



Storytelling Approaches to Conceptualizing Personal and Professional Development: A Journal-Based Thesis

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Abstract <p>This paper examines the usage of autoethnographic and storytelling approaches in monitoring, observing, and analysing personal and professional development following an internship period of twelve weeks at a destination management company. This is a journal-based thesis which covers twelve weeks of analysed journal entries during the period 15.05.2023 to 04.08.2023. The approach of the study is autoethnographic.</p> <p>This paper outlined the different arts-based theoretical frameworks that aid in conceptualising both personal and professional character development. Furthermore, a thorough introduction was conducted about the internship company as well as a review of the job description and daily tasks. The various skills required for the job were listed and their importance was analysed.</p> <p>The weekly journal entries were thoroughly examined and learning outcomes were concluded from each week. Personal and professional development as a result of the internship was discussed in detail, along with concluding remarks concerning the observations, challenges and benefits of using arts-based research inquiry methods in understanding development and personal potential.</p>
Keywords journal, internship, analysis, autoethnography, storytelling, professional development

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1 Introduction

The journey of an innocent and hopeful soon-to-be graduate is usually popularized in the mainstream media; where hopeful senior students eagerly finalize their degrees in the hopes that they would contribute to the productive workforce as soon as possible. This was also the case before embarking on my internship; with the purpose of gaining indispensable first-hand knowledge and professional working experience.

I start by positioning myself in this thesis. The professional and personal development that occurred during the internship process is observed through the lenses of an author examining her own internship journey in third person. As the basis of this study, storytelling literature and autoethnographic theory are used for analyzing the internship process as expressed in my internship journals. The professional development process of the internship is examined in retrospect after completion of the internship in order to fully comprehend the scope of transformations that have occurred.

It is important to note that this thesis is written in hindsight of the internship experience. The weekly diary entries are in past tense; their professional development objectives have already been highlighted and each week demonstrated a clear purpose and outcome. The justification for the journal thesis containing diary entries that have not long ago been written is that the retrospective nature of the theoretical framework compliments the nature of already written material to give way for comprehensive and holistic comparison and analyses.

During the summer of 2023, I had the exciting opportunity of completing the second professional internship of my bachelor's studies at a destination management company in Helsinki, Finland. My degree program in Tourism Management was relevant to the position of Travel product & operations Assistant intern, and therefore in the spring of 2023, I decided to start the application process for the role. The aspects that piqued my interest the most about the role were the company's international background with English as its internal language, along with their specific request of candidates with previous practical and technical knowledge about the Middle Eastern travel market in order to expedite their expanding operations. My fluency in the Arabic language as well as my secondary educational background from the Middle East along with extensive knowledge in the culture, traditions, mannerisms, and consumer behavior of Middle Eastern travelers served as morale booster and had helped my application stand out amongst the competition.

I believe that it is beneficial to observe the personal and professional development of my character undergoing the internship through the metaphor of a journey. The extensive literature review will be

discussed in detail in the later chapters of the thesis, but with hindsight, I can conclude that I was completely oblivious to the corporate travel world. I had certain preconceived notions due to my studies, but retrospectively, not much could have prepared me for the voyage ahead. Therefore, I would consider my personal and professional development a special and individual journey equal to that of an idiosyncratic expedition that utilizes both autoethnographic methods of understanding personal and cultural positioning as well as storytelling methods of conceptualizing the various transformations that have occurred.

1.1 Journals as a Form of Assessing Professional Development

Dr. A. J. Saleh, associate professor of educational psychology, states that “reflection is a path to self-knowledge and to greater personal efficacy” (2015). Keeping a journal intended for learning purposes and especially to track personal development is considered as “concrete evidence” of transformational occurrences (Saleh 2015). The mere intention to establish and regularly update a learning journal is revealing of one’s inherent character and attitude towards the commitment for solid professional development.

The usage of tools such as journals as a way of monitoring professional development is highly convenient to recognizing development because of its reflective nature. The process of attempting to categorize and interpret daily events in a coherent and written manner helps to bring forth insights and realizations that may not have been discovered during the bustle of the hectic working days. Journal entries offer a silent form of written therapy and self-reflection. Furthermore, a permanent record of the most important professional development aspects exists and is readily available for review and contemplation.

In terms of structure in this thesis, the journal entries will be presented on a weekly basis rather than daily, due to the fact that the thesis has been written after the completion of the internship period. Therefore, it is significantly easier to recall details on a weekly basis rather than daily. This allows for a comprehensive approach to analysing the weekly themes as well as providing more room for observing the development of professional competencies. Furthermore, analyzing the journal entries in hindsight allows storytelling techniques to be applied. The key professional competencies that have been developed are professional communication, customer insights and marketing as well as teamwork and project management. These various themes and their developmental journey will be discussed further as the thesis progresses.

Finally, the reason for selecting a journal-based thesis format is due to the relevancy of the internship position to the degree of Tourism Management. In hindsight, the internship has provided indispensable insider knowledge about the travel industry along with its intricate workings which included commission rates, contract terms and customer negotiation tactics. A journal-based thesis format also allows for analysis and reflection, which is the reason for selecting relevant autoethnographic literature as the focal points of the chapter on the theoretical framework of the thesis. A profound emotional and professional change has occurred during the period of the internship which was documented through the journal entries as well as reflected through the analyses via the lenses of various autoethnographic and storytelling theories and sources.

1.2 Key Professional Concepts and Abbreviations

Interning at a destination management company provided a chance to encounter terms and abbreviations that were previously vague or unknown. Most of these abbreviations were used daily and were a crucial component of email exchanges with suppliers, clients, and customers.

SIC	Seat in Coach (Telescope Travel 2017).
DMC	Destination Management Company. (Cvent 2023)
FIT	Free Independent Traveller (TripSavvy 2019)
FOC	Free of Charge (Xotels 2023)
TL	Tour Leader (Travelway Europe 2023)
ETA	Estimated Arrival Time. (Britannica 2023).
MICE	Meetings, Incentives, Conferences & Exhibitions (EHL Insights 2023)
HB	Half Board (Cvent, 2021).
CP	Continental Plan (Emblem Hotels 2023)
BAR	Best Available Rate (Five Star Alliance, 2018)

2 Company Presentation and Required Skills

This chapter will present information about Timetravels Incoming as a company and workplace along with the skills required for the job. A brief introduction will be presented about their history, operations, business model, market, and customer segments along with a description of the tasks and job requirements. This chapter will also analyze the job tasks and provide a brief run-through of a typical working day. Internal and external stakeholders and their respective importance in the company will be discussed as well as a summary of the most advantageous hard and soft skills required for the internship will be presented.

2.1 Company Description

Timetravels Incoming Oy Ltd is a tour operator based in Helsinki, Finland and the daughter company of Timetravels Group. Timetravels Incoming specialises in the production of tailor-made travel itineraries for small- and large-scale tourist and student groups to destinations such as Finnish Lapland, Sweden, Norway, and Iceland. The main customer bases of Timetravels Incoming are from East and South-East Asia, due to extensive long-term partnerships with trusted travel agencies in the area. During the last few years, the Chinese and Middle Eastern travel industries began to show keen interest in tailor-made travel packages to Northern Europe, particularly Norwegian and Finnish Lapland. My cultural background and expertise in the Middle East due to being born and raised there was an advantage in helping Timetravels Incoming to better understand and penetrate the market more effectively. (Timetravels s.a.)

2.2 Customer Segments

Timetravels Group has segmented its markets according to their customer needs and profiles. These “target niches” include international students in Finland and Northern Europe, mostly exchange students, looking for an organized, knowledgeable, and more importantly, affordable travel company which takes care of everything from the accommodation to the meals and transportation. A business cooperation with student organization companies such as ESN Finland and ESN Latvia were signed in 2011 and 2012 respectively to facilitate the operations in the student travel market. A typical travel package aimed at students will include (shared) accommodation, transportation, a local tour guide, extensive activity programs, and entrance tickets to specific establishments. The starting price for an average one-week trip to Saariselkä in Finland, for example, is around 400 euros per person.

In 2016, Timetravels launched its daughter company, Timetravels Incoming. Initially, the daughter company was formed to expertly handle the increasing interest and traffic from Chinese and Asian travellers to Finland and Northern European destinations. Notably, the Asian market differs from the Northern European student market due to its larger volumes in numbers of tourists and subsequently

larger revenues. Due to traveller tastes, wishes and expectations, the travel packages generated for the Asian market includes non-shared accommodation no less than 4 stars, a full board meal plan (breakfast, lunch, and dinner), local guides, along with almost all entrance tickets and fees for activities included in the final price. Based on observed patterns, the average starting price for a 1-week trip to Rovaniemi, Finland, for example, is around 2,500 euros per person.

2.3 Job Description and Skills

Cambridge Dictionary defines a job description as “a list of the responsibilities that an employee has and the details that they were expected to perform in their work”. In other words, job descriptions are meant to inform employees about their specific tasks, duties, and responsibilities regarding their job (DarwinBox s.a). However, prior to examining the job description of the internship, we need to first examine the skills needed to fulfill the duties of the internship.

The most important skill that was required to cope with the tasks of the job was the skill of multitasking. According to the American Psychology Association multitasking involves an individual switching between two or more tasks simultaneously, oftentimes with the aim of completing the tasks at a rapid pace.

A second skill that was needed and strengthened was the skill of problem solving. Often, there were certain activities that could not be booked on specific dates or times. Norway, for example, is notorious for its limited restaurant and activities selection on Sundays (The Local 2023). This usually meant that the itinerary for the day had to be rewired and edited and a suitable solution had to be found straight away without delay. This skill was the most challenging skill to improve, because problem-solving as a concept is subjective.

2.3.1 Hard Skills and Transformative Skills

In this chapter, the different types of skills and their relevance to the job will be discussed. It is therefore important to distinguish the differences between hard skills and transformative skills. Hard skills are those skills that require specialised or specific technical knowledge such as bi or multilingualism, fluency in a specific programming language, or various educational qualifications such as a master's or PhD. Soft or transformative competencies refer to personal habits or traits which directly correlate to how an individual functions as an employee, for example having integrity, being open-minded, possessing problem solving and organisational skills or being dependable (Birt 2023). More recently, the OECD has published the three most important transformative competencies required for students by 2030: taking responsibility, reconciling tensions & dilemmas, and creating new

value (OECD 2023). Susan Eisner states in a journal of Human Resources and Sustainability studies that “today’s college graduates face an uncertain and demanding job market in which they are likely to encounter evolving skill needs, reduced hiring, and heightened competition” (Eisner 2010). My personal interpretation of these “evolving” skills that Eisner referred to can be considered developed subsidiaries of traditional hard and soft skills.

2.3.2 Hard Skills

This subchapter will introduce the specific hard skills required and utilized during the internship period. The hard skills required for the role included a general educational background in tourism or business management. This skill acted as a base to understanding the business practices that Timetravels Incoming followed as well as various basic accounting and financial principles applied to generating quotes and price negotiations. Another hard skill that was required was specific cultural knowledge of the Middle Eastern market, which has already been gained with personal experience and utilised during the workdays to make informed and tailor-made decisions regarding the UAE segment of the market. Most of the hard skills were acquired during university classes and further strengthened by conscious daily effort during the working days.

More general hard skills that were utilized during my internship included presentation skills and data presentation. This was required during sales presentations to deliver pertinent information about next season’s destinations in a coherent and aesthetically pleasing manner. This skill was acquired through various public speaking and theatre opportunities. Copywriting skills were also needed during the constructing of the material for the sales presentations, as it was required to describe every day of the one-week trip in a creative and inspiring manner instead of simply stating the activities of the day and their timings. After establishing the hard skills, we will examine the concept of transformative skills and their usage during the internship.

2.3.3 Transformative Skills

According to Masterplan (2023), transformative skills are skills or abilities which make it easier for individuals and ultimately companies to adapt to changes and increase innovation. The transformative skills, that were required for the role included problem solving and critical thinking skills, along with strong organisational and dependability tendencies. The handiest transformative skill was problem solving and the ability to think analytically. The nature of the travel and tourism industry is largely unpredictable; changes and deviations to the schedule may arise, often at the last minute. Therefore, an integral part of my role was to “think on my feet”, suggest and implement timely and accurate solutions to ensure operations unfolded smoothly. Since problem solving and analytical thinking skills

are very subjective, it was difficult to refer to previous experience in implementing efficient decisions. Nevertheless, a genuine effort was made and consequently, the speed and accuracy in problem solving evolved as the internship continued.

