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A CASE STUDY OF DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP AND CREATIVITY SKILLS IN HIGHER EDUCATION (HE) STUDENTS

This paper contributes to the area of creativity and educational leadership in higher education, by mobilising both concepts empirically in the 21st century learning environment. The students who enrolled in the Plan and Promotion for Events and Festivals as part of the coursework and assessment had to plan a one-day event at Zayed University (ZU) from start to finish. The paper discusses the impact of this event as a case study from three perspectives: student, academic and professional and analyzes the impact of this event on students' learning across five areas which are knowledge within the students' area of study, knowledge outside the students' area of study, linking theory and practice, career growth and self-development.

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Introduction

This paper is centred on an educational leadership initiative organized by the College of Communication and Media Sciences (CCMS), Zayed University (ZU), in the spring of 2015. It summarizes this initiative, touching on several creative characteristics it demonstrated as an educational event and its significance to all stakeholders involved, including students, faculty and industry professionals.

The American College Personnel Association (ACPA) (2008) suggests that in institutional environments that include students, faculty and students' affairs staff, these groups each contribute to the learning environment. To further enhance student learning and personal development, institutions of higher education (HE) should create intentional conditions to motivate and inspire students to devote time and energy to educationally purposeful activities. For example, faculty may use effective teaching techniques and arrange classroom space to promote interaction and collaboration, encourage students to use institutional resources (e.g., libraries, student organizations, laboratories, studios), employ effective learning strategies (e.g., study time, peer tutors) and participate in community governance and other educationally purposeful activities, such as education and industry partnerships.

A goal of HE institutions should be to improve the educational systems and policies that allow the growth of leadership amongst educators. This can be achieved through ascribed leaderships such as that of a Dean or a designated course leader, and it can also be promoted by the creation of an environment where educational leaders can independently flourish. This paper approaches educational leadership with consideration for how educators can demonstrate educational leadership within and without their classroom environment. Inside the classroom, educators can empower students by adopting interactive teaching, where educators and students can share knowledge and experience on a specific topic. Outside the classroom, educators can help students' further knowledge and research abilities by involving them in

research projects, case study writings, collaborative events conducted by industry and/or the university, educational fieldtrips and mentorship programs with industry.

There are many definitions and characteristics of leadership. Put simply, a leader inspires and leads people, and as stated above, educational leadership should not be limited to university and industry management and administration only. This paper presents a self-initiated case of educational leadership of ZU academics in collaboration with leading industry professionals to empower students and themselves as well.

Literature Review

Turnbull (2012) states that educational leadership should include creativity since it enables young people to flourish, which is beneficial for the global economy, business, and society in general. Morgan (2004) examined the development of vocational HE in leisure and tourism at Bournemouth University in the United Kingdom and found that the university was experiencing 'academic drift' (p. 94). Its courses were designed to enable graduates to acquire relevant industry-specific and managerial skills, which in turn would enable them to develop as future managers or leaders, thus helping shape the future of the tourism industry. Students are now able to improve their skills beyond the travel agency desk, reservations office or tourist information centers with a strategy to develop students for an 'experience economy' (Morgan, 2004, p. 91), with qualities of self-awareness, imagination, and creativity. The findings of the study also suggest that future tourism managers of 'experience tourism' (Morgan, 2004, p. 98) need additional skills, such as being critical and analytic, creative and innovative and improved communication skills like narrative, story-telling and non-verbal cues that create an atmosphere that 'draw on the emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual uniqueness of the individual' (Morgan, 2004, p. 98), which customers will see as positive and honest behaviour and will help to attract and retain customers.

Interest in creativity dates back to the time of Plato (Cropley, 2004) and is found in the Greek, Judaic, Christian and Muslim traditions, (Craft, 2001). Education institutions have been criticised (Craft, 1999) for 'spoon feeding' (Parnes, 1970) and 'killing' creativity (Kaila, 2005). Creativity in teaching and learning has ebbed and is no longer sufficient (Shaheen, 2010) thus preventing governments from achieving a 'creative society' (Grainger et al, 2004) and 'releasing creative potential in the economy' (Davies, 2002). Experiential learning as a theoretical framework is an important concept in this case study.

