

Developing and Presenting a Leadership Case Study: Inspiring Leaders 2013/2014

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Case Study Background

We agreed that this Leadership Programme case study would focus on the issues associated with leading an inter-disciplinary, Cross-School, Fusion funded research and development project. While this project is led by and primarily of interest to Phil, we recognised that there is a physical space, estates dimension to the location of cross-School (and cross-campus) research collaborations where colleagues habitually inhabit professional 'territories'.

Steve also had an interest with a previous career background in collaborative working across multiple teams at dispersed locations. He also had links with the management of the SUBU managers and was aware of developments related to student drinking and entertainment venues such as The Old Fire Station. In this context, Steve arranged a meeting with SUBU's Alan Dove which was very helpful in the context of the research project.

This project has presented leadership challenges. Although colleagues 'signed up' to participate in the research and development activities, securing their involvement in practice has been difficult. The project team all have numerous competing professional priorities associated for example, with Professorial responsibilities and leadership of an academic group. One of the team is also only in post on a 0.2 contract, though this has not prevented him from being one of its more productive members. The location of the School of Tourism at Talbot Campus and HSC at Lansdowne has also proved to be a constraint on our meeting. The sensitive subject matter of the research project (relationships between alcohol consumption, public health and tourism) has also had consequences for Phil's ability to lead a project that is subject to competing external agendas and political sensitivities.

This case study thus presents an opportunity to consider whether material covered during the Leadership Programme (and from other sources) might helpfully be applied in reflecting on this project in particular and leadership of inter-disciplinary research (that may also involve external interests) in general.

Research Project Context: Real Ale, Tourism and Public Health – tensions and opportunities

This project involves staff and students in Bournemouth University's Schools of Tourism and Health and Social Care in researching theoretical, policy and media discourses on public health concerns about excessive consumption of alcohol, alongside a focus on English regional, local and personal identities relating to real ale packaged and promoted as tourist attraction.

The project aim is to explore the socio-cultural relationship between real-ale as leisure choice and its association with regional and local identities, in contrast with Public Health concerns about excessive consumption of alcohol. The project also aims to establish how researchers, practitioners, policy-makers and communities can contribute to reconciling these apparently conflicting positions.

The research objectives are:

1. To examine socio-cultural identity-formation around leisure, real-ale and taste, in particular the trend towards real-ale becoming a marker of middle-class, tourist distinction.
2. To explore how real-ale is used to boost tourism, the hospitality industry and social and economic regeneration in selected locations in the Bournemouth, Dorset and New Forest region.
3. To explore the relationships between real ale consumption as 'serious leisure' pursuit and marker of distinction against public health concerns surrounding 'excessive' drinking
4. To inform policy formation in tourism, leisure spaces, licensing, public health and planning.

The project was funded under the Fusion 'Co-Creation' strand and formally started on the 1st January 2014 and is scheduled to complete 1st October 2014. However, work is on-going and will continue beyond this time period.

The aims and objectives are on reflection, over-ambitious for the purposes of its completion during a 9 month funded Fusion project. Its subject is of long-term academic, policy and public concern and interest. Imposing BU timescales on external partners was not achievable. However, outcomes and outputs have been achieved as set out below.

Project outcomes and outputs

The End of Award report submitted Thursday 11th September noted that the project activity includes writing and submitting articles for publication, drafting bids for research funding and developing relationships with key stakeholders (including students) concerned with alcohol, tourism and public health locally and nationally. This work is on-going and will continue beyond the formal FIF end date of 1st October 2014.

We noted that progress with external relationship building has been tentative and gradual. It has been necessary to time our approach to both Public Health and Tourism agencies in Bournemouth to coincide with their emerging agendas and in view of potential sensitivities. In Public Health, for example there is interest in shifting the balance of its work from targeted specialist treatment for 'dependent drinkers' to more preventive, educational work, including among tourists though this is a sensitive issue for the tourism industry.

