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Authenticating the Learning Environment

The research documented in this paper argues that the authentic learning environment is achievable through "academic practitioners" who can ground business education and research within practice. A culture fostering the academic understanding of the practitioner environment enables practical engagement with academic rigour. The case study illustrates specific examples from degree programmes engaging with student and academic voices, with a particular focus on the development of authentic learning experiences for tourism and hospitality students. Key aspects of business education need embedding within the development of tourism and hospitality curricula in order to engage with the tacit knowledge required by the sector through a holistic approach to curriculum development.

KEYWORDS: authentic learning, curriculum, academic-practitioners, learning environment

INTRODUCTION

Authentic learning has attracted considerable attention amongst learning theorists as a pedagogical strategy that educators could adopt to address longstanding debates around curriculum effectiveness (Deale, 2008; Remidez & Fodness, 2015). Authentic learning environments can be defined as circumstances that resemble the complexity of the real-life application of knowledge (Currie & Knights, 2003; Godfrey, Illes & Berry, 2005; Smeds, Jeronene & Kurppa, 2015). Within the context of business education, authentic learning could provide the vehicle for rediscovering the values of business education (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Elobeid, Kaifi & Lele, 2016) and providing a delivery mechanism for an integrated approach which assimilates the business environment (Benn et al., 2015; Currie & Knights, 2003; Steiner & Watson, 2006; Wang, Ayres & Huyton, 2009). This is particularly important in tourism and hospitality education in enabling appropriate management capabilities amongst graduates (Albrecht, 2012; Dredge et al., 2012).

Although there has been increasing support for the need to develop an integrated approach to the curriculum which assimilates the business environment (Barnett & Coate, 2005; Currie & Knights, 2003; Godfrey, Illes & Berry, 2005; Steiner & Watson, 2006), especially in hospitality and tourism education (Stergiou, Airey & Riley, 2008; Zahra, 2012), there is a lack of congruence between business practice and the university curriculum, resulting in business education becoming constrained with little relevance for practitioners (Duane, 2012). This has resulted in the encouragement to ground business education and research within authentic learning through a community of practice, which is concerned with the collaborative engagement of members through shared interactive tools, resources and knowledge (Albrecht, 2012; Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Elobeid, Kaifi & Lele, 2016).

This case study aims to critically explore the extent to which authentic learning can be embedded in tourism and hospitality curricula and the role of the educator in this process. In particular, the paper evaluates a business school's approach to authentic learning and its adequacy as an academic framework for teaching and assessment. It will be argued that a culture fostering the integration of both philosophic practitioners (Tribe, 2002) and academics as "academic practitioners" enables the pursuit of 'hopeful tourism' by engagement in real problems with real people (Pritchard, Morgan & Ateljevic, 2011, p.945; Sheldon, Fesenmaier & Tribe, 2011), while ensuring academic rigour (Busby & Huang, 2012; Fidgeon, 2010). The study aligns with Tribe's (2002, p.340) need to "promote a balance between satisfying the demands of business and those of the wider tourism society and world", through integrating knowledge from across different fields to encourage graduate competence. The paper demonstrates a pedagogical approach to understanding the practical, educational and managerial implications for educators, employers and students, contributing to ongoing debate around best practice.

The following section explores the key literature on authentic learning and curriculum development and highlights key themes which are taken forward. An outline of the methodology follows, detailing the research method adopted, the sampling techniques and data analysis tools used. An analysis and discussion of the key findings is then presented, and concludes with an outline of the significance and implications of the results and analysis. In order to draw the analysis together, a framework is proposed which identifies the necessary attributes needed to enable and facilitate the fulfilment of the academic practitioner. It seeks to demonstrate how the authentic learning environment is achievable and sustainable given the challenges facing academics including expanding student numbers and a need to focus on research outputs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to address the balance between vocational and professional skills and critical and analytical skills in Higher Education, Tribe (2002) advocates for the development of curricula that nurture the 'philosophic practitioner'. This would comprise vocational, professional and humanities knowledge and skills, including reflection and action, promoting a balance between satisfying the demands of business and those required to operate within the wider tourism world. This type of education focuses on the notions of 'knowing', 'doing' and 'being' (Barnett & Coate, 2005; Dredge et al., 2012), and underpins the debate highlighted by Belhassen and Caton (2011, p.1389) that recent public discourses on British Higher Education emphasies the need for "skills" and "competencies", rather than "understanding", "wisdom" and "critique", creating a disconnect in the higher education culture.

Current changes in the labour market and the economy create a 'turning' point for curriculum development with longstanding debates between higher education institutions and the business community acknowledged in the literature (Airey, 2015; Alexander, Lynch &

Murray, 2009; Duane, 2012; Grubb & Lazerson, 2005; Morrison & O'Mahony, 2003). Existing curricula is too technically orientated and out of touch to address longstanding skill gaps in the business community (Jafari, 1997; Orphanidou & Nachmias, 2011) and various attempts to provide a curriculum that can deliver capable managers failed to deliver its promises (Tribe, 2001). This is particularly pertinent when hospitality and tourism degrees are within Business Schools. Stein, Isaacs and Andrews (2004) suggest that Business Schools find the delivery of tacit knowledge, 'the know-how' a problematic area, noting that too much emphasis is placed on teaching practices rather than on how the curriculum is planned and implemented. This leads to authenticity of the curriculum being dependant on individual teaching practices rather than the learning strategy, thus privileging taught abstract knowledge rather than developing the higher level skills acquired through application of knowledge (Elobeid, Kaifi & Lele, 2016; Herrington & Oliver, 1999).