Experiential learning

Experiential learning or active learning also called learning by doing (McCarthy, 2016), is defined as 'the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience' (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). Such learning takes the learner through a four-stage process of experience, reflection, thinking and acting (Lei, Lam & Lourenco, 2015). A study of an event education class with 80 students by Lei, Lam, and Lourenco (2015) found that experiential learning is an effective method of pedagogy. In their study, an experiential learning exercise helped students with their social behaviour and learn new skills and knowledge which ultimately will help them in the future.

Savage, Norman and Lancaster (2008) found that experiential learning is fun and memorable and makes learning materials more practical and relevant. Healy and McCutcheon (2008) found that accounting students' experiences of active learning through case study and problem-based learning and in-class group presentations resulted in students achieving life-long skills like teamwork and self-learning, also gaining self-confidence. As part of an experiential learning cycle (Grimwood, Arthurs and Vogel, 2015) graduate students imagined themselves into the identity of 'tourist–researcher' to experience, document, narrate, interpret and reflect on (both independently and collaboratively) a tourist activity or destination. This

learning experience required students to perform a tourist activity (e.g., self-guided exploration) or visit a tourism facility (e.g., a visit to a living history museum), documenting this tourist experience using personal photographs.

The second aspect of the assignment included a reflective observation, which each student was required to develop, and a presentation of a photo essay. In this way, students had the opportunity 'to mobilize the concrete experience of their journey into deeper reflective understanding of personal choices and meanings associated with travel' (p. 371). This learning outcome showed students how to play a role in activating ecologically embedded social change, gave them technical skills for marketplace competition and facilitated awareness within the role they play in responsible and reflexive tourism placemaking. Yang, Cheung and Song (2016) examined how experiential learning activities influence employability skills, which in turn influence learning satisfaction among entry-level hotel employees. That study found that experiential and practical learning activities contributed the most to employability skills and learning satisfaction, followed by professional skill-related activities and school-based activities.

Creativity and experiential learning

Many studies have linked creativity to experiential learning. Creativity in the learning environment and education can be developed in experiential learning (Ayob, Hussain, Mustafa & Shaarani, 2011). Creative learning environments engage students and help improve their performance through the cross-fertilization of ideas, and problem-based critical thinking ultimately leads to self-initiated learning (Moran 2010; Robinson 2001). For example, Roberts (2010) suggests that creative approaches enhance learning, which can lead to innovations in technology, which ultimately benefit the economy. Ayob et al. (2011) demonstrated how construct-based creativity models reproduced creative behaviour in an experiential-based

learning environment. Their sample included 25 engineering students from the Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment and the Faculty of Science and Technology who participated in ROBOCON 2010, an annual international robotics contest. Through their performance in various assignments they were engaged in, students were assessed using a list of creative attributes. The 11 creativity traits observed were 'problem awareness, ability to produce and consider many alternatives, ability to elaborate, flexibility, ability to highlight the essence, openness, ability to put ideas into context, combination and synthesis, ability to visualize richly and colorfully, ability to break boundaries and ability to use humor' (p. 253).

Guest speakers as part of the learning experience

The involvement of industry guest speakers is an innovative active learning strategy and an invaluable educational tool (Wolfe, 2006). Active learning helps bring 'the real world into the classroom and expose students to their experiences, insights, perspectives, ideas and knowledge' (Riebe, Sibson, Roepen & Meakins, 2013, pp. 57) encouraging students to actively learn by participating, evaluating and reflecting on their educational experiences (Machemer & Crawford, 2007). The employment of guest speakers, usually executives from a variety of industries, is useful as an experiential technique because such guests share life experiences with students and give insight into respective industries. They can be highly motivating and interactive, prompting real dialogue (Paul & Mukhopadhyay, 2005). A study by Paul and Mukhopadhyay (2005) investigated experiential learning techniques, including the use of guest speakers, to determine whether students' overall learning and its different facets were enhanced. The results confirmed that guest speakers enhanced overall learning and made it more active, fun, easy, efficient and effective.

Guest speakers not only enhance the quality of the student learning experience but also increase students' employability prospects (Lashley, 2011) through advice on curriculum

design, contribute to work placements in integrated learning placements (internships) and improve workplace skills (Riebe, Sibson, Roepen & Meakins, 2013). Moreover, Payne, Sumter and Sun (2003) argue that a focused, well-organized, and interactive guest speaker session assists student learning by developing students' analytical skills and critical thinking abilities and showing how to apply their theoretical concepts practically. Building a long-term corporative and consultative partnership between industry and higher education (HE) requires commitment from industry professionals, their companies, the instructor and the educational institution.

