

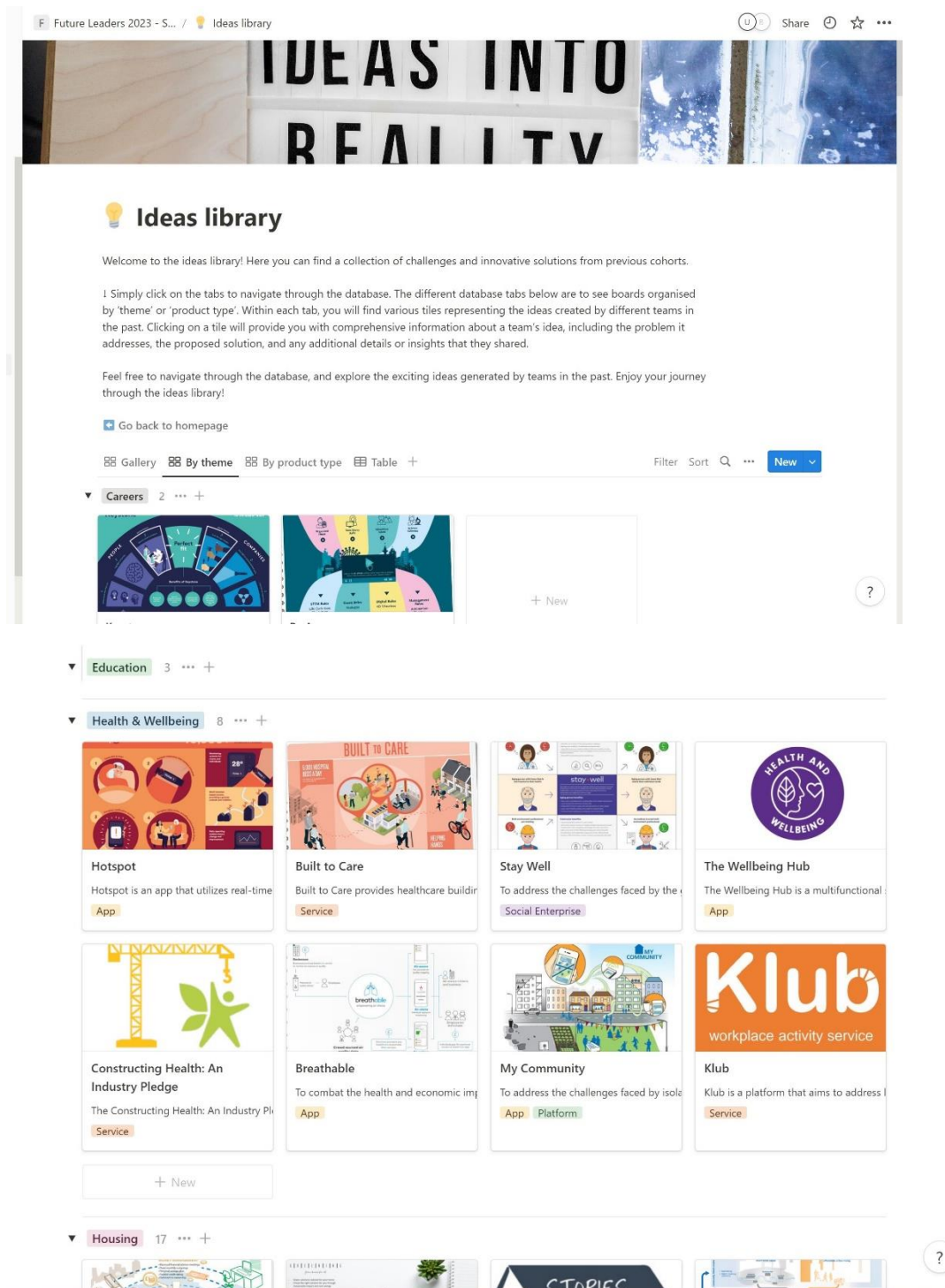
Leadership in Action 2023

Leaders for a Sustainable Future—Driving Transformation through Project Management and Environmental Innovation

