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Developing Key Skills for Hospitality Entrepreneurship

A Diary-Based Thesis

DEGREE PROGRAMME IN INTERNATIONAL TOURISM MANAGEMENT
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ABSTRACT

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The essential key skills to become a successful entrepreneur in the hospitality industry were explored in this thesis. As the most important skills required, leadership and management, financial management, marketing and branding, customer service, and innovation and creativity skills were taken into consideration. The main objectives of the thesis were to identify the key skills and their theoretical frameworks, analyse my own industrial experience according to that, and explore how to develop them over the period to grow up as an entrepreneur in the hospitality industry.

This thesis is a diary-based thesis, and the research approach has been "autoethnographic", which is a qualitative research method. The autoethnography approach allowed me to connect the theories of the research to my personal and often subjective experiences with wider perspectives. This diary-based thesis has been a journey. This journey has been an honest exploration, and I made a growth in certain skill areas to a great extent and knowledge on the subject of hospitality entrepreneurship. However, at the same time, I explored certain skill categories rather difficult to develop over this period.

Some findings proved that certain skills in hospitality entrepreneurship can be developed through reflective learning and hands-on training and experience. Internships under experts are a great opportunity to grow up in the industry. They are mostly leadership traits, financial skills, fundamental marketing skills, customer service excellence, and creative thinking. However, certain skills, such as presentation and public speaking remained unsatisfactory. As future developments, improving presentation and public speaking skills were considered, along with more practises in financing and marketing applicability in businesses. Embracing updates in the industry and technology were some highlights. Flexibility and adaptability have been solutions for many problems/questions that arose during the process, for example; learning of Finnish language to get adjusted to the Finnish culture would be a good solution for many limitations. Personalized services are recognized as important additions to hospitality businesses. In this thesis, certain comments may have come out as recommendations to aspiring entrepreneurs. The thesis consists of literature, and theoretical frameworks, combined with practical scenarios, results of experiments, experiential insights, and personal reflections in each chapter. This thesis has been a journey, where an aspiring entrepreneur applied the practical knowledge and experience to the theoretical learnings.

Key words: diary-based thesis, autoethnographic, entrepreneurship, hospitality industry, personal skills, leadership skills, entrepreneurial finance, marketing skills, branding, customer service, innovation, and hospitality trends.

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1 INTRODUCTION

With the rise of the popularity of domestic travel, local destinations in Finland are now attracting more travellers, and as a result, it increases interest of local destinations than ever. With the rise of sustainable travel, travellers are mainly seeking diversity, quality, flexibility, and environmentally friendly unique experiences. In recent years new trends such as design cottages and high-end boutique hotels which give closeness to nature with luxury, have touched the travellers. They tend to support local businesses and sustainable tourism, especially businesses that focus on green practices. (Helsinki Times, 2025.) With the rise of the popularity of recent tourism activities around the world and its ever-revolving and dynamic nature, the hospitality industry has become a field that demands new opportunities. This creates individuals with the right attitudes and the right knowledge to thrive in the hospitality business as hospitality entrepreneurs.

As an aspiring entrepreneur, according to my past experience in the hospitality industry and knowledge gained from studies as a student of Bachelor of International Tourism Management, I understood that developing the right skills is important and crucial to run a creative and sustainable business in the hospitality industry. Based on this idea, I wanted to navigate and deepen my knowledge on the necessary skills to become a right personality for this rapidly changing business. This diary-based thesis is mainly a learning platform for those key skills required to run a dynamic business in the industry. The main objectives of the thesis are, to identify the most important key skills for successful hospitality entrepreneurship with right theoretical frameworks, reflect my learnings according to them, analyse the same with my past experience in the industry as a Guest Relations Officer and an Executive Secretary, and navigate the ways for further developments to serve my idea of developing an

attractive business to cater Finnish market and culture with a blend of Asian essence as a cultural exchange.

To narrow down the research, five main skill types which help the competencies of effective entrepreneurship, have been identified. They are mainly leadership and management, financial management, marketing and branding, customer service skills, and innovation and creativity respectively (Robles & Zarraga-Rodriguez, 2015, p. 828-832). The thesis process explores, to what extent I have the traits of them at the moment, how I could develop and inculcate the rest of the skills over time, the factors that influence the growth of them, to identify the most difficult areas of them for improvement. As further improvements, it is expected to set goals to achieve them as much as possible in the future. This diary-based approach reflects and relates both theory and my personal experiences and includes comparisons of real-world experiences with academic insights. It is expected to provide possible practical recommendations for future hospitality entrepreneurs based on the findings and personal reflections.

2 DIARY AS A RESEARCH METHOD

2.1 Diary-Based Thesis

The main goal of the diary-based thesis is to guide the student toward independent professional growth and development, and professional growth during the thesis. The focus of the diary-based thesis is not on making diary entries, but on a much more essential part of the weekly analyses. In the weekly analyses, it is important to retrieve new information, models and best practices from the sources of the theoretical framework and to apply the retrieved information to one’s own competence. Analyses are the basic idea of the work.

The process would make it well acquainted with the main sources of information in the field and would make the ability to search for information independently and systematically. (Haaga-Helia, 2022, p. 3-4.)

To keep up with the requirements, I have structured my thesis for weekly analyses. During the process of analysing a sub-topic/a skill, new information has been retrieved, and recorded the practices done accordingly. The theoretical frameworks have been provided in each chapter and sub-chapters, with an in-depth analysis and a personal reflection. To get acquainted with the necessary skill and competency levels for effective management, past experiences, and studies have been reviewed, experiments were conducted, and further improvements have been planned when and wherever it is necessary. Most importantly, the thesis supervisor was updated on regular basis about the way the work progressed.

2.2 Method of Reporting

As per the guidelines issued by Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, the primary goal of a diary-based thesis is the student's own professional development. The requirements highlight, Wihi returns, instructor's feedback to improve the work, and discussions on corrections for the following work. The structure of a diary-based thesis includes: a cover sheet, abstract, table of contents, introduction, description of the initial situation, diary reporting, and sources and appendices. (Haaga-Helia, 2022, p. 2-7.)

As per the requirement, my method of reporting focused on defining the skill with essential theories, and learning experiences over time. Most of the entries were entered on daily basis or weekly basis (I have attached my weekly plan in the appendix as appendix 1). Each chapter reflects theoretical frameworks and important literature, followed by a reflection, ideas, concerns and challenges, analysis/review of past experiences, and suggestions for further improvements. The work was returned to Wihi on regular basis, where I received comments and feedback by the supervisor in each stage of the process.

2.3 Reliability and Validity

Both qualitative and quantitative researchers need credibility of the research, and the most important issue in a research is to ensure reliability and validity. The credibility of a qualitative research depends on the ability and effort of the researcher, which test hypotheses and generalizations of a test. Both can be described as credibility, transferability, and trustworthiness. The term 'Reliability' is a concept used for testing or evaluating quantitative research, for almost all kinds of research. Therefore, the most important test of any qualitative study is its quality. A good qualitative study would help the audience to understand a situation, which could be otherwise confusing. In qualitative research, validity has to do with description and explanation, and whether or not the given explanation fits a given description. (Afzal & Azeem, 2008, pp. 35-45.)

According to Doing Academic Research by Ekpe Inyang (Inyang, 2017, p. 8), reliability is defined as the ability of an instrument to produce the same or similar results each time it is used to take measurements under the same or similar conditions. The reliability of a research may affected by the wordings, changes in the physical settings, condition of the respondents, interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, and many factors. With my research approach, "autoethnographic", I have focused on trustworthiness and consistency to a great deal of my research. The autoethnographic research method was a great help to keep the work real and honest. To keep up with the reliability, I have maintained a timetable for my work, and the way it progressed to make the process transparent. I have analysed, why I have selected the given five skills deeply with relevant theories. My reflections were recorded regularly, using a consistent format, to ensure the research process remained systematic throughout. However, due to the nature of the research, the results I received at the end may not be the same for another researcher, as the final results are based on the experience and skills I hold, the exercise I do during the research to improve myself, and what I recognize as satisfactory as well as unsatisfactory.

According to Doing Academic Research by Ekpe Inyang (Inyang, 2017, p. 8), validity can be defined as the ability of a research instrument to measure what it was designed to measure. This may be whether the sources are adequate to the objectives of the study. To ensure the validity of my research, a concrete base to reflect my views and experiences according to theoretical frameworks and important literature in each skill has been maintained. Different types of academic sources and timely articles have been used to support the reflection and to bring different perspectives to the reader. I have critically and honestly analysed the existing skills, using thick descriptions and reflective analysis with the research context. I have tried my level best to document the research aligning to a professional setting for the reader to understand and also to present the research findings authentically to provide valuable insight.

3 HOSPITALITY ENTREPRENEURSHIP

3.1 Defining Hospitality Entrepreneurship

According to the Journal of Entrepreneurship Education, tourism entrepreneurship has been the driving force behind the rise of popularity of the travel industry during recent years. With advancements in technology, changing consumer preferences, and a growing emphasis on sustainability, entrepreneurs are now introducing and reshaping the way people explore and experience destinations. The activities of tourism entrepreneurship vary from travel experiences to novel sustainable accommodation options to the travellers. The article concludes stating, that even with the challenges, the future looks promising for tourism entrepreneurs who are able to adapt to changing trends and capture new opportunities. (John, 2024, p. 1-2.) I could agree with the journal about the rise of popularity of hospitality entrepreneurship, due to the development that I have experienced throughout my career in the hospitality industry since 2004 to-date.

I believe, unlike traditional entrepreneurship in the hospitality industry, the current market should be shaped and tailored to provide a traveller with a unique, quality, and memorable experience. It is important to understand and identify customer behaviours to create an opportunity or a market for a personalized experience. At the same time, the business should be managed to the best possible standards and satisfaction of relevant authorities. Advancements in the industry, especially technology and digital aids, customer preferences and sustainability should be well-captured to meet customer expectations and tailored according to rapidly changing trends. Hence, the ability and the skills of the entrepreneur play a vital role in making a business sustainable and unique one in the industry.

3.2 The Hospitality Industry Landscape for Small and Medium-Sized Businesses

The number of entrepreneurs and small firms has dramatically increased globally over the recent years. Due to globalization, ease of labour markets, and entrepreneur-friendly government policies, especially ease on trade restrictions, the number of entrepreneurs and small businesses has dramatically gone up. Starting a new business is not as hard as it used to be, and also the availability of resources in-terms of advices and starting up necessities such as start-up grants. All of these changes have helped small and medium-sized businesses, especially the small businesses in the hospitality industry to rise higher. (Lee-Ross & Lashley, 2008, p. vi.)

It is a commonly known fact, that the hospitality industry is gigantic and mainly comprises sectors such as accommodation, tourism, food and beverage, and leisure. This further ranges to hotels, resorts, restaurants, motels, event management companies, travel agencies, and travel management companies, and more. “The hospitality entrepreneurship” or small and medium-sized businesses could be born out of any of these above sectors in the form of products, services or experiences. The entrepreneurial journey in the hospitality industry can be challenging due to its nature of higher expectations by consumers.

