

TMI David Hughes Memorial Award

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Reflective Essay

"Internships could be argued to be the single most important link with industry"
(Aggett and Busby 2011, p. 107)

My belief in this statement came alongside my desire to attend one of the leading universities for Tourism Management, Bournemouth University, that offered a four year sandwich degree highlighting the importance of industry experience in the graduate world. Not only would the course enable me to understand the theoretical concepts but a placement year opportunity would give me the necessary industry experience reflecting my determination to develop my wealth of knowledge and my CV to increase future opportunities throughout my career.

Amongst this, I have always had the desire to learn more about the tourism industry in the English Riviera, where I have been brought up to see the masses of tourists visiting throughout the peak summer months. An opportunity arose for me to join their team for twenty weeks commencing in June 2011 and I never imagined how much I would achieve in a short space of time.

The English Riviera Tourism Company (ERTC) is the official destination marketing organisation (DMO) for the English Riviera, a Devon resort with a phenomenal 22 mile stretch of coastline. The company was set up in October 2010 following the commissioning by the local borough council to replace the tourist board and it operates with the ambition of achieving the goals laid out in the Turning the Tide for Tourism in Torbay 2015 strategy. It was important for me to really understand the competitive nature of destination marketing and Nadler and Tushman (1997 cited by Ritchie and Crouch 2005, p.73) argue that DMOs "may be one of the last remaining sources of truly sustainable competitive advantage" which allowed me to realise the importance of theory about competitive advantage in business context in line with one of my placement goals.

It was important for me to create goals in order to get the most out of my placement experience, and whilst none are directly related to Destination Marketing, as my other placement was in the airline industry, they gave me a greater understanding of the industry as a whole. The goals I put in place for my placement experience were:

1. To put into practice both marketing and financial theory that I have learnt at University
2. To understand what management styles work best within the tourism industry workplace in order to help structure my future career.
3. To build a substantial level of industry knowledge in the particular fields I experience in order to assist in direction for my future.

My time at the English Riviera Tourism Company assisted me in achieving these, and this was reflected when I was asked to return the following year, enabling me to achieve more and making for an extremely rewarding experience. I initially expected to have a generic role, but was taken aback as I was gradually given more and more responsibility throughout my time with the company (see appendix one).

I would categorise myself as achievement motivated in relation to McClelland's Human Motivation Theory. I found the performance feedback rewarding and particularly liked being given "immediate feedback on the correctness of each step taken to learn something" (McClelland 1988, p. 248), highlighting areas that I could develop, all of which became SMART objectives for me to work towards in both long and short term. My SMART objectives included not only aspects of my job role but also longer term goals such as improved use of excel that would improve the quality of my coursework and dissertation.

A particular highlight of my placement was demonstrating the ability to learn from my mistakes made, and build upon these. Turner (2003) emphasises that 'Experience needs to be accompanied by structured reflection and observation, leading to abstract concepts and generalizations, enabling the learner to develop theories for performance improvement'. Stage 3 of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (see figure 1) represents the thought process into the success of my first offline publication whilst stage four sees the advancement made by the second publication. Not only have I proven to myself that I can progress in areas I have previously misjudged, but I have also seen the importance of reflecting on all tasks and projects in the future to develop my performance and mitigate any recurring mistakes.

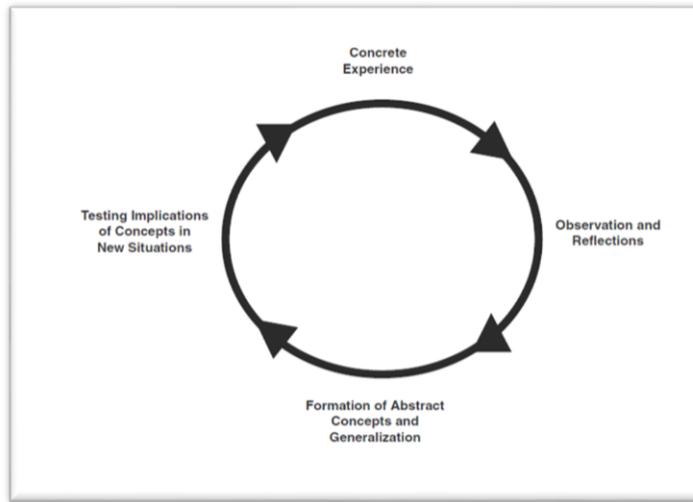


Figure 1: Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle. (Kolb and Kolb 2005, p.3)

In terms of the benefits of placement; my opportunity taught me that valuable experiences and thorough understanding of an industry are much more beneficial in the long-term than aspects such as salary. Having worked from a young age I have always valued having an income and whilst I have had experience of budgeting from moving away, I had never had to work alongside University. Despite the fact that my placement was low paid, the achievement and motivating experiences I experienced at the English Riviera Tourism Company, enabled me to progress towards essentially removed my desire for a salary. In this situation, I would strongly disagree that motivational progression is based around prerequisites and fundamentally relies upon the satisfaction of prior needs including physiological (Maslow, 1943). Furthermore I support Herzberg et al. (1959) in their discovery of the Motivation – Hygiene theory stating salary is not as important as recognition and achievement. This is much more fitting and credible in my experiences as the sense of achievement I have experienced far outweighed the reduced salary.

