IN2015 Workshop 5 2018:

Commercial Awareness

By the end of this workshop you should be able to:

- Understand what commercial awareness is
- Use an organisation's online presence to help you to develop commercial awareness
- Apply the information from the workshop to make strong applications
- Apply the information from the workshop to perform well in face-to-face recruitment situations
- Create and maintain a LinkedIn account

What is Commercial Awareness (CA)?

- Concern about the wider environment in which an organisation operates
- Interest about what is likely to impact its ability to be successful
- Curiosity about how it manages staff, suppliers, resources, risks and reputation
- Insight into how it responds to its clients, competitors and challenges
- It is also general understanding about how industries and businesses work that is not specific to just one company

"Commercial awareness is a mind-set: an attitude to people and to business."

Christopher Stoakes thinks that CA has 3 aspects to it:

1. People. Clients are people and you need to understand them as people. CA is about how you get these people to become and/or remain your clients and how you deliver the work that they give you
2. The businesses these people work in. Businesses are organisations. You need to figure out how they are organised, what issues they face, and what their strategies are
3 Money. At university it is easy to lose sight of the need for a business to make a profit. Not just the business that you work for but your client's business. If your client does not generate a profit they probably won't be your client for long

Why does it matter?

- It is a core skill that many employers look for and assess candidates on
- If you show good CA you will write more interesting job applications, you will come across better at interview and it will set you apart from other applicants
- Recruiters expect you be aware of the commercial context in which the business operates
- It will help you explain how technology can transform a business's operations and strategies

- On placement students take the IN3027 module. Currently 25% of the module mark goes to performance reviews with the manger. 5% of that mark goes to business awareness. This is the area that students typically get the lowest scores in
- Paying attention today will help you to *get* a placement and *excel* in your placement when you start work and maybe receive higher marks in your workplace reviews

Business Awareness		Student	WPS	Student and WPS to use WBPR assessment scheme to agree mark (0-100)
	Very Poor			
	Poor			
	Average			
	Good			
	Very good			
	Excellent			
	Outstanding			

Please tick the most appropriate box.

Student: Provide an example of a situation you have been in that demonstrates your ability in this area. You should use the STAR technique to qualify your answer and refer to your chosen SFIA6 role(s). Word count: 250 words

Why do recruiters value Commercial Awareness?

- Throughout the recruitment process you will need to *evidence* various competencies with examples of when you have been a good leader/team-player/communicator etc…
- You will also have to answer questions about your *career motivation* for the role
- How do you *evidence* career motivation for the role?
- By showing commercial awareness of course! If you can show that you genuinely spend your time reading about the sector, company, role, competitors or going to conferences or meet-ups or hackathons it will *prove* your interest in the work

- It can't be taught; it starts with being interested, you are either interested or you are not
- Managers can give you jobs to develop various skills like leadership and analytical ability but they can't *make* you be interested in the work
- One of the most important things for a company to be sure of before they offer you a job is that you really are interested in the company and the job
- If you are interested in the work you will grow into the role, you will be more likely to do good work because you enjoy it, and you are more likely to stay in the job

How do you become Commercially Aware?

- Becoming 'commercially aware' takes time and effort
- You have to build it up over time; it is a lifelong process
- Reflect on your own experience of being a consumer – what makes you choose a new company to buy from, what makes you stay with it, and why would you leave it?
- Establish what similar companies specialise in
- Start to notice which companies are rolling out new technologies and clarify in your mind what you think about them
- What do you think about supermarkets using facial recognition to ID you?
- What do you think about Amazon delivery people letting themselves into your house or your car?

Start to develop it from a range of sources

- Read company news, annual reports, strategic plans, mission, vision and values statements on their websites
- Follow organisations in the media and on their social media accounts – Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and blogs
- Keep up-to-date with the news and world-wide current affairs, listen to business podcasts and the Radio 4 Today programme
- Join professional associations like the BCS as a student member
- The best way is to get inside a company and do a work placement!