Professionals can be used effectively in the classroom as guest speakers, motivational speakers, extraordinary speakers etc. while also serving on the advisory board of a program. Companies can learn about the high-quality programs of the educational institution, encouraging them to support the program by means such as financial support, hiring students, internship opportunities or even representing or advertising the program to industry. This also provides an opportunity for companies to share information and for students, in turn, to work on projects seeking solutions to industry problems (McCleary & Weaver, 2008). The benefits to HE institutions of guest speakers include motivating students and increasing their commitment to learning. Industry speakers can also share knowledge of industry insights that cannot be found in textbooks (Ormond, 2004), as well as providing career opportunities and informal networking opportunities (Metrejean, Pittman & Zarzeski, 2002) and offering information in discipline-specific areas, such as human resources recruitment procedures, employee evaluation, strategies for dealing with ethnic diversity and the importance of branding oneself. In marketing classes, speakers can explore brand management and strategies, product decisions and pricing strategies.

Effective educators who use industry guest speakers should develop a strategy to ensure that both students and the guest speaker get the most positive interaction and experience

(McCleary & Weaver, 2008). In another study, this one of a finance class from the University of Cape Town, Rajaratnam and Campbell (2013) found that the benefits of having a guest speaker were significant. The students' understanding of theory benefitted from instruction in practice, and they felt more empowered and transformed, while increasing their networking opportunities with industry.

From the perspective of the students, there are several benefits to inviting industry guest speakers. Students gain the opportunity of being exposed to the realities of industry, information on career paths and firsthand knowledge of the experience, problems, and pleasures of industry (Okumus & Wong, 2004); they can be enlightened with an understanding of industry competition and narrate their own experience with the successful competitive strategies they have adopted; industry guest speakers can also confirm and credit up-to-date and relevant information provided by professors in the classroom (McCleary & Weaver, 2008).

This interaction also provides industry professionals with a better understanding of the quality of students and their level of preparedness to enter the industry, which is helpful to companies at the time of recruitment. Students gain knowledge of how to prepare for job interviews and build their confidence in choosing a career path and networking opportunities (Metrejean, Pittman, & Zarzeski, 2002). A study by Sherman, Sebora and Digman (2008) confirmed the impact of guest speakers. These researchers examined the difference effects of various pedagogical approaches to entrepreneurship on career choice intentions with a sample of 98 students in a university in the Midwest, in the United States of America. They found that reading from a text about a career in entrepreneurship had little impact on the decision to choose that career. However, the invitation of entrepreneurs as guest speakers had a significant impact on students' decision to choose a career as an entrepreneur.

It is important for any educator to set expectations for the industry speaker. The course instructor must prepare the speaker by providing him or her with the students' educational

backgrounds and any industry experience among them (Hess, 2004), reading materials that may be provided by the speaker to accompany the topic being presented by the speaker and which are to be distributed to students (McCleary & Weaver, 2008). For example, if the business development manager of a tourism marketing organization were presenting on marketing strategies, it would be helpful for the speaker to discuss how marketing works, with relevant examples explaining market segmentation, targeting and positioning, thus increasing the relevance of the lecture and generate interest. Similarly, the educator must prepare the students (Mooney, 1998) by providing them with background knowledge on the speaker, having students conduct research on the company, prompting them to ask questions and offering encouragement by awarding extra credit for intelligent questions.

For the industry professional, this engagement provides them with a better understanding of the role of educators and the preparation involved in delivering effective and stimulating class preparations; it might also encourage them to join academia in the future. To foster good engagement, it is also important for industry speakers to have an understanding of the content and objectives of the course, as unprepared speakers waste class time, resulting in an unfavourable image of the speaker's company. Industry speakers must choose ways to keep students engaged, using interactive technology, films, social media activities etc., as well as employing entertainment and humour to impart information, keeping in line with course content while sharing appropriately funny and amusing situations (McCleary & Weaver, 2008).

