

Chapter 10

MY STORY OF TEBOGO'S STORY

"... maybe I am a bit different to the others"

Tebogo's (pseudonym) about his struggle with developing his portfolio

Personal Data

Participant:	Tebogo (pseudonym)
Degree:	Completed BA degree
Region:	Pretoria (Main campus)
Age:	25
Gender:	Male
Peer help experience:	60 months
Experience in portfolio development:	36 months
Marks obtained for the portfolio:	Experiencing difficulty (40 - 49%)

Tebogo confirmed that he was comfortable in having the interview recorded and completed the consent form to participate in the research.

INTRODUCTION

This story is based on the transcribed interview between the researcher and Tebogo. In this chapter the researcher's impressions of Tebogo will briefly be discussed. This will be followed by a discussion of emerging themes, highlighting Tebogo's experiences with his portfolio management process. The relationship between the researcher and Tebogo will also be described in terms of what was found to be helpful about the interview focussing on Tebogo's

portfolio and what was less helpful. Finally, an overall analysis of Tebogo's portfolio will be provided in the conclusion.

MY IMPRESSIONS

Tebogo arrived 30 minutes early at the venue where the interview was to take place. He, however, kept himself busy with other tasks in the peer help office until it was time for our interview. He was neatly dressed in an orange, checked shirt and black denims, creating a semi-formal appearance. He has a friendly, agreeable disposition and seemed relaxed. After I had explained where my interest in the use of portfolios originated from, I asked Tebogo whether he would be comfortable if I were to page through his portfolio during the interview. He seemed embarrassed about sharing his portfolio and laughed self-consciously while replying: " Yes [laughing], there is not much to page through, but anyway".

EMERGING THEMES

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

Theme of initial difficulty and confusion

When portfolio development was initially introduced to the peer help group that Tebogo formed part of, he mentioned that it confused, not only him, but also a number of his fellow peer helpers. Tebogo stated that he did not understand the reason for developing a portfolio. He felt that he had been working hard in the peer help programme, and had not been required to document his experiences until the portfolio development process was introduced. It therefore seemed as if Tebogo resisted the change that took place within the programme - thus lacking the flexibility to adapt to this new programme requirement. This linked with the

theme of not understanding the rationale of portfolio development; the theme of lack of flexibility and the **theme of resistance to change**.

Theme of continued negativity towards the process

Throughout the interview it seemed as if Tebogo continued feeling negative towards the portfolio development process. This was apparent from the following information that he shared:

- Tebogo viewed the portfolio as a tool to report to the project leaders and not a career tool that he was developing for himself. It appeared as if Tebogo failed to understand the personal benefit to be gained from developing his own portfolio and he questioned why he was expected to document his experiences. This linked with the **theme of not understanding the rationale of portfolio development** and the **theme of issues around accountability**.
- He felt that he had been rendering a volunteer service in the past, and had not been required to prove this in writing. He said: "... I believed that I needed to show my hard work through the work itself, not really putting it on to paper, to show it this is what I've done". It emerged that Tebogo felt that his dedication and commitment to the programme was enough and he resisted the idea of reflecting on his experiences. It also seemed as if he resented the fact that this was now a requirement for the peer helpers - thus linking with the **theme of resistance to reflection**, the **theme of lack of flexibility** and the **theme of resistance to change**.
- Tebogo also had definite perceptions on how the concept of portfolio development was introduced. He said: "... and then to start working [as a peer helper] without a portfolio and then all of a sudden, right in the middle of your peer help involvement, sort of have the portfolio thrown at you - you get a little bit confused in terms of what I was doing wrong". It was clear that Tebogo resented the manner in which the concept was introduced and viewed this new development as a punitive measure, which added to

his negativity - thus linking with the **theme of not understanding the rationale for portfolio development** and the **theme of issues around accountability**.

From the aforementioned it was evident that Tebogo had a negative attitude towards portfolio development. This linked with the **theme of not understanding the rationale of portfolio development**; the **theme of issues around accountability**; the **theme of resistance to reflection**; the **theme of lack of flexibility** and the **theme of resistance to change**.