Building on this argument, Dredge et al. (2012) highlight in their research on curriculum space the importance of collaborative dialogue and shared understandings between industry and higher education in the design, content and delivery. Rather than recognising the need to develop distinctive learning opportunities, it is a matter of developing the appropriate 'authentic' culture amongst key stakeholders which is of concern here (Benn et al., 2015), through the development of learning strategies in the curriculum. This confirms Garvey and Williamson's (2001) call for the development of an 'open' curriculum which offers a more 'subjectivist' approach to curriculum design, allowing learners to take control of their own learning.

The above argument reinforces the need to reconsider the 'dominant narrative' or 'mindset' of knowledge development in the curriculum (Barnett & Coate, 2005; Bennett, 2005; Orphanidou & Nachmias, 2011; Pegg et al., 2012; Steiner & Watson, 2006). Consequently, authentic learning or learning-by-doing has found a prominent place in the

current education agenda as a pedagogical approach to effective learning and the opportunity to reconsider the dominant narrative around knowledge development (Lombardi, 2007). Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989, p.34) define authentic learning as "the culture in which a domain of knowledge is practiced". Supporting this, Deale (2008, p.57) describes authentic learning as "learning that focuses on educational activities related to real-world problems and issues". It is concerned with the rediscovery of the practice of business values (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Elobeid, Kaifi & Lele, 2016).

Attempts have been made to contextualise authentic learning into effective pedagogical models over the past 40 years (Airey, 2015; Borthwick et al., 2007; Tochnon, 2000) and this includes simulated learning and enminded processes. Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) developed a pre-empted model based on simulated learning, aiming to bridge the gap between the theoretical learning and the real-life application of the knowledge in the work environment. A critical element of simulated learning is the notion of the 'community of practice' (Herrington & Oliver, 1999; Tribe & Liburd, 2016). Students are exposed to the 'real world' via learning activities that seek to simulate aspects of authentic work conditions (Bennett, 2005). From this perspective, learning becomes intertwined with judgements as participants equate authentic learning within real communities of practice (Downes, 2007; Herrington & Herrington, 2006; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Weber and Englehart (2011) suggest this provides students with the opportunity to integrate their business knowledge with real-life social contexts resulting in students experiencing social responsibility through civic engagement, strengthening their sense of corporate citizenship, sustainability and social responsibility. An alternative method identified by Coghlan (2015) uses scenario-based learning, role play and collaborative learning in order to study tourism as a complex adaptive system. The assessment tasks include a reflective assessment, which enables the development

of critical thinking as well as practicing skills required by the tourism industry, bringing together academic rigour and the professional competencies required (Dredge et al., 2012).

Authentic learning has also been seen as an enminded process where learners are engaging with the discipline as an authentic activity. As Browthwick et al. (2007, p.16) highlighted, "authenticity comes from the connection between a student's experience and the disciplinary 'mind'". In the enminding model, authenticity is the notion of codified and tacit knowledge in learning (Stein, Isaacs & Andrews, 2004). On one hand, codified knowledge being the main form of knowledge imparted at university, while tacit knowledge enables learners to make 'on-the-spot' managerial decisions in the work place, providing a measure of a curriculum's relevance or appropriateness to the world that graduating students will enter (McKenzie et al., 2002). Key learning elements considered to be part of the real world include, for example, learner, classroom activities, discipline knowledge and the profession (Van Oers & Wardekker, 1999; Whitelaw & Wrathall, 2015). This explicit view of authentic learning is also highlighted in Tochon's (2000) mode of authentic learning situations. In this model, the term authenticity is perceived as intersections of the situated lived experiences (of the students) and the disciplinary 'mind', expressed through planned and enacted pedagogical contexts and events. Authentic learning becomes evident through the process of 'enminding' learning activities with the historic mind of the discipline (Stein, Isaacs & Andrews, 2004). As Borthwick et al. (2007, p.17) argued, learners should be engaged in authentic reflective activities about the discipline and individual knowledge necessary to produce "shifts in self-knowledge and in the discipline". Therefore, authentic learning acts as a socially interactive and reflective process, as in the simulated learning process, that guides and promotes learners thinking (Airey, 2015; Belhassen & Caton, 2011; Coghlan, 2015; Nicaise, Gibney & Crane, 2000).

Authentic learning intentionally integrates knowledge and practice as 'portable skills' that enable students to transfer knowledge, synthesis and judgement making from one business context to another (Lombardi, 2007). To achieve this, there is a need to foster a culture of both practical engagement and academic rigour in business curricula (Tochon, 2000). Learning is not only about developing knowledge within educational institutions, but also a process of reinventing, refreshing and renewing the culture within communities of practice. As Van Oers and Wardekker (1999) argued, communities of practice are not static, learning has the potential to be simultaneously related to the process of authenticating personal learning and the community of practice or discipline. Therefore, authentic learning means learning to participate from a personal sense within culturally bound, often pre-set, meaning structures (Leont'ev, 1978), much of which is heavily Western orientated (Airey, 2015). However, the community of practice can quickly become inauthentic as the real-world 'natural' experience is often artificial or staged within the institution (Stein, Isaacs & Andrews, 2004). To keep the balance between what is meaningful to students and appropriate for the community of practice, the context is often challenging for curriculum designers, inviting a combination of practice knowledge and academic rigour (Borthwick et al., 2007).