I would like to mention some key information, I noticed during my reading of Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management in the Hospitality Industry, which I thought would be useful for my future reference. It is important to be aware of the foundation or background information before stepping into any business plan. Reality plays a vital role, as the transformation of the business plan, which one day needed to be a tangible business venture. Hence, the knowledge of practical aspects of starting a business is important. During the implementation process, it is necessary to stay focused on the plan, secure financing, and act effectively and efficiently toward the business objectives. As further steps, it is necessary to work on strategies for expansion of the business, and to keep up with these requirements, an entrepreneur has to have certain skills to perform successfully.

3.3 Hospitality as a Service Industry

The hospitality industry is treated as a service industry. A service industry is not a manufacturing industry that produces physical and tangible goods. In contrast to the manufacturing industry, the service industry produces services that are not physically tangible. (Roy, 2015, p. 1-4.)

If we consider the above definition and the content of the book, it is important to understand the structure, strategy, and nature of the hospitality industry, and this is where personal skills emerge to maintain the quality of the services provide. As discussed in the hospitality industry landscape, an entrepreneur in the hospitality industry must possess managerial skills such as leadership management, financial management, marketing and branding, customer service excellence and innovation and creativity, crisis management and adaptability, and many more to cater to industry requirements. It is challenging to create stability the industry due to its dynamic nature.

With my hospitality industry experience and people I have met during my career, I have learned, that some people do not inherit most of the above skills from their birth to become remarkable personalities. However, they have

learned and developed many skills over time and become key characteristics in the industry. One significant personality that I have met during my career in the hospitality industry is a Director of a leading hotel company in Sri Lanka and a popular entrepreneur personality in the country. I got the opportunity to work closely with him as his Personal Secretary. He has identified his enthusiasm and interest towards food and beverage, and culinary, while working in a food beverage department. Following his interests, he has started to deepen his knowledge attached to a popular university in Australia. He has then gradually and eventually developed his career into a successful manager and then into an entrepreneur in the hospitality industry. Working under him was a remarkable learning journey. This is one point in my life, I got inspired to pursue my career in the hospitality industry as well as to develop the idea of hospitality entrepreneurship. As a Director of a star-class hotel chain, he was responsible for a few hotels as well as tourist bungalows. The operation was enormous including finances, food and beverage, human-resource, training and development, marketing, and customer service. Through his ways of dealing with the management, the rest of the staff, and the guests, I witnessed a great amount of managerial and leadership qualities in his character, which he has developed over time. That truly inspired me to pursue a career and higher studies related to hospitality, and follow a dream of becoming a successful entrepreneur in the industry. This real-life experience has been a great inspiration, and a proof that a person could improve their managerial skills through trade education, training, and work under experts in the industry.

4 IDENTIFYING KEY SKILLS AND DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Leadership Management: The Power of Self-Awareness

A person’s intelligence, self-confidence, determination, and integrity are mostly based on the personality of each individual. However, there is no clear universal trait list for this as most of the traits based on personality, which is treated

as a criticism in leadership. (Lussier & Achua, 2022.) Leadership or self-awareness is treated as a highly essential skill in management.

I strongly believe, necessity of great leadership for successful operations in the hospitality industry. I have witnessed influence, and guidance the teams receive through thorough leadership to achieve organizational goals. Great leadership is a tool for a positive work environment. Effective leadership provides inspiration, motivation, and encourage innovation, adaptation and flexibility.

4.1.1 Theories and Frameworks of Leadership

During the journey of researching on the effective leadership management, I learned Kurt Lewin's Leadership Styles, which first proposed in 1939. Kurt Lewin was a German-American psychologist known for his field theory. The framework was based on decision-making and identifies three major styles of leadership. This framework is a popular theory for understanding the basis of leadership and makes the platform for many subsequent theories. (Complete Medic, 2024.)

I strongly feel, that this theory has a great relevance to the hospitality industry, which needs quick, dynamic, and most effective decisions in no time. Kurt's leadership style can be well-suited for aspiring entrepreneurs as it provides a strong theoretical foundation. The theory addresses both negative and positive characteristics of each category of leadership. I personally have experienced a blend of all of those characteristics in leadership personalities. Kurt's theory addresses different leadership approaches, which would be useful to learn, develop, and inculcate within a person, who is inspired to become a successful leader in any industry. These different styles could create a great impact on the staff motivation and successful outcome of the operation. Further, they might be adapted to cater current trends in hospitality entrepreneurship, such as team-building and cross-cultural management.

The first leadership style is Autocratic (Authoritarian). The leaders who are autocratic, act as sole decision-makers. They least consider the ideas of their colleagues or team. The second style is Democratic. The democratic leader involves team members in decision-making process. They seek the guidance of team members and promote a collaborative environment. However, the final decision is born by the leader or as per the result of a common and best-suited idea. The third or the last leadership style is Laissez-Faire. In this category of leadership, the leader allows the team to make decisions and keep a minimal involvement. (Complete Medic, 2024.)

I have witnessed that, leadership in general, has all these three characteristics blended when performing and responding to matters. According to different situations, each category would act favourably or differently than the other type. However, they may act negatively too. I feel, that the autocratic leadership is well-appropriated when a quick decision is required. This style can create a great amount of freedom for an entrepreneur in decision-making, whenever he or she feels the decision would act favourably without the consent of the team. This in a way saves time and skips a long process to reach a final decision. However, in contrast, the style could lower the staff morale, and create dissatisfaction due to fewer involvement of team members in decision-making. This might create an impression that the team's decision is not valued by the leadership. I believe, unlike the autocratic leadership style, democratic style welcomes and encourages the involvement of team members in matters. Under a democratic leadership, fellow members can be creative and bring their best ideas to the table without hesitation. This might bring a great amount of job satisfaction to a working environment, which is also highly important in increasing productivity at a workplace. However, this style too could have drawbacks as autocratic style. Sometimes too many different perspectives, and loaded ideas can be harmful or slow down the process of reaching final decisions. It may also be debatable to choose one best idea that arises among many.

The third style, laissez-faire leadership would allow team members to make decisions on behalf of the business. The leaders intervene least in supervision

and it happens only when it is absolutely necessary. Similar to the democratic style, laissez-faire too seems to welcome creativity of employees, which would motivate them for more independent work. Moreover, this style could have a greater capacity to create trust between the leader and the team. However, to be successful in laissez-faire style, the employees might need to be highly skilled and trained for decision-making, and most importantly, they should be able to work independently. Laissez-faire leadership method could go wrong in situations where the teams need more guidance. This may lead in dropping down productivity, and difficulties in achieving desired level of quality and standards of work. Hence, the style may not be suitable for less experienced or less skilled individuals who need more guidance and support. However, the above three styles confirm, that the leadership should be extremely mindful, effective, and efficient.

I realized, that as an aspiring entrepreneur, my capacity of taking up responsibilities and pressure, capacity of adapting to the business or industrial environment, level of communication and innovativeness must be identified. As a leader is demanded to be having the above characteristics, one purpose of this study is to work on improving the subtle areas that need attention. Leadership nowadays, is one of the popular and commonly taught subjects in management. Hence, there are plenty of opportunities to deepen the knowledge through professional learning.

4.1.2 Six Essential Leadership Skills

Six essential leadership skills and how to develop them, by Rebecca Knight of Harvard Business Review (2004), discusses some interesting key points and facts on leadership skills. Further, she adds that developing these six key leadership skills is not just about one's personal growth, but about shaping the future of work and inspiring those who are around them. In addition to her insight, I have discussed the theory as well as the input of Kirstin Lynde, founder of the leadership development firm Catalyze Associates to it. Further-

more, I have used the theories of Jeffrey Sanchez-Burks (which was connected to the news article), to bring more perspectives to the table. The most important point I learned from this reading is, that it is important to ask questions from myself, my team, and the environment. This way I would be able to learn from feedback and develop new viewpoints.

Emotional Aperture

Emotional Aperture is the first leadership skill that is being discussed by Rebecca in her review. According to Sanchez-Burks, leaders must understand the changing situations and adapt to the different needs and challenges their teams face. “Emotional Aperture” simply means, reading the room or reading the people around you. It is important to get a deeper understanding or become aware of how their team process information, handle risk, and maintain the operation. In order to develop this skill, he recommends self-reflection exercises, such as journaling about team interactions and interpretations of them. (Sanchez-Burks & Huy, 2007, p. 7-8.)

What I did to develop “Emotional Aperture” from what I have analysed was, I made a plan to start sharpening my emotional understanding beyond my closest environment. As the first experiment of the research, I started writing down what I love to do as my work, what I can do to motivate myself especially to pursue what I love to do. Then, I started writing down what I do not like to do or the things that frustrate me. The result I found was fruitful to picturise my immediate future, especially to identify one concrete idea of what I like to do. It generated mainly two ideas, the immediate idea was to find a job in the hospitality industry related to culinary and cookery, aiming to enhance my knowledge in kitchen operation. As the second idea, I wanted to start a small-scale business, most probably as part-time work, until I develop it up to a full-time business. Then I picked what interests me the most, and there I choose the business idea. Then I wrote down three business ideas and they were as follows; the first idea was to introduce Sri Lankan Batiks to the Finnish market, the second idea was to introduce Sri Lankan spices to the Finnish market, and third idea was to introduce preserved Sri Lankan food to the Finnish market, respectively.

Reviewing them was an eye-opener and has been a self-reflection. I then understood that, I am able to incorporate all the three ideas, and create one business to introduce to the Finnish market. If I introduce Batik, it could probably be best for only one season, and that is only the summer. If I combine all the three ideas, I would be able to run the business throughout the year. That encouraged me to keep focus and enthusiastic on all the three business ideas. Following which, I started my second experiment, and did the same process with some of my family members, and taking a step forward, I got a few outsiders involved in the same process. I tried to review the results with them, produced feedback, and also I shared my ideas to receive feedback. During the week, this activity made me realize how important it is to be honest about my likes and dislikes, especially if I am in a team, how it will support the team to develop as individuals as well as a team, and also how important transparency is for decision-making, in what I do, and the way it creates trust within a team and a business. This way I think, as a leader I can keep my team closer to me by knowing their wishes. I really can recommend this exercise to enhance one's self-awareness, and how much a person can improve further with that focus. Emotional understanding is necessary as a leader in hospitality management to understand the consumers and provide them with an intangible service even before they request to do so, and also to identify emotions of the staff.

Taking another step forward, I tried observing human behaviours in public places, reactions, and observe how people connect with each other, non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and body language. This has been an interesting task, however, it was challenging to stay unnoticed during the observations. To summarize, I have noticed mixed emotions, such as, especially the sales persons were cheerful, however, at the same place, some of the back of the house workers who came out from time to time were not much cheerful, and some looked stressful. Some paid attention to the surrounding, and kind of appreciated it, but some did not. However, this experiment helped me reshape and expand my perception on human emotions to a great extent, which

most of the time we never think of noticing. This may help to notice the emotions of people around us that might go unnoticed due to lack of skill to capture them.

Adaptive Communication

Adaptive Communication involves knowing how and when to adjust your behaviour and leadership style to fit the situation and your audience. Further, the author of the Harvard Business Review adds, connecting with your group's emotions builds a great relationship, which would help to work towards a visions. (Knight, 2004.) Adaptive communication is tailoring the way of responding in a professional environment.