Theme of halfheartedly taking charge of the portfolio development process

As it is a requirement for peer helpers within the Unisa Peer Help Volunteer Programme to compile a portfolio, Tebogo had to comply, despite his negative feelings. It therefore seemed as if he halfheartedly attempted to compile his portfolio and this was confirmed in a number of statements during the interview:

- Tebogo confirmed that he did not put much effort into the portfolio development process. He said: "... this was not something I worked very hard on as is required by ... [referring to the project leader]". Accordingly it appeared as if Tebogo was not committed to developing his portfolio and he halfheartedly met the requirement of the project leader/programme - thus linking with the **theme of lack of commitment** and the **theme of lack of intrinsic motivation**.
- He also stated that developing his portfolio was not a priority for him. He said: "... I didn't really have the time for it. Sitting down [by] myself and say this is what I've learnt today, this is what I've learnt this week ... I really haven't ... [found] the time of doing it" - thus linking with the **theme of portfolio development not being a priority**.

Tebogo's negativity was further exacerbated by the fact that it seemed as if he merely developed the portfolio to gain external recognition only. During the interview he shared the following:

- He wanted to develop it to receive external recognition in the form of certificates. He said: “So maybe to improve the situation is to make a professional portfolio and then one will get all the accolades [referring to certificates] as well”.
- He wanted to develop a portfolio to impress others. He said: “.. and give it to them [referring to future employers] to look at it and maybe be impressed about it”.

This showed that Tebogo did not want to develop his portfolio for his own benefit - thus linking with the **theme of lack of intrinsic motivation**.

Tebogo’s lack of commitment and intrinsic motivation to develop his career portfolio had a direct effect on him. He mentioned that he felt disappointed because he had not worked hard enough on compiling his portfolio. He said: “[I am] ... pretty disappointed that I ... possibly haven’t worked hard enough on the portfolio and did not give it as much time as the others”. Tebogo also mentioned that he was disappointed that other peer helpers received certificates based on their portfolio development, and he did not.

Tebogo’s lack of commitment and intrinsic motivation, not only prevented him from committing himself to the development of his portfolio, but also impacted negatively on Tebogo’s self confidence. He shared the following:

- He felt uncomfortable when junior peer helpers asked him for help with their portfolio development as he could not help them. He said: “... when new peer helpers come to me and said ‘Look, I want you to help us with our portfolios’ and you don’t know what to tell them”.
- He seemed embarrassed when the researcher asked to see parts of his portfolio. He said: “ ... which is basically not ... it’s basically nothing”.
- He seemed apologetic about some items in his portfolio. He said: “Yes, I do have a quotation - not properly ... [written] out, but anyway”.

As Tebogo did not put effort into developing his portfolio, he felt embarrassed about it which

had a negative effect on his self-esteem and his confidence. Despite this, he still could not motivate himself to commit to the development of his portfolio - thus linking with the **theme of lack of intrinsic motivation** and the **theme of being stuck**.

From the aforementioned it appeared as if Tebogo did not want to develop his portfolio. He did not put much effort into the process as this was not a priority for him. He merely developed it to receive external recognition. His lack of commitment and motivation had a negative impact on his self-esteem and his self-confidence. Despite this, Tebogo could not motivate himself to commit to the process. This linked to a number of themes namely the **theme of lack of commitment**; the **theme of lack of intrinsic motivation**; the **theme of portfolio development not being a priority**; the **theme of resistance towards the portfolio development process** and the **theme of being stuck**.

Theme of on-going inner conflict

From the story that Tebogo told, it seemed as if he found himself in a very difficult position. It was clear that he resented the manner in which portfolio development was introduced; the fact that this tool was now required in the programme; and that, as a peer helper, he was obliged to meet this criterion. This resulted in a strong pull between what he did not want to do, but had to do to comply with the requirement. During the interview Tebogo made a number of conflicting statements indicating incongruence between what he wanted in terms of his portfolio and what he actually achieved, namely:

- He mentioned that he wanted a professional portfolio, yet admitted that he did not understand how to compile it. He said “ ... I battled to get a proper professional portfolio ... I'd like to have one but I really do not have the grasp of doing the professional thing”. Despite his confusion, Tebogo was also hesitant in contacting others for help - thus linking with the **theme of on-going confusion**; the **theme of lack of self-efficacy** and the **theme of not wanting to ask for help**.