Learning researchers have distilled authentic learning into a number of design elements and approaches which allow educators either to embed authenticity into the curriculum through special units or part of the course assessment and feedback process (Altomote et al., 2016; Reeves, Herrington & Oliver, 2005). Authentic learning could be embedded in the curriculum through a number of learning strategies, including capstone experiences which combine business subject areas together into a case study or an industry-based project (Athavale, Davis & Myring, 2008; Bailey, Oliver & Townsend, 2007), situated learning activities (Croy, 2009; Herrington & Oliver, 1999), scenario based learning, action research and problem-based learning (Coghlan, 2015; Lombardi, 2007; Weber & Englehart,

2011; Whitelaw & Wrathall, 2015). Lombardi (2007) argues that critical to the successful implementation of authentic practices is the assessment context. The assessment methods should be linked with the programme outcomes and the learning strategy (Creme, 2005) as well as considering issues of engagement and consistency in design (Borthwick et al., 2007; Rule, 2006; Zahra, 2012). This confirms Yeoman's (2012) reflective research on authentic learning that assessment should stimulate creative and critical skills through action research and students ability to construct and negotiate knowledge. Additionally, Stinson and Milter (1996) suggest that it is the faculty attitude, capability and orientation that has an impact on a 'doing it for real' basis of business learning for students.

For most faculty members it is the emphasis on disciplinary expertise resulting in lecture/discussion type teaching, demonstrating Stein, Isaacs and Andrews (2004) notion of 'codified' knowledge. This confirms Lowden et al.'s (2011) argument that current cultures in many institutions reward research activities and underestimate the value of teaching and other scholarly activities. In this process, the educator's role changes into a facilitator, 'guide by the side', providing role models of performance (Stinson & Milter, 1996), or problem presenter where they act as an knowledge-giver to provide 'scaffolding' for learners necessary to understand the community of practice (Lombardi, 2007). This requires suitable time for investigation, opportunities to detect relevant and irrelevant information (Young, 1993) and the educator's sufficient depth of practical knowledge (Albrecht, 2012). This links to Stein, Isaacs and Andrews's (2004) 'implicit' knowledge, which requires students to be able to reflect upon the outcomes of their experience. Additionally, Pegg et al. (2012, p.30) observes that students should be active partners in the educational process to help them to "better able to see the benefits of the curricular strategies adopted and hence better able to articulate their skills development when required". In a recent study in tourism management,

Roberts (2009) criticised hospitality and tourism educators for having limited or no recent industry experience and thus unable to enhance the quality of the learning environment.

Considering the variety of views and perspectives put forward in this review of the literature, the notion of engagement, reflection, practical implication and communication are dominant features of current critical thinking around curriculum development. Higher Education providers have a lot to gain from authentic learning through joint engagement with students, academics and employers. This would enable the development of a curriculum within a culture that acknowledges the importance of academic research, sustaining and underpinning opportunities of practical application and reflection (Alstete & Beutell, 2016). This raises questions as to what makes authentic learning effective. There is a suggestion that high levels of application, reflection and thinking are required by both the student and the educator in order to provide opportunities to activate skills developed in the programme (Blaxell & Moore, 2012).

What has become evident here is the variety of approaches for the implementation of authentic learning. These approaches attempt to overcome the tension between higher level academic skills and the practical competencies required by the business community (Dredge et al., 2012). A 'community of practice', therefore, emerges which is concerned with the collaborative engagement of stakeholders through shared knowledge and understanding (Albrecht, 2012). However, this appears to create a tension for curriculum designers in the need to simulate business contexts that are not static while maintaining academic rigour. If this is not achieved, the learning environment can quickly become inauthentic and staged, rather than being dynamic. This suggests the importance of the role of the educator (Dredge et al., 2012; Tribe, 2002), and also that of institutional culture in the development, implementation and sustainability of the curriculum and its links with authentic learning opportunities.

STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The methodological philosophy that underpins this study is a qualitative, interpretive approach. This philosophical consideration enabled the researchers to collect knowledge from parts of a phenomenon by getting inside situations and considering the actors understanding of everyday life within the Business School (Gill & Johnson, 2002). The basis of the interpretive approach is grounded on the notion of people studied being providing their own explanation of their situation or behaviour (Veal, 1997). Thus, it was important to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between academic experience and interpretations of authentic learning. Such methodological approaches enables the exploration of hidden components of authentic learning by examining situations and involving the actors in everyday contexts (Gill & Johnson, 2002). The researchers' role was to reveal and understand socially constructed perceptions through accessing the meanings participants assign to them. As Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) suggest, interpretive studies assume that people create and associate their own subjective and inter-subjective meanings as they interact with the world around them. As highlighted, authentic learning is a process which resembles the real life application of knowledge. This is a social process and its success is dependent upon a range of social, environmental and contextual factors. The subject of this research does not lend itself to capture hypothetical deductions or the positivism approach. Understanding a social process involves understanding the world of those generating it (Rosen, 1991). Therefore, an interpretive approach was chosen as the authors acknowledged the subjective views that the participants were likely to express regarding teaching and learning.