It seems to me, that emotional diversity is necessary to run a business with a uniqueness, especially a business that involves in hospitality, as it requires a high level of creativity to stand out among competitors. To value diversity, one must improve the capacity of listening to their colleagues. The review highlights some practical ideas. One is having one-on-one conversations to understand your colleagues and mindful reflection (Knight, 2004). This was the next exercise or the experiment I did. I tried this with a few colleagues by asking them to reply a few general questions on "how to improve staycation experience in your country?" I recorded their answers, and reviewed them. However, I did the process with a preparation, and prior to the meeting, I provided them with a background idea, the purpose, and requested their fullest corporation. This is a good eye-opener on how creative a team could be and how diversified a collection of ideas could be. This confirms, how each person has different perceptions on one matter, and how important to consider their perception about one matter to get a bigger picture. Hence, I could agree with preparation, one-on-one meetings, respect and mindful reflection to enhance one's adaptability.

Flexible Thinking

Flexible thinking highlights, that understanding the larger context is important for the growth of a business. However, at times one should be able to prioritize ideas and solutions according to the situation and hold what could hold further.

Here is where the leader should embrace new opinions from the team members, as it may help to reach stronger decisions. (Knight, 2004.)

I strongly believe, that it is necessary to filter the information according to their importance. Mind mapping is one of the best tools that I have learned during my studies to enhance thinking on a matter. This is a visual aid, which helps explore different perspectives. This would help to connect ideas, find relationships and patterns between ideas, and provide different angles to find novel solutions. What I like in mind-mapping is, it is not restricted to any structure, but encourages to think freely, and widely. It provides the base to open-ended thinking to find answers to problems. This way, one can look into different approaches when necessary. This is a least challenging exercise one can practice without any restrictions. To put this into practice, I did few mind mapping exercises for the three business ideas I had, to figure out, what to do and what not do, and to realize the scenarios when connecting them together. The exercise was fruitful and made me pay attention to many areas that I have not given much of a thought earlier.

Perspective Seeking, Taking and Coordinating

Perspective Seeking, Taking and coordinating is simply encouraging to seek different perspectives to make the business operation effective. The review states that, this managerial skill is crucial for tasks like negotiating, managing risk, strategic thinking, and resolving conflicts. (Knight, 2004.) Hence, the skill seems to be crucial and should be taken in to consideration seriously.

In my opinion, it is important to broaden the network, and keep in touch with the experts inside and outside the industry. It might be difficult to develop further without the input of some important parties. This way, I was able to seek knowledge on matters that I was not familiar with, and be able to get different perspectives from more experienced and knowledgeable persons. What I have learned during my career was to encourage myself to speak to people who are well-experienced and more knowledgeable, and drive myself to learn about new things. To enhance my business idea, I contacted one of my former bosses, and discussed them with him. He suggested, that it would

be more beneficial if I could directly deal with the batik and spice producers to maintain the quality and the cost. Further, we discussed about the quality of the products, taxation, and possible challenges, as it needs to be introduced to an international market. However, he is positive about success of it and proud of the idea of introducing Sri Lankan products to the Finnish market. Apart from the above, the author suggests to read more novels, mentioning, that could make one's imagination more powerful. Reading is a powerful tool, as I believe what I read makes me what I am. I understood, that I could practice small things in my daily life that would help me to grow with wider perspectives.

Strategic Disruption Skills

According to Shimul Melwani, an associate professor at UNC's Kenan-Flagler Business School, Strategic Disruption Skill is, that leaders should now be able to challenge the current state of affairs or existing conditions of an organization, especially by questioning the status, condition, or worth of outdated practices including their negativities or positivities. Questioning the status quo does not mean the rule-breaking but it would affect certain practices positively, as most of the practices would not serve organizations effectively without making changes based on current scenarios or environmental changes. Further, he states, Developing Disruption Skills could be practised by obtaining new ideas from your team or your colleagues for improvements, and also apply them for the necessary changes. (Knight, 2004.)

I strongly believe, it is necessary to disrupt existing systems or outdated practices at times to create significant changes to the monotony of operational systems and transform results for the betterment of the business. This could be accomplished through innovation. During the second year of my degree programme, I planned to broaden my entrepreneurial knowledge, and took up this specialized course called "Developing your own business / Entrepreneur Accelerator". There I learned how importantly a business model caters a business, and shows when and where to disrupt the existing process. A business model is a foundation to the ideas of starting the business or changing wher-

ever needs to create value. Hence, the understanding and knowledge of developing a business model is crucial as an entrepreneur. The Business Model Canvas is a simple, however, a great tool that would act as a spine to the business. It helps to give a quick overview of the business, making it easier to update regularly. Another, area that requires reviewing of a business would be the technology that a business uses. Introducing new technologies as well as making the necessary update to the existing technologies, is necessary and would greatly support keeping up with the modern world. Especially, the technology a business uses ensuring the efficiency of the business.

As an exercise, I revised the Business Model Canvas I did during the same course, and changed to fit into the new business idea. The initial business idea (the idea I developed during the course, Entrepreneur Accelerator) was quite similar to the new idea, however, there were areas that needed a thorough review. Review of Business Model Canvas has been a good exercise to practice the strategic disruption mechanism of a business, and could recommend aspiring entrepreneurs to gain practice on this.

Resilient Self-Awareness

Cultivating resilience is important in an organizational culture as it could affect the organizational climate in a great way. It is recommended to receive feedback regularly from the team or colleagues, and track the progress to strengthen both self-awareness and accountability. (Knight, 2004.) Strong self-awareness would be a strength in leadership.

I believe that, leaders must engage with their teams more often in a more personal and empathetic manner to create an environment, which consists of a great support network. I have experienced, most of the leaders make discussions on inspirational personalities at meetings to set examples and to be inspired. It does not need to be only successful business icons, however, social leaders, athletes, hospitality industry personalities, religious leaders, and many more characters are there for us to learn leadership qualities. Jaime Oliver, the wild chef, is my inspiration, and reading him always keeps me alive to enjoy the culinary experience that I love to experience in my life.

It seems to me that, the above-discussed six insightful essential skills would help me to improve the subtle areas of leadership in a person to thrive in a rapidly changing work environment. Within the large context of leadership, I am now aware that, there are many important sub-categories to be developed to become a successful leader for my team. Decision-making according to the situation, understanding the environment, especially the input and emotions of the team, creating a diversified environment to maintain the creativity of the business, enhancing self-awareness and adaptability, flexible thinking and perspective seeking, when to embrace innovation and where and when to involved more personally and empathically were key learnings of the chapter.

4.2 Financial Management

Financial Management is a key to running a successful business. At the same time, running a business can be hugely challenging due to the involvement of most important resources and their limitations. As an entrepreneur, or an aspiring entrepreneur, you must be able to understand the financial position of your company and secure the right financing while meeting your customer needs, and competing with your competitors. Expert financial management would direct your business to achieve goals, in fact, it would help you to run a profitable business. The right financial management is crucial in any business irrespective of being a fresh business or an established business. (AACA, 2004, p. 1-2.)

I think, skills and knowledge related to financial management are vital for an entrepreneur from the starting point of a business due to some key reasons. In the hospitality context, the prime objective of a business is to provide the guests with a memorable experience to maintain the sustainability of the business. Due to the same reason, financial position of the hospitality businesses have a direct influence to the quality of the service they provide to their customers/guests. Financing in the hospitality business directly links with quality and standards of the property, amenities, food and beverage, and staff training

programs to deliver an exceptional service. On the other hand, it is highly important to maintain satisfaction and motivation of the staff with fair wages and salaries with timely payments, and help them to develop and grow professionally. This would help creating a positive environment, which ultimately would lead to higher level of service standards. Effective financial management could provide a hospitality entrepreneur with a sustainable and profitable business. Monitoring expenses, opening the business for more revenue streams, and controlling the capital are extremely important to manage the finances effectively. Hence, it is important to develop financial management skills by aspiring entrepreneurs to maintain the best practices, face challenges, look for solutions, and achieve financial goals. It is still possible to outsource the financing and accounting functions, however, it would generate more positive results if entrepreneurs themselves possess proper understanding of the financial activities and wealth of the business as the owners of the business.

Entrepreneurial finance is a major field, and adapting the principles and theories for planning and developing, starting up, operating, growing and maturing, valuing, and harvesting business projects. In entrepreneurial finance, entrepreneurs and managers make decisions to finance. Starting a new business would require a well-thought-out process of execution with an in-depth knowledge of the product, service, consumer, market, suppliers, legal rights and responsibilities and process itself. This would create a solid base of reality rather than on assumptions and imagination. Additionally, the knowledge of taxes, health and safety, discrimination, laws related to property and business contracts would be necessary to deal with day-today business matters. (Alhabeeb, 2015, p. 3-4.)

According to the book of Entrepreneurial Finance, financial skills are a vital area to study. In a business, finances are involved from the starting point of a business, and goes through out the process until the end result, which is profit or loss. During which, either the business owner or the manager / finance manager makes decisions on the finances or the matters related to finances of a company. It seems to me that, if a business is related to the hospitality industry, then the core of the operation, which is the overall guest experience

is treated as highly important, and awareness and deep understanding of the industry and its regulations are important. Staying updated about the industry trends plays a key role in understanding issues and risks of the business. The resources should be allocated efficiently to increase productivity and achieve strategic business objectives. It is important to streamline the accounting process to enhance the efficiency of the management system. With the enhancements of technology, the hospitality industry too can enjoy smart ways by adapting the online systems for their daily operations.

A guide for entrepreneurs of ACCA, which provides learners about many financing fundamentals states, that when you run a business you are putting your plan into practice. Financial management helps you track and measure your performances, identify problematic areas and new opportunities, and protect your business from risks, which could be a reason to collapse your business. Hence, skilled financial management is critical to monitor efficiency, cash flows, profitability, and sustainability of a particular business. (ACCA, 2004, p. 3.)

Reading the above guide and the above-mentioned book on entrepreneurial finance made me find some important points. The life span of a business would mainly depend on the finances that a particular business is holding. Hence, it is important to secure future funding supports, such as investors who are willing to invest in a business, and also financial institutions who are willing to grant finances, such as loans, when a business is in need of outside funds. To provide the business with an overview of the financial status of the business, and to help with decision-making, effective financial management is required. It is important to manage cash flow, control costs, secure investors, and monitor loans. Efficient cash flow would ensure that the business has enough money to cover the expenses to run the business, while cost controlling ensures the expenses are carefully checked and monitored to maximise profits. It is also important to monitor financial data, as they would guide to right decision-making for growth of the business. Furthermore, business owners have the option of recruiting skilful people for the smooth run of the financial department. According to the size of the business or the organization, there

can be different types of positions and layers in financial employment, such as auditor, financial analyst, finance clerk, finance officer, chief financial officer, director finance, finance manager, financial executive, finance assistant, financial administrator and many more. There are key financial terms and concepts which are worth learning; such as cash flow, equity, assets, liabilities, profit margin, and many more.

