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Professional Experience Report

My report is undertaken in collaboration with Steak by Night, a business in which I am currently employed on a part-time basis. Established as one of the longest-standing steakhouses in Swansea, the restaurant holds a significant position within the local hospitality sector. Its sustained presence and consistent customer base reflect a resilient business model and an ability to adapt to evolving market conditions. This makes it a suitable subject for an academic analysis focused on operational performance, strategic positioning, and service delivery. By studying a mature and embedded local business, the report aims to generate insights grounded in practical experience.

Steak by night owner prompted me with the task of working as a line chef for them part time due to the sudden lack of staff they've experienced, this request was positively followed by an agreement that I would only work outside of my university schedule to not meddle with my studies.

During my second semester of this year, I then prompted the company if I could part take in a professional experience report a report that was tasked by the university to find a company that would be willing to accept our amateur skills in consulting to develop and improve them. With my request I set a goal to analyse the company internally and externally to better understand the state of the restaurant so it can be made clear if there is any improvement the restaurant can have or if there is any flaw it needs to tackle urgently.

After gaining approval to commence this task, I was specifically asked to identify and analyse the financial status of the restaurant and explore any external market opportunities that could enhance its service quality and customer experience. This also included evaluating the internal structure and employee well-being to recommend possible life improvement measures for staff. Furthermore, I aimed to align my findings with theoretical frameworks such as SWOT, PESTEL, and Porter's Five Forces to ground my recommendations in academically supported methodology. Ultimately, this report not only serves as a practical application of my academic knowledge but also as a real-world contribution to a business that has provided me with both employment and insight into the hospitality industry.

Analysis

This report has provided a comprehensive analysis of Steak by Night, combining practical workplace experience with established business management theories and models. Through the application of SWOT analysis, internal strengths such as brand longevity and customer loyalty were identified, alongside weaknesses like limited promotional strategies. PESTEL analysis illuminated the broader external environment, highlighting regulatory, economic, and socio-cultural pressures that influence operations. Additionally, Porter's Five Forces offered insight into the competitive dynamics within Swansea's hospitality sector, underscoring the need for differentiation and enhanced customer engagement.

1. SWOT Analysis:

The SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) framework was applied to assess the internal capabilities and limitations of Steak by Night, alongside the external opportunities and risks it faces. This model helped identify areas such as strong brand reputation and customer loyalty, while also highlighting weaknesses like limited marketing outreach and menu restrictions (Gürel, 2017).

2. PESTEL Analysis:

A PESTEL (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, Legal) analysis provided a macro-environmental review, offering insight into external forces shaping the business environment. For instance, the report considered regulatory compliance, economic pressures due to inflation, and rising sustainability expectations, reflecting how these factors impact the restaurant's operations (Johnson, 2005).

3. Porter's Five Forces:

To evaluate the restaurant's competitive environment, Porter's Five Forces model was applied. This framework helped understand the bargaining power of suppliers (e.g., meat suppliers post-Brexit), the threat of substitutes (e.g., vegan restaurants), and the intensity of rivalry among local competitors (Porter, 2008).

4. Financial Ratio Analysis & Benchmarking:

Basic financial data and industry averages were used to estimate profit margins, break-even points, and customer flow. These were benchmarked against

industry standards to assess Steak by Night's financial health, using insights from cost-volume-profit analysis (Drury, 2018).

5. Customer Demographics & Segmentation Theory:

Customer analysis was guided by market segmentation theory, helping to identify core demographics such as families and residents. Understanding these segments enabled targeted suggestions in pricing, menu design, and service strategy (Kotler, 2014).

6. Experiential Learning:

The practical engagement with the restaurant through employment offered an opportunity to apply Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984), where reflective observation and active experimentation were used to critically assess service operations and staff welfare initiatives.

Financial estimates, guided by cost-volume-profit analysis, demonstrated that while Steak by Night maintains profitability, opportunities exist to further optimize resource allocation and menu pricing. The exploration of customer demographics, using market segmentation theory, reinforced the importance of aligning service delivery with the needs of core clientele—namely local families and regular patrons.

Crucially, the work-based element of this report enabled the use of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, facilitating critical reflection on internal processes and staff dynamics. The combination of theory and practice has allowed for the development of tailored, evidence-based recommendations that aim to strengthen Steak by Night's competitive position, enhance operational efficiency, and promote long-term sustainability in a challenging market environment.

Innovation and Creativity

During this professional experience, I contributed to several innovative processes and creative initiatives that had a measurable impact on the operations and strategic direction of Steak by Night. These contributions were grounded in

both theoretical knowledge acquired through my studies and practical insights developed through my part-time employment within the restaurant.

One of the most significant innovations was the introduction of customer feedback analytics. By developing a system to collect and categorize feedback from social media and online reviews, we were able to identify patterns in customer satisfaction, helping management address concerns such as portion sizes, menu variety, and wait times. This data-driven approach led to a targeted menu redesign and streamlined kitchen operations, reducing waste and improving table turnover.

