership for her own learning**.

- She aimed at applying what she had learnt in theory, by establishing a peer help driven career guidance and outreach programme in schools. She said: "I learnt a lot with regard to choosing a career, career presentations, career exhibitions. To be able to practise what I learnt, I took the initiative of contacting the Department of Education so that we can do career guidance in the schools ...".

Nandi's portfolio also contained a reflection on self-directed steps that she took to assist a student who was looking for information that she did not have. Nandi chose to search for the information herself, as she had the goal to broaden her own knowledge about the matter. Rather than referring the student to a professional counsellor, which some peer helpers do in such instances, Nandi searched for the information herself. Nandi explained: "What happened is that one of the students phoned me to find out about ... the Council of Counsellors. I said I don't have any idea about it but I can find out for them". She continued to describe her experience:

This is just information ... if you ... search on the Internet about professional membership ... there was this Council of Counsellors in SA. This was the council for people who have ... honours in other fields of studies like Criminology and Sociology, who cannot be admitted to the Board of Psychology if they want to practise in other places like in the police as counsellors. Then I phoned the

Department of Criminology ... they just said I must send the student through, there is a person who deals with that. Then I decided to search on the Internet to find out what is it. And then I found it and then I made copies... I also felt that this is something that I can put in my portfolio ...

As Nandi was an Assistant Student Counsellor at Unisa at that time, and had obtained the same level of qualification as the student she was helping, Nandi realised that she could also register at this Council. She consequently kept copies of this information in her portfolio for her own benefit, and also to share with other students. This indicated a pro-active and goal directed activity and linked with the **theme of self-efficacy** and the **theme of using the portfolio as a resource file**.

Theme of facilitating on-going reflection

During the interview with Nandi it became apparent that her portfolio process facilitated on-going reflection. Initially, it seemed as if Nandi was torn between, on the one hand, the time consuming nature of reflection and portfolio development, and on the other hand, the importance that she attached to her on-going reflection activities. She said:

It becomes difficult for one to get time but there is a stage that you really feel that this is important for me to reflect. And ... once you get time, you get time to reflect on other things ... certain things happen and you forgot to put it down [referring to reflecting on experiences].

Once Nandi realised the importance of on-going reflection, she overcame her conflict and started reflecting on her experiences. Her portfolio contained a number of examples of how she reflected on her experiences and what she had learnt from these, namely, she:

- **reflected on past experiences** such as on her academic skills development.

Through this reflection Nandi realised that she would have performed better academically if she had been trained as a peer helper and had enrolled for the Certificate in Student Development. She also realised that she was lacking certain academic skills. This linked with the **theme of self-assessment**.

- **reflected retrospectively** on the difference that she perceived between the trained peer helpers and herself, before she was trained as a peer helper. She realised that the trained peer helpers had developed a number of skills such as communication skills, ability to work under pressure, interpersonal skills, listening skills, time management and CV writing skills. This reflection allowed Nandi to set goals namely to be trained as a peer helper and to actively work on developing her skills - thus linking with the **theme of self-assessment** and the **theme of goal-directedness**.
- **reflected on personal experiences**. Nandi shared an incident that she was involved in, relating to an interpersonal conflict. She said: "I want to tell you a personal story but ... I want you to see how I have changed and manage to solve the problem through working on my portfolio. For three years I had a colleague.... [sharing an incident of on-going conflict]".

Nandi mentioned that she went for therapy and because she was so depressed, she started reflecting on this situation in her portfolio. She mentioned that she felt like a victim at that stage and it felt as if the other person was in control of the situation. She said that she had reflected on whether the colleague's comments were personal attacks or just general comments. She reflected that she felt that she had overreacted in the past and needed to become more objective. Nandi also reflected that the fact that she remained silent about this problem for such a long time, had been to her detriment. She also reflected on how she needed to change her perspective on how powerful she had previously perceived this person to be. This linked with the **theme of introspection**; the **theme of self-assessment** and the **theme of developing self-knowledge**.

- **reflected on current situations** such as when she was appointed as a contract

worker in Mmpumalanga, where she had to work independently as the only counsellor in that region. Through this reflection, Nandi became aware of a variety of skills that she had developed during this contract period. The skills that she listed were problem-solving; decision-making; flexibility and adaptability. She said: “[t]his was more of a development phase for me. My ability to work under pressure and independently without supervision”. This linked with the **theme of monitoring skills development** and the **theme of self-assessment**.

Another example of a **reflection on current experiences** that Nandi shared, related to her involvement during the Unisa Open Day. She wrote:

I had a project with [Company's name]. Everything went well but there were few things which I felt I should have done differently, like not involving a lot of students from other movements, not trusting people with regard to money and to make sure that you involve other people as witnesses when you reach an agreement with an outside company, because when the job is done, they are reluctant to pay.