Updating my knowledge on financial management is challenging due to certain complex areas. However, I did a few practices to refresh my past learnings on the subject. I revised the business project that I did for the course “Innovating Tourism Business Models” on “Creating a Niche Market for Sri Lankan and Indonesian Batik Culture in Finland”, where I practiced a few scenarios such as business planning, analysing the business model using business model canvas, budgeting, forecasting of sales, and quantitative and qualitative research. Revising the financial assessment chapter was a great learning, and now, I could see the areas that need careful attention and improvement. However, I could recommend anyone who wishes to learn or refresh the existing knowledge, going through simple statements would help in a great way as it has helped me a lot. During the process of navigating through the crucial areas to develop in financial management as an aspiring entrepreneur, I came across with some important areas that are worthy to recommend for learning when starting up and running a business.

4.2.1 Forms of Business Ownership

It seems to me that, it is important to learn about business ownership categories, as it would act as a base for what type of a business I am going to run. I have seen many businesses run by sole proprietorship. In contrast, there are partnerships. Businesses with partnerships are run by two or more people, as they share responsibilities, profits, and liabilities. In addition to the above ownership types, I see corporations. Hence, learning about the right structure, which best aligns with the goal of the business is important.

To enhance my knowledge on different forms of business ownership, this is what I have done. I started referring online resources such as Investopedia, entrepreneur.com that offer free guides, and online materials of Khan Academy. Additionally, during the search for resources, I found many books and articles, case studies, YouTube videos, workshops, and seminar information to learn about business ownership. Additionally, professional business networking groups such as LinkedIn provide platforms for discussions with professionals in the business field. Referring above sources, I gained knowledge on different business structures, tax information, important decisions, controlling, risk management, succession planning (backup-planning for ownership of the business), and many more related information. I understood, that learning various forms of business ownership with its legal aspects would be greatly helpful, as it provided me a base to revise my business plan for “Sri Lankan Batik in Finnish Market”.

4.2.2 Entrepreneurial Organization / Business Planning

I think, learning business planning is incredibly important for entrepreneurs for several reasons. A business plan would provide an entrepreneur a guidance, as it consists of a vision, mission, goals, and strategies for the business. This would surely keep a business on the track. Furthermore, According to ACCA (the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants) Financial management and business success – a guide for entrepreneurs, business planning is essential if someone is starting a new venture, or expanding an existing business. It helps to identify and assess the opportunities and threats facing the business with confidence. It provides an in-depth understanding of the market, the competitor, an overview of the business environment, contemporary challenges, weaknesses of the business, and potential pitfalls. For example; it would show, how to invest in a new product development while controlling the costs. Business planning also creates a room for assumption, of which helps to minimise the risks unexpected events. (ACCA, 2004, p.5.)

I strongly believe that, it is necessary to identify both short-term and long-term goals of the business. This is where I took another step forward. I broke-down the objectives of my business idea into small steps and planned how to action and activate them in real. I hope these objectives and ideas would act as a clear roadmap and help in the start-up process. If the entrepreneur is in a process of searching investors, a business plan would act as a research document for them. A strong business plan has a capacity of building credibility. As per ACCA, a business plan must comprise certain areas, such as long-term goals, objectives, strategies, tactics, and financial review.

ACCA has suggested “SWOT analysis” stating that it can be a useful starting point. The SWOT analysis highlights the strengths (resources, capabilities, location, and quality), and weaknesses (limited capacity of funds, capability, and capacity), and looking at the opportunities (industrial trends, strong network and partnership, and efficiency), and threats (competitors, political and environmental restrictions, taxes, climate, and weather conditions) a business would possibly face. (ACCA, 2004, p. 6.)

As an exercise, I reviewed the SWOT analysis chapter of my previous business plan “Creating a Niche Market for Sri Lankan and Indonesian Batik Culture in Finland”. As a partially qualified person from a well-known management accounting institution, I could say, professional certification would be an added qualification to any business. It is always important to keep track of the industry updates. During my career, I have worked as an intern and this really has enhanced my practical knowledge. At the same time, I have an account attached to LinkedIn to get connected with the experts in the field. It is important to receive guidance and real-world insight during the early stages of practicing business planning skills. During these few months, I read the book “Entrepreneurial finance: Fundamentals of financial planning and management for small business”, which I gathered vast amount of information related to planning, budgeting, forecasting and implementation of a small business with real-world scenarios. As I have tested my knowledge with the business project “Creating a Niche Market for Sri Lankan and Indonesian Batik Culture” (this business plan was done by me and a partner as a full course of Developing a Business

Model in Tourism), as a further action, I decided to analyse it back, taking a small portion but considering much deeper elements, while focusing the comments sent by the lecturer.

4.2.3 Entrepreneurial Finance and Valuation / Financial Statements and Analysis

It is obvious entrepreneurs need to have an understanding of the elements of financial statements due to their importance in running an efficient and profitable business. It is a well-known fact, that a business needs financial statements for several reasons, and every business must produce its financial data for internal and external purposes. They help evaluate the company's overall performance, especially providing a detailed picture of profitability of the business. If in case a business runs with a loss that too could be traced through the financial statements. This way the owners and managers are able to see what is working and what areas need changes and improvements. Financial statements possess the capacity to provide the most important information such as revenue, expenses, and profits. They could be the base for decision-making on the operation, strategies, and investments for the betterment of the business. Investors make decisions based on financial statements to make risk-assessment, and to evaluate return from their investments. Financial organizations such as banks, would evaluate the financial statements of businesses before they make decisions on approving financial support for those businesses.

According to the book, Entrepreneurial Finance, there are key financial statements that are important to learn. They are supposed to present business financial data in a commonly acceptable way according to the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB). The most commonly used statements are the balance sheet and the income-expenses statements. (Alhabeeb, 2015, pp. 93-97.) However, I have come across with three most important financial statements that every business owner needs to understand. They are income statements, balance sheets and cash flow statements respectively.

I strongly believe, that budgeting and forecasting are highly important. They are needed in predicting future financial status, understanding cash inflows and outflows, profit and loss statements, balance sheets, operational costs, gross profit margins and return on investments and many more elements are highly imperative in decision-making on financial matters. Knowledge of financial statements is crucial for running a smooth daily operation through transparency. Below given are some important key areas that I have noticed.

Income Statements, Balance Sheets, and Cash Flow Statements

Income statements, also known as profit and loss statements, can be used to identify revenue and expenses, evaluate profitability, provide information to stakeholders, and plan for the future. The statement would show how much has been made, how much has been spent, and where the business is sitting financially. (YEC, 2023.) According to the book, Entrepreneurial Finance, income statement shows the firm's financial position over a period of time (for managerial purposes, income statement is usually prepared on monthly basis), usually a year, through the comparison between the in-resources (revenue and income) and the out-resources (expenses). (Alhabeeb, 2015, p. 97.)

Balance sheets are commonly confused with income statements, however, balance sheets are reports showing a company's assets, liabilities, and equity at a specific time. They can be used to monitor financial health over a period of time, make decisions related to debt and investments, and attract new investors and talent. The analysis can be done by comparing the business's current assets to its current liabilities. (YEC, 2023.) The book, Entrepreneurial Finance, suggests, that the balance sheet puts what the firm owns versus what it owes at any point in time. It identifies the net worth or the owner's equity, which is the difference between assets or total assets, and liabilities or total liabilities. (Alhabeeb, 2015, p. 93-96.)

The third category of the financial statements is the cash flow statement. The cash flow statements can be used to track cash inflows and outflows and find ways to improve a business's financial position to achieve long-term goals. Similar to the other two types, that too analyses the financial information over

a certain period of time, and shows what the making and spending of a business. A cash flow statement would help to track primary sources of cash inflows from the customers. (YEC, 2023.) According to the book, Entrepreneurial Finance, when products are sold, they either bring immediate cash or delayed cash through the accounts receivable if they are sold on credit. Spending cash would occur when materials for production are purchased either by cash or credit through the accounts payable. There could be many that generate cash and accrued such as loans, wages, selling stocks, taxes, and tax refunds. (Alhabeeb, 2015, p. 96.)

It seems to me that, financial statements are essential tools for entrepreneurs as they provide an overview of the financial performance of the business. To refresh my memory, I started referring some online materials from Khan Academy and YouTube videos, and I find them useful and effective. I came across a few books with some good reviews. A few recommendations are “The Entrepreneur’s Guide to Financial Statements” by David Worrell, and Entrepreneurial Finance by M.J. Alhabeeb (which is used as one of the main sources for financial management). Due to the enhancement of technology, there are many software related to any subject in the market, for those who wish to improve skills related to financial management. I have tried basic accounting software, which would help with tutorials and produce financial statements automatically. Additionally, I wish to take an internship to practice the financial aspects of a business under an expert in Finland.

It is understandable, that business activities in the hospitality industry could be highly depend on the seasons. It is always important to keep a back-up plan as no one knows what might happen in the near future. Hence, decision-making plays an important role for a smooth run during off-seasons. It is important to have a contingency fund for unexpected or unpredicted expenses. Businesses related to hospitality, need its best financial strategies for sustainable and successful growth. I must improve the pricing strategies, as the right pricing is a key to profitability as well as sustainability. As further improvements, I wish to set a realistic budget for my business plan.

Further, I would like to mention that, reviewing financial data should be a regular thing to better understand the financial position of any business. It is a must to analyse income, expenses, profit and loss, to make immediate decisions. There are many ways aspiring entrepreneurs could improve skills related to financial management, and also, there is a possibility to join entrepreneurial groups, where they discuss common issues. One of the most popular platforms nowadays are Facebook groups, who have common interests. I always keep in touch with industry peers, who are hospitality entrepreneurs, as they are qualified to offer advice and share their experiences. As discussed, learning and practicing are required to improve this skill due to their strong theoretical bases. In this learning, I managed to refresh my existing knowledge on business planning, forms of business ownership, and financial statements, which are important elements of entrepreneurship.

4.3 Marketing and Branding

Hospitality products and services are mostly intangible, except products for memories, souvenirs, and pictures. Consumers of hospitality products and services expect multiple options and experience opportunities, and the product or the service is treated as the prime experience. As the production, delivery, consumption, and experiences differ from those of other products, hospitality businesses use unique marketing strategies to connect with their consumers. Similarly, hospitality consumers make decisions utilizing different ways, other than the ways they utilize when they buy other types of products and services. In hospitality, experience is treated as the main focus, and businesses are supposed to make special ways to market them, and consumers too would have different perspectives when choosing what to experience. Hence, hospitality consumers go through a decision-making process that is very complex. The aim of the marketing activities is to create customer value and unique customer experiences. Hospitality marketing should be undertaken professionally, depending on the different characteristics of the industry. Hence, marketing managers in the hospitality industry must understand the nature of hospitality marketing. (Gursoy, 2018, p. 2, 9.)