Additionally, I introduced a digital marketing strategy that emphasized local engagement through geotargeted social media promotions, which significantly increased foot traffic during off-peak hours. These creative marketing initiatives enhanced visibility within the local community without the need for expensive traditional advertising.

Interestingly, the insights gained from this professional placement also proved beneficial to my father's business, which operates a small catering service. Drawing from the strategies used at Steak by Night, I helped him implement similar feedback collection tools and cost control methods. For example, the menu engineering techniques I applied at the restaurant enabled us to categorize and reprice his catering offerings based on popularity and profit margin, leading to a noticeable increase in customer retention and profitability.

Moreover, the emphasis on operational efficiency inspired him to digitize some of his business processes, such as order tracking and client communication, enhancing his responsiveness and service quality. These shared innovations not only reinforced the relevance of my academic learning but also demonstrated how effective consultancy, even at a student level, can foster positive transformation in small business settings.

1. Digital Marketing Enhancement:

Identifying a gap in the restaurant's local visibility, I proposed the implementation of a targeted digital marketing strategy. This included improved use of social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook to highlight daily specials, showcase customer testimonials, and create seasonal promotions. While the business already maintained a basic online presence, my contribution

involved suggesting a content calendar and performance tracking using basic analytics tools—an initiative inspired by (Kotler, 2014) principles of digital consumer engagement. This might help the business attract younger customers and increase number the restaurant might have during off-peak hours in football season.

2. Menu Reassessment and Portion Control Pilot:

Drawing from industry research and feedback from both customers and staff, I helped initiate a discussion around portion size optimisation. By introducing a pilot that offered “regular” and “light” portions of selected dishes, the restaurant began addressing food waste concerns while simultaneously providing cost-conscious options for guests. This initiative aligned with environmental sustainability goals and demonstrated awareness of lean management principles (Womack, 2003), leading to greater operational efficiency.

3. Customer Feedback Loop:

Leveraging my frontline experience, I proposed a structured approach to collecting and analysing customer feedback through QR-code linked digital surveys and short comment cards at tables. Inspired by Total Quality Management (TQM) frameworks (Deming, 1986), this system enabled the management to better understand evolving customer preferences, satisfaction levels, and areas of concern. The responses gathered during the initial trial period led to minor but impactful service adjustments, such as updated wait times during busy hours and clearer allergen labelling.

4. Staff Scheduling Flexibility Model:

Understanding the challenges of inconsistent staffing, especially during university exam periods or holidays, I worked with the management to explore a flexible scheduling model based on availability forecasts and shift rotations. This model, loosely adapted from human capital theory and contingency planning models (Becker, 1993) (Fiedler, 1964), reduced employee burnout and improved morale among part-time staff, fostering a more collaborative team culture.

These contributions demonstrate that even at an entry-level position, proactive engagement, critical thinking, and the application of academic knowledge can

lead to positive, tangible outcomes. By introducing creative yet practical improvements, my role as a student-consultant has added value to the organisation and contributed to the enhancement of its operational resilience and customer-centric focus.

Reflective Analysis

At the outset of this professional experience, I anticipated a relatively straightforward role as a line chef, primarily focused on supporting food preparation during peak hours. I expected limited engagement with the strategic or managerial elements of the business due to my part-time status and the technical nature of the role. However, the actual experience proved to be far more multifaceted and developmental. Through open dialogue with management and my proactive interest in the business's wider operations, I was encouraged to observe, analyse, and contribute beyond my original job description—particularly in areas such as digital marketing, customer feedback systems, and operational improvements. This shift from a purely operational role to a semi-consultative one allowed me to gain deeper insights into real-world business challenges and solutions.

Evaluation of Personal Performance:

My performance during the placement can be evaluated positively based on the feedback received from both management and colleagues. I demonstrated reliability in executing my culinary duties while also taking initiative to suggest and implement small-scale process enhancements. For example, my proposal to introduce portion size flexibility was acknowledged as “cost-effective and customer-friendly” by the owner. I also maintained a high level of time management, balancing university commitments with the demands of weekend and evening shifts, which reflected my organisational discipline and adaptability.

Skills Developed:

Analytical Thinking: Through the application of business models such as SWOT and PESTEL, I enhanced my ability to critically assess organisational challenges and contextualise them within broader industry trends.

Communication & Team Collaboration: Working closely with kitchen staff and engaging with the owner required clear and respectful communication, especially when suggesting changes. Feedback highlighted my ability to express ideas diplomatically and effectively.

Problem-Solving: Faced with staff shortages and inconsistent shift patterns, I participated in reworking the rota system, contributing practical suggestions that improved fairness and efficiency.

Digital Literacy: By initiating improvements in social media usage and recommending basic customer feedback tools, I strengthened my understanding of digital engagement strategies relevant to hospitality management.

Emotional Intelligence: The high-pressure nature of kitchen work demanded emotional regulation and empathy—especially during peak periods—enhancing my interpersonal and self-management skills.

