



LiA Project Report

Oh so many problems!

Introduction

I went into my LiA without knowing what to expect. I was originally supposed to volunteer at a palliative nursing home for dementia patients in a small Danish town called Græsted. I thought it would be the “perfect” LiA for me given my summer one research on palliative care and status as a neuroscience student. I wonder if I only sought that opportunity because it fit so well with my background. I wonder if I really wanted to do it or if I felt like I had to do it. Alas, my Denmark visa got rejected at the end of May (halfway through my planned LiA duration, mind you) and I had a month to figure out and plan an entire new LiA. London came to the rescue!

I spent six weeks in the magnificent city of London, with a research services organization called FrameWorks UK. Their work revolves around helping non-profits and charities *frame* social issues in a way that drives meaningful change. They define framing as “the choices we make about what ideas we share and how we share them. It’s what we emphasize, how we explain an issue, and what we leave unsaid.” In the age of short attention spans, instant gratification, cancel culture, and rampant misinformation, you can see how communication is crucial. Little tweaks in phrasing have massive impacts in perception. Communication is the strongest way in which we can drive positive narrative change in society. My role as an intern encompassed a multitude of tasks, from administrative to research-oriented. I talk about the specifics in the *Outcomes* section but my main goal as an intern was to help FrameWorks with the tasks they were putting off or tasks they would not have the time or capacity to do otherwise. I learnt a lot throughout these six weeks, but the main leadership theme I want to focus on in this project report is problem-solving.

... Oh so many problems I encountered.

Outcomes and SMART goals

In my project outline, I initially set some SMART goals for myself. Here, I work through them one-by-one to see how much I actually accomplished!

Goal #1: By the end of the first week, I will build rapport with the small cohort of employees at FrameWorks and familiarize myself with their research standards.

This was done, however, I'd say it took longer than a week. When I first walked into our office, I was incredibly nervous. Since I was the only intern, I was also dreading how I would make small talk as everyone else was a full-time employee and older than me in age. What do I talk about? How long can one really talk about the weather? Pro tip: talk about the trains! And the cost-of-living crisis! British transit and weather will last you a solid 15 minutes. Jokes aside, over time, I built good rapport with the employees and felt comfortable talking to them about anything and everything - my weekend plans, career prospects, etc etc.

Goal #2: Over the course of my LiA, I will complete at least one comprehensive literature review on the mindsets of the UK public on a relevant topic.

This was done. Although I cannot disclose details, the literature review was broadly about political polarisation in the UK and surfacing the underlying reasons behind people's political decisions. I used a newspaper database called LexisNexis, ran my searches, and narrowed down results from 758 articles to about 40 articles. I then thematically categorized the articles, did some data charting, and produced a research transcript organized in order of narrative strength. What I mean by narrative strength here: the amount of times this certain reason/political mindset came up in British media. It was not the most methodologically rigorous nor was it meant to be, but as a guide, I loosely followed a scoping review framework. This literature review will aid in one of FrameWorks UK's upcoming research projects, and will primarily help in the development of an interview guide to elicit the most helpful responses possible. The research will be part of FrameWorks' broader Moving Mindsets project, significantly facilitating their narrative change work. Read more about [Moving Mindsets](#) here!

Goal #3: By the end of the fifth week, I will have developed a tool to track FrameWorks' impact, increasing efficiency from prior tools by at least 50%.

This was done, by the second week actually! This task was the first one assigned to me, and I was able to complete it by my second Monday at FrameWorks. FrameWorks essentially wanted a way to quantify their impact - for example, if they'd coined a phrase or keyword to better represent a social issue, they wanted to know whether it was being taken up in media (both social and traditional) and what that uptake looked like. I went digging and did a lot of research into the different media monitoring tools on the market, producing a spreadsheet of sorts with pros and cons as well price ranges.

Goal #4: To support my own research skills development, I will engage in at least 2 check-in meetings with my LiA supervisor.

This was done, and was so incredibly helpful. Sophie was my LiA supervisor and I met with her 3-4 times during my 6-week internship. It was a time for me to bring up any questions I had, whether they were about my specific tasks or general questions about FrameWorks or her role at the organization. Sophie would also liaise with other employees to ensure I was getting briefed on other tasks and was able to handle my current workload. All in all, very useful and fun sessions!

Challenges and Leadership Skills

Oh so many problems! I'll divide this section into two parts.

Part I: Challenges within my control

Going into my LiA, I did not know a lot about UK politics. North American and Middle Eastern politics have had me more than occupied in the last few years, and with the exception of a few internationally salient events such as Brexit, my understanding of UK politics was a blank slate. Thus, my literature review required a remarkable amount of background research. This process was time consuming – both in narrowing down the searches and in understanding the context of the final selected articles. Every article was talking about

a different political scandal so I had to read even more to familiarize myself with what each scandal meant for the UK at the time of the article's publication. All this to say, I can probably list every post-Brexit major political scandal in the UK! Surely, someone will do a trivia one day where I will be able to put this skillset to test.