- And....take part in this next activity!

Activity – researching organisations to make strong applications and prepare for interviews

- Organise yourself into groups of approximately 4 people
- Each group will be allocated a sheet with a company and category
- Your task is to use your smart phones or lap tops to find answers to a series of related questions on your sheets.
- You might choose to divide these questions between you to save time
- You have ten minutes to complete your research and 3 minutes for each group to feed back their findings to the rest of class

Business news and current affairs

- Being able to state how much profit the company made last year shows that you have done some research but it won't make you an interesting candidate
- If you know *how* the company made a certain amount of profit last year or that profits actually declined last year and can speculate *why* that will make you interesting

- Avoid telling the company what they already know about themselves
- If talking about a new contract they have won or a project that they have just delivered, find an aspect that you find genuinely fascinating and form an opinion about it

- Do keep up to date with what is happening in the company, sector and world but *apply* your knowledge and develop *opinions*
- Anyone can read the paper on the day of the interview and state the share price but it takes a real commitment to developing commercial awareness to be able to talk confidently about fluctuations over the past year and be able to predict what might happen in the future

Challenge

- Always have at least 3 news stories that you are following
- Keep checking them across various media from start to conclusion
- Vary the stories that you follow – political, environmental, technology, consumer interest, general business….
- The most important thing is that you are genuinely interested
- It won't take long before you really do have some opinions about lots of things

- **VIDEO** - https://tinyurl.com/y853se6r

- Notice how Ellie has opinions and can say what things mean for her personally

How is it tested in the recruitment process?

Online applications

- Why have you applied for this role? (show genuine interest)
- Why did you choose your degree subject? (be original if you can)
- When have you demonstrated customer focus? (show that you are a safe pair of hands with the companies clients)

How is it tested in the recruitment process?

Interviews

- What do you know about our business? (how is it organised, what are the main products and services?)
- Who are our competitors? (how do they differentiate themselves?)
- Which news story has caught your attention recently and why might it affect our business or clients? (keep it recent and relevant to the role)

What does a student with a sound level of commercial awareness sound like at interview?

- Confident when asked to describe what they think the role they are applying for will involve
- Able to show understanding of the business and its functions, products and services in the UK
- Aware of legislation and governance affecting the sector
- Knowledgeable about the marketplace, major competitors and how they differ from each other
- Up-to-date with the general news

What does a student with a high level of commercial awareness sound like at interview?

- Knowledgeable about how the main competitors are performing right now, for instance who has won a major contract and with who
- Savvy about current company challenges and the marketplace they operate in and able to speculate intelligently about the future

- Aware that what happened in the past sometimes helps predict future trends. e.g. political instability, irresponsible lending and credit crunches
- Educated about how significant world events or political changes world impact on the firm

- Outstanding candidates might have ideas about how they would prepare and plan for a major catastrophe like a physical terrorist attack, extreme weather damage to facilities or a cyber attack
- Aware of global offices and how the UK business communicates across globally dispersed teams

How is it tested in the recruitment process?
Assessment centres

- You might be given a subject to research a week before the assessment centre so that you can deliver a presentation on the day
- You might be given a case study to work on alone or in a group for 20-30 minutes when you get there that simulates real-life workplace situations
- You are likely to be presented with a business problem that you have to find a solution for
  - Here recruiters will be watching how you:
    - Work with the material you are given – how you apply your analytical skills
    - How you apply your commercial awareness that is relevant to the role or the business
    - Take into consideration the impact of your proposed solutions on the wider business context such as other departments within the business or its clients
    - Mitigate for changes in external environment such as changes in political party and any associated change in tax breaks or legislation

Learn the language of the industry

- Try to learn a few key words that people use in industry

- If you use some of the phrases used in job descriptions and on company marketing material this will be a good start
- Some companies use applicant tracking systems and software to search applications for key skills and words used

- Look at LinkedIn profiles of people you aspire to and copy the language they use
- Follow tech blogs and go to industry meet-ups to learn some new words

- Be very careful not to overuse buzzwords or acronyms if you don't know what they mean and if you are interviewing with a non-technical HR person who also won't know what they mean either but who will definitely spot that you don't know what you are talking about!