A case study approach was specifically chosen as the core strategy for this study, providing the opportunity to explore, analyse and interpret a single instance of authentic learning (Gillham, 2000; Stake, 1995; 2008; Yin, 2009). Yin (2003, p.13) defines a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-

life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident". A Business School in the United Kingdom was chosen as a case study in order to explore how an authentic learning environment develops and is sustained. Such an approach allowed the evaluation of the Business School's approach to authentic learning and its adequacy as an academic approach in teaching and assessment. By using a variety of resources and techniques, which can include interviewing, observations and documentary sources, case study research allows for a comprehensive and critical understanding of the circumstances and characteristics of a particular instance (Gomm, Hammersley & Foster, 2000; Yin, 2009).

Qualitative data in the form of a questionnaire to academic members of staff, and qualitative data relating to students' views and experiences, were elicited through a focus group. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select the study's sample and to generate data that could lead to explanations about academics within the business school case study authenticating the learning environment. Such a sampling strategy establishes good correspondence between the research question and the sample, with the objective of yielding insights into and understanding the phenomenon under investigation (Streubert & Carpenter, 1995). A sample of 51 academic members of staff was purposefully selected to participate in the study. A total of 24 academic members of staff responded to the survey (see Appendix 1 for the survey questions) representing a 48% response rate. The purposeful selection of research participants helped to ensure that the sample used in the study was relevant to the research question. With regards to the profile of the academic respondents, specifically their academic and practical experience, 42% of the respondents had previously worked in industry before joining academia. Of that 42% (10), 4 of the respondents had owned or managed their own business. In total, 75% of respondents had or were working towards their doctorate and 100% had a Masters-level qualification. About 60% of the respondents had

been working in academia for 10 years or more, 20% had been working in academia between 5 and 10 years, and 20% 5 years or less.

A focus group of three undergraduate students enrolled on a Tourism Management programme, one undergraduate student enrolled on a Tourism and Hospitality Management programme and two pre-experiential postgraduate Masters of Business Administration (MBA) students was conducted. The focus of the discussion was framed around the following key topics: teaching and learning, assessment and project work. Specific modules were chosen which embed authentic learning experiences in order to deliver foundational managerial and leadership attributes, oral communication, relationship management skills and work ethics in tourism (Wang, Ayres & Huyton, 2009). The focus group lasted 40 min, was audio recorded and subsequently transcribed.

The analysis of data is a crucial component of the research process and is arguably the most difficult. Bryman (2008) highlights, however, that there are no clear guidelines on how qualitative data analysis should be conducted. Given the nature of this study, the authors adopted a thematic approach in the analysis of both the survey and focus group data. Thematic analysis seeks to identify and describe patterns and themes within a qualitative data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Boyatzis (1998), who noted that thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data, reflects this. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that there is an absence of any clear guidelines around thematic analysis and consequently outline a framework in which thematic analysis can be undertaken which provides rigour and validity in such analysis. The approach of thematic analysis was therefore applied in this research providing a flexible framework adaptable to the research question and data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

From the data analysis process three key themes in the development and sustainability of an authentic learning environment were identified. These themes include the importance of organisational culture, the methods of enacting the authentic learning environment and sustaining the authentic learning environment. This section will focus on and explore these three key themes. In order to better understand the comments from academic respondents, basic information has been given regarding subject area and if the respondent has prior industry experience.

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AND THE ACADEMIC PRACTITIONER

For Stein, Isaacs and Andrews (2004) students are graduating without the ability to employ key business skills in managerial situations, creating an impression that business schools are not fulfilling their function of developing professional managers (Duane, 2012; Economist, 2011). When considering the phrase 'academic practitioner', the authors had in mind a group of academics heavily engaged with external businesses. The assumption was that this knowledge transfer between the business world and the University enhanced and developed authentic learning environments for students. However, the data reflected the opposite view, with 50% of participants noting that they had little or no engagement with businesses at the current time, and that it was not overly important in developing an authentic learning environment. This result implies that universities are privileging taught abstract knowledge resulting in the authenticity of the curriculum dependant on individual teaching practices (Elobeid, Kaifi & Lele, 2016).

In spite of this perceived lack of engagement with business, 100% of the participants, 21% (5) of whom are tourism and hospitality academics, stated that whether teaching finance, human resource management, tourism or hospitality, an authentic learning environment is essential. For example, one academic participant commented "the more real the experience

the better and deeper the learning becomes, particularly when combined with reflection" (tourism academic, industry experience). One of the important aspects of an authentic learning environment is enabling students to apply their theoretical knowledge of models and theories to real-world contexts or codified knowledge (Stein, Issacs & Andrews, 2004). In other words, authenticity comes from the connection between a student's experience and the disciplinary 'mind' (Browthwick et al., 2007; Smeds, Jeronene & Kurppa, 2015). Specific aspects of codified knowledge are those skills that a university education develops and includes critical thinking, problem solving, communication, teamwork skills, creativity, organisational ability, work ethics and technology (Wang, Ayres & Huyton, 2009). The application of this knowledge provides the understanding of Stein, Isaacs and Andrews's (2004) definition of tacit knowledge or the 'know-how' of management decision making which is often 'on-the-spot' and links to the notion of 'understanding', 'wisdom' and 'critique' (Belhassen & Caton, 2011). This includes oral communication, relationship management skills and work ethics in tourism. Students responded to the opportunity of engaging in the 'messy' side of application, commenting that:

> It has not only transformed my way of thinking about how groups function, but also the various operational and systematic modes of managing groups and the changing dynamics during the different phases of the project life cycle. (Undergraduate Tourism and Hospitality Management student)