Further transformative skills that have been utilized and nurtured were multitasking, adaptability and communication skills. Multitasking skills were paramount in ensuring daily productivity, as there would be more than one confirmed travel group that needed their operations handled every day. Keeping track of the various travel groups and their unique destinations, itineraries, requests, requirements, and operations was an expectation that emerged very early on in the internship. It was also a requirement also required to possess adaptability skills to facilitate sudden changes, cancellations, delays, or critical situations and to be able to respond accordingly. Communication skills were also strengthened thanks to my direct supervisor being only one desk away. Inquiring about anything even remotely confusing was crucial in avoiding complications and misunderstandings later.

2.4 Duties, Tasks & Responsibilities of the Job

Now that the various skills required for the job have been outlined, this chapter will introduce the job description and the numerous tasks expected to be carried out during the internship period at Timetravels The role of Travel Product & Operations Assistant included the following responsibilities extracted from the internship contract:

1. *“Maintaining professional destination knowledge used to design cost-efficient travel products that meet the traveller’s needs under Timetravels Incoming’s core values*
2. *Accurately and promptly offer travel solutions to the travellers*
3. *Pre-booking the needed resources which include accommodation, transportation, entrance tickets, etc.*
4. *Revising and modifying bookings according to travellers’ demands*
5. *Delivering pertinent information to suppliers and tour guides*
6. *Following up on financial transactions such as invoicing*
7. *Any further tasks or duties assigned by the employer are required to be performed”.*

A typical working day of a Travel product and Operations Assistant Intern at Timetravels Incoming included arriving at the office located in central Helsinki at 09.30 AM, which was the recommended starting time. There are three main emails that needed to be checked straight away; those include:

1. Personal company email (myname@timetravels.com): this email included mostly internal communications, i.e any sales materials, documents or contracts intended for personal reference and viewings. Meeting requests for sales presentations with suppliers would be requested with the personal company email
2. Reservation email (reservations@timetravels.com): this email included all email exchanges with suppliers concerning accommodation, activity and restaurant bookings as well as invoicing documents. The reservation email was the main email that was checked throughout the day, as interactions and transactions with suppliers, companies and hotels were considered an integral part of the daily work
3. Inquiries email (groups@timetravels.com): this email included all the incoming inquiries and requests for travel groups. A significant part of the daily work tasks included handling incoming inquiries and generating tailor-made or recommended travel itineraries which included a comprehensive price quote. The offer is then sent to the inquirer and an effort is made to “close the deal”, i.e successfully convince the client to purchase the itinerary generated by us.

Most of the working days were occupied with switching between the various tasks that the three emails entailed. Confirming bookings with suppliers, generating or recommending travel itineraries based on travel agencies' requests and following up with sent offers with the aim of securing a confirmed sale would be a general description of a typical working day. Lunch hour was usually from 12.45 till 13.45 and the working day would officially end at 17.00. The internship period started on the 15th of May 2023 and concluded on the 4th of August 2023, which means that 12 weeks worth of diary content will be presented, discussed, and analysed.

2.5 Analysis of the Work

The specific tasks relating to the Travel Product and Operations assistant include a daily check of the three most important emails which have already been highlighted in the introduction chapter. Based on the incoming emails and their varying requests, the daily tasks could range anywhere from

finalizing a hotel booking with updated travel dates, timings, and rooming lists to drafting an entire detailed travel itinerary from scratch.

The reservations email needed to be checked every ten minutes to ensure timely replies. An example of requests that might be received through the reservation emails are restaurant, hotel, and activity bookings confirmations. Cross and double-checking dates, timings, group sizes, cities and special considerations were a key part in ensuring smooth reservation operations. The up-to-date information of a travelling group was compiled in a comprehensive Google Sheets document which contained a special identifying group code, the entire detailed itinerary, price breakdown and quotations along with any extra notes. These group documents were an important point of reference and always utilized before confirming any email from the reservations email account.

Another important task was regularly checking the “groups” email, where all the new inquiries would be sent. These inquiries were fresh with requests and included the size of the group, the destination, the travel dates, and duration as well as information about the travelers (country of origin, family or group, seniors, or young adults, etc.). Most inquiries came from travel agencies which Timetravels Incoming has established a trusted partner relationship with and so consequently, elements of trust and respect had to be maintained during email exchanges. A significant part of the working day would be dedicated to crafting an itinerary to meet the clients’ needs along with calculating accurate price quotes to include in the final offer.

Occasionally, sales presentations would need to be drafted. These presentations were usually carried out in Google Slides and followed an aesthetically pleasing, artistic and optimistic style of advertising. The content of the sales presentations included promotional material and sample itineraries with daily activities and accommodation breakdowns for a specific popular destination such as Finnish Lapland, for example. These sales presentations are then presented to trusted partners and feedback is collected on specific requests. It was essential to edit the itinerary presented according to the partner’s wishes, as an updated tailor-made itinerary would need to be sent to them as a part of the meeting follow-up documents. Tailor-made itineraries that are sent to the partners following a sales presentation meeting had a higher chance of being considered for promotion and distribution by the partner.

The most important skill that was required to cope with the tasks of the job was the skill of multitasking. A relevant example of the application of this skill was when there were countless instances where I had been handling up to four group operations at the same time. The groups were very similar: all originating from the same country, travelling around the same month and the itineraries

were extremely similar aside from a few restaurants and hotels. I had to quickly learn how to multitask efficiently by sending the same reservation email for groups that had matching services, hotels, or activities instead of sending requests separately.

2.6 Stakeholders

This chapter presents the stakeholders of Timetravels Incoming, both internal and external. According to Cambridge Dictionary, stakeholders are defined as “an employee, investor, customer, etc. who is involved in or has interest in a business and its success”. Examples of potential stakeholders in a company include employees, managers, suppliers, shareholders, investors, etc. The stakeholders’ respective roles will be introduced as well as their benefits and importance to the company.

2.6.1 Internal stakeholders

The internal stakeholders in Timetravels Incoming included the employees, the managers, and the owners of the company, to name a few but essential roles. The employees are integral to the internal stakeholder’s circle as I believe my colleagues and I were the powerhouse behind ensuring smooth daily operations and producing multiple draft offers and itineraries throughout the week as well as handling bookings and operations to the highest standards. The managers of the company expressed their stake by ensuring that we stayed aligned with the overall vision, values, and goals (both long and short term) of the company and occasionally reported to the owners. The owners of the company were interested in the general situation of the different departments as well as any important or notable achievements and pieces of information. This synergy of roles and responsibilities created a healthy food chain where every member felt appreciated and believed in the meaningfulness of the work being done.

Internal Stakeholders

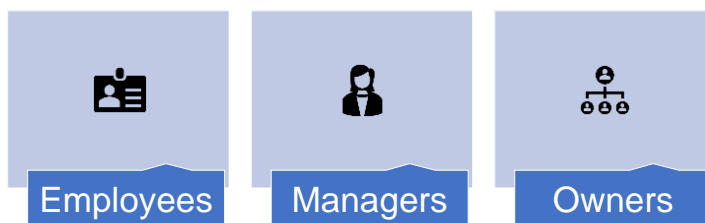


Figure 1: Internal stakeholders

2.6.2 External stakeholders

The external stakeholders in Timetravels Incoming included, but were not limited to customers, partners, suppliers, and governmental organisations. A “customer” was considered any individual person inquiring about a travel package or a pricing quotation without being affiliated with any travel agency, partner or not. The partner agencies were established travel agencies that often had signed a contract with the company entitling them to earn commissions at varying rates. Governmental organisations such as Visit Finland and Business Finland could also be interested in the status of Timetravels Incoming operations from a tourism perspective, as governmental institutions appreciate collaborations with local Finnish companies and in the best-case scenario, can help them establish networks of international collaboration on a level that only a governmental organisation can facilitate (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland s.a).

External Stakeholders

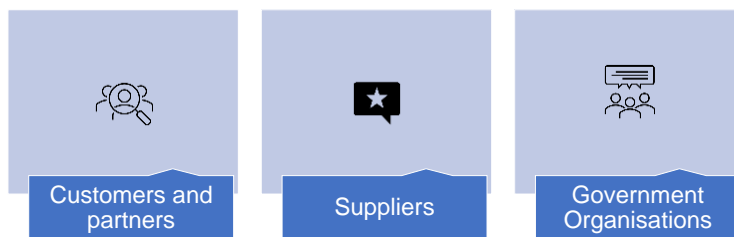


Figure 1.1: External stakeholders

2.7 Interaction Situations

The working model implemented during the internship was office based. Remote work was only permitted during special circumstances, such as national holidays or sick days. In retrospect, the fact that I had to physically be present in the office for the duration of the internship helped me immensely with asking questions, solving doubts, receiving feedback, and reviewing emails, itineraries, and price quotations accurately and speedily with my supervisor. Our interactions consisted mainly of mentoring, cross-checking facts, and documents as well as miscellaneous pieces of information that can help me in my interactions with partners and suppliers.

Throughout the working weeks, there were only three people present in the office: myself, another intern, my supervisor, and another colleague working in another department of the same company. This small circle created a relaxed and stress-free environment where personal feelings and comments could be expressed and as many questions as possible can be asked without judgement or scrutiny.

2.8 Social Sustainability

In a modern workplace, it is essential that employee wellbeing and surroundings are prioritized in order to increase efficiency and satisfaction. This statement can be embodied by the essence of social sustainability. The Western Australia Council of Social Services (WACOSS) defines social sustainability as “the creation of healthy, productive and worker-friendly communities through the integration of processes, systems, and structures that benefit current and future generations”. In essence, social sustainability heavily advocates for all practices that improve worker well-being, because there could be a direct relationship between socially sustainable communities or workplaces and employee satisfaction. The most important part of social sustainability is ensuring that it is applicable not just to the current generation, but also to future generations, hence the word “sustainability”. From a business standpoint, social sustainability seeks to explore the effects of businesses on our general society. Health and safety, wellness, fair workplace practices, working conditions, diversity and equity are a few examples of various fronts of social sustainability from a business perspective.

The social sustainability practices that were evident in Timetravels Incoming included various workplace perks and benefits. The nature of the work required an office setting with a modern laptop, which was provided free of charge. Monthly bus passes were also financed by the company, which was very helpful since I live one hour away and needed to commute by bus and metro every day. A daily allowance of ten euros was provided for lunch using an Edenred meal benefit card. Free coffee, tea, snacks, and fruits were readily available most days in the office kitchen. Lunch breaks were an hour long, which was an appreciated change from the thirty-minute lunch breaks that I was used to in previous workplaces. Remote or distance work was also permitted, due to the flexible nature of the tasks. Overtime was not encouraged, so as to maintain a work-life balance. Therefore, I was never asked to work overtime nor given time-consuming tasks after four o'clock in the afternoon. All the aforementioned aspects of Timetravels Incoming as a workplace clearly promoted a socially sustainable office culture that increased my wellbeing and overall satisfaction.

2.9 Professional Development Themes

As explained in the Introduction chapter of this paper, the internship journey addresses many themes and areas of personal and professional development. However, May., E. (2018) writes states in a blog post for the Niagara Institute that professional development endeavors have been either paused or completely abandoned ever since society entered a collective survival mode to cope with the world's new normal after COVID-19. A study conducted by Deloitte with the aim of investigating the future of learning in the wake of COVID-19 concluded that almost half of the participants stated that professional development and learning budgets have been cut (Deloitte 2021). Almost four years post-COVID-19, some apparent side effects of the disregard for professional development topics may start to emerge in the form of rising skill gaps that need to be urgently addressed to preserve the efficiency of the future workforce.

The professional development themes that will be discussed are leadership, teamwork, communication, business acumen and self-management. Further essential sub-themes within these main themes include performance management, public speaking, presentations, storytelling, time management, goal setting, critical thinking, and stress management. These main themes and sub-themes will be expanded on and analyzed with reference to the weekly journal entries, which will simplify tracking and reflecting on their development.

3 Theoretical Framework

For this thesis, I have chosen the journey metaphor to explore my internship experience. From a professional development standpoint, the objectives of the weekly journal entries and their analyses were to ultimately observe the journey of my personal and professional evolution due to a credible exposure to authentic working life. The journal entries acted as a point of reflection; a chance to compare the factual and logical with the personal transformation that has occurred and shaped my perception of reality. It could therefore be concluded that the most practical approach to laying the foundation of the theoretical framework is to utilize the concepts of autoethnography, storytelling techniques and character archetype analysis. The justifications for choosing the different components of the theoretical framework and their relevance to the analysis of the journal entries will be discussed in detail in their respective chapters.