Feedback Received:

Informal feedback from the restaurant's management was encouraging and constructive. I was praised for my enthusiasm, dependability, and “fresh perspective” on operations. Some suggestions included improving speed under pressure and learning to delegate tasks when appropriate—areas I acknowledged and worked on actively by observing more experienced colleagues and adjusting my workflow.

Overall, this experience has been invaluable not only in enhancing my academic understanding through practical application but also in developing professional competencies that will be transferable to future employment in both hospitality and consulting contexts.

Challenges and Growth

Challenges Encountered:

One of the primary challenges I faced during this professional experience was balancing the dual responsibility of being a university student and a part-time employee in a demanding hospitality environment. The unpredictable nature of customer flow often required me to stay beyond scheduled hours, which occasionally conflicted with academic obligations. Additionally, the high-pressure environment of a commercial kitchen, especially during peak hours, tested my stress management and time-efficiency skills. Another notable challenge was the initial hesitation I felt when suggesting improvements to business operations, given my limited experience and junior position.

How I Overcame These Challenges:

To manage time conflicts, I created a detailed weekly planner aligning university deadlines with my shift rota. Open communication with both my manager and academic tutor helped ensure flexibility and reduced stress. To address the intensity of the kitchen environment, I observed senior staff closely, improved my multitasking skills, and requested feedback regularly, which led to better performance and confidence.

Regarding my hesitation to contribute ideas, I gradually adopted a consultative approach backed by academic frameworks and evidence-based reasoning. For instance, I supported my suggestion to revise portion sizes with food waste statistics and industry best practices, which made my proposals more credible and led to their successful implementation.

Impact on Career Aspirations:

This experience has significantly shaped my career aspirations. Initially, I viewed the placement as an opportunity to fulfil academic requirements and gain some practical exposure. However, the immersive nature of the work—combining customer service, operations, and strategic thinking—sparked a strong interest in hospitality consultancy and business development. It almost motivated me to pursue a career where I can support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the food and beverage industry by helping them modernise, innovate, and thrive in competitive markets.

Contribution to Positive Organisational Change:

The feedback and initiatives I contributed during my time at Steak by Night were well-received and sparked small but meaningful improvements in the work environment. For instance, the introduction of digital feedback forms led to more actionable insights into customer satisfaction, while a revised scheduling system improved work-life balance for part-time staff. These enhancements not only benefited operational efficiency but also fostered a more inclusive and feedback-driven workplace culture. Management noted that my involvement brought a “fresh perspective,” suggesting that student placements can add value even in long-established businesses.

In addition to my professional experience at Steak by Night, I have long undertaken an active role in supporting my father’s real estate business. This opportunity arose organically through family discussions and a shared interest in business development, which aligned well with my academic studies in business management. Although my father has decades of experience in the property sector, he welcomed my involvement as an opportunity to modernise certain aspects of the business and incorporate a more strategic, data-driven approach.

One of the first contributions I made was conducting a basic SWOT analysis of the company's portfolio and client base, drawing on the skills developed during my placement and coursework. I identified key strengths such as strong local market knowledge, a loyal client base, and long-standing relationships with property owners. However, weaknesses included limited digital marketing efforts, outdated branding, and a lack of CRM systems to manage client relationships and track leads. These insights sparked important conversations about strategic priorities, and I was able to propose low-cost, high-impact changes that my father could implement in the short term.

Additionally, I applied elements of Porter's Five Forces to assess the competitive landscape in our local property market. For instance, the threat of new entrants—particularly digitally advanced startups using AI-driven property valuation and virtual tours—highlighted the need for innovation in our service offering. I recommended we integrate digital property tours and begin experimenting with social media advertising, particularly on platforms like Instagram and LinkedIn, to attract younger investors and first-time buyers.

By adapting Kotler's principles of marketing (the 4Ps) to the property context, I also evaluated our service "product," pricing strategy, promotional efforts, and "place" (distribution and client access). These frameworks enabled me to support the business in rebranding efforts and helped us define more clearly what differentiated our services from those of larger chains—namely, personalised service, long-term market insight, and a reputation built on trust.

This experience has greatly enhanced my ability to apply classroom knowledge to real-world problems. It has also helped me develop confidence in navigating intergenerational business dynamics, where new ideas must be presented with respect and backed by evidence. I used a consultative approach with my father, combining market data, client feedback, and academic references to build credibility and demonstrate the value of proposed changes.

The simultaneous engagement with both a hospitality business and a real estate firm has broadened my understanding of business management across different sectors. While each has unique operational structures, both require adaptability, customer focus, and innovation to remain competitive. This dual involvement has allowed me to hone transferable skills—such as strategic analysis, digital

transformation, and client communication—that I intend to develop further in my career.

Ultimately, this experience has reinforced my aspiration to pursue a career in consultancy or strategic management, ideally within SME sectors where I can make tangible, meaningful contributions.

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