- He viewed the portfolio as a worthwhile document to have. He said: “.. I think it is something you can take into a interview ... and show the people ... what I have done...”. Despite acknowledging the benefit of the portfolio as a career tool, he could not apply himself to the development process - thus linking with the **theme of lack of self-efficacy** and the **theme of lack of commitment**.
- When asked whether he thought it was important for him to compile a portfolio, he replied: “... it’s a tough one that one. I’d like to say it was important, but it does not show (embarrassed laugh) on my part, whether it was important” - thus linking with the **theme of incongruent behaviour**.
- Tebogo’s portfolio was arranged around a quotation by his role model, an international cricket player, who stated: *“If you want something that much you will do everything to get it, but if you don’t, you will find every excuse and explanation why you didn’t get it”*. On asking Tebogo whether this applied to him, he confirmed that it did - thus linking with the **theme of being stuck**.
- Tebogo also experienced problems in structuring his portfolio. He felt that the tasks of an Assistant Student Counsellor and a peer helper were very different and he struggled to combine these different tasks in one portfolio. Despite this difficulty Tebogo was hesitant in asking for help. He confirmed that he preferred to ignore the situation and continued everyday as if he did not have a problem. This linked with the **theme of lack of self-efficacy**; the **theme of denial** and the **theme of not wanting to ask for help**.

It was therefore evident that Tebogo was experiencing on-going inner conflict about developing his portfolio. This presented in incongruent behaviour. Although he indicated that he understood the value of the portfolio as a career tool, he could not commit himself to the development thereof, or elicit help from others to get him on track. It also appeared as if he lacked the self-efficacy to commit to the process. His continued inner conflict and lack of commitment, kept him stuck in an on-going dilemma. This linked with the **theme of on-going confusion**; the **theme of lack of self-efficacy**; the **theme of not wanting to ask for help**;

the **theme of incongruent behaviour**; the **theme of lack of commitment**; the **theme being stuck** and the **theme of denial**.

Theme of reflection on goals

Tebogo's portfolio also contained some reflections on goals. Tebogo had a specific goal in mind, namely to become a sports journalist. Although this goal was written out in his portfolio, he was vague about what he had to do to reach this goal. He said:

I know where I want to go in life, I have it roughly ... in my head - what I want to do in life, but I really haven't sit down saying this is what I want to do; this is how I am going to do; on to a thing like a portfolio. I don't know - I didn't feel that it is necessary to put it on paper - as long as I know what I want to do in life...

Although the portfolio required from Tebogo to identify his goals, he omitted to set small, measurable steps to ensure that he reached his goals. Tebogo wrote down broad goals for the next fifteen years, progressing from print media to journalistic writing, to being a journalist at a government department and then progressing to a large Sunday newspaper, and finally a sports commentator. Once again, he shared broad plans without any specific steps on how he would measure whether these sub-goals have been reached - thus using his portfolio to list his goals in broad terms only. This linked with **the theme of a lack of setting smaller measurable sub-goals**, the **theme of issues around accountability** and the **theme of using the portfolio as a resource file**.

The theme of a lack of setting smaller measurable sub-goals was also apparent in the manner in which Tebogo managed the production of the Peer Helper Newsletter. His goal was to produce two copies of the newsletter annually. To attain this goal he had to arrange for contributions from fellow peer helpers which he found difficult as he did not determine a timeline which would structure the deadlines for contributions. As Tebogo did not set smaller attainable sub-goals and he did not commit himself to monitor his progress toward the achievement of these sub-goals, he did not achieve these goals within the required time frames. As a defence mechanism he then found a number of excuses why the newsletter was

not produced in time - thus linking with the **theme of a lack of setting smaller measurable sub-goals** and the **theme of issues around accountability**.