Tech-related blogs and community meet-ups

- *Follow these blogs/sites to research the industry.*
- *This will add credibility to your applications and help you to learn some new words!*

- http://blogs.ft.com/tech-blog/ (Financial Times – balanced, trustworthy commentary)
- https://www.infoq.com/ (Current tech trends & presentations from conferences & seminars)
- https://www.thoughtworks.com/radar (Easy to read quarterly summary of industry trends and technologies to look out for)

Meet-ups

- https://skillsmatter.com/events Skillsmatter host a lot of events and meetups. It's a great way to network and pick up/brush up on skills.
- http://www.meetup.com/UK-Hackathons-and-Jams/ "Fun, intense and rewarding"
- http://www.meetup.com/SiliconRoundabout/ "We meet to share ideas and lessons learned over free drinks. It's good place to talk technology, business, design, social media and marketing."

Using your online presence to search for placements, network with professionals and develop CA

- **LinkedIn** – Professional networking site, search for jobs, join relevant groups, follow companies and learn about what people do
- **Twitter** – 'Follow' organisations that are of interest and 'Tweet' interesting things to gain your own followers
- **Facebook** – Companies try to interact with students this way. Be very careful. Keep your privacy settings watertight and/or set up a separate account for professional use
- **Debut** is the world's first student and graduate careers app. You play games to get talent spotted. Check it out! http://debut.careers/
- You can use blogs, personal websites, sites like GitHub and Stack Overflow to learn from fellow computer scientists

Activity – Rate Your LinkedIn Profile

■ If you already have a LinkedIn profile please complete the boxes on the handout to assess what is good, what you can add, and what needs improving.
■ If you don't have a profile you can use the handout to work out what you can add to your profile and if you like you can search other computer science students to see what their profiles look like.

■ You have 15 minutes

How can you develop CA on placement?

- Know what the short and long-term vision of the company
- Know what part technology plays in delivering these visions
- Read internal newsletters

- Companies pay for third party research – access it and use it
- Get to know clients and stakeholders that are impacted by your work
- Learn about your client's business

- Keep up with new launches and sales metrics if relevant
- Proactively seek out opportunities to understand the business environment in which you are working
- Talk to as many people as possible from different areas of the business to get a range of perspectives – use the tips from last week's slides to NETWORK!

# Case study - Haris Seoudy did a placement with IBM. He was contracted out to Thames Water for the year

- Haris **wanted** to find out more about the **operational** side of the business and **learn** exactly how it provides water and wastewater services to 15 million **customers**
- He got himself invited to the Slough Sewage Treatment Works where he learnt about the different **processes** that take place to convert waste water into clean water from producing sludge all the way to removing solids like wet wipes from sewage water
- From this he saw the **problems** the operational engineers face – like fatbergs!
- After this he decided to learn more about the **sector** that Thames Water operate in so that he could **understand** their **key issues** and relate to their problems better
- He went on to **self-teach** himself about the **history** of the industry, UK **regulations**, industry **structure**, the water **cycle**, and **competition** within the industry.
- In his spare time he read the "GB Water Industry for Dummies" book to learn about **smart networks**, **climate and demographic changes** to the landscape, and **common asset issues**

What did Haris say about his extra-curricular activity?

■ About the sewage plant trip he reflected that, "the trip was extremely beneficial as it has put everything into perspective when water-specific terms are being used in projects. It has allowed me to see the bigger picture of where I work and the seriousness of supplying clean water to the UK."

