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Module cod:BMPT4018

Reflection Paper: Universal Epic Universe Roundtable Discussion

Summary of Key Points

The roundtable discussion on the launch of Universal Epic Universe brought together multiple perspectives on the complexities of managing a large-scale organizational project in the tourism and entertainment sector. The conversation revolved around several core themes: organizational challenges, effective leadership, HR strategy, communication during change, and the broader implications for the tourism industry in Florida and globally.

A major theme was **organizational restructuring**. As Universal Studios prepares to open a massive new theme park, participants identified several structural and logistical issues, including resource reallocation, leadership adjustments, and the integration of new departments. The need to balance current operational demands with the creation of a new park highlighted how resource-intensive such a project is. There was consensus that Universal would need to rethink how it distributes talent and capital, while also preserving standards at its existing parks.

Another focus was on **leadership styles**. The discussion acknowledged the importance of adaptable leadership—particularly transformational and situational leadership—during complex and evolving phases like pre-launch, construction, and opening. Leaders need to inspire, communicate vision, and manage uncertainty, but they also must be able to shift into more hands-on, transactional modes when deadlines or operational hurdles arise.

The role of **Human Resources (HR)** came up as well. Participants shared thoughts on how Universal can prepare its workforce to meet the demands of this expansion. Ideas included strengthening recruitment pipelines, implementing training programs focused on guest experience and brand alignment, and offering motivational strategies such as performance-based rewards, internal mobility, and strong onboarding processes. These strategies were considered crucial to maintaining morale and fostering a shared sense of purpose.

On the broader scale, we examined the potential **impact of Universal Epic Universe on Florida's tourism economy**. The group predicted that the park would not only increase

domestic and international tourism but also reshape competition in the theme park industry, particularly in the Orlando area. It could extend visitor stays, boost local business revenue, and attract more investment in hospitality and infrastructure. Some concerns were also raised about possible overcrowding and increased strain on local services and transportation systems.

Lastly, the discussion covered **change management and communication**. Effective communication between leadership, employees, and stakeholders was identified as essential. We talked about tools like town halls, feedback surveys, and digital platforms that could keep teams informed and engaged throughout the park's development. The use of internal "change champions" to promote culture and align values across teams was also mentioned as a best practice.

Personal Viewpoints

Going into the discussion, my perspective was mostly focused on the operational and financial aspects of launching a new theme park. I viewed the project as a major business expansion with measurable outputs: budget, construction milestones, and tourism growth. However, the roundtable changed my thinking significantly. Listening to others talk about organizational culture, leadership adaptability, and employee motivation opened my eyes to the less tangible—but equally critical—factors involved in a successful launch.

In particular, I came to understand that **leadership is not just about decision-making—it's about influence, empathy, and timing**. I hadn't previously considered the emotional labor required of leaders navigating major change, especially in a high-pressure environment like theme park development. I also realized that culture-building starts long before opening day and that employee alignment with the company's mission is not automatic—it requires intentional strategy and ongoing support.

I was also intrigued by the conversation on **regional tourism dynamics**. I had underestimated how a single new attraction could transform travel trends not just locally, but on a national or even international scale. The idea that Epic Universe could shift competitive dynamics with Disney or even influence hotel development patterns in the area gave me a greater appreciation for the ripple effect of such projects.

Evaluation of the Discussion

Overall, the discussion was constructive and insightful. Participants came prepared with diverse perspectives and real-world examples, which enriched the conversation. There was a healthy balance between strategic thinking and practical ideas, and many points were grounded in experience or academic models, making the discussion both dynamic and informative.

One of the key strengths was the **collaborative atmosphere**. Even when opinions differed, there was mutual respect and active listening, which made it easier to synthesize different

viewpoints. I appreciated how some participants linked their ideas back to broader themes, helping us stay focused and aligned.

However, there were also areas for improvement. **Time management was a challenge**, with certain topics—particularly HR strategy and communication tools—receiving less attention than they deserved due to earlier segments running long. Some participants also dominated the conversation, while quieter members weren't always encouraged to share. This may have limited the diversity of input, particularly from those with HR or operational backgrounds.

Suggestions for Improvement

To improve future roundtables, I suggest the following:

- 1. Structured Time Allocation:**
Assign specific time blocks to each major topic, with a moderator keeping things on track. This would ensure balanced attention and reduce the risk of overrunning.
- 2. Pre-Session Input Collection:**
Gather initial thoughts or questions from participants ahead of time. This would help guide the discussion toward areas of greatest interest or expertise.
- 3. Encourage Inclusive Participation:**
Use facilitation techniques like round-robin input or breakout groups to ensure that quieter voices are heard. Sometimes the most innovative ideas come from those who speak less often.
- 4. Follow-Up Summaries or Action Plans:**
End the session with a clear summary of takeaways and next steps. This reinforces learning and encourages ongoing reflection.
- 5. Incorporate Case Studies or Guest Speakers:**
Real-life examples or insights from industry professionals could deepen the discussion and connect theory to practice.

Conclusion

This roundtable on Universal Epic Universe provided a valuable opportunity to explore the intersection of organizational strategy, leadership, HR, and tourism development. It highlighted how large-scale projects demand not only financial and operational planning but also a deep focus on people, purpose, and communication. The discussion expanded my understanding of what it takes to launch a successful theme park and offered lessons that apply to many organizations undergoing change. By focusing on adaptability, alignment, and collaboration, Universal Studios—and similar entities—can navigate complex transitions with resilience and purpose.