3.1 Autoethnography

“When students discuss culture in a reflexive manner, they become more aware of themselves and their surroundings by objectively attempting possible categorizations and simplifications of reality.

Autoethnography is about taking notice and paying attention to life as it goes by.” (Au-Yong-Oliveira 2020, p.2)

In a thesis based on auto-biographical tools such as a journal, an autoethnographic approach is justified. In this chapter, the concept of autoethnography is introduced along with its brief history. Various applications of autoethnographic methods will be explained as well as their relevance and contribution to the thesis. As an opening statement on the emergence of autoethnography, Bochner (1994) states that scholars of the time began wondering how different social sciences would become if “they were closer to literature than to physics, if they offered stories rather than theories”. These reflections kick-started the emergence and subsequent popularity of autoethnography.

During the 1980’s, significant opportunities aimed at reforming social science inquiry methods were introduced (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011). This was inspired by the general agreement amongst scholars of the time about the gnoseological and philosophical limitations of social science (Ellis & Bochner 2000). An encouragement for a new way of interpreting the relationship between authors, audiences and texts began to emerge. Consequently, the realization of a plethora of complex and meaningful stories which enhanced academic research and inquiry due to implementing autoethnographic methods helped readers and authors to better understand themselves and others.

Poulos (2021, 4) defines autoethnography as a qualitative and autobiographical genre of academic writing that aims to analyze and interpret the author's personal experiences in order to gain further revelations about culture, traditions, personal feelings, emotions, and general socioeconomic aspects. Therefore, autoethnographic literature requires the author to be openly vulnerable in their work in an authentic manner to gain insightful aspects about their research questions. These insights can help the author conceptualize and address questions and themes relating to exploring topics such as profound personal transformations, traumas, life changes, matters of spirituality, and the grieving process (Leavy 2020, 57).

The importance of autoethnography in academia, specifically in higher education, lies in the need for students to produce introspective and reflective research and personal conclusions through storytelling methods. According to Au-Yong-Oliveira (2020) higher education has been stipulated as a principal factor for societal growth, and thus "students need to seek new and accessible avenues for their research endeavors. Autoethnography is one such avenue" (Au-Yong-Oliveira 2020, 4). The appeal of autoethnographic methods and approaches lies in its relatively low-cost, accessible, eye-opening, and contemplative nature. The researcher not only views the experience from an inquisitive and analytical point of view, but important insights about cultural awareness, personal bias and certain innate tendencies or prejudices may surface.

The relevancy of the autoethnographic approach to the journal entries and ultimately their analyses and application can be found in clarity it provides in recognizing character development, as the nature of autoethnography is largely introspective. This indicates that the answer to the question of personal and professional development according to the professional development themes can be found within, i.e., any authentic developments worth mentioning are recognized by analyzing the journal entries in hindsight in order to classify changes in ideals, values, views and character. As the weekly entries are being analyzed, a clear story may start to emerge; a story that tells of profound evolution which is facilitated by the contemplative and self-examining nature of autoethnography. Theories such as Joseph Campbell's "Theory of the Hero's Quest" acts as a storytelling framework that accompanies the autoethnographic narrative of the weekly entries.

3.2 Theory of the Hero's Quest

According to Allison & al. (2019), the universe is constantly subjecting itself to profound transformation, both on a microscopic scale as well as a larger, all-encompassing scale. Body cells undergo various cycles, biological and chemical processes evolve within the body and aging slowly transforms organisms both internally and externally. Often, life presents an ultimatum to all living creatures: "change as all phenomena in the universe must change, or fall". Fragments of these insightful

reflections tend to act as a “narrative template”, particularly within the plots of heroes’ journeys, encouraging self-discovery and character metamorphosis.

The “monomyth”, a term and theory popularized by Joseph Campbell and commonly referred to as the hero’s journey or the hero’s quest, can be defined as a “narrative pattern” (Masterclass 2021) which typically involves an innocent hero who receives a calling to venture out into a transformative adventure, but not without initial hesitation or downright refusal. The journey commences either way, usually with the aid of a mentor figure who helps the inexperienced hero to realize their abilities and learn to use them efficiently in their travels. The hero’s journey climaxes with the main conflict of the story, in which the hero needs to make use of their newly gained abilities and advice from their mentors to overcome obstacles and triumph over their troubles. Mentally, the hero has undergone a cathartic transformation, and returns to the setting that they left behind as a changed person and proceeds to share and spread their newly gained wisdom and experiences with others.

Joseph Campbell, literature professor and author of “The Hero with a Thousand Faces” (1949), describes the monomyth as follows:

“A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered, and a decisive victory is won; the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.”

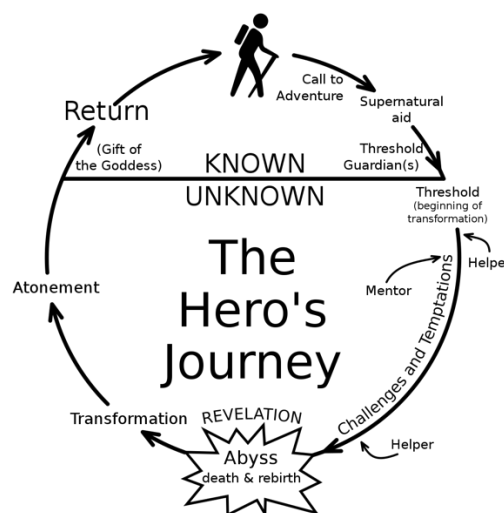


Figure 1.3. Stages of the Hero’s Journey (Wikipedia s.a)

The theory of The Hero’s Quest is relevant to the journal entries and to the overall personal and professional development that occurred during the internship period because it provides an opportunity to conceptualize the experience in a holistic, three-dimensional, and introspective manner.

Each stage of The Hero's Quest can offer transformative and eye-opening insights when compared to its consequent stage during the internship period. The cognizance of these inner and outer transformations can, and have, aided in the profound realization of personal strengths, abilities, and confidence. Upon reflection upon the different stages of The Hero's Quest, a newfound appreciation for one's own resilience is discovered, and a sense of reassurance is provided. This is because the person who has experienced this transformation and reflected upon the literature and theories associated with it is now equipped with new knowledge and perspectives on facing challenges and dealing with changes. These concomitant stages of The Hero's Quest will be highlighted in the analysis of the journal entries based on my internship.

3.3 Hero Archetypes

At this point, it is helpful to introduce archetypes in further detail. Swiss psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Carl Jung states that "archetypes are inborn models of people, behaviors and personalities that play a role in influencing human behavior" (VeryWellMind, 2023). Profound personal transformations that occur in the backdrop of theories such as The Hero's Quest first require the realization of one's innate self-worth and the ability to abandon the illusion of insignificance. The belief that inside each one of us is our own personal hero, ready to break the toxic programming of this material world and explore the leaps and bounds of human potential is a strong motivator to explore our true selves. Perhaps it might be easier to conceptualize these innate characteristics or archetypes as dormant alternate personalities awakened by different challenges and situations. Each personality carries with it an air of mysticism, of supernatural wonder and capabilities intended to be used as peaceful weapons in our personal journeys.

In "Awakening the Heroes Within: Twelve Archetypes to Help Us Find Ourselves and Transform Our World", Carol S. Pearson highlights twelve archetypes, even referring to them as our "inner guides". These inner guides are the Innocent, the Orphan, the Warrior, the Caregiver, the Seeker, the Destroyer, the Lover, the Creator, the Ruler, the Magician, the Sage, and the Fool. These archetypes, or "guides", are defined by Pearson as "universal patterns reflected in symbols, images, and themes common to all cultures and times". Pearson takes it a step further by allocating the archetypes to each stage of The Hero's Quest, as Joseph Campbell's work acted as a "call to quest" for Carol to conceptualize her book (Pearson 1991, p.1-5). These archetypes act as an aid for interpreting the transformations that occur when a significant journey akin to The Hero's Quest is either about to occur, currently occurring or has already occurred.

Pertaining to the question of how different groups of individuals in a society view archetypes and their importance or usefulness, Pearson highlighted five of such groups and explained the most convenient and preferred way for them to interpret archetypes. Scientists, given their logical and skeptical nature, may perceive archetypes as “holograms” to be analyzed and dissected. Spiritualists may perceive the archetypes as “gods or goddesses” embedded in the collective subconscious. Religious individuals who believe in only one God can, with an open mind, interpret the archetypes as “different facets” of that God. Academics can interpret the archetypes as “metaphors or paradigms.” Lastly, people who are interested in self-development and growth can interpret the archetypes as different guides that bring challenges and lessons, but ultimately leave a gift (Pearson 1991, 6-7).

The relevance of the various types of Pearson’s archetypes to the personal journey of development through an internship opportunity is created by using the archetypes as a point of reference to one’s own characteristics and traits, subsequently utilizing that information in recognizing which part of the journey I am currently experiencing along with the tools and opportunities that can be utilized to overcome day-to-day difficulties. Oftentimes, it is of great help to remove one’s innate personality and all its shortcomings and replace it with an archetype that one closely relates to, to fully embody the “role” and triumph over difficulties while acquiring indispensable knowledge. Monitoring development through embodying and understanding archetypes indicates transformation and avoids stagnation.

By this point, the groundwork has been established for the theoretical framework that will be referred to in the analyses of the diary entries. Highlighting a link between the theoretical framework and the weekly analyses helps the reader interpret the experience from the author’s perspective and conceptualize the development that has occurred through the same lenses.

4 Weekly Entries and Analyses

This chapter explores the personal journey of my internship. Based on the theoretical framework of the Hero's Journey as presented in Campbell (1949) and Pearson (1991), the weekly entries will be juxtaposed with the stages of the hero's journey. The weekly diary entries were written during the internship process in a centralized document and updated daily. The format of the entries were bullet points with the most important topics of the week and a few sub-notes for further clarification. The short bullet-point style of taking notes was convenient because of its quick and straightforward nature. During particularly hectic working days, I would be too busy to structure full sentences with report-style formatting and insignificant content. Therefore, bullet points helped in recalling the events during their analysis and were a useful way of taking note of the most important aspects of the work without becoming sidetracked. The weekly journal entries will be analyzed using the framework of the theoretical knowledge that has been discussed, i.e., varying stages in the hero's journey and hero archetypes along with autoethnographic narratives.

The titles of the weekly entries are written as a reference to the twelve stages of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey. This is done with the aim of highlighting each working week's stage and significance in my development journey, since the working weeks featured a resemblance to the monomyth. Each weekly entry will also feature one of Carol Pearson's twelve archetypes to further justify and explain certain actions, thoughts, or decisions. Finally, extracts from the journal entries have been attached in the form of bullet points for further reference.

4.1 Week 1: *Call to Adventure* (15.05.2023 – 19.05.2023)

During the first week, I could already start to notice faint nudges of my very own "call to adventure". Campbell describes this stage as one that rumbles the comfort of ordinary life, presenting a quest or goal that must be undertaken. That goal of the first week was for me to complete the mental leap of shifting my mindset from an ordinary, unemployed student to a budding tourism industry professional. This stage could be illustrated by the warrior archetype, that of a hero boldly facing the mythical dragon. I found myself aspiring to "slay" and "triumph" over my troubling thoughts. Reflecting on these themes from an autoethnographic perspective, my "warrior" archetype was triggered by my childhood educational experiences, where I was always encouraged to outperform and succeed in my undertakings no matter how significant or trivial.

The highlights of the week included:

- Company and process introductions
- Iceland sample itineraries and routes

- Introduction to forming trip calculations via Google Sheets
- Checking rates from contracted partners
- Making sure all costs and prices are up-to-date
- Making sure the calculations make sense price-wise
- Researching and benchmarking itineraries from travel agencies in our assigned target markets (UAE and India)
- Abbreviations learned: **SIC** *sit in coach*, **DMC** *destination management company*, **FIT** *free independent travellers*, **FOT** *free of charge*, **TL** *tour leader*, **ETA** *estimated time of arrival*, **MICE** *meetings, incentives, conferences & events*. **HB** *half board*. **CP** *continental plan*. **BAR** *best available rate*.
- **Challenge of the week:** understanding the formulas for the price calculations and breakdowns

Analysis

The first week as a Travel Product and Operations Assist intern was a whirlwind of new and unfamiliar concepts. I embarked on the journey “fresh faced”, ready to start my first ever corporate level office job. Straight away, company processes and ways of conducting daily operations were introduced, for example, the naming system of various incoming groups, where to save sheets of calculations and other documents, the format of sending itinerary offers and basic formulas to be applied to the calculations according to the company policies. A major part of the first week was familiarizing myself with all the different contracted suppliers that have a relationship with Timetravels Incoming, and where to find their rates and contract terms and conditions to use it as a vital point of reference when planning and scheduling services by the contracted partners.

