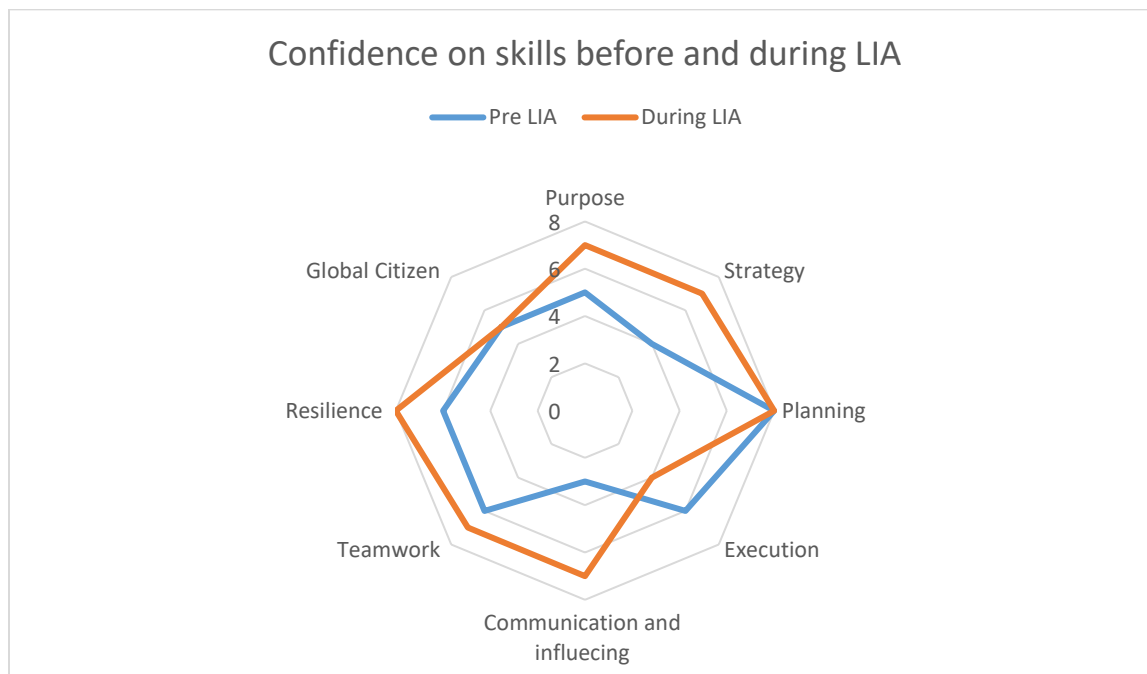


An essay on putting what I have learnt into practice: Mid-way through the project.

As outlined by the Foundation, the LIA period continues to challenge my previous experiences of: purpose, strategy, planning, execution, communication and influencing skills, teamwork, resilience and being a global citizen. By putting each of these skills into practice I continue to adjust my leadership style and alter my management behaviours. For the LIA I am leading a continued piece of research into how the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced attitudes and behaviours with the pedestrian environment, including conversations with community groups and council leaders. Although this is happening in a known geographical context, the extension of conversations about the pedestrian environment and pandemic out of an academic context greatly challenges my communication style and removes me entirely from my comfort zone.



The diagram above reflects my current confidence on the skills outlined by the Foundation on a scale from 1-10. Notably, my confidence on execution has decreased; I feel this is due to the complications that have occurred throughout the project and my despondency in this. I am someone who measures success by metrics, due dates and efficiency but when doing social

science research this is not always what matters. Communicating with people, understanding experiences and taking different angles are all progress that adds nuance and richness to the project even though they may not be reflected by an objective metric. Learning to cope with this and respecting execution of tasks in other ways continues to be a cornerstone of my LIA experience.

Strategy

Previous lessons from the leadership development sessions showed that this was one of my weaknesses- I have a lack of creativity and thinking outside of the box. I can be very route 1, and find it difficult to be flexible beyond this. Strategy to contact multiple different community groups was something I found difficult to be imaginative with, but I broadened my criteria and changed my priorities. This led to extremely insightful conversations that then had a positive impact on other aspects.