Theme of difficulty in reflecting experientially

Throughout the interview it was apparent that Tebogo experienced difficulty in reflecting experientially on significant experiences and projects that he was involved in. Tebogo provided a number of reasons for this, namely, that he:

- **did not know how to reflect on paper.** He said: "... I really didn't know how to put my experiences or what I've learnt within the Peer Help Programme ... on paper".
- **was unsure and confused about whether to include only peer help related experiences, or also life experiences.** He said: "I didn't know whether to put in ... only my peer help experiences or my personal ... experiences as well on to the portfolio - is this a Peer Help portfolio only or also a life portfolio".
- **found it difficult and seemed to feel threatened by having to write his reflections on paper.** He said: "... I always knew how to reflect on these things but putting it on to paper has been the most difficult thing".
- **did not take time to write his reflections.** He said: "Maybe I did not find the time for it ... I like to write, and have done a lot of writing. I don't think that's the problem. I think I didn't really have the time for it. Sitting down on myself and say this is what I've learnt today, this is what I've learnt this week, this is what I've learnt this particular month, this is what I've learnt in this year. I really haven't ... find the time of doing it...".
- **was not committed to the development of his portfolio and it was not a priority for him.** He said: "I'd like to say it was important, but it does not show [laughing self-consciously] on my part, whether it was important or not...".
- **was unwilling to reflect on past experiences.** According to Tebogo, reflection entailed looking back at experiences and he preferred to look forward - thus indicating a lack of willingness to learn from experiences.

Although it emerged that Tebogo showed some insight into the reasons for his lack of reflection on experiences, he remained resistant towards the process of regular reflection. It therefore seemed as if Tebogo experienced the process of reflection as very threatening as it could highlight his weaknesses and challenge his self perception. This linked with a number of themes namely the **theme of a lack of willingness to learn from experiences**; the **theme of resistance towards regular reflection** and the **theme of being stuck**.

During the interview the researcher had the opportunity of highlighting a number of experiences that Tebogo omitted reflecting on, namely: his involvement in writing articles for the newsletter; being the editor, and being responsible for the design, layout and editing of articles; his difficulty in getting the contributors to stick to the time frames for submission of articles; his difficulty in dealing with the timely submission of articles in an assertive manner to enable him to reach the goals that he had set for the newsletter; his difficulty in producing two editions of the newsletter per year and the growth and development that Tebogo perceived in terms of his photographic skills. These experiences would have been valuable opportunities for Tebogo to learn from but he failed to reflect on them - thus linking with the **theme of lack of reflection on significant experiences**.

Theme of reflection on skills development

Tebogo mentioned that he had grown over the last few years and that he had developed a number of skills, but that he had not reflected on these. Tebogo, however, used his portfolio to compile brief summaries of his involvement as a peer helper and as an Assistant Student Counsellor. These summaries lacked structure and evidence of where and how his skills development had taken place. One of the examples that Tebogo read during the interview, focussed on his growth and development. He read:

Yes there has been changes in my life as a whole. I think I am a bit more

matured right now; you work with people of different cultures, not only your fellow peer helpers but also your clients that they come in the office; you learn how to speak and you learn presentation skills, how to stand in front of people as well ie. giving career presentations. The other thing is that I also learn how to incorporate all these cultures into ... the peer help culture as it were - so ja, the way I've seen it, my interpersonal skills have improved as well.

Tebogo's narrative essay also lacked evidence of experiential reflections, but provided a summary of the skills that he had developed, although it lacked concrete examples of how and when the development had taken place and what he had learnt from these:

Being a peer helper I have grown as a person, I look at life with more mature eyes, I probably grown beyond my age. Being a peer helper has probably been my most important decision of my life. I am very happy that I have taken that decision of becoming a peer helper. In 2001 I have become an Assistant Student Counsellor which is a further step - level in the Bureau for Student Counselling and Career Development. Last year I became the second editor of the newsletter. I was very happy with my achievements of my first edition. I have successfully completed my undergrad studies last year and are now looking forward to registering for my honours studies next year.

The portfolio also has in it my CV, all the newsletters I've been involved with, part of research, sport and politics articles, and an article which I have written with the help of a lecturer from Political Sciences. In terms of self-directed learning, what I've learnt so far is editing skills; working in a changing setting; and with people of different backgrounds; being a leader and a follower to best accomplish goal; express ideas to other group members, listen to other group members; actively to participate in a group.