The School of Tourism has close working relationships with Bournemouth Borough Council's Tourism Department and with other key interest groups in the town's tourism 'trade' through the National Coastal Tourism Academy (NCTA). However, raising 'difficult' issues such as 'binge drinking', the Night Time Economy (NTE), public order etc. is challenging for some tourism sector actors in Bournemouth who are cautious in confronting critical social issues (and their potential for generating 'negative' media coverage). However, the recent move of Public Health into the local authority does represent an opportunity as shared interests and (local) political priorities are likely to become more coincident, for example with (some) tourism actors being keen to demonstrate 'best practice' in the management of stag and hen party visitors to the town, and in the diversification of the NTE 'offer'.

The report noted the meetings held with representatives of external agencies in tourism and public health and also with a PhD candidate whose work relates to our project.

We observed that project *outcomes* are on-going and complex and that we will continue to develop those relationships and make progress in a timely manner.

We reported project *outputs* as including one article to date that can be attributed to the project:

Haydock, W. (2014) The 'civilising' effect of a 'balanced' night-time economy for 'better people': Class and the cosmopolitan limit in the consumption and regulation of alcohol in Bournemouth, *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events*, 6:2, 172-185, DOI:[10.1080/19407963.2014.900989](https://doi.org/10.1080/19407963.2014.900989)

We also reported that Phil is working with MSc Tourism Management student, Maiko Izuka whose dissertation addressed real ale festivals, tourism and identity. A literature review has been drafted as a basis for at least 2 articles.

A research bid was submitted to Leverhulme in collaboration with Leeds Metropolitan and Coventry Universities, *From tickers to hipsters: Real-ale, leisure, tourism and local identities*. This was unfortunately unsuccessful. We will re-consider re-submission in light of reviewer feedback. We are also considering submitting a proposal with a stronger public health emphasis to the European Foundation for Alcohol Research <http://www.erab.org/> with their next call anticipated in April 2015. Initial discussions have taken place with Ana Maria Munar at University of Copenhagen Business School on a collaborative bid EU on 'Beer Tourism'.

We will submit at least 2 papers to the Annual Conference of the Leisure Studies Association Conference to be held at BU July 2015.

The project has therefore generated outcomes and outputs though these are very much work-in-progress. We are now at a point where the research team needs to decide whether it continues to work together as a collaborative or on a more individualistic basis. If the former, how may I reflect on leadership of the project to date and, potentially in the future?

Reflection

I briefly reviewed some of the materials presented and articles recommended through the Leadership Programme. Examples of these are listed in the references below. Unfortunately, I did not find much that was relevant for this case study. While topics such as 'emotional intelligence' and models such as Belbin's on team development may be of some broad, generic interest in business management and HRM leadership contexts (and often taught to undergraduate management students), I found such material not to be helpful in this context.

However, 2 sources that did prove interesting in reflecting on leading inter-disciplinary research teams were a presentation by Ockene (2005) and 'A Short Guide to Leading Interdisciplinary Initiatives', published by the Institute for the Study of Science, Technology and Innovation (ISSTI) by Meagher, Lyall, Bruce, and Marsden (2011).

Ockene's presentation suggests that the benefits of researchers working in inter-disciplinary teams include:

- Exploring different facets of a question
- Providing diverse viewpoints looking at reality and higher levels of explanatory power
- Developing innovative approaches for combining skills, methods and disciplines to accelerate discovery
- Enhancing the growth of individuals

All of these points resonate in the context of this research which features 'parallel' literature and approaches.

Ockene also argues that an effective inter-disciplinary research team:

- *Agrees* on and commits to shared goals, objectives, roles and responsibilities, and how it will work together
- *Communicates* well and appreciates differences
- *Expects* members to be accountable, responsible, and prepared.
- *Shares* information, perspectives, and progress.

Again, these points are all relevant to my experience. The team has attempted to reflect these features though with room for improvement.

Regarding inter-disciplinary research team leadership, Ockene considers that good leaders:

- Communicate well
- Are enthusiastic and committed to a goal
- Draw on each member's strengths
- Respect others
- Establish direction
- Have skills in group dynamics
- Build trust and confidence

On reflection, I believe that I display these ideal traits to an extent, though establishing a clear direction could have been done better.