Academic researchers have evaluated the impact of guest speakers in various disciplines. For example, Zorek, Katz and Popovich (2011) investigated the impact of guest speakers on student development in a professional development seminar series given by 18 guest speakers, who demonstrated a positive impact on multiple aspects of student development, including professionalism and positive curriculum outcomes. In another study, by Riebe, Sibson, Roepen and Meakins (2013) with 150 Australian undergraduate business

students that investigated the perceptions and expectations concerning the incorporation of guest speakers into the curriculum of a leadership unit, with a focus on employability skills development, the results indicated that 'an appropriately briefed, qualified, interesting and engaging guest speaker plays an important role in active learning by exposing students to the "real world" of the workplace and can reinforce the significance of key employability skills for future career success' (p. 55). In another study, Kumari (2001) found that industry guest speaker visits motivated student participation. Mullin (2001) suggested that industry guest speakers can support the material provided in class and enhance student knowledge.

Methodology

The Context

The case discussed in this paper encompasses the organization and implementation of an event that demonstrated creative elements and educational leadership. It concerns the capstone course Planning and Promotion for Events and Festivals taken by fourth-year undergraduate students in 2015, first semester. The class was 15 females 21–25 years old, who were majoring in tourism, integrated strategic communication or business.

Under the supervision of the course instructor, the students taking this course took lectures on event management planning and conducting, hosting and evaluating an event. Each stage of the event management process was combined with a practical component of the course, giving the students the opportunity to experience the live context of event management. The MEPRA II Student Chapter Event was sponsored by the CCMS, ZU and the Middle East Public Relations Association, MEPRA. (MEPRA is a young and leading professional public relations association in the region, which has been collaborating, with the ZU Dubai Campus since 2014.)

The case is given in two scenarios. The first scenario discusses the student's main course project work and is labeled the Special Event Project. The second scenario presents the event evaluation, termed Evaluation Conducted After the Event, performed together with the attendees. In collaboration with their instructor and another faculty member, the students designed an evaluation questionnaire. These questionnaires were distributed to all attendees one day after the event. The students who organized the event and the other student members of the audience completed an evaluation on their experiences.

Case Scenario 1: The Special Event Project Scenario

This capstone course was intended to help students who were registered in the Planning and Promotion for Events and Festivals develop practical skills through the use of concepts required for special event planning and the coordination and execution of an event on campus. The course was compulsory for students graduating in tourism and was offered as an elective for students in the College of Communication and Media Sciences and College of Business.

As noted in the literature review, creativity can be developed through experiential learning (Ayob, Hussain, Mustafa & Shaarani, 2011). In learning environment of the case, as outlined below, experiential learning was initiated by students' hosting, coordinating and executing a live event on the university campus. To provide students with the theory as well as the practical experience of experiential learning, the course involved in-class lectures supplemented by real-life practical work experiences. Students were allowed to be creative and engage in activities like an exchange of ideas, problem-solving and critical thinking.

Prior to the event, the class met twice a week for 2 hours 40 minutes per week over a period of 13 weeks. After the event, they met for two weeks for wrap up and evaluation. Each week, students received a one-hour lecture on a variety of topics about event management principles, and then, they were allocated time for practical work experience activities that

required them to plan, organize and coordinate the event. Students made regular presentations and provided reports of their progress and activities to their instructor. Undertaking such activities week after week, the students were exposed to how theory is applied in real life, the challenges and issues encountered in the application, and how to approach and take action to solve these challenges.

As part of the organization of the course, the students were divided into three teams with five members each, and as outlined in the five steps below, each team coordinated and conducted the following activities.

__Step 1__ Each team prepared an event bid proposal. They had the liberty to brainstorm, create, design and develop their proposal, which was required to outline the following tasks, which in turn were required to be presented to the supervising instructor, another instructor and the other class members by a certain date.

- A developed and described event concept idea.

- The event's aims and SMART objectives.

- It's feasibility.

- A financial budget.

- The expected impact of the event.

- Event promotion, marketing, and publicity strategies.

- Safety, security and risk-management strategies.

__Step 2__ The final event proposal chosen by the professors was a combination of different ideas presented by each team. The students were provided with the final developed proposal and had to plan and organize, as outlined below under step 3.

__Step 3__ The event process was as follows:

- The students worked together to structure, plan, implement and evaluate the MEPRA II Student Chapter Event. The event, as conceptualized by the students, included two

separate sessions with two different themes. The theme of the morning session was Preserving Culture and Traditions and that of the afternoon session was Brand Yourself (for speaker names and individual topics presented see program details in the appendices, pp. 33–35).

To organize these two sessions students overall needed to:

- Create and design an event concept.