It is understandable that marketing and branding of a product or a service, is highly important to create awareness among the consumers. If the product or the service goes unnoticed by the business handlers, the only result the business would face, is to run the business with many losses. What I believe is, a business is supposed to generate profits through sales. It is supposed to create a customer base to run the business long-term and work towards profitability. To do this, it is necessary to understand the market. At the same time, the business should build a long-lasting relationship with customers. An entrepreneur should be able to inform his clients about his product or service, and marketing acts as a strong medium to achieve this. Effective marketing strategies make it easier for entrepreneurs to communicate the importance and features of their products or services to potential customers. This way they can make awareness among their customers and create a market in a competitive environment. Similarly, creating a brand image is crucial, and marketing has the power to create a brand image on behalf of the business. At the same time, it is important to identify the competitors to stand out uniquely among them. This is where one needs strong marketing skills to make their product or service attractive and position them in the market. A well-planned marketing strategies could bring many benefits to a business. It helps in building loyalty and trustworthiness through proper communication.

I strongly believe, that it is important to choose proper and most effective marketing channels to promote the business. This should also be within the company budget and help maximize the return. In today's digital age, online platforms and social media act as the most popular medium of communication to reach a larger audience. Hence, it is important, that I gain necessary knowledge of digital marketing tools. Sustainable marketing strategies would surely uplift the products and services in a competitive market. Therefore, marketing and branding would be fundamental skills to make a business owner a successful entrepreneur. I realized that, if I am an entrepreneur with correct knowledge of marketing strategies, I would be more confident, and strong in creating an awareness about my business in the market. Hence, it is crucial, that I develop this particular skill to stand out in the industry.

4.3.1 Understanding Market Background of the Hotel Industry

According to my study and readings of the Case (Six successful hotel units in Abuja and Jakobstad): The Role of Marketing in Hotel Industry by Juwon Talabi, I noticed, it is important to learn types of accommodation, market segmentation, market positioning, hotel marketing mix, and marketing strategies. It seems to me that, inculcating marketing skills in a person is challenging, however, gaining necessary knowledge is possible through many strategies. Some people could be talented in making impactful communication, while others could not. However, as any other skill in life, this too can be learned and try to improve by certain activities and achieve results over period of time. I have met one marketing manager from a popular supermarket chain, who has developed his marketing skills through thorough reading and speaking to people fearlessly. He highly recommends reading, as it develops the awareness of the industry matters, and discussions on different matters. However, a deep understanding of the industry is necessary. It is important to stay updated on the demand, supply, opportunities, competitors, trends, challenges, and threats in the industry.

If I think of a hotel brand, I would obviously think of one of the many popular brand names due to their high level of brand existence. However, I believe that, whether it is a popular brand name or a small property, it has to have a name that showcases its uniqueness to the industry. Brand name should be there to create an impression among the customers and the competitors. To create a strong brand presence one needs strong marketing strategies and skilled marketing talents. However, in today's digitalized and globalized world reaching the target market has become more convenient than ever. An entrepreneur, who is looking to create a strong brand image in the industry should not only create a name for their business but also create trust in the industry. I always believe, that a large portion of the success of a business depends on the customer experience, loyalty of the brand, and its visibility. Hence, it is necessary to understand and learn the strategies and skills, to attract customers by convincing them for a better experience, create an awareness of what services the particular business has to offer them, and reach for bookings to

run a successful business. It is necessary to take every single action, to encourage the customers or the guests to come back to the business in search of the service they received once. Hence, it is needed to be personalized, caring, and making a bond with the guest.

I find marketing is the most challenging skill for me to develop at the moment due to certain characteristic and communication limitations I am having. I am not happy with my public-speaking skills, especially presentation skills, which I always wanted to improve to professional level, as I find it difficult to speak to a larger audience. I get nervous whenever my turn comes to speak and start struggling to express my ideas. Hence, I thought of taking up some online coaching sessions to improve my professional language in Finnish and English. As a practical exercise, I invited a few friends who are fluent in discussions on a subject and also who need improvement on public-speaking skills, and then we all spoke on a topic. This was impromptu, as we picked up topics spontaneously, and most of the suggestions came from the other participants in the table. Most of the topics were related to tourism trends, hospitality industry, and entrepreneurship. However, the purpose of the discussion is to create an impact on others through impressive speech, and to receive feedback at the end of the session on how convincing they were. This was a good practice, praised by almost everyone. As a further step, we have planned to meet well-prepared to make the discussion more fruitful with the most relevant and updated information. We all agreed that, it was a great learning session. We felt most of our ideas were heard and valued. This would be on my agenda, under actions to be taken for further improvements.

4.3.2 Key marketing skills

The hospitality industry is treated as a highly competitive environment, as it is required to attract potential guests, drive direct bookings, and boost revenue while maintaining guest loyalty. Hence, it is important to learn the main marketing tools and tactics practiced in the hotel industry. As an aspiring entrepreneur in the hospitality industry, my first target is to familiarize myself with

the most important areas in marketing and strategies to develop a good marketing plan for my future business. In the hospitality context “customer” is treated as the main focus. Making a satisfied customer who would look for repeat service should be the primary goal of the hospitality business. Then how to reach the target audience comes in matter. On the other hand, the brand that represents me in the market is the other most important element. To deal with these three elements, I am required to improve certain skills.

According to “Psychology of Consumer Behaviour: Understanding Your Market” by Keiser University, understanding consumer behaviour is essential for marketers because this knowledge allows them to craft marketing strategies that address the unique and personalized needs of their target audience. Consumer behaviour plays an important role in marketing because it allows marketers to better understand the motivation of their target audience, identify products and services that address the needs of their target audience, fill existing gaps within the market, and grow their brand in a way their target audience relates to. (Keiser, 2025.) Entrepreneurs must understand their target market meaning which, what their potential customers need and expect. Understanding the target market is required to develop market strategies or to develop a brand. A successful entrepreneur in marketing, is one with the knowledge of surveys, social media platforms, digital marketing, analytical skills of industry reports, and traditional marketing methods. Analytical skills of an entrepreneur play a great role in a business, as they have to use data and information which they receive from above activities, and evaluate them to see the customer expectations to enhance the quality of the business activities.

Further, the article suggests tools and techniques for analysing consumer behaviour effectively and efficiently. Some of them are search engine analytics tools, such as Google Analytics, social media analytics tools, and website analytics tools. Based on this recommendation, I decided to learn more about Google Analytics. I found, that Google Analytics is a user-friendly platform for an entrepreneur. I find it important to learn further due to certain important

features it has, which could be extremely useful to track down important information. It would be useful to understand customer behaviour in the hospitality business.

Understanding the customer is a key to tailor marketing strategies that should be implemented to reach the target audience. A skill-full marketer should be able to understand their customers, and what they want as their overall experience. To put this into practice, I revised the survey I have conducted for the business plan “Creating a Niche Market for Sri Lankan and Indonesian Batik in Finnish Market”. The purpose of the survey was to identify the demand for Sri Lankan and Indonesian batiks in Finnish-market, and tailor the product according to different customer requirements. Two types of questionnaires were prepared according to the anticipated nature of the interviewees. The first questionnaire was for the interviewees who do not have any idea about batik wear, batik industry, and its artisans. Hence, the questionnaire contained a detailed-information about the product. The second set of questions were targeted the audience who already has an idea about batik and has used the products.

When I was doing this comprehensive business plan, I always had the idea that I would be doing my thesis based on entrepreneurship. The process had interviews from total of five potential customers. Then I have summarized the data and information (interview results) to reach the conclusions for the final product I would be introducing to the Finnish market, how and when. This made me understand the nature of my target market segment, their wishes, what I can offer them, personalized or tailored products, when to introduce my product to the market according to the seasons, and for which price. This was a great learning process to identify the challenges in promoting the product to a new market. When I revised it now, I came across many areas where I could develop further to achieve a more efficient and unique market according to the consumer behaviour. Hence, I modified the questionnaires with more comprehensive details on design preferences, colour themes, and preferred materials, and got five more respondents to attend the new questionnaire. I must say,

the results I received created a clearer picture. To learn customer behaviour correctly, it is important to pay attention to the sensitive areas of the customers.

“Psychology of Consumer Behaviour” further states, that knowing your consumer, makes it easy to tailor marketing and advertising campaigns, improve the product positioning to get more exposure among the target audience, develop a greater sense of brand loyalty (customer retention), and ability of personalizing the experience for each customer. Knowing your customer has major portion in your marketing strategy. (Keiser, 2025.) Hence, it is important to understand and develop skills in this segment of marketing as a part of the desired skills to become a successful personnel in the industry and, must in identifying, understanding, and designing the market.

Digital Marketing and Social Media Marketing Skills

Digital marketing is crucial for reaching customers in the hospitality industry. Rising of online platforms has been a turning point of digital marketing, including social media marketing, email marketing, search engine optimization, and many more. According to The Insider (the magazine of Glion Institute of Higher Education) on the importance of hotel marketing strategies states, that hotels can employ various tools such as Search Engine Optimization (SEO) (tool which ensures your business ranks well in search engines), email marketing (to inform promotional activities, stay connected to members to inform news and updates), and content marketing (having able to create relevant content such as blogs, videos, and many more to keep the audience informed), to effectively promote their offerings and distinguish themselves. (The Insider, 2004.) Further, a vastly experienced hospitality professional, Glenn Carrol (former Vice President Commercial Europe for InterContinental Hotels Group, and later establishing a consultancy to advice hoteliers across the world), in one of his exclusive articles on “how to guide to boosting the bottom line”, states that, irrespective of being about digital or offline promotion channels of your business, one must understand that the marketing to reach a wider audience cost money, which might go out of control. Hence, it is important to create a cost centre for the same. (The Insider, 2004.)

According to the findings of my learning, in the hospitality context, digital marketing makes businesses reach a larger audience with potential customers effectively. It helps hospitality businesses reach a local and a global audience to attract local and international tourists. It could be used to reach a target market segments efficiently, and must in building brand awareness in today's digital world. There are a few key-components of digital marketing, that are crucial and important to learn, such as email marketing, content marketing, search engine marketing, and pay-per-click advertising. These advertising methods would be cost-effective compared to traditional marketing methods, such as TV commercials and print ads. Small business owners would find it difficult to use these traditional advertising methods largely, however, can be hugely benefited from the modern online platforms. At the same time, social media could make an impact on any business. They have the ability getting connected with immediate users. Apps like Pinterest are effective modes for showcasing. When it comes to social media marketing, social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and TikTok are absolutely popular, and could be utilized in promoting hospitality brands, their services, special offers, and features to a large audience.

I believe, that having a clear understanding of the digital marketing methods used in today's world is crucial, for the promotions to achieve the ultimate goal that is attracting the customer to the product and services. Content creation and influencer marketing also are popular nowadays as strong marketing tools, and find it extremely important to know. Am I having enough knowledge of these latest marketing tools? I always question myself. Thanks to my professional studies, I got an opportunity to follow this course called "Digital Marketing Communication and Content Management", and also an intensive week with a group of exchange students on "Social Media Marketing and Content Creation". Under the first course, a group of four students were supposed to create two versions of web pages (two samples) for a popular project on hospitality career opportunities for youth. Creating these two versions of web pages was a great experience. We were given a chance to design this particular website according to the most suitable ways to reach the young audience, who are interested in pursuing their career in the hospitality industry. I am

proud of my contribution to this exercise, as I actively involved in designing the visuals as well as the contents to one version. In this exercise, I focused on the search options of the website, an attractive colour theme, fonts, and images, and most importantly the content to be included to impress the youth. I was confident and happy with the final result, and received positive comments and feedback.