Part II: Challenges very much not within my control

Coronavirus.... I hate you.... so much. As you may know if you've read my weekly logs, I got coronavirus at the beginning of my third week. The illness had me bedridden for a good 2 weeks and I returned to the office at the start of my fifth week. I had half my LiA catapulted into an abyss of misfortune. That is not the part that bothers me though. Having an illness hinder your progress is undoubtedly a challenge, but how you respond and adapt matters a lot more. And that is where I messed up. My supervisor checked in with me frequently, asking if I was on track with my tasks or if I needed to reduce my workload or extend a deadline. I felt inclined to say yes. I feared saying no: not because I was scared of what my coworkers would think (they obviously would not think negatively), I think I was scared of disappointing myself. I wanted to contribute as much as I possibly could and I just wanted to do everything possible to show I cared about my role and for the organization. And so, rather than recognizing my limitations, I assumed I would recover quickly or even work while I was still recovering. This did not end well. I couldn't meet some of my deadlines and had to drop a task very last-minute. Communicating this early on would have allowed my coworkers to prepare alternatives, and my behavior robbed them of that choice. Many lessons here for the future!

The main skill I strengthened through my LiA: problem-solving! It was nice to be given a lot of creative liberty with the literature review. I had to figure out exactly what methodology I would use and justify my choices, as well as work through articles with unfamiliar context. It was also really interesting to work on the media monitoring task! I'd never done anything of the sort before and learnt a lot about the tracking industry while conducting research. A skill I hope to refine and develop even further, given my second challenge, is communication. Because, as we all know, communication is key!

Ethical Considerations and Team Dynamics

When I think about ethical considerations, two things come to mind: (1) my experience with AI, and (2) my positionality as a FrameWorks team member. (2) will also address collaboration and team dynamics.

Part I: My experience with AI

One of my first tasks at FrameWorks was reading their policies and familiarizing myself with their research standards. I read their AI policy and a related document about organizational risks. They were what you'd expect: there's a perception of inefficiency when clients see an organization not using AI and this significantly increases competition. On the other hand, especially within the creative industry, AI is seen as unethical because it scrapes the internet and regurgitates content without consent, permission, or credit. This concern was addressed in their AI policy and their paid Claude subscription could only be used for certain purposes. I don't use AI in my daily life: I believe it has many ethical implications. However, for one of my tasks, I had to use it. For the media monitoring task, I had to code a Google Apps script code to automate results from Google Alerts into a spreadsheet. I do not know how to code at all. So, I used Claude! The organization is quite small – it does not have dedicated cybersecurity or software engineering personnel, so to have some sort of tracking embedded within their system, Claude was the only option. I did feel guilty after using it. Am I a hypocrite? Was it really such a desperate situation? With AI use being encouraged at workplaces globally, I'm sure I'm not the only employee who felt this way. I'm still working through my feelings on AI and how we adapt in an ever-evolving world – it is an ongoing ethical consideration, and I'm not really sure what the answer is.

Part II: My positionality as a FrameWorks team member

FrameWorks UK is quite small, with about 10 employees, a large majority of them being Caucasian women. This was surprising to me because in research, diversity is so important – especially in qualitative research, which is what FrameWorks UK specializes in, where subjective interpretations determine the synthesis of findings. And especially in a small research team, where every individual's perspectives become much more magnified and important.

On my first day, I think I subconsciously felt a little out-of-place as the only Muslim and brown woman on the team. The importance of diversity in research became evident to me during an analysis meeting – this is where principal researchers at FrameWorks meet to analyze and discuss interview responses. The way they interpreted and categorized interview responses was different to how I would do it, due to my background and distinct understanding of certain structural constraints within civil society. At a later team meeting where lack of diversity came up as an organizational risk, I voiced my opinions and made it known that diversity is incredibly crucial to research and FrameWorks would benefit from both hiring diverse members and disclosing the current lack of diversity as a limitation in their research reports.

The team at FrameWorks was incredible. Everyone was welcoming and collaborative, and I learnt a tremendous amount from their expertise. Shoutout to Sophie, Tamsyn, Kate, Charlotte, Angeliki, Maria, Simi & Simon!

Conclusion

There were oh so many problems... but I leave with oh so many solutions! Learning to recognize my own limitations and communicating more effectively within professional settings were the most incredible lessons from this internship. Although my LiA wasn't the most fortunate and has a bittersweet essence to it, I truly would not have it any other way. In hindsight, when I look back at my summer as a chronological list of events, I see myself evolving and becoming a person more tolerable of what life throws at me and more strategic with how I respond. I am a better problem solver and a better communicator than I was before, and I have healthier coping mechanisms. I look forward to applying these skills in my future experiences, wherever they may be!

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