The second half of the week centred heavily on training and introductions to the most significant Northern European destinations. These sessions, usually held during the first few hours of the working days, centered heavily around presenting destinations such as Iceland and their most sought-after attractions along with sample itineraries recommended by the company. Restaurants, hotels, and service providers of which Timetravels Incoming has a trusted partnership with were also presented and encouraged to be used. I found these sessions very beneficial, as it avoided the initial “rookie” confusion of where to arrange hotels, accommodation, and services/activities for clients.

Learning Outcomes

The biggest challenge encountered during the first week was fully understanding how the price breakdowns were performed and learning various Google Sheets formulas to apply them to various calculations in order to provide accurate and satisfactory offers according to company standards. Thankfully, this initial confusion was short-lived and limited to only one week, as there were numerous 1-on-1 sessions with the CEO himself where we would go through questions and doubts for

many hours in the afternoon. Therefore, the skills acquired through that experience would be problem solving and patience. Consequently, the theme of the first week was steadying my landing feet in the world of price calculations in the tourism industry.

Journey summarized

Unbeknownst to me, the idea of embarking on a journey has now been established. Even if I did not possess a clear picture of the aim nor the importance of the journey, I was still drawn to exploring its possibilities. Oftentimes, this is easier said than done, and the reality of current life can cloud future hopes.

4.2 Week 2: *Refusal of the Call* (22.05.2023 – 26.05.2023)

The hero subconsciously acknowledges the need to embark on the journey, but initially resists in order to preserve the familiarity and comfort of their current reality. By the second week of starting all my tasks in full swing, I had gained a solid understanding of what awaits me for the next eleven weeks. This realization had overwhelmed me, and I found myself “holding back” or subconsciously attempting to slow down the unfolding of daily events to a degree that I could handle. This can be considered the second step in the hero’s journey, where the hero initially refuses his call to adventure. The hero archetype for the second week was The Realist, specifically the Contemplative Realist. This archetype prioritizes “facing the facts” and searches for different ways to feel safe in situations of uncertainty as well as attempting to comfort unjustified sources of fear, especially if it’s preventing growth.

The highlights of the week included:

- Introduction to Rovaniemi sample itineraries
- Introduction to trustworthy local contracted suppliers
- Saariselkä, Inari and Levi introductions
- Spotlight on accurate calculations and price estimations
- More Google sheets exercises to complete
- Challenge of the week: finding accurate and up-to-date information and prices regarding accommodation and activities

Analysis

The tasks for the first part of the week involved in depth-introductions to sample travel itineraries for popular and complicated tourist destinations such as Rovaniemi and Saariselkä. In one city, there might be up to three or four different recommended sample itineraries based on the features and

preferences of the travel groups as well as the time of year. It was an important task for my supervisor to clearly explain the reasons and justifications for selecting one itinerary instead of another, as this will aid in making my own education decisions later during the internship.

The second part of the week focused heavily on the accuracy of the price calculations and estimations rather than the logic of the travel itineraries. This task was the most difficult of all tasks for the week and caused frequent moments of frustration. This frustration caused me to overthink my career choices and my own competencies. Little did I know that it was only a small bump in the road and that practice really did make perfect because by the end of the week, I had gained a satisfactory sense of which calculations and formulae to apply for which specific situation. I noticed that this same challenge had carried itself over from the challenge of the first week. The reason for its persistence in the second week is the fact that the calculations and itinerary requests had evolved and called for new and unfamiliar formulae.

Learning Outcomes

The challenge of the week involved overcoming the frustrations of working with numbers along with attempting to make sense of the recommended standardized itineraries in order to be better informed in my future work. Another challenge, albeit less difficult to overcome, was locating where all the important suppliers' contract copies and details were in the internal database and being able to refer to them as quickly as possible when drafting an itinerary with calculations. All these challenges have been overcome by expressing patience for myself and silencing unhelpful inner voicing cause doubts and uncertainty, as well as lots of practice during the working days.

Journey Summarized

Even though I faced self-imposed resistance to starting the journey, I inwardly knew that it had to be done. I could claw at the comfort of the present moment forever, but I would eventually have to move forward as all things do. Living in denial meant that I had more time and effort to familiarize myself with the work tasks. However, with a little help from outside sources, I would be one step closer to fully accepting the beginning of the journey.

4.3 Week 3: *Meeting the Mentor* (29.05.2023 – 02.06.2023)

For the survival and best interest of the hero, a mentor is an essential companion on their quest. The mentor figure aids the hero in regaining confidence and reminds the hero of the significance and the

reasoning behind undertaking the transformative journey in the first place. This came as a welcomed feature of the third week of the internship, especially after the second week's doubts and unnecessary overthinking.

The highlights of the week included:

- Swedish Lapland + Norway introduction and sample itinerary exercises
- Spotlight on how realistic an itinerary is time-wise and schedule-wise
- Introduction to supplier negotiation
- Practising to draft emails to be sent to suppliers and vendors in real-time for real-life ongoing cases
- Taking charge of a group inquiry from the start to finish aka replying to customers' inquiry, finding more about their wishes, drafting an itinerary accordingly, sending an offer, etc.
 - 3 families travelling as a group from Germany
 - 6 guests (5 adults, one child aged 13 years old)
 - Itinerary drafted based on special wishes to see the Northern Lights
 - Dates: 30.12.2023-6.1.2024 (extremely high season)
 - Countries covered: Finland and Norway
 - Cities covered: Rovaniemi, Luosto, Levi, Tromsø
 - Challenge of the week: drafting realistic itineraries according to the customers wishes and according to the company's guidelines
 - Itinerary has been drafted and sent over to the customers for final decision. Offers are valid for 2 weeks. A follow up is sent after 3-4 days of the offer, if there has not been any reply.

Analysis

Two main mentor figures had aided me through the second week. Firstly, my father. Secondly, the CEO of the company. When I was struggling with the absurdity and exhaustion of the working hours and week, my father, who is a retired engineer with more than 30 years of working experience, advised me to accept and embrace the challenges and hardships of the past and coming weeks, for they are a natural and integral part of the very early stages of one's career. "These are the days that must happen to you", I recall him saying.

The CEO of the company was the second mentor figure of the week. This is due to his very involved and "hands-on" character. During the first few weeks of the internship, the CEO was away on a business trip with several hours of time difference from Finland but still managed to remain responsive and answer all questions and concerns in a timely manner. This helped me gain confidence in my work and feel supported in my undertakings. Thus, the archetype for the third week was the Idealist. Equipped with youthful vulnerability and new-found optimism, I attempted to stay loyal to personal ideals and positive values with the help of my mentor(s).

The tasks for the first part of the week involved further sample itinerary schedules for more destinations such as Swedish Lapland and Norway, which were particularly challenging due to my unfamiliarity with Norway and Sweden as travel destinations compared to Finland. However, dedicated study time was allocated to solve that exact problem. An emphasis on how realistic the contents and timings of the itinerary were instead of how realistic the prices were was also highlighted. This shift in itinerary priorities was welcomed and appreciated, since I thoroughly enjoyed drafting realistic itineraries and including what I personally believed made sense, instead of calculating numbers and prices for itineraries about what someone else believed made sense.

The second part of the week involved making an amateur attempt at crafting a travel itinerary based on a real request that was received through the inquiries email. The request in question was from 3 families from Germany intending to travel together as a group to Finland to witness the Northern Lights as well as spend the Christmas season in various cities in Finnish Lapland. I had spent a couple of working days perfecting the itinerary: from making sure the schedule was exciting and realistic to triple-checking the price calculations to avoid petty mistakes. At every stage, my work was reviewed by my supervisor, and I received concise and constructive advice on how to improve my work. However, it was made clear to me that I was allowed to work on one inquiry for more than a day because it was my first one of the internships and that in the future, itinerary generation would need to be finalized in less than 90 minutes. At this point, I considered myself lucky if I could finalize a full itinerary within 48 hours.

From time to time, there was a chance for me to practice the acceptable way of sending emails to and communicating with suppliers. This was an important task, almost 80% of the operations in the company relied on cooperation with their established suppliers. Thus, maintaining a level of respect and professionalism in interacting with them nurtured their hard-earned trust in us and increased the company's chances of extending contracts and agreeing on more favorable terms and conditions or commission rates.

Learning Outcomes

The challenges faced during the week involved self-doubt and finding motivation to face new tasks, which have evolved in terms of themes and difficulty levels. However, these troubles were solved by having genuine conversations with loved ones who could inspire and gently redirect me on the right track. A second challenge was learning not to personally tailor every minute detail of an itinerary according to the client's wishes, as there are some aspects that cannot be compromised. The solution for this issue, stemming from my people-pleasing tendencies, was to refer to standardized and

recommended itineraries for different occasions and drawing inspiration from them, as well as gaining the confidence to justify the deviation from the client's wishes to the client.

With the help of my mentors, I realized the importance of accepting the journey as one of personal growth and I have also gained confidence and resilience to continue. This came at a crucial week filled with dizzying concepts and overwhelming tasks. However, I had now made a personal commitment to the journey and now needed to put my best foot forward.

4.4 Week 4: *Crossing the Threshold* (05.06.2023 – 09.06.2023)

The fateful moment the hero decides to cross the threshold, it becomes established that they have now decided to fully commit to undertaking the journey. At this point, returning is not an option. This moment of realization occurred when I had been allocated the second confirmed group to handle operations for. The dust has settled, all of my inner thoughts and feelings indicated a need to drive forward, to remove the one foot that was stuck out the door and fully step in. At a stage like that, it was helpful to embody the archetype of The Seeker. This archetype seeks to “blaze new trails” and discover new approaches and possibilities. A new path of exciting opportunities has finally been fully cleared and was waiting for me to embark on my journey. Equipped with The Seeker's natural curiosity, authenticity, and independence, I powered through my first “productive” work week since starting the internship.

The highlights of the week included:

- Supplier negotiations continue
- Substituting dates and times, finding substitute restaurant and suppliers for last minute cancellations
- Drafting and sending booking, inquiry and reservation emails regarding a real life case:
 - Group reference **PH4091123**
 - Group size: 35 guests + 1 tour leader + 1 guide
 - Country of origin: Philippines
 - Dates of visit: 18 Nov 2023 to 27 Nov 2023 (10 days)
 - Countries covered: **Finland**, **Sweden** and **Norway**
 - Cities covered: Helsinki (FIN), Rovaniemi (FIN), Saariselkä (FIN), Kirkenes (NO),
- Studying previous cases and inquiries, referring to price breakdowns and calculations as a point of reference

Analysis

During the first half of the week, I was presented with the exciting task of booking all activities, accommodation, and transportation as well as other miscellaneous services for a confirmed group from

the Philippines arriving in November of 2023. I had already practiced and even drafted emails to suppliers regarding the different services required last week, therefore all that was needed to be done was to double check the emails and send them to the suppliers to request and inquire about their services and what they can provide for our group. Once the suppliers have given their green light, a record is immediately noted in the group itinerary.

The second part of the week involved dealing with the aftermath of dedicating the first half of the week solely to sending emails to suppliers with requests for the itinerary services. This means that the main reservation email was flooded with emails from suppliers which I had to carefully interpret, sort and update on the corresponding group itinerary. Referring to previous calculations and itineraries drafted by an experienced colleague such as my direct supervisor was also a significant aspect of the day, since it was a helpful source of reference used in making sense of confusing details.

Learning Outcomes

The challenges of the week involved dealing with the weight of the responsibility associated with handling the operations for a confirmed group, which was a different case from the family inquiry from Germany received during week 2 as they did not reply to the offer, therefore nothing had been confirmed. Another challenge was recalling and locating special contract rates for suppliers, for example, if a supplier offered a 10% commission rate for husky safaris. This information can be found in the company Google Drive, which was a helpful and centralized point of reference. A more mental challenge of the week included “facing the music”, I had subconsciously decided to stop doubting and questioning myself excessively and just focus on the journey that I have fully committed to.