The role of a DMO has been somewhat contested over recent years, purely due to the fact that 'tourism is a sector is in a state of transition' (Presenza et al. 2005, p. 3). The Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI) (2013) defines a DMO as a Destination Marketing Organisation 'representing a specific destination and helping the long-term development of communities through a travel and tourism strategy'. In spite of this, many academics are recognising that the role of a DMO is gradually expanding beyond just marketing, transforming the DMO into a Destination Management Organisation whilst retaining marketing as the forefront activity (Pike 2008, Presenza et al. 2005, Ritchie and Crouch 2003).

With this in mind, it is understandable that DMO's undertake a sheer amount of work and responsibility within an area or region. I was still surprised by quite how large their role is, combined with a small team of employees, work was often ad-hoc, covering colleagues roles when on annual leave and also extended lengths of leave for maternity. Experiencing this was nothing but beneficial to my experience, giving me insight into the variety of projects undertaken and allowing me to be involved in a plethora of tasks including creating bespoke itineraries for national and international press visitors, several unique micro-sites, contributing towards the annual destination guide including the pagination and a more customer-focussed role assisting in the busy Visitor Information Centre. I was also given the opportunity to lead on several projects, throughout which my experience in varied group work undertaken throughout the first and second year of university aided my ability to liaise with necessary colleagues and suppliers.

My ability to change roles from being in the marketing department working on a new offline campaign one moment to being responsible for the Visitor Information Centre when several staff were off sick helped me to enjoy this diverse and distinct job role in a fascinating industry. It is understandable that this is inevitable when there is a small team and luckily there were no looming deadlines within marketing at the time, but I can see the difficulties in managing, training and motivating a small team during testing times like these.

Not only have I met and liaised with a whole host of external suppliers including digital agencies, print designers and local hoteliers amongst others, the diversity of my workload ensured that I was able to communicate with people at varying levels; managers, industry experts, international representatives from Visit Britain, world-wide press visitors and visitors. This increased confidence in my ability to correspond with highly regarded associates will hopefully support me in future job roles, interviews and networking events.

My awareness of challenges faced by Destination Management Organisations has drastically increased, giving me a more realistic insight into the struggles faced by all organisations in the current economic climate; not only will this assist my final year studies at University but I imagine it will be crucial in my ability to attain a graduate job.

In a difficult market, where the domestic market is becoming exhausted as consumers adopt a 'been there, done that' mindset, the ERTC's forward thinking approach enabled it to

comprehend market development. Ansoff's Matrix (1957) suggests that an economic recession is a reason to diversify therefore the ERTC is strategically working its way into the overseas market, primarily using the Agatha Christie attract brand to appeal to the German, Brazilian and Australian market to name but a few. Consequently, the UK market could be neglected but it is essential that the company can hold this market share whilst diversifying and projects I were tasked with attempted to control this balance.

Many of the tasks I completed tasks enabled me to put theory into practice, and gain a greater understanding of management and leadership in a working environment. With a distinctively democratic management style noticeable within the ERTC, each employee's opinion was always valued and I felt trusted to make choices in relation to the projects I was working on. Mullins (2007) highlights the need for harmonious relationships within a not-for-profit public funded company, which may justify the friendly and welcoming attitudes of the team and CEO as well as a desirable management style. Working within such an amicable environment has exposed me to the benefits of encouraging employees and team members to contribute their ideas towards business decisions. A study by Bhatti et al. (2012) shows that employees are much less likely to change jobs when they have a democratic leadership as they feel valued, therefore it is something I will certainly take forward with me to implement in the rest of my education and future career.

My experience enabled me to understand the importance of raising funds, through commercial sales and membership in order to maintain the same exceptional level of marketing that the stakeholders are used to. Rogers (2005 cited by Pike 2008) claims that 58% of regional tourism organisations in the UK gain revenue from membership subscription, something that I had never realised was so crucial prior to working within this environment.

The cross cultural awareness unit which formed part of the first academic year assisted me in overcoming cultural issues involved with liaising with international press visitors. I was able to plan my time around communicating with Visit England representatives and journalists world-wide with a variation of time differences. The realisation of the difficulty of arranging visits for international journalists came having arranged an eye-opening press trip in co-operation with Visit England's bid to show Olympic journalists the rest of the UK, we

were unaware that one journalist was partaking in Ramadam, and was therefore unable to eat at the planned time. As a result I was exposed to the demanding, spontaneous nature of the job role, requiring the ability to make impulsive decisions in order to ensure that the journalist had the best possible time.

An industry placement within Destination Marketing gave me a real insight into how many stakeholders are involved to create a successful destination. Communicating with these stakeholders also gave me good networking opportunities, and the ability to make contacts in terms of future career options.

Working in such a vulnerable industry, I experienced firsthand the 'real working environment' with redundancies and pay cuts in both the English Riviera Tourism Company and many companies that we were working alongside. This resulted in the remainder of the team having to increase their work-load, demanding me to manage my time effectively and organise my work effectively in order to adhere to deadlines. This has indisputably supported the multitude of deadlines I have already met throughout my final year.