- Select speakers, including representatives of industry and professors from ZU. As the event was an official university activity, students had to comply with a series of regulations, policies, and procedures prior to host the event. This included obtaining permission for inviting industry guest speakers, who were required to have UAE government security clearances, following rules governing the marketing of the event on campus and reporting related financial transactions.

- Coordinate with stakeholders.

- Design an advertising and marketing campaign promoting the event and the speakers.

- Invite participants.

This was all in the strategic dimension. Besides this, the students also worked with and were involved with several other technical aspects:

- Budget.

- Collaboration with the administration to organize guest speaker permissions.

- Sponsorship.

- Technology.

- Media selection.

- Venue selection: to gain experience in the site selection process in event planning, students were required to meet with the Zayed University Conference Centre team and obtain quotations for different venues on campus.

- Food and beverage selection.

- Anticipation of risk and legal issues.

- Event publicity (electronic word of mouth and the use of social media such as Instagram and Twitter before and during the event)

- Stage arrangements, event organizer badges, floral arrangements and other related activities.

- Event registration.

- Opening and closing speeches at each session.

- Guest speaker gifts.

- Conduct event evaluation.

- The drafting and submission of a report about the entire experience.

__Step 4__ The Event

- The event was hosted on May 6, 2015

- Venue: the dining hall, Zayed University Convention Centre

- The audience included local female Emirati students, ZU faculty and guest speakers from industry.

- The event included two sessions and each session included presentations by industry guest speakers and academics from ZU and a workshop conducted by industry guest speakers. Table 1 provides an example of the program. During the workshop, the audience was grouped into teams of 8–10 participants. For the morning workshop, the teams discussed and made notes on poster paper on the topic Strategies for Working on a National Campaign to Promote Culture. The guest speakers reviewed the team posters and a general summary of the ideas was discussed. The afternoon session was organized slightly differently: each speaker introduced their topic and then, as a panel, discussed the importance of self-branding. The audience was invited to participate. This arrangement offered all attendees the opportunity of

gaining knowledge and sharing and exchanging their views and insights on the topics of discussion.

Table 1 Sample Program

Step 5 Assessment by the class instructor covered three areas: class participation in the event, self-reflections written by each individual student and a learning portfolio. The details of the assessment are described below.

Class participation relating to the event

The students were required to present their ideas to the supervising professor regularly and to provide updates on their work. A series of presentations helped them complete tasks on time and review their own work to ensure that they were on track and conducting quality work. This participation and coordination together with participation on the day of the presentation amounted to 30% of the final grade.

Self-reflection assessment

According to Kok and Chabeli (2002), reflection is key to learning from experience. Each student was required to submit a reflective paper to document their experiences, to replay them and re-evaluate them (Boyd & Fales, 1983). This included describing their learning

experiences throughout the planning, organization and execution stages of the event, giving a reflection on the event day, highlighting the positive aspects of the event, deciding what could be improved and reporting what they learned from the guest speaker presentations and workshops. This assessment amounted to 20% of the final grade.

Learning portfolio assessment

As part of the learning exercise for educational leadership, students were required to maintain a portfolio including samples of their work for assessment, evaluation, and career development. Zubizarreta (2008) states that the learning portfolio is an important tool, which is particularly effective for learning through experience. The assessment of the learning portfolio accounted for 40% of the total final grade of 100%.

These collaborations and exchanges amongst university students, educators, and industry professionals demonstrate how working together and the exchange of ideas and knowledge on a variety of themes stimulated creativity in education.

Case Scenario 2: Evaluation Conducted After the Event

To determine the impact of the guest speakers on students learning experience, a survey was distributed to the students who attended the MEPRA II Student Chapter Event on May 6, 2015. The respondents were all female and all 19–25 years old. The student respondents who attended were asked to complete and submit their surveys in sealed envelopes to the office of the College of Communication and Media Sciences within a week of the event.

The short survey included two sections. Section 1 was a satisfaction survey using a 5-point Likert Scale (e.g., Allen & Seaman, 2007) for the quantitative section of the survey with the aim of discovering whether the guest speakers' presentations and workshop activities contributed to the knowledge of the student audience and their career growth and self-development. Section 2 included two descriptive questions asking respondents to place the

three most important things they learned from the guest speakers in order of importance and to state whether such educational conferences are important for their studies. These descriptive questions allowed the organizers to obtain in-depth information and better evaluate the effectiveness of the presentations and workshops of the guest speakers (e.g., Patton, 1990).