Journey summarized

With the help of the Seeker archetype, I aimed to deal with the piling workload as creatively and authentically as possible. Right when the work had the chance to become mundane and repetitive, the Seeker's optimism introduced a fresh way to deal with challenges. Handling the workload optimistically and finding imaginative ways of working helped me remain motivated, which was a trait that was especially needed for the week ahead.

4.5 Week 5: *Tests, Allies, Enemies* (12.06.2023 – 16.06.2023)

The hero is now approaching rough seas and faces tricky predicaments. The adrenaline from deciding to fully commit to the journey has worn off and been replaced with a looming sense of reality, of

the gravity of the mission that has been undertaken. The hero needs to distinguish allies from enemies and overcome afflictions. Personally, the 6th week resembled the first “rough patch” after I decided to fully commit to my journey. This is because many decisive assessment tools to monitor our progress were suddenly introduced, which added to the stress of the already challenging workload. To cope with these changes, my previously acquaintance-like relationship with another intern in the same department blossomed into something bigger as we bonded over our shared worries. At that time, I was relieved to find an ally amidst the internal chaos. The hero archetype that this part of the journey called for was The Sage. As implied by the name, this character flourishes by finding answers to the greatest questions and feels challenged and compelled to seek the truth about complicated problems.

The highlights of the week included:

- Supplier inquiries, negotiations and substitutions continue
- Signing new contracts by reaching out to new vendors and suppliers (Geosea Geothermal Sea Baths in Iceland and LAVA Centre Exhibition in Iceland)
- Creating tailor-made itineraries, offers and price quotes for inquiries
- Handling front-to-end operations for a group from UAE travelling to Norway in July (VVIP, affiliated with the royal family, 14 nights in Norway, adventure-travel themed)
- Introduction to **ASANA** - internal project management software used for uploading inquiries and all their relevant information, keeping track of projects and marking completed ones, adding new suppliers and contracts to the database
- Introduction to the *Internship Evaluation Test*, which includes 3 modules based on topics practised so far:
 - **Module A:** Generating a pricing quotation for a week’s trip to either Finnish Lapland, Norway or Iceland. Full calculation executed within 100 mins, nor formula errors throughout the calculation sheet, anticipated hour schedule is required and must be reasonable, calculation sheet must correctly present-day numbers, destinations and meal plans
 - **Module B:** Execute the bookings for all services of a confirmed group. At least 35 sent & replied emails within 3 days with the suppliers, following proper inquiry email protocol and etiquette.
 - **Module C:** Execute sales calls for potential agents & manage the buy-in process: at least 2 sample itineraries ready for a certain season, schedule sales call lasting at least 30 mins, demonstrate and highlight the itinerary with unique selling points, follow up in a timely manner and execute the agent buy-in within 7-30 days, a.k.a have the travel dates confirmed with a signed contract.

Analysis

The beginning of the week involved the continuation of negotiations with the suppliers and documenting the exchanges in the corresponding group file so that everything stays up to date. My knowledge and fluency in supplier relations had increased due to my expanded understanding of the matter, and therefore I was able to negotiate two new contract deals for the company, which meant

a smoother path to conducting business and more concrete figures such as commission fees and special partner prices. I have also taken an all-hands-on-deck approach with handling incoming inquiries and drafting preliminary offers and itineraries for them, which has increased my speed, accuracy, and efficiency. Internal project management tools were introduced and needed to be integrated into daily operations almost immediately.

The second half of the week mainly concerned dealing and familiarizing myself with the “Internship Evaluation Test” that was introduced in the beginning of the week. The terms of the evaluation sounded reasonable and doable. However, after several failed attempts, I started to doubt both my abilities and the requirements of the test. I would pass one part of the test flawlessly but make a small insignificant mistake, which would cause me to fail an entire section. I wanted to avoid becoming very emotionally invested with the test and decided to store it aside for the time being to focus on real-life inquiries and emails.

Learning Outcomes

At this point of the internship, I have started to notice the first solid signs of professional development. I had fully integrated myself into the rhythm of the working days and felt like a productive member of society. The tasks and duties required at work were finally familiar, which made me feel somewhat professionally competent. The self-imposed personal schedule of completing tasks was proving to be very efficient, as I was able to complete a diverse array of tasks in one working day. This made me feel productive and boosted my morale and motivation. However, the challenges of the week involved staying level-headed after the disappointment from the failed attempts of the Internship Evaluation Test and trying my best to keep up with the reservations and inquiry emails, making sure to stay up to date with any requests as the goal was to answer them all back within a maximum of 48 hours.

Journey summarized

Equipped with The Seeker’s inquisitive nature and innate drive to solve complicated problems, I attempted to navigate the newfound stress of performance assessment tools. However, this stress was short-lived, as I had aimed to try my hardest in all of my attempts but also to take a step back and complete other tasks if I get overwhelmed. It was important to take my time and gather the inner wisdom of the Sage, because the next week was about to be a true test of character.

4.6 Week 6: *Approach to the Innermost Cave* (19.06.2023 – 23.06.2023)

The hero is now preparing to enter the proverbial “belly of the beast” and is required to assemble all the tools, advice and knowledge gathered along the way to ensure that there will be safety and triumph on the other side. The sixth week of the internship period was officially considered the mid-way point of the journey. However, I was kept busy with preparing to cross my own bellies of the beasts: the sales meetings with trusted partners and the Internship Evaluation Test. Executing the sales meetings in a coherent manner that resulted in a follow up from the partners as well as passing at least one section of the Internship Evaluation test was equal to me “slaying” the “beast(s)”. For this reason, The Warrior archetype once again emerges as the dominant archetype for the week, specifically the subtype of the competitor/winner. This subtype thrives and becomes energized through tackling obstacles and competing with others. In this case, I was subconsciously competing with the other intern in a non-competitive way.

The highlights of the week included:

- Less supplier inquiries and negotiations, more crafting specialised and standardised itineraries for our target markets
- 2 meetings this week with clients to introduce upcoming packages for the next season: 7D Lapland Winter Wonderland adventure themed
- The aim of the meetings is to successfully convince the travel agency to market the package and sell enough to form a proper confirmed group which we are then expected to handle all the bookings for, from start to finish
- Drafting and calculating more sample itineraries to be suggested/presented to the client upon request
- Perfecting and polishing calculations for our standardised itineraries
- Tailoring the standardised itineraries based on the customers’ reasonable requests and based on their target market and destinations
- Learning several mark-up strategies and ways to increase the profit margin
- Learned the difference between tour operator and ground operator.
 - **Tour operator**: offers extensive services as a package that all travellers would require when they’re travelling abroad: accommodation, transportation, activities and sometimes flight tickets. Tour operators negotiate, book and pay local suppliers for their services. Tour operators generate travel packages that are then sold to travel agencies who market the packages and collect the customers.

Ground operator: local agencies that provide services like transportation and guide services.

Analysis

The first half of the week involved spending further time on specialized and in-depth tasks regarding various confirmed groups and their operations. At this point, there were more than three confirmed groups that I was simultaneously handling bookings and operations for, therefore my multitasking and memory skills were strengthened dramatically. A shift has occurred from tailor-making every client request to simply suggesting a recommended itinerary that closely resembles their original

request as much as possible. This has saved precious time and allowed me to focus on fine tuning and perfecting existing travel plans rather than drafting them from scratch and risking “sloppy” planning.

The second half of the week involved preparation for the sales meetings with trusted partners. I was required to produce a promotional booklet that presented an entire itinerary for a specific popular destination. This booklet would then be presented over a sales call in Microsoft Teams. Live comments, suggestions and feedback would be collected, and it was the most important part of the sales call. Knowing the wishes and requests of the partners allowed us to edit the itinerary and send a new version for review, one that would hopefully be more to their liking. If they are satisfied with our offer, they may start to promote the itinerary and collect paying customers travelling as a group, which we will handle operations for.

Learning Outcomes

The professional development that has occurred during the sixth week involved expanding my sales and marketing skills as well as practicing my public speaking and presentation skills. Sales and marketing played a big role in ensuring the material produced for the sales meetings was relevant, compelling, and aesthetically pleasing. Public speaking and presentation skills were required during the meeting to communicate the contents of the presentation in a fluent manner. During the sales meetings, I was thankful for my previous experience in theatre roles and public speaking competitions for training me to speak confidently in front of an audience.

Journey summarized

The Warrior archetype was befitting for this week due to the number of challenges and important tasks that needed to be addressed. Fiercely bold and tenacious, The Warrior sets out to conquer and destroy any obstacles that might cross their path. At this point of the internship, I had almost reached halfway through the journey. Therefore, it was important to equip myself with the wisdom and experience gained from the previous weeks in order to succeed in the upcoming weeks, and especially to triumph over the journey’s ordeal.

4.7 Week 7: *The Ordeal* (26.06.2023 – 30.06.2023)

A hero’s journey always includes a moment where the hero is tested. The hero’s greatest fears and biggest challenges have appeared, demanding to be addressed. There is no progress to the next

stage of the journey without first overcoming these ordeals. The fears and challenges that needed to be addressed have presented themselves in the form of the thoughts and opinions of others about my hard work. I tend to take most criticism personally due to my sensitive nature, so it was important to address inward issues before attempting to solve outward problems. The repeated shortcomings of attempts on the Internship Evaluation Test reached a boiling point, which began to poke and prod at my fear of failure. Considering the nature of these turbulent events, the hero archetype that was embodied was The Revolutionist, formerly known as The Destroyer. This archetype is driven by an urgent need for change using unconventional methods and challenging the status quo.

The highlights of the week included:

- More attempts at Module A of the Internship Evaluation Test (see Week 5). A mix of major and minor mistakes that were not caused by lack of knowledge but by rushing to finish everything in the allocated time span. Considering the amount of tasks there is to be passed in Module A, the 100 minute time limit might not be so justified.
- Acquainting myself with the post-sales call protocol: creating a new partner profile for the client in Asana if they don't have one already (see Week 5), updating/uploading client information in their profile such as name, address, contract person with emails and phone numbers, country of origin, target market (groups, MICE or FITs, etc)
- Updating singular inquiries from the aforementioned clients to their profiles complete with the itinerary breakdown and calculations + official offer documents sent
- Uploading the "meeting minutes" and sales presentations used for a client under the "general" discussion section of their profile
- More inquiries arriving on the group reservations email. I tried to enthusiastically tailor-make each itinerary and offer to match the needs and requests of the clients. I was advised not to do so very often, as it could become very time consuming and exhausting to cater to every individual request. Nevertheless, I felt like I personally preferred to tailor make itineraries since it helps me learn how to be quicker and produce them instead of copy pasting the standardised/recommended activities for the client.

Analysis

The first half of the week involved further attempts to pass the Internship Evaluation Test. These attempts were, once again, unsuccessful. At this point, I had started to believe that the structure and requirements of the test were unrealistically planned, and indirectly began to communicate this with my supervisor. My concerns were not taken seriously, and I decided to focus on other matters for the time being. New updates regarding confirmed groups and information needed to be updated to the internal project management system, so I focused on completing that task for as long as my brain needed a break from taking and failing the evaluation test.

Towards the end of the week, more sales meetings were conducted and most of them went well, as expected. However, the last sales meeting of the week took a sour turn. I was presenting a regular

package to a trusted partner, and it seemed like the partner was not happy with the price (per person) of the package and complained that it was too expensive (2ee Appendix 2). I explained that the total price of the package was based on the standard group of 30 travelers; if the partner can generate a group of more than 30 travelers, then the price would be lower. The partner was not happy with my answer and criticized my assumption of managing to attract more than 30 paying travelers. My manager interjected at this point; the question was not about the content of the presentation that I had produced anymore.

Learning Outcomes

This week was particularly challenging. I experienced the first sales meeting backfiring against my efforts and the Internship Evaluation Test attempts were not going as successfully as I had hoped. I had decided to communicate my feelings once again towards the high standards of the test. I'm sure my supervisors had a good understanding of how I felt, but no modifications were made. It was during that time that I finally decided to not allow the test to dictate or accurately measure my progress and that only I know how far I have come. This mindset shift felt unbelievably freeing and allowed me to continue my regular tasks without feeling the looming pressure of any assessments.

The professional development that had occurred from both the rejections of the sales meeting and of the evaluation test resulted in further nurturing of adaptability and communication skills. I developed an understanding that the "real world" is often harsh and unfair, however most negative experiences should not be taken to heart and only the most constructive parts should be internalized. Nevertheless, the satisfaction of believing in myself despite the disappointment of the evaluation test and the unhappy partner was greater than if both things would have worked out.