However, I still feel there is always a room for improvement and staying updated. It is always challenging for me to keep up with the technology and latest versions of social media platforms. I am confident of using Facebook, however, utilizing Instagram, TikTok are still challenging for me to make an impact. We were given to create many clips on different themes and run them on social media platforms in the latter course. I think, the practice, and updates would be gained by working with a real client or can be developed as a hobby initially. However, I am much interested in content creation as I am able to deliver my thoughts through powerful writing. During my first and second years, two of my articles got published as blog posts on the SAMK Tourism Blog, which I treat as a treat to my writing skills. In connection to digital marketing, social media marketing, and paid online ad campaigns, there are many tools that manage online reviews and ratings, such as TripAdvisor and Google Reviews, which cannot be ignored, and crucial to learn. However, to stay up-to-date on current trends and issues, the insights from workshops, seminars and webinars can be read and analysed. I strongly believe, that hands-on experience is necessary to gain practical skills, and networking with professionals in the field can be beneficial. My LinkedIn account is a great platform and I try to use it more often to stay connected with the professionals. In this chapter of learning, I think, I improved my perspectives of understanding the customer, the customer behaviour and modes to reach customers to create an impactful marketing. However, developing overall marketing skills remain as a personal challenge.

4.4 Customer Service Excellence

4.4.1 Introduction to Customer Service in Hospitality

Customer service is the practice of delivering products and services to both internal and external customers through the efforts of employees or by providing appropriate personalized service (Simon & Louise, 2022, p. 5). Furthermore, The Insider states, that customer service in the hospitality industry is related to any area where customers will have direct interactions with staff in a hospitality venue. This could be speaking to the front desk of a hotel to book a room, checking in for a stay or ordering a meal, or any other time hotel personnel are attending to customers. Even if this gives the image of front-office staff, there are also many customer service management roles in hospitality. (Glion, 2023.)

According to the above book and magazine, hospitality industry is treated as a service industry, and customer service can be treated as the face of it. The overall customer experience mostly depends on the customer service they receive at the property or during the communication. This fully impacts customer loyalty, repeat visits, returning to get the service back or recommend the establishment. In hospitality, the first point of guest relation happens when the guest inquires and communicates their requirement and the establishment responds according to the guests' request. From that point onwards, guest relations come into effect when welcoming guests, creating a warm atmosphere with a personalized service, receiving feedback, and after-service contacts. This would build lasting relationships, which is highly essential for the growth of the business. Due to these reasons, customer service team plays an important role on behalf of a business. Hence, as a business owner or an aspiring entrepreneur one's knowledge on customer service would surely become an asset for the success of the business.

As a person who has worked in the hospitality industry, and also as a guest relation officer in a reputed hotel property, customer service skills could be my biggest strength. My attentiveness to guest requirements has been a key

strength, and I have received positive feedback for the same, including much appreciations from the establishment. During my career in the hospitality industry, I hope I have gained a vast amount of experience in handling guests from different customer segments. I was one member of the management, when the hotel property got selected to the SAGA Top Ten Award. However, as the industry is fast-paced, there is always room to learn updates and new ways to approach the guests.

According to the case study of “The Lopesan Group, Gran Canaria, Spain”, states, customer service holds a higher position of Lopesan Group priorities. This highlights the way they welcome guests at the reception with cooled cocktails, saying that “there is no second chance for a first impression”. The aim of the quality of the hotel focuses on guests to feel that they have stepped into a different planet. (Simon & Louise, 2022, p. 19-21.) This reminds me of my service at the hotel, as we used to serve cooled Piña Colada to the guests, while ushering them to the reception for check-in formalities. I still could recall, the manager used to quote this moment as “the moment of truth of the whole journey”.

4.4.2 Key Customer Service Skills for Hospitality Entrepreneurs

I strongly believe, to attend the mission of making the consumer feel as they stepped into another planet, I must possess certain skills. Offering an excellent service is not easy, as it should reach the level of customer’s expectations. The service should be respectful that the guests would feel welcomed. In a way, it is a problem-solving process, and that is where I should have an excellent knowledge of the establishment and its’ capacity levels of providing the services. In the hospitality context, guest’s emotion should be treated with respect. It is important that the organization has a system to collect feedback for each guest experience where they are free to express the true feelings about the service they received, and the feedback the organization receive in-

return would be extremely useful for future improvements in the guests' services the business offers. Customer service might be the most important job role in the hospitality sector.

The Insider suggests that, one of the most comprehensive ways to get these skills is through educational courses, as these skills are an essential aspect of hospitality studies. Furthermore, it highlights some critically important skills to be learned and improved. They are interpersonal skills, communication skills, problem-solving skills, attention to detail, and multitasking skills. (Glion, 2023.) With my industry experience, I too felt they are important, especially for aspiring entrepreneurs and people who are looking for a career in customer service in the hospitality industry.

Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal skills are what people need to interact with each other. The work 'interpersonal' means 'between people'. This is also referred to a social skill which means how we show respect to each other. The hospitality industry is a people-based industry, hence, it is important to build and maintain a good relationship between both staff and customers. The article highlights, body language (eye contact, facial expressions, posture, and gestures), attitude and behaviour, speaking listening, greeting, respect, manners, empathy and appearance and personal hygiene. Excellent interpersonal skills and professional qualities result in excellent customer service. These qualities are also important between staff to build good working relationships across departments. (BBC, 2025.)

However, I think, in addition to the skills, there are specific situations where professional training is required to standardize the ethics of the working environment. These practices benchmark the day-today activities. For example; when answering the telephone, this is often the first contact between the customer and the business. Hence, most businesses treat telephone etiquettes are highly important to create a professional, but a warm image. A simple phrase like "Is there anything else I can help you with?" and a finer greeting

can make a magical touch of warmth. I strongly believe, training is highly important to maintain the standards of the hospitality environment. During my career in the hospitality industry, I have undergone many training programmes and work-shops, which immensely helped me shaping-up my guest-relations career. I must say, certain employees join the establishments as freshers or trainees, while some hold proper education on the service sector and relevant experience. The experience makes the service easier, however, I too joined as a fresher to the industry. Trainings, short courses, seminars, and workshops helped me greatly to adapt to the environment quickly as well as to the job. I got the chance to join a hotel for my internship in Finland and was in the reception for a month. It was a great opportunity for me to re-practice my previous job which I used to enjoy a lot. Even though the job role has some differences, the ultimate expectation was to connect with the guests impressively and understand their emotions immensely. However, the establishments need both types of employees, freshers as well as experienced workers due to the nature of the industry. Hence, a fresher would require an orientation programme, as well as workshops or seminars to learn the important area of customer handling. No matter what the job role is, good interpersonal skills and professional qualities would be an asset to a person.

Body language can be treated as a main trait to connect with the customer, as building a rapport with customers is important. It simply means, having trust, respect, and mutual understanding with the customers through verbal and non-verbal communication. (BBC, 2025.) I believe, building a rapport with the customer/guest is essential in hospitality. Hence, it is important entrepreneurs develop this skill to be successful in connecting with their guests. I revised my previous job descriptions to see, whether there are any job tasks aligned with it to cater the above skill. And yes, I found some interesting job tasks that I have practised during my career as a guest relations officer. It was part of my duty to receive feedback from the guests. Then the feedback results were summarized on monthly basis to see into the areas that need attention, solutions and improvement. I was expected to bring the summarized results to the management meetings and expected to join discussions to share my ideas and thoughts. Additionally, meeting the guests whenever they need and help

them solve their problems were the job priorities. It was expected to create positive vibes among the guests about the environment they were at that moment, which means to create an impression for them to feel welcomed and taken care of. This way the guest relations job was expected to build a rapport with the guests.

As a further development, I started working on a feedback process for my future business. Here, I focused on one segment and that is “Introduce Sri Lankan spices to the Finnish market”. The main idea was to receive feedback for my products, and instead of a simple survey, the customers can give feedback on aroma, freshness, taste, and packaging separately, and the system would encourage them to do so. Once they send feedback, they are able to may be unlock discounts, receive a special recipe and many more information back to stay connected with the product. Then I plan to use an artificial intelligence tool to categorise the feedback according to common themes for product improvement. A rating system, a friendly message after purchase, and an emoji-based feedback are also in consideration. Receiving feedback from the customers can be recommended highly to keep a rapport with a personal touch. This is always a nice gesture to make the customer feel that, they are cared and valued. With the enhancement of technology, there are many ways an organization could stay in-touch with the customers. Automation is a great tool for reminders of customer birthdays, anniversaries and special days, where the organization could send them greetings. These actions are important in a modern business environment. However, it is challenging to develop this concept further at the moment, as I do not have an ongoing business to receive feedback.

Listening and speaking skills are an important part of interpersonal skills (BBC, 2025). This helps entrepreneurs to negotiate with stakeholders. Negotiation skill is a must in a business to secure the best deals, and to resolve conflicts and disputes. During my learning of the thesis topic, I got the chance to speak to a person who works as a negotiator in a reputed company in Finland. I have noticed some interesting characteristics of him during one of our meetings. I was delighted to see his language ability with a greater vocabulary. His speech

was convincing, and anyone would feel like having a good conversation with him. During one of the conversations, I could recall he mentioned, that his educational background was one of his greatest strengths in his career. I admire his subject knowledge, as he truly enjoys his job. Hence, I can bring forward his recommendations for anyone who wishes to improve negotiation skills, which are, thorough knowledge of the subject and excellent communication skills, especially for aspiring entrepreneurs to reap the best deals in the market. I find, improving negotiation skills would be challenging, hence, I should learn the subtle areas of the skill responsibly. I think, I would have to work on this skill thoroughly as I have never got an opportunity to practise this skill during my career.

I strongly believe that, networking is highly required in today's business world. It is interesting and inspiring to know the stories of entrepreneurs. There are many benefits and advantages that I gained through connecting with professionals and experts in the industry. The most popular networking platform for professionals in any field, LinkedIn, directed me to connect with like-minded people, and that helped me gain information specially to work on my thesis idea, and strength to focus on a business in the future. It was a wonderful platform for entrepreneurs to stay updated and get motivated. It is one of the biggest platforms for knowledge and experienced inputs as it provides different perspectives of professionals and experts through their journeys and life experiences. I feel that these platforms are able to provide entrepreneurs with new clients, and opportunities also in addition to the knowledge they provide. Mentors are very important for a business, as this gives an impression that I am not alone in common business matters. As I have connected with a few, I must say they do not hesitate to help with their advices, and hopefully, this might reduce the mistakes, especially in decision-making, if you are new to the industry. However, one should be genuine in connecting with them and dealing with the mentors.