She also argues that the norms for working together need to be established and that these include:

- How will we communicate with each other?
- How will we make decisions?
- How will we resolve conflict?
- What decisions are individual ones and what are team decisions?
- How often will we meet?
- Will we keep minutes?
- What are members' responsibilities?

Here, I believe that I could have done more to lay ground rules and protocols. These responsibilities were arguably under-specified from the outset.

I also invited research team colleagues to reply briefly to the following questions:

1. How can this project be best led?
2. How does project connect with your personal research agenda and programme?

3. In what ways are you constrained from participating in this project?

One response was received (from the colleague employed on a 0.2 contract) as follows:

1. How can this project be best led?

“I think the key is to have all 'team' members contributing, to help shape the research, and that means everyone having input into setting the processes and outcomes. However, I think it does need someone who is named in order for actions to be clearly defined and carried through. This should simply be one lead member of the team (this is yourself, it seems to me, as lead on the bid)”.

2. How does project connect with your personal research agenda and programme?

“This connects very well as a development of my previous research, which focused on drinking and distinction within the night-time economy. This research should broaden out those same themes and interests to look at another group of drinkers: older, real ale consumers. The links with tourism and leisure and public health are also a close fit with my previous academic work (which looked at alcohol from a perspective that fitted with leisure studies) and my current professional role (as a commissioner of health-based drug and alcohol treatment services)”.

3. In what ways are you constrained from participating in this project?

“The simple constraint is time. I am on a one-day a week contract with other commitments, meaning that the amount of time I can solidly dedicate to this project for sustained periods is limited”.

Lessons learned and scope for improvement

A point raised by Meagher, Lyall, Bruce, and Marsden (2011) concerning the development of personal leadership capacity in inter-disciplinary research initiatives reflects my experience, ‘...a feeling of loneliness at the top intensified by possible disconnection or lack of engagement by team members; the challenge of juggling the inherent (potentially creative) ‘messiness’ of inter-disciplinarity with the need to develop meaningful synergy and realistic but tangible results’.

They also observe that, ‘a leader is helped most by on-going self-reflection that takes place throughout an initiative...Reflective leaders can learn by doing. *Formative evaluation and/or utilisation of a ‘critical friend’ can provide a useful mirror for the leader, as well as a sensitive way of tracking processes and interactions crucial to the unfolding of an initiative.*’ I have highlighted this point as I believe that the designation of ‘critical friend’ would have been very helpful. I suggest that such a role could be incorporated within Fusion project processes, involving the Professoriate in a mentoring capacity.

Further useful remarks made by Meagher, Lyall, Bruce, and Marsden (2011) include that, ‘both formal and informal steps need to be set in motion by the leader’, who also needs to identify and delegate responsibilities.’ However, ‘each member of the team, whether an established or early career researcher or a stakeholder, should understand clearly that they have roles to play and responsibilities to meet.’

In conclusion, Meagher, Lyall, Bruce, and Marsden (2011) make helpful recommendations for leadership at the critical *early stage* of an inter-disciplinary research initiative:

- Developing an appropriate focus around an informed definition of genuine inter-disciplinarity
- Selecting the right people for the team
- Planning
- Involving stakeholders early on

In the context of this project, I believe that I could have provided clearer direction on the latter 2 points.

Meagher, Lyall, Bruce, and Marsden (2011) also argue that leadership functions *throughout* an inter-disciplinary research initiative need to involve:

- Developing and maintaining effective communication mechanisms and common understanding
- On-going mechanisms for building relationships, teamwork and networking
- Recognising (and adjusting to) the extensive time and effort taken by inter-disciplinarity
- Effective management, so that tasks and also ultimate 'products' result
- Setting a tone and developing a team culture that fosters inter-disciplinarity

All of these points are very sensible and relevant. I propose that BU addresses the 'mechanisms' to facilitate leadership of inter-disciplinary research initiatives as formal part of Fusion processes.

The above lessons should next be considered in terms of the facilities that the University is providing under the Fusion banner, particularly with respect to the utility of the New Academic Building and subsequently Labs 1 (and 2). Understanding at grass roots level how academic leaders will be able to benefit from space and facilities that promote collaborative effort and assist in overcoming the barriers referred to, particularly the top 2 bullets from Meagher et al, above will be important.

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