Journey summarized

The numerous ordeals of the week made me feel like all my genuine efforts had backfired. Surprising criticism and shortcomings on the Internship Evaluation Test had combined to form the biggest challenge that I needed to face in my journey so far, because these challenges both happened to hold undertones of my personal fears and insecurities. However, the most helpful thing I could do was to be thankful for the character development and remind myself that the hero must be tested for their journey to progress. Soon, I will reap the rewards.

4.8 Week 8: *The Reward* (03.07.2023 – 07.07.2023)

In a blog post titled “The Hero’s Journey of Recovery”, Susan Sanchez states that the “freedom of being entrapped by maladaptive behaviors is priceless”. My own maladaptive behaviors that have jeopardized my internship journey were my overthinking, fear of failure and overly self-critical nature. These set of traits allowed me to indulge in perfectionism and overcompensation. Becoming fully aware of these bad habits and consciously trying to stifle them was last week’s inspiring discovery. This week, I “reaped what I sowed” and decided to equip myself with newfound confidence and assurance for the work week ahead. Since a weight has been lifted off my shoulders and my mood felt lighter and more joyful, I found myself relating with The Jester archetype, also known as The Fool. The wise fool acknowledges the absurdity and hypocrisy of life and aims to rise above it. I had realized that outside influences should not dictate my worth and the only things I can change are from within.

The highlights of the week included:

- Receiving more inquiries which we then need to refer to the closest sample itinerary for the destination and check availability for certain activities planned to correspond with the travel dates as well as updating prices and calculations accordingly
- Drafting offers based on the calculations and inquiries and sending them out in a timely matter, no more than 2 days after receiving the initial request
- Taking initiative to reach out to partners in the target market and send them sales presentations for destinations and packages that we assume that they might be interested in
- Drafting visa letters for confirmed groups

Analysis

The first half of the week was heavily centered on operational tasks which involved ensuring that all the different confirmed groups have their accommodation, transportation, meals, and extra miscellaneous activities booked and confirmed and that an accurate and up-to-date record of these details is readily available. The chaos of the sales presentation week has levelled out; however, it was still recommended to reach out to more partners in an attempt to organize a meeting where tailored promotional material for specific destinations is presented. This demonstrated willingness to step out of the comfort zone, as the previous sales meetings were negotiated by my supervisor, and I was only required to attend and present material.

The second half of the week involved the introduction of different types of operational work regarding the confirmed groups. We were now required to draft an official visa letter for the confirmed groups that we were handling. This is because many of the groups were travelling from the Philippines, and

Filipino nationals required a visa to enter Finland and most EU countries. The task of drafting visa letters was particularly stressful; the smallest written mistake could result in a visa denial. This made the visa letters time-consuming and of high importance. Nevertheless, all the letters were drafted and submitted with no issues.

Learning Outcomes

For the first time since starting the internship, week 7 did not present any big challenges outside of the ones previously encountered. This is because the work had become very familiar, and I had begun to anticipate and work on any problems before they had the chance to appear or snowball into a greater issue. I considered myself “riding the wave” of all my previous accomplishments and efforts, both mentally and physically, that helped me to arrive at a point where I can self-reflect on unwanted behaviors and thought patterns which can affect my performance at work.

4.9 Week 9: *The Resurrection* (10.07.2023 – 14.07.2023)

As the hero is making their way back from seemingly conquering the ordeal, they are confronted with a final set of trials and setbacks. Yet the light at the end of the tunnel does not seem so far away, since the hero has now committed to completing the journey back home. This final set of tribulations during the ninth week concerned dealing with the weight of being assigned a big responsibility at work as well as juggling four more equally important tasks all at the same time. The fear of responsibility was not an unfamiliar feeling; and I had initially hoped to survive this internship “quietly” without meaningless burdens. However, I realized that there would be no room for professional nor personal growth if I approached my working life with a “please, not me” attitude. The Ruler archetype embodies all the attributes befitting the final week of trials and tribulations: new challenges and opportunities excite and motivate Rulers to adopt bigger roles and responsibilities as they enjoy the thrill of demonstrating leadership and competence.

The highlights of the week included:

- Continuing to monitor inquiries that are sent in via the groups email
- Drafting itineraries, calculating costs, and sending offers to clients
- Updating and following up tasks in Asana
- Confirming reservations: hotels, restaurants, activities, transport, guiding services etc for confirmed groups (working on 4 at the same time: PH4091123, PH4131023, PH4141123 & PH8011123. Mistakes and confusion may occur because all 4 groups are travelling around the same 2 months with very similar itineraries but different passenger numbers).

- Assigning a specific number that becomes my identification number when finding out who's working on a case just by looking at the group code. Example of the group code naming system:
 - **PH8011123**
 - **PH**: country code that the group is coming from
 - **8**: own unique identifying number, showcases that I am responsible for handling the operations of the group
 - **01**: The first group that I'm handling this year
 - **1123**: the month and year of arrival. In this case, November of 2023.

- Inquiries and requests sent in the "group" email have been slowing down during this week and the week before. This has provided extra time to review the operations and logistics of all the previous cases which have been assigned to me since May as well as tying up loose ends with suppliers.

Analysis

During the first half of the week, administrative tasks regarding the confirmed groups continued to consume most of the working days. It was essential to triple-check even the smallest details of the itinerary in case of errors or miscalculations. One of the most common mistakes in planning an itinerary is scheduling activities on a national holiday of the country in question. Not double-checking national holidays can result in the restaurant or activity being closed for business on that and the transportation and local guides would cost double the hourly rate. This would cause a snowball effect and the ultimate blame would be placed on the company's shoulders. Hearing many horror stories of that sort kept me busy with reviewing all four itineraries I was responsible for.

An exciting opportunity was offered to me at the end of the week. I would need to decide on my own personal number to add to all my confirmed groups for the future. A personal number is featured in the group code and aims to identify which employee is responsible for the entire group operations: from restaurant, hotel, transportation, and activity bookings to invoicing and post-travel protocols. I chose the number eight which I later learned meant wealth and prosperity according to Chinese superstition. Shortly afterwards received my first ever group, 30 travelers from the Philippines arriving in November 2023, that I was expected to handle full operations for. I started work on my group immediately and summoned all the previous skills and expertise I've learned from handling the other groups up this week to help me in my efforts.

Learning Outcomes

A profound advancement in my professional development had occurred this week. Assuming responsibility expanded my skills and abilities and erased my unjustified fear of splashing into bigger corporate puddles. The theme of the week was change and how to deal with its various forms, since I had grown accustomed to a daily "flow" of things and had subconsciously hoped it would remain

that way. However, a handy transformative skill of mine, adaptability, helped me see the new opportunities in a positive and enthusiastic light. The challenges of the week involved dealing with the new workload of having a confirmed group registered to my name whilst balancing old tasks that have been started and need to be finished as well as beginning to ponder about my future in the company (see Appendix 3).

Journey summarized

Stepping into the characteristics of The Ruler was not an easy feat. Assuming responsibilities of a consequential nature has always been something I avoided. This week, running away from my fears was no longer an option. Instead, I had decided to feel excited and optimistic about this new challenge, assuming responsibility as long as it motivated me to do something I have not done before. At this point, I could already sense the profound developments in my character and ways of thinking. I would not have been ready to undertake responsibilities of this caliber before the journey started.

4.10 Week 10: *The Return* (17.07.2023 – 21.07.2023)

The first signs of the journey's end start to emerge, and the hero starts to make their way back to the ordinary world. As the last week of work drew closer, I found myself fighting inklings of thoughts about my future in the company. The reason why I preferred to push the thoughts away from my mind was because of their negative nature. I had started to realize, deep down, that I would not be willing to continue working in the company any longer after my internship was over. This heavy realization had the power to compromise and affect my work negatively, as there was a creeping belief that the work was "meaningless" if I was leaving in few weeks. Those thoughts were short lived; the most helpful thing I could do for myself was to focus on the tasks at hand and continue putting my best foot forward. The Magician archetype demonstrates that true fulfillment with a current situation occurs when a vision is realized and worked towards. Intuition and organic insights can aid in realizing my own vision to work towards.

The highlights of the week included:

- Drafting more visa support letters which include: full name list of the travellers along with their passport no. and rooming type, daily itinerary description and a list of every hotel they will be staying at with the confirmed reservation numbers
- Individually requesting all hotels that the group will be staying in to stamp and sign the rooming list and send it back for us to collect (sent to the travel agency who will use the letters as a supplement to their visa application)

- Learning which inquiries are worth providing a quote for and which inquiries we have to reject.
- **Examples of inquiries we can provide a quote for:**
 - Not too last minute (preferably more than 4 or 5 months from the inquiry date)
 - Semi-trusted partner
 - Flexibility in their wishes
 - Non-high season (availability is extremely difficult and overpriced in Finnish Lapland from December to end of February)

Examples of inquiries that we have to reject:

- Extremely last-minute requests
- Non-packaged requests (we only offer our service as a hotel+transportation+guide+activities package)
- Requests from price sensitive markets (more likely to reject many offers and waste time)
- Extremely high season dates (too close to Christmas or the ski holiday February in Lapland)
- Requests that simply don't make sense reasonably, logistically nor legally (For example, a MICE group from India wanted to travel to Helsinki and arrange a dinner cruise with "free flowing alcohol", a concept that is illegal in Finland. Inquiry rejected).

Analysis

The first half of the week focused further on operations concerning the visa letters that were to be drafted as accurately as possible and cross-checked with every hotel that the travel group is staying in. This process could be lengthy due to the varying response time of hotels. Nevertheless, I sent all of the hotels an official stamping request for the rooming list and decided to close the task to make room for something more productive, such as fine-tuning and double-checking small details for the various travel groups that I was responsible for. The most interesting one of them being my newly appointed and completely self-managed travel group from the Philippines that I needed to dedicate just as much care and attention to as other cases.

I continued with mostly email exchanges and administrative tasks during the second half of the week as well, except there was a sudden increase in the number of incoming inquiries concerning travel packages for Finnish Lapland and the popular Norwegian fjord area. This uptick in the number of inquiries and offers that I was expected to generate would have fueled my anxiety during the first weeks of work, but I found myself dealing with the inquiries in a calm, collected and informed matter. I was no longer apprehensive or self-doubting in the material that I was producing. I trusted in the experience that I had already gained and used it to exude confidence and reasoning in justifying, for example, the price of a package I have generated or certain itinerary decisions.

Learning Outcomes

Professional development reached its peak during this week. Not only have I fully absorbed new skills and experiences from the work so far, but I have also fully allowed myself to internalize these developments and showcase them so that they can enrich the work that I have produced and the decisions that I have made. This enrichment increased my confidence and feelings of competency and eased the challenges of the week, which were learning which inquiries to proceed with further and which inquiries to reject for legal or logistical reasons. This challenge was overcome with the usage of common sense and some help from my supervisor who offered her judgement and explanations for not proceeding with an inquiry.

4.11 Week 11: *The Return Continued* (24.07.2023 – 28.07.2023)

The end of the journey has begun to dawn on the horizon. The hero continues to make their way back home, knowing that the worst has been conquered. Week 11 was filled with silent reflections and contemplations. I was about to embark on the last stretch of the internship period and many thoughts concerning my future in the company were restlessly running through my mind: is this the right place for me? Is this the type of work that I envision myself doing long-term? What are my current priorities and how will they need to be compromised or reevaluated because of the decision to continue this job? The answer to these questions could only be found after shedding a light on deeply held values and beliefs. The Idealist archetype embodies the essence of the characteristics that I needed to equip my subconscious with: idealism, enthusiasm, and an unwavering trust that whatever decision I make will unfold favourably.

The highlights of the week included:

- Re-checking and updating quotations for current groups
- Handling new inquiries promptly
- Most of the inquiries have now decreased in volume, more focus is emphasised on handling current and confirmed groups
- Requesting & organising confirmation letters from the hotels
- Negotiating with vendors and suppliers about:
 - Hotel room rates (eg. “could you book last year’s half board rate for this year’s group?”)
 - Commission prices for activities (eg. “Last year the commission rate was 20%. I know this year it has decreased to 10%, but could we apply a 20% commission rate for this group? We are sending plenty more groups during the winter.”)
 - Special requests (eg. “Is it possible to arrange 1 soft drink per person with the buffet dinner instead of coffee or tea?”)