Last summer, as I completed my research internship in the field of photoacoustic imaging, I realized the significance of the environment in which we work. Despite contributing to a promising field, I couldn't ignore the suboptimal working conditions, such as a windowless lab, garbage cans towered with plastic surgical gloves and cluttered spaces. This led me to question how world-class researchers can achieve groundbreaking results in such environments. Motivated by this realization, I decided to focus my Leadership in Action (LiA) project on the built environment industry.



For six weeks, I had the privilege of working with UK Green Building Council (UKGBC), a sustainable infrastructure charity dedicated to improving the sustainability of the built environment. I was situated in their Learning and Leadership team and my work centered around two key areas: Advancing Net Zero in the built environment and the Future Leaders Challenge Programme. The latter targeted engineering professionals with 5-10 years of experience, equipping them with the skills and mindsets necessary to address critical sustainability issues in the industry. During my time, I curated a collection of radical sustainable transformation ideas accumulated over the 10 years and organized them into a resource for the next cohort of Future Leaders.



Sneak peek of the resource product

Witnessing the Future Leaders Programme of 2023 was the highlight of my experience. I had the opportunity to engage with delegates as they pitched their ideas and discussed the future of the built environment industry, particularly their efforts in circular economy and moving closer to our net zero target by 2050. The networking sessions provided invaluable insights as I connected with built environment professionals passionate about sustainability.



Delegates pitching their ideas

Additionally, I delved into project management within the built environment industry. I developed an engagement and dissemination outline, along with a template and timeline based on projects at UKGBC. This framework ensured clarity and seamless execution of site tours, activities, events and panel discussions. Through these endeavours, I had the privilege of conversing with like-minded individuals who shared my vision and commitment to advancing net zero and creating a better world.

As part of my personal project, I expanded on an existing idea called Modpod. Recognizing the pressing issue of homelessness in London, with thousands of people affected and significant financial resources allocated to address the problem, a solution was proposed that utilizes the built environment as a platform for minimizing homelessness. Modpod entails temporary land provision by councils to investors, who construct sustainable pre-fabricated homes for the homeless. This initiative aims to provide secure shelter for 850 individuals, enabling them to secure employment with a temporary address. I then explored a circular model that involves collaboration between built environment experts, landlords and charities. This model repurposes vacant buildings into safe spaces, offering opportunities for upskilling and providing a network for tenants. Ultimately, this circular approach aims to reduce homelessness while positively impacting the health and well-being of those affected.



At first, the idea of entering into an industry with no prior experience was intimidating. The unfamiliarity and potential challenges that lay ahead made me hesitate. However, upon reflection, I realized that doing an LiA was an opportunity to step out of my comfort zone, explore new realms, and grow personally and professionally. It was a chance to challenge my limits and to develop resilience in the face of uncertainties. Throughout my time at UKGBC, I approached each new experience with an open mind and a willingness to learn. I actively sought out opportunities, take on unfamiliar tasks and collaborate with individuals from different backgrounds. Today, I embrace the value of stepping outside my comfort zone and embarking on new adventures.

As I navigated the dynamic landscape of the built environment industry, I honed my ability to lead by example. Through project management within the organization, I developed skills in organizing and coordinating multifaceted initiatives, ensuring all aspects aligned with the organization's sustainability goals and missions. This experience reinforced the importance of effective leadership in driving sustainability initiatives and shaping the future of the entire sector. The Leadership in Action project definitely has empowered me to drive change through project management and climate solutions, fostering leadership skills and a deep commitment to a sustainable future.

I express my sincere gratitude to UKGBC and the Laidlaw Foundation for granting me this invaluable opportunity. The knowledge and experiences gained through this journey will remain etched in my memory forever.