From these two examples and from what Tebogo shared during the interview, a number of skills are apparent, namely:

- **leadership skills**. He said: “ ... the other one is being a leader i.e. I put a newsletter into practise ... being a leader is basically being the editor of the whole thing and to oversee the articles are they in time”.
- **multi-cultural interactional skills**. He said: “ ... you work with people of different cultures ...”.
- **presentation skills**. He said: “ ... you learn presentation skills, how to stand in front of people as well i.e. giving career presentations... “.
- **editing skills**. He said: “... I had to design the thing [referring to the newsletter], do the layout ... and edit all the articles...”.
- **teamwork**. He said: “Its working in a changing setting with people of different backgrounds”.
- **supervising skills** limited to aspects such as overseeing the service rendered by junior peer helpers.
- **photographic skills**. He said: “ ... I have improved in terms of photographic skills ... you have taken so many photos in the past two years ... and then the quality of this year’s photos is a bit more ... than the other years”.
- **self directed learning skills**. He said: “Self-directed i.e. to sit on your own, do the editing, do the layout of the newsletter, it shows that you’ve taken the time to learn by yourself as well”.
- **research skills**. He said: “I decided to go on the Internet this year and ... look at ... how the world is looking at peer helpers all over the world”.

It is therefore clear that Tebogo has an appreciation for and an awareness of the growth and development that has taken place over a period of time. His portfolio, however, lacked structured reflection providing concrete evidence of where his skills development has taken place, how he felt about the experiences, what he has learnt from them, and what he would do

differently in similar situations. Tebogo therefore seemed to be aware of his growth and development, but hasn't reflected in detail on what he has learnt. It is therefore apparent that Tebogo used his portfolio as a resource file to collate his skills development only. This linked with **the theme of lack of experiential reflection** and **the theme of using the portfolio as a resource file**.

MY RELATIONSHIP WITH TEBOGO

Tebogo and I have been working together for five years in the peer help programme. Since portfolio development was introduced three years ago, it became apparent that Tebogo was experiencing difficulties with the process. After the 2002 peer helper evaluations the project leaders met with Tebogo to discuss his career development and the importance of developing his portfolio. He admitted that he was struggling with the concept and undertook to pay attention to it. He continued to render a service both as a peer helper and as an Assistant Student Counsellor.

However, during the 2003 peer helper evaluations it became clear that Tebogo's portfolio had not developed any further and that he continued to experience problems. It was decided to include Tebogo in this study as the researcher has a professional interest, as researcher, counsellor and peer help project leader to hear Tebogo's story and to understand the difficulties that he was experiencing. When I met Tebogo he seemed relaxed and spoke freely about his difficulties. He appeared, however, to feel embarrassed about the quality of his portfolio.

My perspective of what was helpful

The interview commenced with me asking Tebogo to tell me, not only about his experiences in developing his portfolio, but also to share his difficulties. By acknowledging that I knew that Tebogo was experiencing difficulties, the issue was brought into the open and allowed Tebogo to discuss his difficulties and openly share how this struggle had impacted on his self-confidence.

At a stage in the interview Tebogo described his difficulty in deciding what to put in his portfolio. In a despondent tone he said: "... maybe I am a bit different to the others". This allowed for the opportunity to affirm my interest in his situation by replying "... but this is what

I want to understand...”. This genuine interest had a positive impact on the rapport that had been established between the two of us and allowed Tebogo to continue describing his difficulties.

When Tebogo discussed his disappointment for not getting recognition for his hard work in the form of certificates, it allowed the opportunity to reframe his disappointment as being both a disappointment at not developing a quality portfolio and disappointment at not receiving the accolades he was hoping for. This was accepted by him and he responded: “Ja, very much so, ja”.

The interview also provided the opportunity for Tebogo to speak with confidence about the growth that he has perceived in his photographic ability. This was in contrast to a large part of the interview that focussed on his difficulty with portfolio development and his disappointment with the lack of recognition received.