This reflection facilitated learning, assisted her in developing insight into her own behaviour and enabled her to set goals for future involvement in similar events - thus linking with the **theme of introspection**; the **theme of self-assessment** and the **theme of on-going reflection**.

- used the skill of reflection to **compile parts of her portfolio such as her work philosophy**. To compile this section, she reflected on values that were important to her in a work context:

Example of Nandi's Work Philosophy

... to be honest in my work and to be the best I can, to bring changes in my work. And also to be open for learning and trying new things always. To learn more and improve my own skills and to have good personal relations with other colleagues. And try to give the client the recent and well confirmed information. To be able to know my boundaries with regard to rendering service. And also to admit that I don't know or that I can't be able to help the clients - to acknowledge that. And to be able to separate between a work problem and a personal attitude. And to work with everybody, irrespective of colour, age, sex and gender or personality. And be able to work independently, do things before the instruction comes ...

It therefore seemed as if the process of reflecting on her work philosophy, has highlighted her values and independent behaviour. She said: "... I don't have to be pushed, ...nobody [has] to come and say do this, do that... you know it is part of your responsibility" - thus linking with the **theme of self-efficacy** and the **theme of taking ownership for her own learning**.

During the interview it was therefore apparent that the portfolio allowed Nandi to **reflect holistically on past and current experiences with the aim of setting goals for future development**. She reflected on both work and personal experiences, evaluated work-in-progress to monitor the development of projects and set future goals based on her reflections on experiences. Her reflections were data rich both in terms of the depth of the reflections as well as the breadth of the experiences that she reflected on. This linked with a number of themes namely the **theme of self-assessment**; the **theme of introspection**; the **theme of developing self-knowledge**; the **theme of monitoring skill development**; the **theme of**

self-efficacy and the **theme of taking ownership**.

Theme of monitoring of skills development

At the beginning of the interview Nandi confirmed that the portfolio enabled her to reflect on her growth that has taken place as a result of her participation in peer help activities. She felt that the portfolio enabled her to provide evidence of the skills that she had developed. She said:

... especially in the skills areas where I was before I joined the peer help programme, and where I am now ... it can be able to show me the difference.

This was confirmed by her comments about portfolio development in the Personal Data and Consent Form where she wrote:

Once I have grasped the purpose of [the] portfolio I was excited about it because I realised that it was only through it that I can monitor my own development and also my own weaknesses and strengths.

Nandi mentioned a number of reflections which described activities that she was involved in and highlighted the skills that she felt she developed through her participation. These included the following:

Table 17: Summary of Nandi's skills

Activity	Skills developed
Working with trained peer helpers during a registration period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication skills • Decision-making skills

Contract appointment in Mmpumalanga	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to work independently • Problem-solving and decision making
Peer Help Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to reflect feelings • Being assertive (using "I" messages)
Participation in peer help activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening skills • Telephone etiquette • General office administration • Working independently and under pressure • Being flexible and adaptable
Portfolio development process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing skills
Peer Help Programme Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to communicate with external institutions • Organisation skills • Negotiation skills • Marketing skills

It therefore seemed as if the portfolio development process facilitated on-going reflection and allowed Nandi to identify the skills that she had developed. Nandi also showed how she reflected on incidents in her portfolio and then **summarised these skills** in her CV:

Extract from Nandi's CV, summarising the activities that she had reflected on in her portfolio and highlighting her transferable skills:

I am working at the BSCCD and my duties include the following:

- answering student letters, student e-mails and messages on the discussion forum by giving career guidance and curriculum advice.
- Helping students when the counsellors are overloaded with work or understaffed or during staff meetings.
- Acting as departmental secretary during bureau staff meetings or when the secretary is on leave
- Organising presentations of career outreach to schools for career guidance and study skills and exam preparation.
- Helping students with CV writing skills and how to present themselves during interviews.
- Doing general administrative work at the peer help office and counselling office.
- Doing research on peer help alumni by establishing what they have gained from the programme.
- Doing research for theology department on planning of their winter schools and discussion classes to establish when and how many days will the student prefer it to be done.
- Assist the Career Development Adviser with students who need help with regards to CV writing and presentations.
- Help the Career Development Adviser in organising the Graduate Recruitment Fair which demanded me to help students and representatives from companies where ever they needed help during the Fair.