Having to review my performance regularly in terms of my SMART Objectives and the multiple appraisals I have experienced, I have been able to create a more comprehensive SWOT analysis of myself. The strengths I have outlined will enable me to be more confident in an interview as I am aware of what I am capable of, and the weaknesses give me a challenge to work towards, and reasons to invest in courses to mitigate these (see appendix 2). I have also been able critically review my CV and make the improvements I desired, with the added industry experience. I consider the ability to be critical of one's own ability important in order to develop and nurture my future coursework and career.

This experience has stimulated a continual interest in destination marketing, with hope for my future career to be related to this, attending interesting talks at the World Travel Market with industry experts and leaders. My enthusiasm for destination marketing is also evident through my dissertation topic focussing on some of the key issues identified at the English Riviera Tourism Company; exerting individual brands to each town, whilst encapsulating them all as the English Riviera umbrella brand.

I am incredibly proud of what I have achieved on my placement journey and believe I am certainly on the way to achieving my long term goal of having a successful career within the tourism industry. Working in a DMO has not only given me insight into the management and marketing aspects of a destination, but I have been able to meet and talk to many of the stakeholders in the region, from hoteliers, small bed and breakfast owners, attraction managers and tourists themselves, in order to piece together the most crucial aspects of destination management from an employee's perspective. I have been able to implement theory into practice in order to see the implications they have on the working environment, and most of all I have been able to vastly increase my knowledge of marketing and destination management having worked on a huge variety of projects which will be invaluable in my final years of education and career. Ultimately I have fulfilled many exciting experiences whilst expanding my skills in varying disciplines that have developed my personality and have helped to shape my future career choices.

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Appendix One

Part of my 'EF1' Appraisal form completed by the CEO approximately half way through my first period of time at the ERTC

Name of Student: Claire Rosslee

Name of Company: English Riviera Tourism Company

Name of Appraiser: Carolyn Custerson – Chief Executive

Start Date of Employment: 11 June 2012

Date of Appraisal: 23rd August 2012

1. Please comment on the quality of the student's work, giving information on the type and range of work the student has been involved in

Claire has far exceeded our expectations and we are absolutely delighted with the quality of her work. Deliberately we have planned a challenging and diverse work programme for Claire so that she makes the most of her time working with an experienced marketing team at the English Riviera Tourism Company and the range of work Claire has been involved includes:

- Developing and launching Winter Escapes a new online and offline programme of off peak breaks designed to extend the traditional summer season
- Assisting with mailing out to the industry using E Mail Newsletter technology
- Arranging itineraries and hosting domestic and international journalist visits
- Organising the production of a new offline publication to promote the Welcome English Riviera Customer Service Course
- Updating and amending online product records for tourism products across the resort
- Maintaining and updating the company database
- Planning and briefing the production of the new English Riviera Mobile Web Site
- Assisting with the promotion of the new tourism widgets for adoption by the industry
- Assisting with the production of English Riviera Brand Guidelines

2. **Please comment on the student's ability to work without supervision/take responsibility**

Claire is very capable with working without constant supervision and has been very willing to accept responsibility for some quite big projects. This ability has meant that we could offer Claire the chance to work on a broad range of different projects so that she learnt as many skills as possible and gained some real live experience in the world of Destination Marketing.

Appendix Two

SWOT analysis of myself following my placement experience

S	W
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am an undergraduate Tourism Management student • Student at one of the top universities for Tourism • I have industry experience as a result of my placement year • I have almost 6 years previous experience in a customer facing role • I have a wide range of employability skills ranging from good literacy and numeracy skills, to excellent time management • I have received certificates in recognition of 93% in Financial Reporting Assignment, and of overall mark of 69.7% in second year • Friendly and sociable – key team aspects • Have confidence and ability to use my initiative and work independently • One of my best traits is the ability to pick up something new quickly and digest it • I am a competent Microsoft Office user • Can communicate my experiences much better – therefore hopefully improve interview techniques • As a result of industry experience I have more direction and drive to work within this industry • Feel more confident as a result of regular meetings with senior managers – more comfortable in this situation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I avoid sales / cold calls as this area is a weakness of mine – however I am trying to build on this • Have not continued with French and German, so they are now very Basic • When in a new environment, I lack confidence in my ability • I need to continually build on excel skills • Do not have time for any more experience as an undergrad – next chance I will have to work, final year will be completed
O	T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can continue to build on the skills I have demonstrated I have throughout my placement • Offered further opportunity on top of my 40 placement weeks • Role free as maternity leave at ERTC in summer 2013 – could be an opportunity to remain employed there • Flexibility and willingness to take a Internship or job opportunity abroad • Happy to work for lower wage in order to boost experience • Industry experience will enable me to choose units for final year of my degree that will assist me in my future career • My networking will enable me to meet industry professionals that may open a future career path or assistance with a dissertation topic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive industry with many facing redundancies • A lot of young adults have degrees – so a degree alone is not enough • Currently only have 10 months industry experience • Experienced very few proper interview situations