Analysis

The surge of inquiries from last week did not carry over to the beginning of this week, allowing more time to handle the operations for the current groups that I was managing. The weekend had provided time for the hotels to review and stamp the rooming list for the visa letter request that needed to be sent to the travel agencies as soon as all the stamps have been collected. Therefore, most of the visa letters were fully drafted and sent back to the travel agencies for review. The biggest task of the last few weeks was finally over and left some important lessons in precision and accuracy.

The second half of the week consisted of grappling with the skill of advanced supplier negotiations. Due to the various economic crises that have negatively affected the tourism industry, many suppliers decided to increase their prices to cover costs. This kind of decision carries a “trickle down” effect which ultimately ends with us having to increase the total package price, which is not received well by the travel agencies who need to add their own mark-up on top of the price of the package and attempt to convince customers to buy in. Therefore, requests such as “can you offer the same price for this activity as last year? We will be bringing big volumes of customers to your business so your profit margins will increase” were key in attempting to make the package price reasonable for the benefit of all the parties involved.

Learning Outcomes

The skills acquired during this week were discernment and negotiations. I learned how to spot an opportunity to negotiate about prices, commission rates or terms and conditions from suppliers. The challenges of the week involved commencing the negotiations without being unreasonable or too assertive. Thankfully, I cross-checked my negotiation arguments with my supervisor who helped me remain on the right track in embodying the tone and values of the company.

Journey summarized

With a large part of the journey behind me, I turn my energy and focus into the last week of the journey and of my internship. The archetype of The Idealist had helped me maintain perseverance in the face of my wavering thoughts about my future. All the wisdom, efforts, experience, lessons, and expertise are about to culminate and blossom into lifelong knowledge.

4.12 Week 12: *Journey's End* (31.07.2023 – 04.08.2023)

The hero's journey has finally come to its end. All their efforts have reached a crescendo and culminated in this final stage. The hero has been completely transformed in all fronts: physically, mentally,

and spiritually. The process of their journey has changed their view of the world has enriched their life, so much so that they can never go back to who they were before the journey started. They have undergone a profound transformation and are ready to aid others in attempting to achieve the same fate. It is now time for the hero to settle back into the “real world” and attempt to make sense of their newfound identity that has developed for the better.

The highlights of the week included:

- Taking care of more incoming inquiries
- Following up on previously sent offers with the help of deadline notifications from Asana
- The biggest challenge of the week is staying focused and motivated even though there's a big chance that I will not extend my contract beyond the internship period. The matter of finding motivation is further made difficult by the fact that I have not/will not receive any monetary compensation despite working on the same paid tasks that my supervisor is doing.
- Mentally and physically preparing for the final week of the internship
- The motivation to work has picked up during the middle of the week and I made an internal goal to do my best for the remaining duration of the internship.
- Handled 4 inquiries with quotations, offers and calculations which was a new record. The most I've done in a day were solved 2 inquiries.

Analysis

The final week as a Travel Product and Operations Assistant was a rollercoaster of emotions and mostly concerned fully accepting the fact that I will not be continuing in the company, which was already discussed and agreed upon with my supervisor in the beginning of the week. Therefore, I had to set out to “tie the loose ends” of my current tasks and efficiently as possible to ensure a smooth handover to my supervisor. The Creator archetype, specifically the subtype of the Dreamer, aided in seeing my situation through rose-tinted glasses and using my imagination to create positive and uplifting thoughts and ideas for my future.

I had tried my best to motivate myself for one last time in order to make a genuine effort in continuing the tasks for my assigned groups as if I wasn't leaving at the end of the week. All the visa letters have now been reviewed and approved after they had been sent to the travel agencies, which means that no big changes can be edited into the itinerary anymore. The majority of the week was spent combing through previous groups that I had been responsible for that did not reach the final visa approval stage, which meant some bookings and information could be missing or to be confirmed later. I gathered as many details as possible about missing or questionable aspects about the groups and highlighted or added notes for my supervisor to better understand the context when she assumes responsibility for the groups again.

Nevertheless, I decided to continue with as many email tasks as I possibly could. The inquiries have increased again, and I attempted to handle almost all of them. They involved requests for travel packages to the most common destinations such as Finnish Lapland, Iceland, and Norway. Finnish Lapland in particular has had a busy summer of bookings for the upcoming Christmas and holiday season, and I was advised to start explaining to our partners that we would not be able to make any more accommodation and activity bookings for the entire month of December in places like Rovaniemi. Sometimes, this was not received well by the suppliers who had a hard time understanding how most of the services in a destination could be fully booked almost four months before the travel date. In order to ensure optimal prices and comfortable availability situations, the ideal booking time for Finnish Lapland is eight months or up to a year before the intended travel dates.

Learning Outcomes

The challenge of the week involved the mental and physical preparation to leave a place that played a big role in my life and professional development for the last 12 weeks (see Appendix 4). I had to clear all items from my desk and wipe my administrator profile from the company-provided work laptop. I returned my copy of the office keys and made sure to profoundly thank my colleagues and supervisors for the great opportunity and all the unconditional support that I had received.

4.13 Concluding Notes on The Journey

Now that the weekly journal entries and their analyses have been established, this section aims to briefly conclude the journey of the internship. Starting off as a hopeful soon-to-be intern in the travel industry, I silenced my inner doubts and worries about starting my journey. Self-discovery and professional development were not the first tasks on my priority list, and so the denial continued up until the first couple of weeks since starting the internship. I was confronted with a clear message: change your ways of thinking otherwise I would walk away from the internship empty-handed.

With the help of a few mentors along the way, the work developed and expanded to include tasks that required self-confidence and responsibility, I had no choice but to unlock my innate potential and belief in myself. This proved to be an initially difficult process, however, embodying various archetypes and constantly referring to the stages of the Hero's journey helped provide clarity and introspect whilst reflecting on the working weeks. What I might not have registered back then had emerged during the analysis of the journal entries, indicating hints of profound character development.

The journey ended with a realization of my own talents, efforts, and potential. The most important outcome of witnessing the power of my potential was the reminder that this potential can be easily unlocked and utilized to excel in any academic or professional challenges and ordeals. Many obstacles that I never had the confidence to address, such as accepting criticism and overcoming my fear of spreadsheets, had been successfully overcome. A hero's journey can be compared to a cycle, constantly resetting once the hero is yet again struck with the realization that more inklings and callings will naturally appear and demand to be addressed. Equipped with this newfound confidence, I look forward to facing new challenges and growth opportunities in the future.

5 Discussion

To recap the initial situation before starting my job as a Travel Product and Operations Assistant intern, I was oblivious to and inexperienced in the professional travel industry. Certain academic courses at Haaga-Helia have been informative in shedding light on the very basics of the travel and tourism world, but I believe that the truth is nothing like the textbooks. Nevertheless, I embarked on a 12-week journey equipped with my favourite soft skills (motivation, communication, and adaptability) and a strong desire to grow personally and professionally. The international atmosphere of the company and its relaxed and welcoming work culture helped me ease my way into the work, even if I was initially struggling with an eight-hour work time and a one-hour commute back and forth. The mental and physical strain took a toll on my body, easing off only after the first month and a half.

After the onboarding period had ended and the training wheels were off, I faced a fresh set of problems that were hindering my performance at work. However, following the relatively long period of adjustments, I had finally found a certain rhythm to my days which seemed to consequently complement and facilitate my work. I had fixed my sleeping schedule by removing caffeine from my diet and prioritizing sleep. This in return gave me a boost of energy throughout the weeks and kept my performance sharp and optimal. Furthermore, I tried my best to have a light lunch consisting of a nourishing salad rather than a heavy meal, since I have noticed that I became lethargic and unproductive during the afternoon hours after a heavy meal. Fixing some small but significant habits had provided me with increased energy and clarity to focus on more important developments that were occurring, specifically of a personal and professional nature.

There were no frequent company-wide meetings. The CEO of the company was away on a business trip for more than half of the internship duration. Therefore, the main method of communication was through email. Important announcements and discussion-worthy topics were difficult to organize, as there was a large time difference between the working hours in Finland and the working hours during the CEO's business trip. Nevertheless, not too many situations called for critical and immediate actions and communication occurred smoothly using only email and Gmail's chat function. As for the rest of the office, we were only three of us in one room, sometimes seven or eight, when the parent company's employees came to the office. Since we were a tight-knit group, communication happened instantly, and problems and inquiries were usually solved verbally on the spot.

My professional development was encouraged by the various administrative tasks that have dominated a significant part of the working days. Checking emails frequently as well as sorting and arranging them in order of relevance and importance helped my deductive reasoning skills while learning the language and etiquette of the corporate world aided me in crafting professional and informative emails to suppliers, customers, and agents. My mathematical skills, which are considered a hard skill (see chapter 2) were “dusted off the shelf” which helped me overcome my irrational fear of working with numbers. Tens of price breakdowns and calculations have been crafted in Google Sheets every day, which involved arithmetical concepts that I am now confident in. The daily opportunity to study the tourism destination we specialize in offered niche and insightful insider information that could be utilized in my personal travel decisions.

Personal development had occurred on a more subliminal level. These notable developments were only fully conceptualized during the thesis writing process, which had started less than a month after the internship ended. Therefore, the feelings and knowledge were still fresh in my mind. The biggest personal shifts that have occurred concerned my feelings towards the travel industry and its inner workings, my own perception of who I am as an employee and a contributing member of society and my transformative skills. Most of these changes have been on the positive end of the spectrum; reflecting on them has ultimately provided me with an updated “handbook” about myself. Interpreting these changes in hindsight was the most cardinal element to realizing that they have occurred.

Some new methods and solutions that I have discovered for my work during the internship period mainly concerned developing a self-imposed personal schedule of ranking tasks in order of importance. This increased efficiency and decreased the stress of handling too many unrelated tasks at the same time. An example of a schedule for the day would be delegating the first half of the morning before lunch solely for answering email inquiries and communicating with suppliers as well as hotel/restaurant/activities staff. After lunch and until the end of the working day, I would craft, edit and double-check the travel itineraries and their price breakdowns that I have generated.

Another solution to the problem of not finding supplier contracts and prices in a timely manner was to create a separate, centralized document only for making a note of contract terms and prices in the occasion that I manage to find them, so that I won't waste time combing through old files and emails once again. Apparently, this solution was useful enough for my coworkers to refer to my document at times for certain supplier contracts terms and prices. However, some prices and suppliers were used so often that they were memorized, which made recollection easier. For example, it was easy to recall the price of a reindeer sledge ride in Saariselkä for a specific supplier, since the

price was always 35 euros per person and rarely deviated from the contract except during the peak Christmas season.

The level of personal competence required for the job in relation to the actual competences of the job would be a middle point between a novice and a skilled performer. This is because most of the itineraries, offers or important emails that have been produced still need to be double-checked and confirmed by my supervisor. This is because most of the daily work tasks performed were not intern-level tasks, they were the same tasks that my supervisor was also working on and therefore needed to be professionally assessed and given the green light. However, I developed an in-depth understanding of the inner workings of the travel industry and was able to reflect it in most of my tasks, granting me the chance to consider myself a skilled performer in specific relevant aspects.

The significance of the theoretical framework in the interpretation and analysis of my development is due to the introspective nature of methods such as autoethnography. I consider the analyses of the weekly diaries as a form of “healing” autoethnography, where I had the chance to recall and interpret my working weeks analytically but artistically. The changes in character might not have been apparent whilst the diary entries were actively being written, therefore the process of analysing, conceptualizing, and utilizing them in retrospect acted as a tool that raised awareness to cultural and personal habits that contributed to the internship experience. Being able to use autoethnographic approaches in my writing was an exciting and deeply thoughtful way of reaching new conclusions concerning personal development.

