

# Leadership in Action

# Reflective Report

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## Overview of the Experience

My leadership in action experience was entitled '**Community Network: Diversifying the Newsroom' with Tortoise Media**. The company is based in London, the United Kingdom and I stayed in the city for the six-week period to have access to their offices. My original intention for the experience was to use my academic knowledge and the leadership skills I learned through the Laidlaw workshops to aid in the expansion and diversification of the Tortoise Media readership and membership community in the most socially impactful way possible. The purpose of the community network is to reduce the divide between those who have power and those who do not. It is a noble mission; and one I soon learned was not so easily achieved.

The manager of the Community and Student Network would assign myself and the other interns tasks related to this goal. I was asked to aid with the administration of the network tracker; a spreadsheet filled with contact details of everyone who has been previously connected with Tortoise, or who we intended to contact in the future. These contacts included charitable organisations, universities and departments/societies within universities, student ambassadors, academics, schools and colleges. It was a complicated administrative task and involved a great deal of organisation to maximise the efficiency and clarity of the network tracker.

One of the main tasks during my time with the community network was to help to reduce the list of partner organisations from a list of hundreds to just ten main partners who would cover as broad a spectrum of interests and as wide a geographical reach as possible. We focused on ensuring all regions of the United Kingdom were represented, and that the most underserved communities had a place in the network. It was also important to engage with organisations who were already good conveners as they could expand our reach even further. The other Laidlaw Scholars and I had the unique opportunity to pitch new organisations to be onboarded to the community network as alternatives to the ones that had been listed. I chose Good Things Foundation, a charity focused on digital literacy and reducing the divide between people who had access to knowledge about technology and the technology itself, and those who were not so fortunate. I had difficulties in engaging with them because of timing issues (it being August, many people were on holidays) and a busy schedule.

For the student network, we intended to prepare for the new academic year by reaching out to already subscribed student members, advertising the student ambassador position, and attempting to organise freshers week events with student societies to increase Tortoise's reach in the student

environment. I personally contacted over 800 student societies in the UK to get more student members on board. This involved learning new digital communication skills, for example, Mail Merge and literacy with applications as Google Sheets and Slides. I wrote a draft copy for the student newsletter and for grant applications related to diversification of the news.

It was rewarding when other members of the company with whom I was not already in contact approached me with work that they needed an extra pair of hands on. I got to see into the working worlds of the partnerships and ThinkIn teams in Tortoise. I attended the daily huddle with the Sensemaker team (the daily news roundup published on the Tortoise webpage) where the newsletter was planned out and writing tasks were assigned. I had the opportunity at every daily meeting to pitch stories to the team that I found interesting. They gave us the space and the opportunity to learn how to sell the story to them which was in our area of expertise; I personally liked looking at the law news whereas the other scholar preferred to pitch health and science orientated stories.

It incredibly fulfilling when I was assigned to draft 'nibs' and a 'top' piece on the leading Italian prime ministerial candidate. Although the longer piece did not get published due to the Queen's passing which interrupted the media flow, I did have several of my shorter stories published on the Sensemaker page. I am proud to see stories and reports I had contributed to published to a readership of thousands. I was also pleased when my research on specific topics for the ThinkIns (discursive panel sessions) and other journalism pieces were received with thanks from my colleagues. Sitting in on editorial meetings with the Sensemaker team was a privilege and a great insight into the job of a journalist. I would constantly marvel at their adeptness in hearing a snippet of information and turning it into an valuable story.

As may be clear from above, the six-week experience in Tortoise was a varied and fascinating experience. From writing stories and newsletters, to organising spreadsheets and attending meetings I believe I got to the inner workings of a modern newsroom. Of course, there were moments of boredom and languish; however, on the whole, I found it to be highly stimulating and rewarding.

### A Final Reflection - once a sheep, now a shepherd

Starting out as a Laidlaw scholar in Spring 2021, I viewed the opportunity as a merely academic one with little expectations of the impact it would have on my everyday life. The workshops, researching experience and leadership in action experience were of course instrumental in guiding my development over the past two years. Yet it is really the people I have encountered during this time that have changed how I view the world, and how I now understand my place to be within it. I can

safely say that the discussions I have had with my peers and acquaintances have been more meaningful and powerful than they would have been if it were not for the Laidlaw scholarship.

I wanted to study journalism when I first applied to University. After receiving some practical advice, I chose instead to school myself on the law. This dream-come-true chance to work in a newsroom this summer was perfectly timed as my final year/post-grad crisis hit. Although this feeling of panic is definitely ongoing, I am approaching my next steps in an optimistic light thanks to my experiences with the Laidlaw programme. The workshops, provision of career advice and informal conversations with my fellow scholars have opened my eyes to the opportunity to take the lead in my career and forge a path that is uniquely tailored to my strengths. I can safely say that the Laidlaw programme has helped me to dream bigger than I could have before. It has also concretised in my mind that I want to add value to the world through my work, rather than to merely subtract value from the working world in the form of compensation.

The Leadership in Action experience not only involved working in a new organisation, but a new city. As soon as I arrived in London I was confronted with the diversity of the place. Some places and people felt recognisable, like home, and others were completely foreign. I could feel my brain expanding to acknowledge the woven and colourful fabric of the city. After a couple of days however, my sense of being overwhelmed was transformed into awe. I made great friends with the other interns in the company and we talked endlessly about culture, politics, the pains of youth and the meaning of life. We got out of the office and toured around London together which gave us a sense of perspective. It might go without saying but these chats with people over lunch had a more profound effect on me personally, and my work as a result, than the spreadsheet-orientated administrative tasks did.

The fact that we were all Laidlaw scholars made us trust one another because we knew we were like-minded people. Oftentimes, our chats would be about work, and how our position as Laidlaw interns made us particularly obvious and cut off from the rest of the office. Our little intern table was the most fascinating place to be in the office; we had come from all over the world and had wildly different lives and interests. It was incredibly valuable to see in real time how this type of diversity can transform and invigorate a workplace. We all left feeling like we want our workplaces to do better. I intend to carry this lesson forward with me in my career; and to ensure that values and reality don't end up out of step with one another. A workplace ethos begins to take effect at the ground working level before it can trickle upwards through the organisation.

Given my role in the Community Network, this personal development applied directly to the work I was tasked with. I looked at the Tortoise community with a more critical perspective to see where improvements and changes could be made. Tortoise's value system is incredibly astute and ethical,

yet of course habit and bias weave their way into daily company life. The virtue of youth is to be full of hope – and anger – at the world, and so I tried to channel this energy into the work I was doing.

One phrase that I remember distinctly from one of the first workshops is that often a leader acts as the mayonnaise; that in a sandwich of two different or opposing flavours, there must be something (or someone) who is able to marry the two and create a new sensation. Applying this theory to my own experience, I am eager to see how my interest in media and law can complement each other. A newsroom is a far cry from a lawyer's office. But both jobs tend to revolve around stories and the sharing of knowledge and power. A position in media or the law can be an incredibly impactful one, as we can define the narrative of our modern lives through both the laws we create and the stories we tell. In my view, it is vital that we all understand the responsibility we have in ensuring this narrative is honest and has integrity.

My value system has become a core component of my professional identity over the past two years. I have learned to defend it against social norms and laziness. **I see how easy it is to compromise values for other benefits such as money, power and influence – but no positive changes can be made in the world if ideals that should not be compromised continue to be so.** Learning to balance competing obligations and interests is the work of a leader, and this is work that I am eager to continue.