The above findings confirm the enminding model, that the term authenticity comes through the intersections of the situated lived experiences amongst students and the disciplinary 'mind', expressed through planned and enacted pedagogical contexts and events (Tochon, 2000; Whitelaw & Wrathall, 2015). In fact, many of the academic participants align with this premise, understanding a theory is very different to understanding how it works in practice. One academic stated that "students need to appreciate that in practice, applying a

model or theory is not a neat, precise science, but very often a messy, negotiated, imprecise art" (management academic, industry experience). This quote illustrates the need for levels of application, reflection and thinking from both the student and the educators necessary to provide opportunities to activate skills developed in the programme (Airey, 2015; Blaxell & Moore, 2012; Tribe, 2002). As highlighted, discipline standards and an understanding of the community of practice act as quality assurance in maintaining a high quality authentic learning experience (Wang, Ayres & Huyton, 2009). One academic participant noted that "learning is about modifying and making connections with knowledge/practices that the learner already has" (management academic). Smeds, Jeronene and Kurppa (2015) discuss the importance of developing an enabling environment for students to see connections. Another academic surveyed commented:

> Enabling students to apply theory to practice is a valuable learning experience that cannot be replicated by case studies and allows students to get a real taste of their future roles and become employable. (Tourism academic)

Within the Business School, there appears to be an underlying understanding of the importance of providing students with the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in practical situations, particularly as the application can be 'messy'. In other words, authentic learning acts as a social interaction process that guides and promotes learners thinking (Airey, 2015; Coghlan, 2015; Nicaise, Gibney & Crane, 2000). Together with this understanding, there is also a common view amongst the participants as to what the purpose of a business school is. From the student perspective there is an acknowledgment that:

> The assessments have enabled me to develop my personal skills; I felt that I became a more confident individual. I found this a great opportunity to put my theoretical knowledge into practical experience. (Undergraduate Tourism Management student)

This comment recalls Lombardi's (2007) and Coghlan's (2015) experiences that critical to the successful implementation of authentic practices is the assessment context. Indeed, assessment strategies could enable educators to ensure a successful learning environment and foster open-ended inquiry (Rule, 2006; Zahra, 2012). Therefore, the Business School's approach to assessment allows learners to make the thinking process their own (Belhassen & Caton, 2011; Dredge et al., 2012). This quote highlights the effects of authentic learning on a student's perception towards assessment practices:

> I feel privileged to be a part of the success achieved by the University in initiating a project learning strategy for student engagement. (Postgraduate MBA student)

The notion of management as a profession and the need to engage with the practice of business is highlighted in the qualitative data, with academic participants commenting that "we are preparing individuals for the world of work and managerial roles within it, theory without relevance creates a vacuum" (finance academic, industry experience); "motivation for students to embark on a business course of study would indicate, in most cases, a desire for knowledge and skills that will prepare them for careers in the contemporary business environment" (management academic); "students need to be able to apply theory to practice as the majority of them will enter the work place rather than become career academics" (tourism academic). This view from the data is very similar to the points expressed by Bennis and O'Toole (2005) that business schools need to embrace the professionalization of management. Interestingly, the experience of working on a project that climaxed in a mini conference involving students and the local community working together enabled students to develop essential skills and abilities, with one student commenting:

> Such an event was a real turning point in both self-development and career prospects allowing me to focus my attention on my personal strengths and weaknesses and preparing me for the world of work. (Undergraduate Tourism Management student)

This appears to be an important aspect of the academic culture of the Business School with an emphasis on the final destination of students. There is a strong focus on the professional quality of the students leaving the university thereby integrating the codified and tacit knowledge base required. There also appears to be an understanding that at University, the students are actually taken out of the world of practice in order to learn (Stein, Isaacs & Andrews, 2004) and that what needs to be re-created is the "culture in which a domain of knowledge is practiced" (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989, p.34). This coincides with Stinson and Milter's (1996) observation that enabling the integration of 'doing it for real' learning experiences requires a different model of teaching based on a 'guide by the side' who is a combination of mentor/coach/facilitator and providing role models of how management performance should be enacted. As highlighted by one academic participant "it is essential in the way that business is taught, a doctor does not learn the craft by reading case studies or completing paper diagnostic tests" (management academic, industry experience). Traditional learning practices do not allow learners to self regulate and become independent contributors to the knowledge by gaining first-hand experience of the 'real-world' (Herrington & Herrington, 2006; Tribe & Liburd, 2016). Findings demonstrate that more progressive and student-centred teaching practices have been introduced by educators providing meaningful real-world opportunities for students (Smeds, Jeronen & Kurppa, 2015; Stergiou, Airey & Riley, 2008; Zahra, 2012). What seems to be evident in the data is a mutual understanding amongst participants as to the purpose, drive and culture of the Business School and curriculum development. This was primarily focused on what will happen to students after leaving the University and the linkage with their academic input:

> I think that an authenticated learning environment that resembles and provides exposure to current business practises, supported by appropriate 'real life' exercises, will enrich the student learning experience and provide greater possibilities towards 'rewarding careers'. (Tourism academic)

This statement by an academic participant appears to be embedded within a culture that accepts authentic learning environments: "it just sounds natural to me" (tourism academic, industry experience) and "we have a vocational orientation at this University" (finance academic, industry experience). This seems to go beyond the idea of business engagement alone, although seen by the academic participants "as essential to maintain currency and appropriateness" (tourism academic). It appears to be the integration of the underlying culture within the Business School and its integration with the wider stakeholders of academics, businesses and students (Benn et al., 2015; Dredge et al., 2012). It is this integration that students praise highly, "working with real companies was quite challenging but at the same time a great experience and one in which I learned a lot about myself" (Undergraduate Tourism and Hospitality Management student). This is reflected in comments by Tribe (2001) and Whitelaw and Wrathall (2015) that curriculum development needs to take into account the breadth of stakeholder values and should embrace tourism's broader role and contribution in society.