Skills acquired:

In doing all of the above, I have acquired the following transferable skills: writing skills, creativity, the ability to read between the lines, general office administration skills for example, answering the telephone, receiving students etc, probing skills as far as research is concerned and analysing and interpretation skills. Also designing

Nandi, therefore, used the portfolio to reflect on experiences and to collate proof of all the skills that she had developed. She then **summarised her skills in her CV**. She explained that having reflected upon and then making notes of her activities, assisted her to identify her skills and then to transfer this information to her CV. She also confirmed that she would not have been able to compile a comprehensive CV had she not reflected on her activities in her portfolio. She said:

... because you see what is important in a portfolio - you can be able to record that [for example] I did community work ... what are the skills I have learnt, what have I learnt about myself, and normally if you don't have a portfolio you just go and write the CV, and you also leave important ... [details out].

This linked with the **theme of portfolio development facilitating CV writing**.

Nandi, therefore, used her portfolio as a written record of important learning experiences that have taken place during her participation in peer help activities. These notes helped her to collate the information and to summarise it in her CV under Transferable Skills and Work Experience. This linked with the **theme of using the portfolio as a resource file**.

Nandi also compiled a comparative table (see next page) at the end of her narrative essay, listing the skills she held prior to training, the skills she developed during the core and supplemental peer help training as well as the skills she subsequently developed during service delivery as a peer helper, an Assistant Student Counsellor and during her involvement in the Peer Help Programme itself.

Table: 18: A comparative table of the range of skills that Nandi has developed

Pre-training skills	Post core training skills	Skills developed during peer help service
Listening skills Writing skills Presentation Working in a group Self initiative Research skills Communication	Empathic skills Interviewing skills You and I messages Verbal and Non-verbal skills Written communication Interpersonal relations	Planning and time management Project management Problem solving Organisational skills Team work Marketing skills Working under pressure Adaptability and flexibility Budgeting

Nandi explained that the idea to compare her skills development over the three phases started as she was preparing for the portfolio evaluation in 2003. It therefore seemed as if Nandi developed insight into her skills development over time as she was doing her preparation - thus linking with the **theme of the portfolio facilitating the development of self-insight**.

It therefore appeared, that during the process of developing her portfolio and the simultaneous reflection upon her growth, Nandi became aware of the skills that she had developed. This linked with a number of themes namely the **theme of portfolio development facilitating CV writing**; the **theme of using the portfolio as a resource** and the **theme of the portfolio facilitating the development of insight**.

Theme of using the portfolio as a resource file and document centre

From the interview with Nandi and the experience of having her share her portfolio development story, it was clear that Nandi actively used her portfolio as a resource file to keep copies of information which was, not only of importance to her personally, but also allowed her to assist others. One such example was the information that she kept in her portfolio relating to the Council of Counsellors in SA.

Nandi also used her portfolio as a resource file to store important articles relating to career development. This was done with the purpose of having information which supplemented her training readily at hand, to share with others. In addition, Nandi also used her portfolio as a document centre to collate verifiable proof of a number of documents, namely: formal qualifications; workshop attendance certificates; letters of appreciation and summaries of the projects she was involvement in. There was also a list of all the schools visited, names of contact persons, and the number of learners that attended the career guidance and study skills workshops since 2002. These documents provided valuable statistics to verify her involvement. Nandi, furthermore, explained that the purpose of collating these documents was to provide verifiable proof of her experiences and involvement in projects during job interviews.

MY RELATIONSHIP WITH NANDI

Nandi and I know each other well. I met her when she was appointed as a contract worker at the Bureau for Student Counselling and Career Development in 1999. We started working closely together after she was trained as a peer helper in 2000. There has always been a positive rapport between us but it needed to be re-established when we sat down, formally, to conduct this interview. To re-establish rapport, I asked Nandi about her best friend who was in hospital and she shared her concern about the matter.

During the interview I was wearing three hats, namely that of counsellor, peer help project leader and researcher. This allowed for active, empathic listening and questioning during the interview as well as a genuine interest in learning how Nandi managed her portfolio

development process and used her portfolio to monitor her development.

My perspective of what was helpful

A number of aspects relating to both the interview with Nandi as well as the manner in which she developed her portfolio, were found to be helpful. I found it easy to talk to Nandi and she readily shared her experiences in developing her portfolio and what she thought she had gained from developing this tool. From our discussion it was evident that she clearly believed in the benefits of developing a career portfolio.

She openly shared her initial difficulties in understanding the concept. To help her cope, she conducted a number of self-directed actions to broaden her understanding of what was expected of her. Her self-directed searches helped her on both a cognitive and emotional level to accept this process as being to her benefit.