■ On reading the book Haris said, "As a result of reading this book, I have developed my awareness of the water industry which in turn allows me to provide better IT solutions for Thames Water's issues and processes as I'm now able to understand their key issues. In addition to this, reading the book has increased my confidence and professionalism when I have client-focused conversations with Thames Water about their industry as I understand industry-specific terminology and how the utilities sector operates."

Did all this effort improve his coding skills?
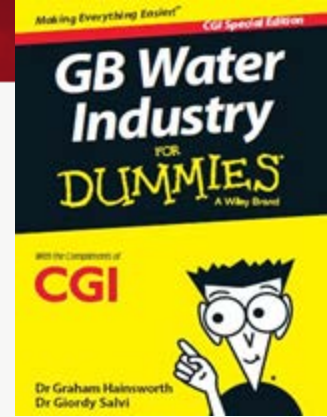
- **Probably not**
- Did it help him to be selected as one of the top three placement students across the whole of IBM for the 2017-18 academic year? **Definitely**
- Did it help him get moved onto the prestigious Morrisons Summer Innovation Project at the end of his placement? (He built a technology prototype to solve their problem and then successfully presented it back to the executive team) **Yes it did**
- Did it contribute to him being offered a graduate role with IBM as a Technology Consultant? **Yes of course**

- *Lots of our students want to be Technology Consultants. To be a consultant you have to learn about the sector that you are dealing with. This is the level of commercial awareness that you will need to commit to developing every time you start a new contract*

Auditing tools

- There are lots of tools that you can use to evaluate the relative position and potential of an organisation that you want to work for, that you do work in, or who you would like to turn into a client
- We talked about using a SWOT analysis in workshop 1 to evaluate yourself. You can also use a SWOT to evaluate an organisation's:

- Strengths (internally)
- Weaknesses (internally)
- Opportunities (externally)
- Threats (externally)

PESTLE analysis helps you to take a big-picture look at the wider industry and external variables that might impact success

- Political
- Economic
- Sociological
- Technological
- Legal
- Environmental and/or Ethical
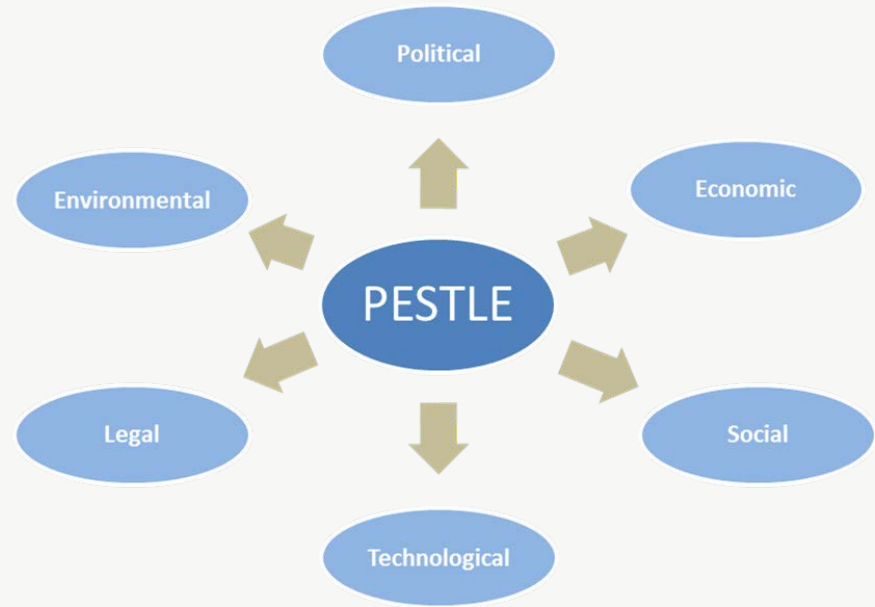
Porter's 5 forces

- Michael Porter, a Harvard Professor posited that if you understand the forces in your environment or industry that can affect your profitability, you'll be able to adjust your strategy accordingly
- He identified five forces that make up the competitive environment, and which can erode profitability