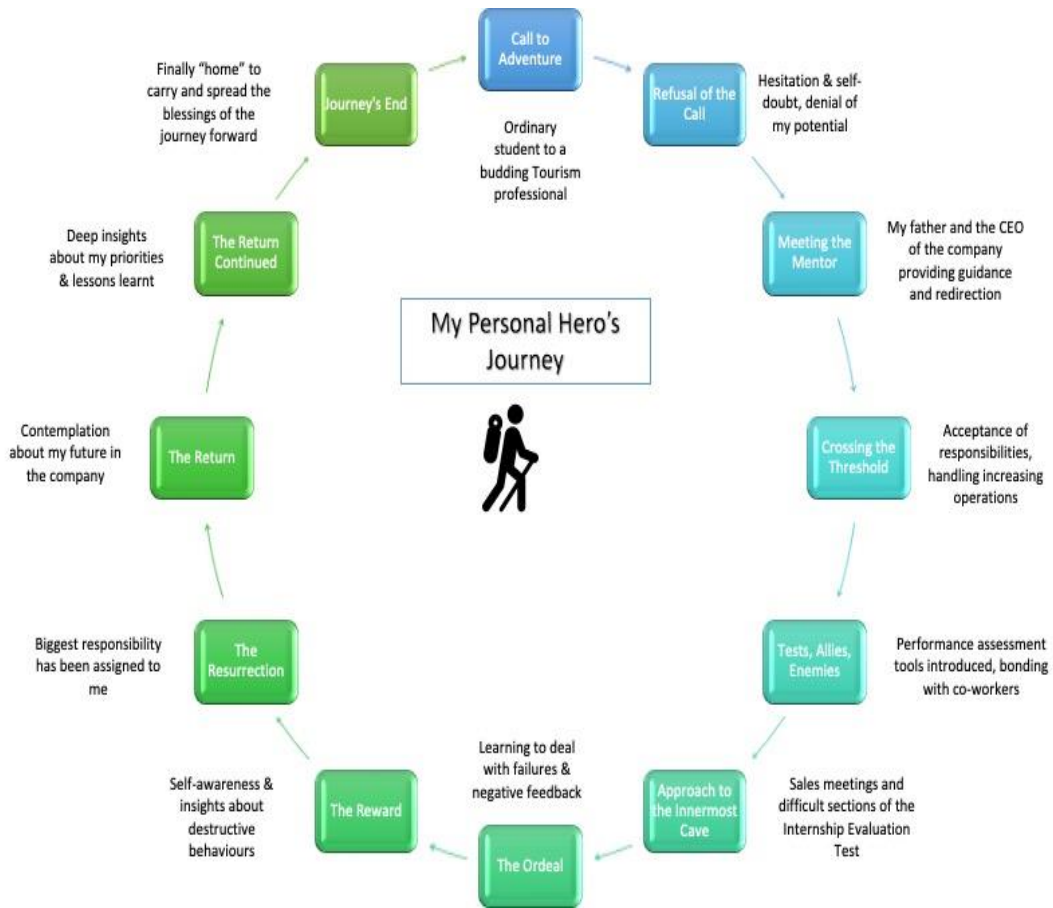


Figure 2. My personal Hero's Journey throughout the internship

Storytelling approaches such as Joseph Campbell's Hero's Quest and Carol Pearson's Hero Archetypes contributed an element of magic and mysticism to my personal and professional development. The idea of the possibility of embodying an imaginary persona with supernatural powers and abilities is in itself an inspiring concept that is so unconventional, one can not help but to be intrigued and attempt to find similarities and comparisons with one's actual life situations. In doing so, I realized that the strength to continue my journey comes from within, and I could possess specific innate abilities that can mentally aid me in understanding and overcoming challenging situations according to my archetype. The blueprint of the monomyth, one that has been proven by the greatest novelists and fairytale stories, offered comfort that came from the knowledge that this road has been walked before and will continue to be walked many times after this experience, thus the cycle is in a constant state of resetting. After this first cycle, I am now more self-aware and equipped with precious knowledge to help me with any challenges I will come to face in the future.

6 Conclusion

The process of writing a journal-based thesis, specifically one that utilizes arts-based and storytelling methods to further enhance and monitor professional development, was an insightful and eye-opening experience. I learned to always search for a hidden subconscious meaning, a secret link that connects my experiences with their possible interpretations, and the effects of these interpretations in aiding my development. I had also learned consistency and realized the importance of prioritizing the responsibility of documenting the internship experience instead of becoming completely enveloped and distracted by working life.

Some interesting insights emerged regarding my personal and professional development during the internship period as well as during the thesis-writing process. I had gained indispensable insider-level knowledge about the inner workings and mechanisms of the travel industry, specifically in Finland and Northern Europe. I had also conquered my irrational fear of mathematical calculations by working with spreadsheets of numerical formulae for multiple hours every working day. The skills of multitasking, communication, logical reasoning, presentation, and teamwork were nurtured and enhanced during the internship and have stapled their place in the values and ideals that I plan to bring forward to the next endeavor in my career.

Due to quality guidance and a clear, established vision, the thesis writing process was efficient and most importantly enjoyable. Analyzing the journal entries in retrospect provided insightful observations that were not apparent during the internship period, and therefore made the analysis process similar to embarking on a treasure hunt. Except, the treasure was revelations about my personal and professional development. Moments of frustration did occur whilst attempting to make sense of and categorize different ideas and sections, since they may not have directly related to the thesis topic but would have been interesting to include either way. This was overcome by focusing on the quality of the content instead of its quantity.

In the near future, I plan to further develop the skills that I have gained during my internship by utilizing them both in my working life and personal life. In my working life in the tourism industry, I plan to use the practical knowledge I have gained about concepts such as commission rates, supplier contracts and negotiation techniques, spreadsheet calculation skills and general corporate etiquette. In my personal life, I plan to utilize the specialized knowledge about various European destinations gained during the internship to help craft a travel itinerary that can be used during personal travels. It is important to acknowledge that “hard skills” such as spreadsheet calculation skills need to be strengthened and nourished regularly in order to be fully retained and efficiently used.

No journey is fully complete without a list of failures, regrets, and doubtful choices. Looking back at how I have spent my free time after the working days, I could begin to understand why I didn't feel fully energized nor fulfilled during some working days. I had regressed to commuting back home, cooking dinner, watching TV, and going to sleep. I regret not intentionally allocating more time for hobbies or daily mindful movement which would have carried over some positive effects into my working days. Additionally, there were some working days where I insisted on going to work even when I was feeling sick, which was counter-productive for all parties involved.

For future writers who are contemplating utilizing arts-based research practices in order to conceptualize personal and professional development, I would recommend a deep understanding of one's own positioning in their journey. The goals, objectives and learning outcomes should also be contemplated before embarking on the observed experience. A thorough understanding of one's own capabilities, strengths, weaknesses, skills, and motivations can pave a clear path for new realizations to occur. Theoretical framework for storytelling techniques and autoethnographic narratives should be studied and juxtaposed with the emerging observations from the experience to find a meaningful connection. Taking responsibility for documenting the most cardinal moments of the journey is crucial in creating a solid record of important material that will provide indispensable insights.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Blog post

Posted Sep 25, 2023



Written by Reel

 Tourism and Event Management, Porvoo Campus

Internship Experience: Day in the Life of a Travel Product & Operations Intern



During the summer months of 2023, from mid May to early August, I had the exciting opportunity to do the second internship of my educational career at a destination management company specialising in tailor-made travel to destinations such as Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian Lapland.

This position was full-time: Mondays to Fridays, 9:30 AM to 5 PM. There was a possibility to work from home in some instances, such as national holidays, however I preferred to come to office as much as possible to take advantage of how easily help is provided when you need it, and how much more motivating it feels to be in a dedicated environment for working and not get distracted about matters that usually would be distracting if I was working from home.

Now that the basic introduction is over, let's break down what I did in a typical day of work!

Morning, 09:25 AM: Just arrived to the office with 5 minutes to spare! I go to the shared kitchen immediately and turn on the kettle for my tea. I absolutely cannot skip this step, it's what gets me through the morning.

09:30 AM: I'm back and settled down in my desk. I make small chit-chat with my coworkers, however most of the mornings a simple "good morning" is enough as everyone is still waking up or haven't finished their first cup of coffee yet. I open my laptop and immediately check 3 very important email accounts that will decide what I'm going to be doing for the rest of the day:

Email account 1:- "The Reservations Email", which is the email account dedicated to sending and receiving bookings that we make on behalf of our clients. These bookings can be concerning hotel, restaurant, transportation and activities reservations. I check if any of the suppliers have replied to my booking inquiries and confirm that they have the correct service, date, time, and target client to avoid confusion or double bookings. I also double check if the price of their services matches our estimated quotation.

Email account 2:- "The Inquiries Email", which is the email account dedicated to receiving requests by individual, group or family clients with their wishes and demands for a holiday package in Finnish Lapland, for example. Most of the time, the travel requests come from a travel agency representing a client rather than individual personal clients reaching out. The B2B (business to business) interactions make the work much easier since the travel agency knows our limitations and what we're capable of providing.

Email account 3:- "My Personal Email" which is the email account where my coworkers or manager send me relevant information about training for different destination, sales meetings with travel agencies to promote our new packages or sometimes even emails that were meant to be sent to the reservations email but ended up in my inbox instead.

09:45 AM to 12:30 PM: In the reservations email, I check if any of the suppliers have replied to my booking inquiries and confirm that they have the correct service, date, time, and target client to avoid confusion or double bookings. I also double check if the price of their services matches our estimated quotation. In the inquiries email, I make a note of all the new requests and inquiries for travel itineraries which I will work on after lunch. I also clear out my personal email and double-check/confirm sales meetings with my manager along with preparing the necessary presentation material for them.

12:45 PM: Lunch time! There are many restaurants around our office since the location is very central to Kampi. My usual go-to lunch is from the supermarket salad bar and something small from the baked goods section, however sometimes I feel like something a bit more hearty and join my colleagues for some Asian cuisine. We have a one hour lunch break which leaves plenty of time to eat and relax before going back to the office.

1:45 to 5 PM: Back to work! The emails which I have sent to the suppliers in the reservations email have most likely been replied to during the lunch break, so I work on cross-checking the updates with the actual plans and schedule we have for a specific group/service. I also start working on the travel plans and itineraries for the requests received in the morning from the inquiries email. This part is extensive and takes up the whole of the afternoon, since planning needs to be done carefully and prices need to be estimated accurately. I double check with my manager and she gives me tips and feedback to improve. The offer is finalised, polished and sent and the working day is over!

Time to do it all again tomorrow...

Thank you for taking the time to read this blog and I hope this gave you valuable insights!

Appendix 2. Extract from Week 7: First Client Conflict

- 3 sales meetings in which the FIT and group packages for the winter season 2023-2024 were presented
 - Feedback was mostly positive. 2 out of 3 of the clients asked for more information and to send the sales presentations directly to their emails. Some clients even sent follow-up emails asking more questions about the departures and schedule specifications, which could imply that they are generating groups for us.
 - One partner was not impressed, she felt that the price per pax was very high for a Lapland trip and she wasn't satisfied that the high price was calculated on the basis of 30 pax. She stated that it was very difficult to generate 30 confirmed pax with their current situation and wished for the prices to be 1) less expensive 2) based on 10, 15 and 20 pax instead of 30, which is our standard reference pax amount for groups. She also mentioned that she's aware of other agencies who are consulting our services and that we're giving them cheaper options. What she failed to understand was that the other agencies are capable of generating larger volumes (30, 35+ pax) therefore the price per person would logically be lower. However, this particular client only generates smaller groups (10,15, max 20 pax) and so therefore the price per pax would be higher in the final offer. My supervisor noticed that this would be a tricky and sensitive partner, and so offered to handle it for me.

Appendix 3. Extract from Week 9: Contemplations about the Future

- During these past couple of slow weeks, I have done a lot of pondering about whether or not to continue with Timetravels after the internship duration is over. The management has made it known from the very first day that they are interested in long-term candidates and would like to consider the summer interns as "full-time employees in training." I had already finished my mandatory 6 month internship period obligated to my studies by Haaga-Helia with Business Finland in Dubai, therefore I shared the same values as Timetravels in regards to my employment status after the internship. Therefore, until the end of the internship, I am planning to keep my options open until then but keep a positive attitude towards any opportunities that come my way.

Appendix 4. Extract from Week 12: Final Preparations

- Mentally and physically preparing for the final week of the internship:
 - **Mental preparation**: deciding whether or not extend my contract and start a full-time job at Timetravels, exploring, applying and interviewing for other job options just in case, reminding myself to be proud of everything I have survived and achieved in the last 3 months in this position, brainstorming the most professional way to inform my managers if I would not like to extend my contract, collecting missing info about the cases and inquiries I've been working on and compiling them in a handover file to my supervisor in case they pick up where I left off, etc
 - **Physical preparation**: slowly clearing out personal items from my desk, removing any food items in the common kitchen (olive oil dressing, tea bags, etc), preparing to perform a factory reset of my work laptop to clear out all my personal files and information, etc.