Once she achieved a broader understanding of the concept, she became enthusiastic about the process. She therefore actively started advocating the use of portfolios to others. It was enlightening to listen how Nandi explained her views about the process and how and why she motivated others to also compile their portfolios. It was also valuable to learn how Nandi did not only expand her knowledge base about the concept but also her practical experience by developing her own portfolio, as well as helping other individuals to develop theirs. The two of us could therefore actively discuss portfolio development as we shared a common interest about this concept as well as a similar enthusiasm for the use of this tool.

Nandi had clearly developed a professional portfolio and considerable thought and effort had gone into the development of the structure, the selection of the items and the typing up of the information. The level of her involvement was clearly evident in the additional section on evaluation that she added as well as the item on the comparative table of her skills. During the interview I asked Nandi to talk me through her portfolio, allowing her to page through the file by herself. This allowed her to set the pace that we worked at and enabled her to highlight those items that she wanted to discuss in more detail. Being talked through Nandi's portfolio helped me to gain an overview of her pro-active and self-directed behaviour and the extent

to which she had embraced the concept of using her portfolio as an aid to her development. She used her initiative to add a section to her portfolio on evaluations and feedback from others. The aim with this was, once again, to highlight her strengths and weaknesses - thus determining areas for future development. It was encouraging to see how openly she discussed her weaknesses and how she embraced the development thereof.

As Nandi and I know each other well, the interview veered towards a personal highlight in her career, namely that of being selected for a specific postgraduate programme. Although Nandi had not had an opportunity to reflect in writing on this new development in her life, I allowed her to share her concerns and feelings openly, creating an opportunity to debrief. This had a positive impact on, not only the rapport between ourselves, but also on our relationship in terms of the trust that existed between us. This incident also allowed me to provide a different perspective to how she viewed the issue, which she accepted.

My perspective of what was less helpful

During the interview Nandi often spoke in general terms - moving from sharing her own experiences to speaking in the third person, all in the same sentence. She was therefore, at times, not sharing her experiences directly. In retrospect, I should have made her aware of this during the interview.

Nandi shared freely how her skills have developed, but I failed to ask her whether she thought that her individual skills could be developed incrementally. In retrospect this issue should have been highlighted as it is important to point out that developed abilities can also easily stagnate - if one doesn't strive to develop them further.

During the first half of the interview I stopped the recording to make practical arrangements to have copies made for inclusion in this study. This negatively affected the rapport for a brief period and could have been avoided. When the tape recording started again, the pick up line was artificial and awkward.

Nandi's perspective on what was helpful

I asked Nandi, some time after the interview, to describe in writing what she had found helpful in the interview we had. From the paragraph that she gave me it is evident that the interview allowed Nandi to get an overview of what her portfolio contained. She wrote:

... what was helpful for me was the fact that I can now be able to look at what I have done.

She also felt that she has confirmed her ability to present her portfolio and to explain the contents to others.

Nandi also said that the feedback had been beneficial and it had boosted her confidence. She also stated that it reaffirmed that she was responsible for her own growth. The interview, according to Nandi, also highlighted the importance of goal-directed behaviour. She wrote:

The interview again made me to realise the importance of a portfolio on planning one's life and giving yourself direction.

Nandi's perspective of what was helpful can be summarised in her closing sentence:

It also gave me a sense of sitting down with somebody and talk on my past and what have I learnt and what it had meant to me.

CONCLUSION

From the interview with Nandi it was apparent that she managed her portfolio development process with enthusiasm, dedication and commitment and compiled an excellent standard portfolio which created a professional image. The general organisation of her portfolio was

carefully planned in terms of the layout of the information and the structure that it consisted of. Each item included in the portfolio was filed in a plastic envelope for protection showing her ownership and pride in the content of her portfolio.

One of the Swedes who browsed through Nandi's portfolio made the comment that the portfolio seemed to contain Nandi's "... whole LIFE of the past three years...!". This was not the focus of the portfolio. Meticulous care was taken to select the items for her portfolio - thus ensuring that her portfolio provided a comprehensive overview of the extent of her experience and skills. Most items included in her portfolio consisted of a written reflection on what the concrete experience was and what she had learnt from it. The aim was not just to document the experience as with a diary, but to select and reflect on significant experiences, to learn from them and to enable her to implement this newly found knowledge in similar situations in future. Her portfolio therefore contained data rich reflections both in terms of the depth of the reflections and the breadth of the experiences that she reflected on.

Nandi viewed the portfolio as being of critical importance to her career development. The central purpose of her portfolio was to provide evidence of the range of the skills that she had developed through participation in a variety of activities. She therefore managed her portfolio development process to such an extent that she could provide evidence of where and how she had developed her skills.