Good manners set a very good impression (BBC, 2025). During the learning period of the interpersonal skills, I pledged myself, to capture a good communication mode to practice in my day-today life when dealing with others. This

is to ensure that the other party is not offended by my way of communication in what-so- ever. In nature, I am a calm person who pays respect to others, and I am proud of it. At the same time, I try to use an impressive language and stay calm even I feel offended, as I simply want to avoid arguments. I like to be in a happy and peaceful environment, and I like to contribute to create my surrounding peaceful with my positive attitudes. My work could be highly-stressful, however, managing my emotions are a critical interpersonal skill, especially if I am attached to the hospitality industry. This is highly needed in customer service, where the customer meets the business. If my tone is rude, stressful, or in a hurry to finish the job, that may not create a good impression on the business that I represent for.

Communication skills

Communication skills play a vital role in customer service excellence, especially in the hospitality industry. Effective communication helps customer service effective and efficient in many ways. According to The Insider, communication is vital, both in written and verbal forms. You will need to be informative and pleasant when dealing with guests, giving them the information they need, but you will also need to have good communication with other team members or employees that you may be managing. This includes knowing how to be motivational, and pleasant, but also clear about what needs to be done. (Glion, 2023.) Effective communication is vital in entrepreneurship, as there would be many messages to send and receive as an organization. It has direct impact on the productivity and success of the operation. During my career in hotel industry, as an employee in the management team, I have maintained respectful and clear communication with staff and guests, management and departments, and directors, and owners of the organization. Tone, clarity and content are vital when speaking with customers, guests on the phone or in person. With my guest-relation experience, I believe that, for me, communication happens in person is more comfortable than it happens over the phone. However, it is important to listen to the customer carefully, use appropriate phrases and positive language to ensure that the conversation has a weight, and deep breathing, and short breaks to maintain stress and calmness.

Non-verbal Communication is more subtle. These include facial expressions, gestures, body language, eye contact, touch, space and the personality of the individuals. Furthermore, it is vital to impart truthful information. (Kapur, 2020, p. 4.) It was interesting to learn deep on non-verbal communication. However, I always try to understand the different gestures people make during conversations. It is important to learn social etiquettes to become a polite person in social circles. I think, body language, eye-contacts, and posture are important when you speak to someone in person. It is always better to avoid discussions, if you are stressed. Visual communication is also important in professional environment. It seems to me that as an aspiring entrepreneur, I must consider the rules before communicating with visuals, as another party could get easily offended. However, the visual communication can be treated as a powerful mode of communication, as it has the capacity to tell a story, for example this could make a presentation, training session or a seminar more interesting and understandable. I strongly believe this is one large area that I have to work hard, especially on presentation skills. I have realised that my presentations skills are not up to the level, and I like to enjoy it than feeling stressed. It seems to be a challenge at the moment because I am not happy with the amount of improvement I have seen during my study period. However, written Communication is the biggest strength for me. I am very confident about my written communication skills which I developed over the years of working as an administrative assistant and a secretary. Thesis writing process has also been a great platform for me to showcase my writing skills. Written communication is vital in entrepreneurship and managerial roles to communicate effectively. With my experience, I can say that people can be trained for written communication. Writing skills can be improved over the period but is a must to read, however, one must have a desire to learn it.

Problem-solving skills

According to the research on “Role of Customer Service Skills on Customer Satisfaction and Its Effects on Customer Loyalty in Pakistan Banking Industry”, the researchers states, as the results suggest, non-verbal and verbal communication skills, reputation building skills, problem solving skills, and customer

service culture are the important factors of customer service skills that enhance customer satisfaction. In the study, they have investigate the role of customer service skills on customer loyalty via customer satisfaction. In the conclusion, they have summarised that, as per the results, non-verbal communication and verbal communication skills play a key role in the satisfaction of the customers. Similarly, problem-solving skills in employees also boost the satisfaction of customers. Their statistics support the customer service culture that highly influencing the customer satisfaction which leads to customer loyalty. (Ali et al., 2018, p. 220.)

As a person worked in the customer service industry, I had many challenges that required effective solutions every day. To solve a customer problem, the person attending to the job would require accurate knowledge of what problems the customers would face most likely related to their product or service. The customer may have concerns related to quality, customer service, guarantees of services, billing and payments, delaying of service, faults, and many more which are common and rare according to product or service. The process needed careful listening to the customer, as well as to understand problem clearly to seek solutions. What I have done mostly is, after listening to the guest as the guest relation officer, I politely tell them I would check the necessary information or the situation, and get back to them as fast as possible, or request a reasonable time to come with a solution. After doing a background check up, if in case, the problem cannot be attended by me, I seek the support of the necessary staff, department heads, or management. For example, if a guest shows up with a complaint about the condition of the room they are staying, it is something I cannot attend from my end. Hence, I first inform the Executive Housekeeper of the hotel to draw his attention to the complaint. Then, upon his response (there are certain common issues that they are able to attend instantly), I pay a visit to the room with him and discuss possible solutions to the matter. Meantime, I try to keep the guest informed about the updates and steps that are being taken. I have experienced how fruitful it is to keep the consumer informed about the solutions or updates on the issue.

However, irrespective of the seriousness of the matter, it is extremely transparent to record each customer complaint to identify certain shortfalls. For example, if we receive guest complaints about discoloured bed linen, then probably, it is time to change the whole stock to a new batch of linen, or else the laundry manager to be addressed about the issue to see whether it is happening due to problems with detergent or machine that does not do the cleaning function well. There are certain problem-solving skills I have developed over the period, however, there could be many areas to develop in relation with the development of technology, as today's hospitality landscape is shaped by modern trends, technology and diversity. However, in general, I think, I should pay attention to active listening, critical thinking, and staying calm under pressure.

Attention to detail and multi-tasking skill

As per the "What are the necessary skills for a career in hospitality customer service?" by The Insider, attention to detail is a must skill in the hospitality industry. It states, there are always entrepreneurial options where you can benefit from customer service skills. Whether it is managing your own hospitality business or consultancy, customer service is very important. Furthermore it states, it is always essential to have good attention to detail. Especially in luxury or high-end hospitality and hotel management, customers will have high expectations and you have to make sure that all the details are right. (Glion, 2023.)

I strongly believe that minor touches are necessary for customers to feel seen and understood, for example, small gestures like handwritten welcome notes, remembering names and interests, and special gestures on birthdays and anniversaries would be thoughtful and make a difference in guest experience. I also believe in taking-down notes, maintaining checklists, and listening to them, helped me to develop this particular skill in customer service. Personalized service is always a plus point in the service industry. A personalized service is what I mainly focus in my future business.

As per the “What are the necessary skills for a career in hospitality customer service?” by The Insider, multitasking skills help you in prioritizing different tasks and multitasking skills make sure that everything is taken care of at the right time. (Glion, 2023.) In customer service, multitasking may include handling phone calls, replying e-mails, and meeting customers in person and keeping in touch with other departments on what is required to be done, and many more to keep up with the expectations of guests. This skill requires a well-organized environment, calmness and attentiveness. A proper to do list can make a difference in a person’s life. I always believe in a to-do list, journal or diary and reminders. For example, a well-maintained calendar has been helpful for me to keep up with the thesis tasks to be completed before deadlines, and to make the thesis meetings productive with the supervisor. I think, multi-tasking skills kept me away from frustrations most of the time. At the same time, deadline keeps me motivated to complete the tasks on time. I find the daily top three tasks method interesting. I have practiced Pomodoro Technique a few years back. However, I sometimes have noticed that, I struggle to keep up with the daily schedules if I include many to do’s, and I lose touch over the period. I most of the time enjoy a routine life. Hence, I should be improving my multitasking skills without sticking into a kind of routine life. This task is going to be challenging for me. Hence, in my next schedule, I thought of avoiding tasks that requires deep attention in two consecutive time slots, limit phone calls (make all calls back-to-back while paying attention to the call duration), and use of social media, especially Facebook. As I always have a physical planner, I should next pay attention to Google Calendar.

4.5 Innovation

The research paper “Innovation in the hospitality industry – Firm or location?” states, that knowledge about innovation in the hospitality sector is a keystone in understanding the growth and development of the sector. The innovation types for service innovation include product and service, process, managerial, marketing, and institutional innovations. Product or service innovations in the hospitality industry are products and services that are new to the customer.

Process innovation focuses on improving the productivity and efficiency of a firm, for example; self-check-in systems for both customers and employees, apps where you can place your order, and booking services. Firms in the hospitality industry may also implement managerial innovations. Marketing innovations in the hospitality industry include new ways of marketing as well as new channels. Institutional innovations take place outside the hospitality firms and deal with the regulatory and legal framework. Design-driven innovation is defined as a new or significantly improved design, interior, and/or atmosphere in the firm. (Backman, 2017, p. 4-6.)

I strongly believe, innovation is vital in the hospitality industry to provide customers/guests with a memorable experience, and to stay unique within the competitors. With global trends such as sustainability and enhancement of technology, innovation can be a great survival skill in the industry. Personalization is a key and to cater it, and the most essential skill can be the innovation. The latest systems may also reduce the costs involved in traditional complicated methods. The discussion of this final skill category in this thesis is an important area for me, as the section would allow me to put my innovative business ideas into words and would direct me through the final goal of becoming small-scale entrepreneur in Finland. I have picked four most important types of innovation that could be aligned with the hospitality industry as well my future business plan.

4.5.1 Types of Innovation in Hospitality

The highly competitive nature of the hospitality industry requires new ways and elements for efficient performance. One of the core trends in this is the development and application of a variety of innovations and new elements that can serve powerfully and impactfully for the development of the hospitality industry. In accordance, there are a few categories which are important to pay attention. They are economic innovation, material and technical innovation, social innovation, and marketing innovation. (Dzhandzhugazova, 2016, introduction section.)

Economic Innovation

Economic innovation refers to the emergence of new markets caused by the introduction new products or technologies, the creation of new ways to buy and sell goods, and economic processes following the innovation process. There are specific ways to implement this in hospitality industry. The purpose of economic innovation is to erase the “blank spots” in the geographical space of the hospitality industry. (Dzhandzhugazova, 2016, Table. 1.)

As an initial step to my small-scale business, I wish to introduce authentic Sri Lankan spices in a way that is new to the Finnish market. In addition, to creating a market for this main Sri Lankan spice products, I wish to introduce Sri Lankan Batik to the Finnish market as a sub-product. According to the social experience of living three years in Finland, the people I have met, most of them are unfamiliar with Sri Lankan batik culture, which is extremely elegant and classy. I have already conducted an initial market research, and have positive thoughts on the possibility of introducing them to the market. Here, I have identified the economic innovation as, creating a market that offers a fresh gastronomic experience, incorporating Sri Lankan spices into Finnish dishes while maintaining cultural authenticity, and also the introduction of batik as a cultural exchange to the hospitality industry. Based on authenticity of the said products, they have strong characteristics to stand out from general Asian spice products that are already in the Finnish market. I wish to focus on customization in batik attires.

Material and Technical Innovation

Material and technical innovation refer to creating new materials, products, services and technologies, new ways to deliver services, improving the old ones. Implementation can be done by expanding the range of specialized facility types according to the needs of the consumer. (Dzhandzhugazova, 2016, Table. 1.) This can be the use of innovative methods on the production and delivery.