METHODS OF ENACTING THE AUTHENTIC LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The above section concluded that authentic learning allows individuals to become aware of the relevancy of their own learning as it was clear that learning activities adopted by the Business School mirror real-business experience and context. The findings from this research highlight a number of approaches which are adopted in authenticating the learning

environment within programmes of study. Project work with local organisations and SMEs, case studies, work-based activities, personal research and experiences were common approaches to authenticating the learning environment amongst participants. Such activities confirm Reeves, Herrington and Oliver's (2005) and Gupta, Goul and Dinter's (2015) argument that a number of design elements and approaches should be considered to allow educators either to embed authentic learning into the curriculum through special units or part of the course assessment and feedback process. For example, academic participants highlighted that the approach within the Business School "provides an opportunity to ground academic research", prepares "individuals for the world of work" by "consolidating the learning" and bringing "teaching to life" (tourism academic, industry experience). These approaches are reflective of the work of Weber and Englehart (2011) and Alstete and Beutell (2016) who argued that capstone projects, service learning projects, team teaching and integrative case studies allow educators to adopt activities which have real-world relevance. Interestingly, some academic participants argued that these approaches to curriculum delivery provide students with the opportunity to integrate their business knowledge with real-life social contexts. This was a key feature in academic participant's perceptions about authentic learning as:

> It should be a primary element in business studies to allow students to develop core competencies and apply theories to practices enabling students to test their knowledge, solve related issues and get a real taste of their future roles. (Management academic, industry experience)

Interestingly, work based experiences were highlighted as a valuable tool in allowing students to apply their theoretical knowledge to real-life scenarios. The value of project work in the development of an authentic learning environment, allowing for both practical

engagement and academic rigour, has been acknowledged by students. "Project work that is as close to reality as possible" (tourism academic) was seen by a number of academic participants as a method of underpinning the theoretical elements of their teaching with experiences that enable students to practically engage with current issues. As highlighted, authentic learning enables learners to take part in multiple interpretations, discipline tasks, real-world problems and simulations that are loosely related to the discipline (Belhassen & Caton, 2011; Herrington & Oliver, 1999; Lombardi, 2007). Other participants highlighted that industry related projects in which external organisations sponsor and engage in the projects provides a more effective form of learning. This supports Remidez and Fodness, (2015), Stinson and Milter (1996) and Tochon (2000) who advocate that business schools need to foster a culture of both practical engagement and academic rigour in business curricula. One student commented:

> Students have the opportunity to see concepts being applied in real life. The most fascinating thing about the diversity day team is the commitment and the level of loyalty to project deliverables. (Postgraduate MBA student)

From the student perspective, the concepts being applied to real life represent expressions and understanding of the community of practice (Elobeid, Kaifi & Lele, 2016). The role of situated learning where authentic context reflects the way knowledge will be used in real life has been highlighted in the literature (Blaxell & Moore, 2012; Herrington & Oliver, 1999). As acknowledged, a situated learning environment provides learners with the opportunity to reflect the way knowledge will ultimately be used where knowledge is not fragmented and simplified by the facilitator (Coghlan, 2015). In addition, findings reveal that projects lead students to understand about followership and loyalty to a goal, something that is easy to read but difficult to identify in practice. Therefore, the emphasis is on student

ability to express different points of views through collaboration and understanding of the discipline while engaging with civic responsibility (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Whitelaw & Wrathall, 2015). This links to relationship management skills and work ethics in tourism (Elobeid, Kaifi & Lele, 2016; Wang, Ayres & Huyton, 2009) as essential employee attributes. Work based experiences reflect Steiner and Watson's (2006) need for many undergraduate programmes to consider the external business forces such as political, social and legal factors. A holistic approach to project work was highlighted as an approach to the development of authentic learning experiences by academic participants. "A more holistic approach to project work, working with colleagues across modules to facilitate practice based learning" (management academic, industry experience) would result in a manageable approach to the creation of the authentic learning environment. Some participants noted that students gain immensely from activities such as projects with local businesses and placements. One academic participant, in particular, described the Business School's approach to authentic learning as:

> I feel that business must be seen holistically to encourage a learning environment that avoids seeing financial as an added value on to the rest of business. It is important to enable business to see the interrelationship of finance with other disciplines. (Finance academic, industry experience)

This is championed by Weber and Englehart (2011) who note that a holistic project which combines each of the business subject areas would result in an integrated approach which assimilates the business environment. The findings show a growing trend in establishing learning opportunities that allow students to be active partners in the educational process and enable them to demonstrate the attributes expected of a graduate from their course (Pegg et al., 2012). Participants made explicit comments about the need to articulate

learning and allow students to take part in professional activities. Such findings might address Orphanidou and Nachmias's (2011) question around the extent to which Higher Education prepares graduates with the relevant practical and professional skills. They particularly highlight that many tourism employers draw attention to a lack of appropriate management capabilities amongst graduates. For Bennis and O'Toole (2005), this involves the rediscovery of the practice of business, connecting with the wider debate of curricula development. This debate includes the incorporation of an integrated approach which assimilates the business environment (Currie & Knights, 2003; Duane, 2012; Steiner & Watson, 2006). The challenge, however, is creating a programme of study that can effectively authenticate this learning environment, which advocates that learning is best achieved in circumstances that resemble the real-life application of knowledge, while ensuring academic rigour (Busby & Huang, 2012; Fidgeon, 2010; Godfrey, Illes & Berry, 2005). This confirms Tribe's (2002) point about the need to develop a curriculum that nurtures the 'philosophic practitioner' which has vocational, professional and humanities knowledge and skills that promote a balance between satisfying the demands of business and those required to operate within the wider tourism world.