- Taken from https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_08.htm

De-mystifying strategy

- Most organisations will be creating and working towards strategies
- Strategies have a destination; a vision of what the organisation wants to be
- There is usually a mission; a driver about why the organisation exists
- You can often find the strategic plan of a company on their website. If you can find one make sure you skim read it before your interview
- Strategic priorities will be given the most funding and resources
- Process is how you arrive at a strategy, this might include forecasts, goals, objectives, activities, measures and outcomes

Major Components of the Strategic Plan

Strategic Level
Action Level
Outcomes

MISSION	Why we exist
VISION	What we want to be
FORECAST	Our future environment
GOALS	What we must achieve for success
OBJECTIVES	Specific intentions expressed in measurable terms to achieve Goals
ACTIVITIES	Planned actions to achieve Objectives
MEASURES	Measures and Indicators of success of Activities
OUTCOMES	Desired level of performance for Measures

Fashion and Company Culture

- Advertising images often reflect the target audience and staff that the company is trying to attract, look carefully at how a company presents itself visually
- Look at staff arriving at work – how are they dressed?
- Normcore – Mark Zuckerberg and his 365 grey T-shirts
- Hipsters – tweed and twirly moustaches
- The City – suits and pointy shoes
- Sports at lunch time and after work
- Office bake-offs
- Sober Socialising – how do people hang out after work?
- Nominated charities and sponsored runs
- Corporate social responsibility like literacy projects

What is Corporate Social Responsibility?

- CSR is about understanding the impact a business has on a wider community and how it can create positive impact in a strategic way
- It can be seen as self-regulation incorporated into a business model
- Sometimes used to create brand loyalty
- **Examples are:**
- Philanthropy - donating a proportion of profits to charities
- Community involvement and development – local or international – such as engaging with universities and schools to provide work experience!
- Having a commitment to sustainability and the environment
- Social accounting which emphasises corporate accountability
- Mandatory ethics training for staff
- Ensuring ethical labour practices
- A commitment to only dealing with ethical suppliers

Ask people to explain things to you.

- If you ask questions you will find out what your clients want you to do and why. If you don't know 'why' you won't fully know 'what'.
- Commercial Awareness is the ability to contextualise the service you give so that it is useful to clients because it helps them to achieve their goals

- Try using active listening. Use your EARS
- Engage – look people in the eye, smile and nod
- Ask – use questions
- Re-state or reaffirm – check your understanding, repeat back what they have said by using closed questions – "So what you're saying is…?"
- Silence – allow people time to think before they respond. Don't try to fill the space, let people speak, don't interrupt them

- *Information here has been taken from Christopher Stoakes. All you need to know about Commercial Awareness (2009-10)*

Reminder: start to do all the things that you said you were going to do in assessment 1 so that you can talk about your achievements in Assessment 2

Dates for your diary…

Disney – Undergraduate placement and summer internship recruitment talk

When – Wednesday 24th October – 2.30-3.30pm

Sign up here - https://careershub.city.ac.uk/students/events/detail/723724

This event is run by the Careers team

Goldman Sachs Women's Conference: Exploring Engineering

8 and 9 November 2018 | Goldman Sachs London HQ

ADDITIONAL DETAILS

Are you a science, technology, engineering or maths student interested in a 2019 summer internship?

Goldman Sachs invites women graduating in 2020 to attend a two-day symposium to learn about career opportunities in our Engineering organisation and how to succeed in the recruitment process.

To find out more about this two day conference and register by **19 October** to attend, visit gs.com/careers.

We will begin taking registration for this event and applications for the 2019 Engineering Summer Analyst Programme on 1 July.

Reading list

- **All you need to know about Commercial Awareness. 3rd ed** Christopher Stoakes. 2011-2012
- **How to build the ultimate LinkedIn profile in under an hour: boost your branding, attract recruiters, and find your next job.** Andrew Macarthy. 2013

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