Tebogo’s portfolio contained a picture of an international cricket captain and a quotation that Tebogo felt was very important. I asked Tebogo to tell me about this person in order to understand what Tebogo admired about him. I asked Tebogo whether the quotation:

“If you want something that much you will do everything to get it, but if you don’t, you will find every excuse and explanation why you didn’t get it”

applied to him, which he confirmed. This allowed Tebogo to see the incongruity between what he said and what he believed in and how this related to his portfolio development.

The interview also allowed Tebogo to share the impact that his struggle with portfolio development had on his functioning as a senior peer helper. This allowed for a deeper understanding to develop between the two of us and motivated Tebogo to ask for individual assistance in this regard.

I also used the interview to verbally guide Tebogo through the process of reflecting on his editing skills to allow him to experience the process. This gave Tebogo the opportunity to discuss the difficulties that he had experienced in compiling a newsletter. The interview also allowed for opportunities to challenge Tebogo to see the incongruency in his thinking and acting.

It was important to have had this interview with Tebogo. He had been grappling with the development of his portfolio for more than two years. A number of incidents were highlighted that Tebogo could reflect on, namely: (1) the development of his photographic skills; (2) the development and the application of his leadership skills in the peer help programme; and (3) suggestions on how to change his schedule to allow for the production of two editions of the peer help newsletter that he had envisaged.

The interview also highlighted the fact that, although individual interviews were held with Tebogo, these focussed mainly on his career development and how the portfolio could benefit him. The opportunity of working through his portfolio seemed more beneficial and highlighted the importance of such an interview focussing on the portfolio.

From the interview it seemed as if Tebogo, for a variety of reasons, did not benefit greatly from the process of developing his portfolio. It seemed, however, as if the discussion with the researcher as a mentor was more beneficial to his development.

My perspective of what was less helpful

Tebogo was the first participant that I had an interview with. As a result of being cautious about not asking leading questions, I often started off with a line of questioning and changed it half way, which could have been confusing for Tebogo. The experience gained from this first interview allowed me to change my style in later interviews.

When I asked Tebogo how comfortable he was on reflecting on his experiences, Tebogo said that he preferred to look forward rather than look back. This was an ideal opportunity to reinforce the importance of reflecting on experiences to enable a person to learn from them and to prevent a person from making similar mistakes in future. I did not follow up on this with Tebogo.

Tebogo's perspective on what was helpful

During the interview it became apparent that Tebogo experienced the discussion as helpful. Tebogo had the opportunity to explain how disappointed he felt about not being able to compile a professional portfolio and discussed his disappointment when he failed to receive certificates during the last evaluation process. The interview also allowed us to discuss his disappointment about not reflecting on significant experiences that he has had in the peer help programme.

Tebogo also opened up during the interview and shared how threatened he felt when the junior peer helpers asked him for help with their portfolios while he had not mastered the task himself.

The interview also allowed Tebogo to discuss the importance of reflecting on the development in his photographic skills which he was particularly proud of. He once again mentioned that this would be something that could be discussed during an individual interview which he wanted to set up for 2004.

CONCLUSION

Tebogo's story is one of on-going difficulty and inner conflict about the portfolio development process. Initially, Tebogo could not understand why a portfolio was suddenly required from him and why he had to reflect on his experiences. He felt that his work should speak for itself, as

it had in the past, and he continued to question this new requirement. He therefore found himself in a dilemma which caused on-going inner conflict namely, he did not want to develop a portfolio, yet had to, as this was a requirement of the programme. He consequently took charge of the process in a half-hearted manner. His lack of intrinsic motivation was evident in the fact that he did not put effort into the development of his portfolio. As this was not a priority for him, he rarely asked for help. On the rare occasions that he did, he did not follow the advice he got from others. He preferred to continue working on his own and pretended that all was well. As he was not motivated to reflect on his experiences his half-hearted attempts resulted in vague, data poor reflections. These reflections merely listed the skills that he claimed he had developed without providing the necessary evidence of the claims that he had made. It therefore seemed as if he used his portfolio as a resource file to merely collate lists of skills that he felt he had developed.