The results are presented below. The survey findings outline the quantitative results from the Likert-type questions. The descriptive findings are grouped under five themes (see Figure 1) developed from the survey results, including supporting statements from the two descriptive open-ended questions that were asked in section 2 of the survey. The instructor of the class that hosted the event and the other co-authors of this paper conducted an analysis of the results.

Findings

The following table presents the descriptive statistics according to each thematic (e.g. Fox, 1999; Anderson et al, 2015). The total number of respondents is denoted by N, f_i is the frequency for the modality i which is based on a 5-point Likert scale ($i = 1, \ldots, 5$). The results of the quantitative section of the survey show that most participants agreed that the event and the talks by the guest speakers had a very positive impact on them (see Table 2). The impacts of the guest speakers were in multiple areas and are illustrated in Figure 1.

The qualifications, experience, content, delivery, and engagement of the speaker with the audience altered the impact of each area on students' learning. Overall, the educational conference event contributed to the learning and growth of the student participants in several areas. The results show that participants both within and outside the area of study believed that the event increased their knowledge on the subject. However, there was only a moderate impact on their career growth and self-development; further, the event also only moderately helped attendees connect the theory learned in the class to the real life and practice of industry speakers

(see Table 2). The descriptive part allowed us to gain in-depth information behind the mixed results on the event's impact.

Questions / Thematic	Total Respondents (N)	Strongly Disagree (f_1)	Disagree (f_2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (f_3)	Agree (f_4)	Strongly Agree (f_5)	Total
Knowledge within the student's area of study	159	6%	6%	16%	46%	25%	100%
Knowledge outside the student's area of study	158	3%	8%	13%	47%	29%	100%
Present a link between theory and practice	154	4%	7%	27%	41%	19%	100%
Career growth	157	4%	13%	24%	38%	22%	100%
Self-development	158	6%	10%	32%	33%	18%	100%

Table 2: Illustration of Survey

The descriptive results present the benefits gained from guest speakers. These benefits are outlined under the five themes that emerged from the quantitative survey results that are seen in Figure 1. Statements from the two descriptive questions of the survey are provided to show support for each of the five themes, explained below with supporting statements.
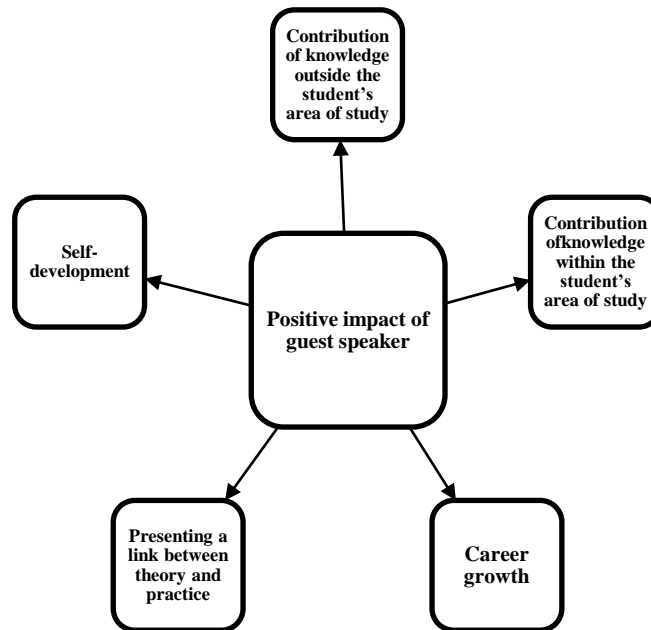
Figure 1: Contributions to student learning

Knowledge within the student's area of study

Statements appearing under this theme in the qualitative analysis were related to the

knowledge generated based on the topics of the speakers. The statements of the students were

focusing on branding, the importance of communication with tourists, and the impact of movies

in representing a culture. Sample statements, illustrating the knowledge gained by the

respondents within their area of study, include: 'It increased my knowledge in my major',

'Marketing and social media open new doors in business', 'How to develop a campaign', 'How

movies represent our culture' and 'I learned how movies are part of culture.' McCleary &

Weaver (2008) claim that guest speakers offer information to students in discipline-specific

areas and provide positive interaction and experiences. The selection of speakers is vital,

because if they are unable to deliver their expertise in an engaging way, fewer participants will

have positive reactions, and more will have negative ones. Zorek, Katz and Popovich (2011)

also found that guest speakers demonstrated a positive impact on students in an undergraduate business course.