Planning

The importance to plan for multiple eventualities became apparent quickly; things cannot always run smoothly and it is futile to expect them to. I learnt that for me personally, to help manage stress having a rough Plan B and C drafted up can minimize my personal concerns and keep my focus on the task in hand, rather than further issues. This became clear within the survey set-up, what had planned to happen could no longer due to personal circumstances outside of anyone's control. Although this situation could not have been expected, there needed to be a higher degree of resilience in the plan itself to cope with situations like this. In response to this, my second plan had 'built-in' backup options and techniques.

Purpose

It is imperative to have a clear, set agreed goal that is being worked towards. By having a clear purpose, tasks can be planned appropriately and a specific end. Concomitantly, I found that by understanding and respecting the purpose of the project and where it fits into wider research helped to maintain my motivation in terms of stress. Also, the 'purpose' of COVID-19 is everywhere, almost inescapable. When this was communicated in a way specified to the pedestrian environment, people understood the research; the ability to translate the academic purpose to the community context is very important.

Execution

My previous skill of planning things carefully and having a clear timeline in my mind waning in the face of adversity meant that at the beginning of the LIA tasks were not being executed at the pace or breadth to which I wanted. This had a large impact on my decision-making ability as I felt that I could not perform any task perfectly, or how it should be. However, this was never the case, instead the tasks had simply changed and therefore I had to learn how to adapt- a task that I feel I am now performing well.

Leadership to me has always been founded on leading by example, and to me if I was not completing things perfectly then I was not fulfilling my role. The ability to broaden the meaning of 'leading by example' to encompass showing resilience through making mistakes, learning and trying again has helped to realign what execution as a leader can mean.

Communication and influencing skills

Stepping out of the academic world where communication can range from being succinct and concise to sprawling, insightful and at times argumentative I felt was something would be a challenge. Before the LIA, I had a low-level of confidence when communicating about my previous research to others in academia as I still had lingering feelings of imposter syndrome. However, the ability to relay ideas and jargon to a non-specialist audience tested my own understanding of the project and previous research and taught me that I have deeper understanding than I knew. This new-found confidence helped me to be direct and clear in what I wanted and needed from people; being direct is something that I have been told to work on throughout the leadership development courses and stepping out of my comfort zone I feel has finally made something 'click' and it now appears to be happening. I am excited to see how this new style of communication can help broaden my horizons once I return to the scope of academia.

Teamwork

As mentioned before, my imposter syndrome before the LIA meant that I was previously more reserved when sharing my ideas in team dynamics. The LIA has taught me that active listening does serve as a vital part of leadership, but it must be seconded through clear communication and at times being direct and decisive. The ability to converse with my supervisor as a peer instead of someone above me has been an odd dynamic to traverse for me, but I am gaining confidence in doing so.

The importance of support within teams has also been proven to me immeasurably. I always have aimed to create an open and honest dynamic in teams that I am in, but have realized during the LIA that I am typically not honest in terms of my stress-levels and workload with others. The ability to 'do it, delegate it or dump it' never made sense to me before, I simply felt that I must do it all, but this is not sustainable and the LIA made this clear to me.

Resilience

Having researched last summer during the pandemic, I felt I had a substantial locker room of experiences to raid when it came to maintaining resilience, but the LIA has challenged me in a different way. Compared to last summer where the issues were out of my control, this summer some of them were inside meaning I not only had to be resilient to the continuing pandemic and general life, but to my own mistakes and failures. This second part I found much harder.

Noticing a mistake, holding myself accountable, learning from it and finding a solution has proved to be more mentally taxing for me than the ever-changing goalposts that the pandemic imposes.

By following my thought processes more clearly and explicitly through my Quintax report, I have managed to understand my own emotions and reactions to adversity more clearly. By going over the material covered in the 'Personal Resilience' workshop, notably the workability range by Dr. Sally Rose, I have also been able to be more effective in my stress management and notice how theory became my reality.

Global Citizen

As a sustainability student, adopting a holistic, international lens is what I do in the majority of my studies meaning that I felt relatively confident leading on this component. However, the ability to converse with multiple community groups that have differing missions and goals made me re-evaluate which scopes to take and when. This is something I am enjoying learning, but currently do not feel I have progressed significantly on.

As I reflect on how I have been challenged so far in my LIA, I feel extremely privileged to have had the opportunity to learn such important lessons in a safe, encouraging environment. The leadership development sessions run by my University continue to be of increasing importance

as the scholarship progresses, and I look forward to re-evaluating my progress once the period is over.