SUSTAINING THE AUTHENTIC LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

This research has highlighted that a holistic approach to project work is one method to sustaining an authentic learning environment. In fact, 48% of academic participants stated that they foresaw having to change their approach to teaching and learning in order to maintain an authentic learning environment due to growing student numbers. This is supported by Altomonte et al. (2016), Godfrey, Illes and Berry (2005) and Currie and Knights (2003) who suggest that a holistic and integrated business curriculum is needed. For

example, when asked about the sustainability of such learning strategy, one academic participant noted that:

> To adapt, a more holistic approach to project work, working with colleagues across modules to facilitate practice based learning which is carefully designed and prepared. (Tourism academic)

Aforementioned, there is a need to foster a culture of both practical engagement and academic rigour in business curricula which allows for the reinventing, refreshing and renewing of the community of practice (Airey, 2015; Albrecht, 2012; Tochon, 2000). For example, one postgraduate MBA student commented that engagement with an industry sponsored project throughout the year, where students are encouraged to draw on their learning from a range of modules, was exciting. Indeed, as noted by one academic participant, "the more real the experience the better and deeper the learning becomes, particularly when combined with reflection" (tourism academic, industry experience). From the student perspective, one student noted that "as the project manager, I had to manage the whole project development as this was the first of a series of events initiated to help graduates meet current challenges in their career development" (Postgraduate MBA student).

This results in what Bailey, Oliver and Townsend (2007, p.66) advocate as the "culmination of the student's studies" in which students collaborate with each other and engage in research activities (Weber & Englehart, 2011), such as a research investigation/dissertation and a reflective presentation at the end of their studies (Coghlan, 2015). Weber and Englehart (2011) and Benn et al., (2015) suggest that these approaches to curriculum delivery provide students with the opportunity to integrate their business knowledge with real-life social contexts. They add further that because of this, students experience social responsibility through civic engagement, strengthening their sense of

corporate citizenship, sustainability and social responsibility. However, issues of flexibility, time constraint and lack of expertise were highlighted in the study. Some participants expressed concerns with regards to sustaining authentic learning as a long-term learning and teaching strategy. As one academic respondent commented, "because of the pressure on numbers, large class sizes and research outputs it will become very difficult to engage in authentic learning activities. I will resort back to just using case studies" (management academic). This confirms Lowden et al.'s (2011) concern that the current culture in many institutions rewards research activities and underestimates the value of teaching and other scholarly activities. A key feature of authentic learning is about the educator's sufficient depth of practical knowledge and ability to provide student opportunities for practical insight (Albrecht, 2012).

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND IMPLICATIONS

This research has identified three core elements to the development of authentic learning environments within this particular case study. This includes the organisational culture that enables the development of an authentic learning and teaching strategy. Second, the methods of enacting the learning environment which develops from the combined action of all stakeholders, the academics, employers and the students (Albrecht, 2012; Dredge et al., 2012), and finally the need for a sustainable approach based on viewing the separate business subject areas in a more holistic manner. It is suggested that the academic practitioner plays a key role in developing and sustaining authentic learning environments which are underpinned by the organisational culture. At this particular Business School that culture seemed to revolve around the importance of graduates' skills, attributes and their ability to apply these in different contexts. There was also a focus on how students understood the applicability of their skills and knowledge within the context of the outside business world. This appears to

lead to an applied approach in curriculum delivery. In order to sustain this approach in a scenario of increasing student numbers, it is argued that bringing together the levels of practitioner and academic knowledge available within each subject area of the business school in holistic programme development, facilitates the sustainability of the authentic learning environment.

Discussions on curriculum effectiveness and applicability into the business environment are now more 'en vogue' than ever before (Deale, 2008; Lombardi, 2007; Remidez & Fodness, 2015). The study confirms longstanding arguments regarding the sufficiency of curriculum provision in Higher Education and the need to bridge the gap between academia and the business community. This paper confirms recent arguments concerning the need for an integrated approach with curriculum design which assimilates the business environment allowing learners to reassemble business knowledge (Alstete & Beutall, 2016; Currie & Knights, 2003; Godfrey, Illes & Berry, 2005; Steiner & Watson, 2006). Reflecting on such arguments, the study develops a platform where various perspectives on authentic learning and development can be discussed and debated. This is not to assume that authentic learning is a one-size-fits-all solution to vocational education. Nevertheless, it can be used as a pedagogical approach to delivering an integrated approach to business education which assimilates the business environment. Evidence shows that such thinking could bridge the skills gaps, enhance students' learning environment and support students' employability. The findings show that an 'authentic culture' could be used as a formula to remain competitive in such a fragile economic and business environment. Therefore, the study's methodological and conceptual approach can be used as a 'scheme of reference' to expand our understanding of the applicability of authentic learning in vocational education across various disciplines.