Knowledge outside the student's area of study

Guest speakers enhance the quality of the student learning experience by showcasing employability outside the area of one's study (Lashley, 2011). By engaging guest speakers from different fields of study, networking opportunities are provided for students to speak with a guest speaker who has a career outside their area of study (Metrejean, Pittman & Zarzeski, 2002) and to obtain internships and workplace skills (Riebe, Sibson, Roepen & Meakins, 2013) in different fields. As indicated in the free statements, the students gained knowledge outside their area of study for two reasons: exposure to different professions and the effective communication/interaction skills of speakers with audiences. Statements of attendees who valued exposure to different professions follow: 'Attending professional seminars that do not necessarily relate to my major because it increases my knowledge in outer fields', 'About professions…different professions influence each other in various ways', 'The important thing is the speakers are from different industries and it makes us learn different thoughts' and 'Seminars and guest speakers offer different learning experience than classes. It exposes us to the real world with different professions. Also to put light on future fields that we can work in that might not have crossed our minds.' Rowe (2004) suggested that guest speakers enhance student perceptions and improve their communication skills. Furthermore, Kumari (2001) highlights that guest speakers speaking discussion directly from within a field of expertise stimulates student learning and helps students communicate better with one another and develop their critical thinking skills.

Regarding the skill in communication and interaction with audiences that the presenters showed, students mentioned positive aspects such as: 'How to know your audience and interact with them' and 'How to communicate with big audiences in different ways.' This interaction

helped the students to learn how to build their confidence (Metrejean, Pittman & Zarzeski, 2002) thus preparing for their future in the industry. McCleary and Weaver (2008) found that entertainment and appropriate humour can keep audiences engaged. Some student respondents highlighted this, stating that 'Mixing humour with seminars is a good idea for engaging an audience.'

Present a link between theory and practice:

Rajaratnam and Campbell (2013) indicated that students can obtain a deeper understanding of theory learned in a classroom when it is contextualized through real-life practical examples provided by industry guest speakers. In this study, students' reflection on the links between theory and practice was not as explicitly articulated as it was in other areas of impact. However, few but dramatic statements appeared that were related with this theme 'There is more to tourism than what we have learned at the university', 'I learned how to link theory with practice' and 'We learn from their experience. See how the world works.' One student wrote that having guest speakers is a better way to learn than the consumption of un-sourced materials. Abdallah (2016) found that industry guest speakers act as real-life knowledge providers by giving industrial examples for the theoretical knowledge expressed by lecturers, which is something employers seek from graduating students. Moreover, the real-life situations and experiences that guest speakers discussed were also interesting to students.

The fact of impacts on students' career growth and self-development were expressed by students. Below follow some shared statements. Sherman, Sebora and Digman (2008) included entrepreneurs and industry practitioners from a variety of fields who could give a firsthand view of the real world. Hearing the personal experience of successful industry practitioners can influence and have a powerful impact on students' career choice. Similarly, this study also found that their experience with the guest speakers provided students the

opportunity to know more about the real world and different careers to assist them in preparing for the future.

Career growth

'Career goals…and gaining some knowledge from it to use it in social life and apply it in the international field of my future career.' 'I learned new skills and I will use them in my life.' 'What the requirements are that are needed to achieve my goals and get the job I want.' 'It helped me set my career goals…let me know my career options and real-life situation.' Students also found the event helpful for providing them information on alternative internship sites.

Self-development

Most of the open-ended statements on self-development were related to the development of *confidence.* The development of self-confidence (Herod, 2002; Kwek, Bui, Rynne & So, 2013) was reflected in statements such as the following: 'Improved self-confidence', 'They made me comfortable and I trust myself more', 'Challenge yourself', 'They taught me how to give a good speech', 'How to reflect myself properly', 'There is no right or wrong way to communicate with an audience if you have your own style' and 'Confidence in speaking.' Rajaratnam & Campbell (2013) confirm that guest speakers made students feel more empowered and transformed.

Open-ended statements related to the branding concept had two streams. One stream concerned the knowledge level of branding in the student's area of study, such as 'I learned how to promote a brand' and 'How we can promote our culture', and branding on a personal level was mentioned in statements that mentioned 'Human brand', 'How to brand ourselves', 'Your brand is presenting yourself' and 'By branding yourself and being unique, you will be able to work anywhere you want.' The branding presentation made them think about their

personal branding matters in the work context and in their personal lives. 'How can I brand myself in my workplace or in my personal life? Branding is a way people will recognize you.'