I have a plan to get connected directly with Sri Lankan producers. This may ease the import process, reduce the cost of goods, and ensure high-quality products (more authentic). I should develop a packaging to preserve aroma and freshness of the spices focusing bio-degradable packaging to deliver the product in a new way. I should discuss with the local producers about improvement of quality that can be done to cater international market, such as blending of few flavours together to make a new flavour for seasoning. I should develop new recipes to introduce to the Finnish market, where the new users are able to use them easily for better results. Batik designs can be customized to summer seasons and exclusive occasions.

Social Innovations

Social innovations refers to new ideas and solutions with the purpose of addressing social and cultural challenges. Implementation is based on new concepts such as business tourism, educational tourism, eco-tourism, pilgrimage tourism and many more. (Dzhandzhugazova, 2016, Table. 1) As per the business plan I am having, I would be able to address it under the food tourism, and cultural exchange.

I have plans to participate in food events happening in the area to gain knowledge on the overall food activities and interests of people living in the area. As per my knowledge, there are many places where food events take place, including cultural centres. I should innovate a business model where the customer would be educated about the product from the cultivation and process until it comes to the kitchen as a seasoning. Similarly, the process and craftsmanship of the batik industry can be introduced to the consumers to make it interesting.

Marketing Innovation

This type of innovation consists in introducing your products or services to new markets, you may have new users for your original outlet. This may include new or significantly improved marketing methods, including major changes in the design and packaging of products, applying new sales techniques and

product presentations, presenting and promoting them on the markets, developing new pricing strategies. This can be achieved through analysing the results of market research, experience shared by experts, and research done by competitors. (Dzhandzhugazova, 2016, introduction section.)

According to the business plan I have, I need to identify and target new customer segments, according to their flavoursome needs. Introducing Sri Lankan spices to a new geographical market itself would be an innovative idea, even if it would be challenging with other spices in the market. I have identified few consumer segments for the same. They are the existing Asian communities in Finland, who still admire the Asian touch of flavours in their pallet, food lovers who are open to embrace the new flavours, home cooks who enjoy spices, and consumers who are health-conscious and admire local innovations. I think, in hospitality context, entrepreneurial skills such as creativity, stay head of trends, knowledge of technology, recognizing of opportunities, and adaptability would be greatly advantageous. Innovating marketing could be done through digital and social media platforms to reach the target segments, and could be done comprehensive introduction to the ingredients, their health benefits, ways to use with right amount of quantities, and video recipes. As a further step, I might reach out to restaurant and hotels too.

4.5.2 How to develop innovation as a skills

I should focus on the raw-materials, and products I need to introduce to the Finnish market, and thorough analysis of them is vital for improvement of existing ones. I strongly believe curiosity and observation power in a person to become successful in any field of work. Different perspectives would be advantageous to develop my business plan up to the execution level. I think, I should try to understand the customer first, and his unmet needs. I find brainstorming from different angles is extremely fruitful and necessary to develop the initial idea. I always try to get connected with Finnish society to get their ideas on food preferences. This may help me in deciding customer segments.

Another skill I find to develop in innovation is the discipline to attend pending work.

It is necessary to work on innovation frameworks such as Business Model Canvas and strategies (which I have described in earlier chapters). Meanwhile, I think, I should start experimenting my idea in small portions, to figure out the areas that need improvement. Creative thinking is extremely important in the food industry, I should improve my creativity to introduce my products to the Finnish market with confidence. I should be focusing on new solutions for the challenges I am going to face and an effective management model such as an e-commerce website to reach a large audience. It is necessary to utilize resources efficiently, as the resources would be scarce, and would have to fully depend on the imports from Sri Lanka. The ultimate purpose of the business should be to approach innovation for earning profits as well as to achieve guest expectations.

5 SUMMARY OF RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of Results

The focus of this thesis is to analyse the essential key skills required for successful entrepreneurship in the hospitality industry. I tried to focus on five main skills to narrow down my research, naming leadership and management, financial management, marketing and branding, customer service, and innovation respectively. Under those five main skill categories, I have identified many sub-categories, and highlighted important theories, industry experience I am having, internship experiences, information on practical application to work-life, tests and experiments I have done, and challenges I have faced during the skills assessing process. The “auto-ethnography methodology” made the process effective for me to gauge my personal experience, results of internships, professional practices and make them align with academic research,

theory, and self-reflection. The research method has been a strength for me when reflecting my ideas and thoughts on a skill professionally.

The findings made me realize that there are many sensitive areas that I should pay attention to, and at the same time that many of the main skills and related knowledge can be developed and polished up to an extent over time. However, this needs continuous focus, curiosity, learning and updates, and practice. I managed to notice the tiny areas such as how to grab attention and understand the emotions of others in leadership. I understood the responsibilities involved in leadership and, I am happy to take up that challenge and lead my own business one day. I am confident of my customer service skills, however wish to embrace the updates of technology, and personalized service for a smooth run of my future business. I am very interested to work on innovative skills, as I already have a business plan on my hand to develop, and I noticed that I have improved planning and analytical skills during the process to a great extent. I feel more confident now to work on my own project. However, the presentations skills that linked with leadership and marketing, is yet remaining as a personal challenge, and the financial management skills are to be improved by working under an expert with an ongoing business. This made me summarize that certain skill development areas can vary from person to person, and should work hard on developing. During this process, I understood opportunities as well as challenges and limitations to rise as an entrepreneur. The biggest opportunity could be the interest of inhabitants to enjoy a new market of Sri Lankan spices. However, one strong challenge and limitation could be the language barrier in the area I live in Finland, and the limited population. It is important to learn the Finnish language to get connected with local customers, and can be highlighted as a way of adapting to the Finnish society.

To keep up with the reliability of the research, the autoethnographic approach supported me as a great tool. In my research, both the subject and the observer are myself. Throughout this diary-based journey, I have committed to present my experiences and knowledge truthfully and the areas to be developed honestly. I kept recording my findings on regular-basis, and reported

thesis supervisor regularly without fail. To ensure trustworthiness, I have provided self-reflection then and there where I discuss the theory, even with my biases and assumptions on commonly known factors in the hospitality sector. At the same time, I have mentioned the challenges I faced and the limitations most likely to be facing too. Throughout the process, I wished this research would encourage many other aspiring entrepreneurs in the hospitality industry to revise their unlaunched projects, work on business planning, and improve the skill areas that are crucially needed to stand-out in the industry.

5.2 Conclusions and discussion

“Developing Key Skills for Hospitality Entrepreneurship” is a journey of my life. Going through further studies on entrepreneurship during the degree programme with all the relevant courses, I started gaining confidence to take up the path to this thesis. This thesis has provided an in-depth exploration of the key skills required for successful entrepreneurship in the hospitality industry, based on both theoretical knowledge and industrial experience. This diary-based auto-ethnographic approached allowed me a confident, however, a challenging experience to regain the areas that have gone unnoticed to notice, and the updates, which is supposed to be touched before working on my business idea. This thesis ensures the critical evaluation of theory with the practicality, self-reflection of my professional background and areas to be developed to stand-out in the hospitality industry as an innovative and competitive entrepreneur.

The journey has been a learning platform since the beginning. The prior discussions, obtaining necessary approvals, and structuring were the beginning stages. Initial discussions on the thesis type (features of a diary-based thesis) and research method (autoethnographic) were two concrete bases that helped me to build up my research on that. Regular reporting, deadlines on tasks to be completed, going through corrections, and fixing them according to the instructions given by the thesis supervisor were important points to be maintained throughout the journey to accomplish the research deadline timely. It

was needed to maintain interest, curiosity, and energy for over a period of six months. The process was a great platform, during which I improved my professional competencies to a great level, mainly making me a confident person to work on a concrete business plan.

In conclusion, this thesis process provided me with vast knowledge and information, practicality and applicability of the theory with real world scenarios. It made me understand importance of entrepreneurial skills such as leadership traits, financial knowledge, marketing and finance knowledge, customer service excellence, and innovation, also including applicability, value of enthusiasm, effort, curiosity and learning. The thesis journey made me a confident person to work on my future expectation. Hence, I treat this process as extremely important and fruitful for myself to take up the challenge in becoming a hospitality entrepreneurship. However, I understood skills in public speaking and presentation require more attention, professional inputs, and a development plan.

This research may become a useful resource for aspiring entrepreneurs to identify necessary skill areas in-advance and work on business planning. The thesis highlights the importance of learning (including the Finnish language), and attending trainings, internships and workshops. The thesis draws the attention to personal growth of aspiring entrepreneurs, while making me understand the importance of creativity and adaptability to become an innovative individual in the hospitality industry. As further plans, I possess an initial business plan that would require step by step developments. During the next six months, I expect to complete the planning stage with experiments and wish to start the initial execution formalities.

At last, throughout the research process, I have paid attention to the written language, and the structure to maintain the overall quality of the thesis. I have used Artificial Intelligence to generate certain ideas to bring my findings and perspectives to a broader context. Furthermore, I have spoken and done activities with many people, however, I kept their identity anonymously to secure their ideas on businesses and respect their privacy, and also to keep up with

the ethical consideration while doing my research. I have presented all the observations and findings honestly and truthfully including the areas that I developed during the process as well the areas kept unsatisfactory during the period.

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APPENDIX 1: TIME TABLE

Week 1-2: Initial Research

Review the idea paper, reading out a diary-based thesis, and navigate through the updated situation on hospitality entrepreneurship.

Identify the required key skills for successful entrepreneurship in general.

Identify the hospitality trends, where the skills needed to be tailored according to the rapidly changing environment.

Week 3-4: The Thesis Structure

Research and trial for the most suitable structure to deliver the idea.

Narrow down to a list of essential topics and sub-topics.

Composing the introduction with definitions and objectives.

Week 5-6: Develop chapter 3 and 4

Defining hospitality entrepreneurship, hospitality landscape, and hospitality as a service industry with theoretical aspects.

Insights on each topic and sub-topics based on studies and personal experience.

Meeting with the thesis supervisor to get feedback on the work completed as of the 6th week.

Week 7-8:

Defining leadership management, theories and frameworks of leadership management and 06 essential leadership skills.

Insight on each sub-topic, reflection and discussion of what I have learned, and activities carried out to see into the practicality and to develop the initial stages of leadership management.

Week 9-10:

Second meeting with the thesis supervisor.

Review the leadership management theory with personal reflection again and did some practical exercises – listing down likes and dislikes, same exercise with the family and friends.
Started structuring financial management chapter.

Week 11-12:
Work on theoretical frame-work and personal reflection.
Reviewed financial chapter of “Creating a niche market for Sri Lankan and Indonesian Batik in Finnish market as a cultural exchange”.
Started structuring marketing and branding chapter.

Week 13-14:
Work on theoretical frame-work and personal reflection of marketing and branding.
Reviewed the business planning chapter of the “Creating a niche market”, and revised the qualitative research part to enhance the “Identify the customer behaviour”
Moved to customer service excellence

Week 15-16:
Work on theoretical frame-work and personal reflection of innovation.
Started working on the structure of the innovation.
Developed the innovation plan of the business plan “Introducing Sri Lankan batik and spices to the Finnish market”.

Week 17-18
Moved to summary of results and conclusion, and abstract.
Revising for errors and mistakes
Fixing of referencing