This study aims to further stimulate the debate regarding the need for 'job-ready' graduates in tourism and hospitality encouraging stewardship and professionalism amongst graduates who are global citizens. In order to make a difference, educators can pursue 'hopeful tourism' by engaging in real problems with real people (Pritchard, Morgan & Ateljevic, 2011; Sheldon, Fesenmaier & Tribe, 2011). Therefore, this paper argues that a culture fostering the integration of both practitioners and academics as "academic practitioners" enables practical engagement with academic rigour. The study aligns with the work of Tribe (2002, p.340), Dredge et al. (2012) and Altomointe et al. (2016) and highlights the need to "promote a balance between satisfying the demands of business and those of the wider tourism society and world", through integrating knowledge from across different fields to encourage graduate competence. The case study illustrates specific examples from both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, with a particular focus on the development of authentic learning experiences for tourism and hospitality students, engaging with real-world problems. It was found that despite differences in education levels and subject area, the students' perspective on authentic learning was consistent. This study supports the need for a balance between liberal, vocational and reflective curricula, aligned with Tribe's (2002) notions of a 'philosophic practitioner' and perhaps extending his notion to that of 'academic practitioners'.

The case study has highlighted the need to enable and facilitate the fulfilment of the academic practitioner. In order for this to be realised, and in an attempt to draw this analysis together, a framework has been developed which identifies the necessary conditions for authenticating the learning environment. The three core elements required are organisational culture, which is achieved through academic excellence, the enacting of active citizenship and a focus on sustaining learning and personal development as shown in Figure 1.

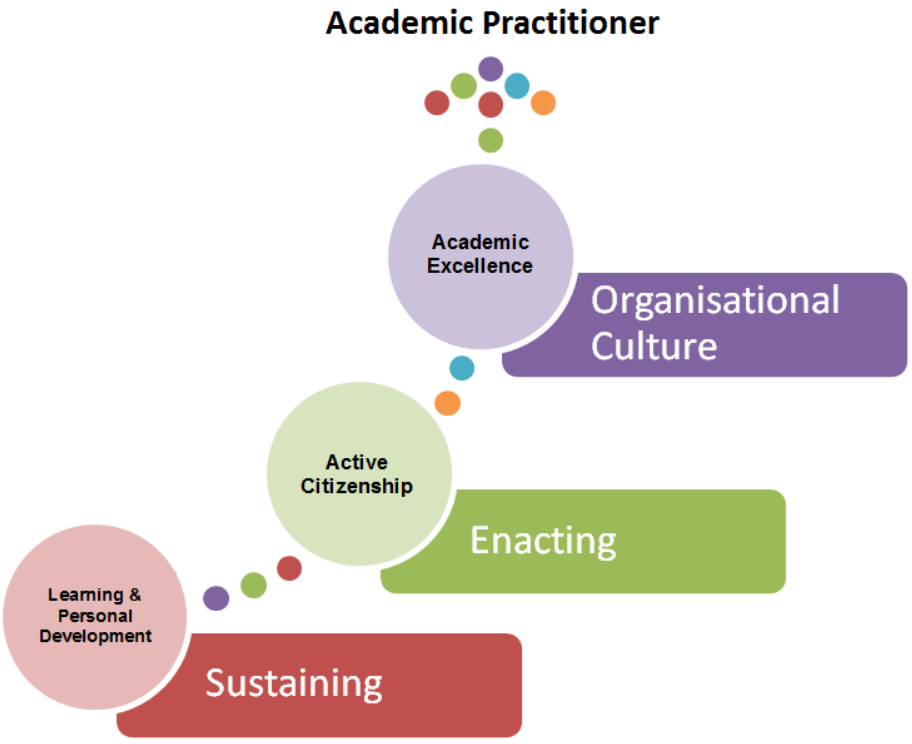

Figure 1: Supporting Elements of the Academic Practitioner

There are a number of limitations and research avenues that merit further investigation which should be acknowledged here. First, limitations usually associated with a relatively small sample size do apply. However, due to the variety of data collection tools used and the rich data collected during the focus group, this is not seen as problematic. Second, a single case study was chosen for this research in order to provide an insight to the themes identified in the literature. While it is recognised that the use of a single case study organisation has its limitations, the use of one case study did allow for an in-depth exploration of the development and sustainability of authentic learning in a small multi-disciplinary academic environment. This has provided a series of foundational themes from both academics and students which can then be used to develop further studies within small and large business schools to establish if the size and lack of multi-disciplinary teams affects the opportunities for authentic learning environments.

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APPENDIX 1: SURVERY QUESTIONS

Question Number	Question
1	Do you think it is important to authenticate the learning environment?
2	If you answered no to question 1, do any of the below apply? (You may select more than one response).
3	How do you authenticate the learning environment in your modules? (Please provide specific examples).
4	Do you foresee having to change your approach to maintaining an authentic learning environment with growing student numbers?
5	If you answered yes to question 4, how do you think you will adapt? (Please provide specific examples).

6	If you answered no to question 4, how will you maintain the authentic learning environment when faced with growing student numbers? (Please provide specific examples).
7	On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being no contact and 5 being highly engaged, what is your current level of engagement with local businesses?
8	On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being not important and 5 being very important, how important do you think your business engagement is in developing authentic learning environments?
9	Please provide a reason for your choice in question 8.
10	Do you have any other comments on authenticating the learning environment which you would like to add?