The students also mentioned perceptions of Arab culture and Emiratis, including existing stereotypes that they already knew. However, they saw how communication, that is, proper communication through personal and mass communication channels can help to overcome misperceptions: 'There are companies and initiatives that are working to present a real, authentic, and a bright image of our misrepresented nation', 'We have to educate our parents about what is right in communicating with people from other nationalities', 'I learned how to construct my own image in front of non-Emiratis by creating a clear picture of our culture and society', 'What foreigners think about us [Muslim people] and how we could change that.' are striking and illustrating statements. Based on these findings, we conclude that the students in this research come from very conservative Arab/Islamic families, which play a major role in their social lives and activities. For this reason, they look for an escape from the home environment (Michael, Wien & Reisinger, 2017). Therefore, the experience of interacting with industry guest speakers gives them the opportunity to meet people from environments that are not their home and university and allows them to be exposed to people from the outside world. Such exposure and interaction helps them build their confidence and resilience to thrive, mature and confront challenges in life (Campbell-Sills, Cohan & Stein, 2006), be socially competent, develop a more positive outlook, increase their perseverance and be self-reliant (Connor & Davidson, 2003), inquisitive and attentive (Sagor, 1996).

Discussion/Conclusion/Implications

This study complements planning and organizing events for HE research in the UAE, identifying how collaboration among creativity, educational leadership and industry speakers can enhance student learning through practical learning activities while increasing their

knowledge of the real world of industry, how theory relates to practice, career growth, and overall self-development.

The following discussion reflects the integration of creativity and educational leadership in the event process and the event itself from three perspectives: student, academic and professional.

Student perspective

By organizing an industry and academic presentation/workshop event, students were able to be exposed to the professional world. This exposure helps them learn and discover more about the skill sets demanded by industry. These students are future leaders of institutions in the UAE, and the organization of such innovative and creative events provides them with the opportunity to think outside the box. Such initiatives help them learn how to function and how to collaborate and constructively lead them to develop their creative skills. Developing, learning and implementing these creative skills will help them become successful leaders in the future (Shaheen, 2010).

Academic perspective

Leadership can be self-initiated and need not be top down. In the CCMS, where communication is a vital ingredient of functioning at all levels, it would not be wrong to say that self-initiated leadership was practiced, in a limited way. The participation of faculty from the CCMS and other colleges, as well as industry and educational collaboration triggered by a faculty member, resulted in a well-organized day where the semester agenda of CCMS and ZU, in general, were promoted. This collaboration led to research partnerships and collaborative classroom activities among academics from different specializations, leading to enriched interpersonal relationships, teamwork, and creativity amongst academics, bringing about successful leadership.

Professional perspective

Such collaborations can stimulate research among both academia and industry professionals. Industry professionals can learn from academics through their research, and in their turn, academics can look for research ideas from industry professionals. The outcome of such relationships can add a new dimension to scholarly activity, such as granting the opportunity to write local industry case studies, which can be used as classroom examples. With such local collaborative initiatives, the borrowing of concepts and cases in education from other parts of the world outside the Middle East will be minimalized.

These initiatives provide a sense of ownership, create meaning and make education relevant, fun and easy to absorb. It is not wrong to conclude that the MEPRA II Student Chapter Event demonstrated successful educational leadership, because it provided students the opportunity to empower themselves, taking ownership and responsibility for their own learning.

We note that this course required a considerable investment of temporal and financial resources to run this type of educational leadership initiative learning activity. It was also challenging for both the class instructor and the CCMS as a whole. On the other hand, this type of assessment and the hosting of a special event benefitted students in a number of ways. It not only enriched the student skills of event planning, coordination, and execution but also positively improved their leadership, creativity, organization, teamwork and communication skills. It positively changed their perceptions through exposure to different styles of learning through application: linking theory to practice and their experience of coordinating and working with the instructor, the college department and industry professionals. From the perspective of the course instructor, it was encouraging and positively rewarding to see the positive transformation in student attitudes, creative abilities, knowledge, and skills that

ensued. It is hoped that this report on that educational leadership learning initiative will encourage and motivate fellow educators to adopt such learning and teaching methods.

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