Critical Reflection

Assessment 3

Reflective Report

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Introduction

From March to June 2025, I completed a business internship at Taronga Zoo as part of the MQBS8090 unit. My placement was in the Carnivore Unit, where I worked on a time and motion study aimed at understanding zookeeper workflows and identifying operational improvements. My main responsibility involved collecting real-time observational data on zookeeper activities, such as feeding, cleaning, enrichment, and care routines. This data would later be analysed by my team of four students to generate insights and recommendations for zoo management.

This internship was not only chance to apply the technical and analytical skills I gained through my master's program, but also a learning experience in teamwork, professional communication, and ethical responsibility. In this report, I reflect on my progress toward three learning objectives I identified at the beginning of the internship:

1. Gaining practical insight into sustainable animal care practices

2. Improving communication and collaboration in a professional team environment

3. Applying ethical and accurate recordkeeping practices in a real-world setting

I also draw on supervisor feedback and relevant academic literature to critically reflect on how I developed throughout the placement and what I learned from the experience.

Progress Towards Learning Objectives

1. Sustainable Animal Care Practices

My first objective was to gain practical understanding of sustainable animal care practices. While I was not directly involved in designing or implementing care routines, I observed and recorded activities related to animal welfare, including feeding schedules, habitat maintenance, and enrichment sessions. This gave me a close look at the day-to-day realities of sustainability in animal care.

What stood out was how zookeepers balanced operational efficiency with animal welfare. For example, enrichment activities for large carnivores like lions and sun bears were structured yet adapted to each animal's behaviour. By observing these practices and speaking with staff, I learned how decisions is made based on both routine and responsiveness to animal needs. I also noted how data collected during these routines fed back into care decisions showing a continuous improvement cycle driven by observation and adjustment. Cognitive interviewing allows researchers to evaluate survey questions through in-depth interactions between the interviewer and respondent, which helps shape the quality and type of data collected (Willson & Miller, 2014).

My supervisor commented that I "followed all protocols when on site and was diligent with records." This confirmed that I not only observed ethical care practices but contributed to documenting them in a reliable and respectful way. The experience helped me connect theoretical sustainability principles with practical implementation, echoing Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, where concrete experience and reflective observation are key to deeper learning. According to D'abate, Youndt, and Wenzel (2017), internship satisfaction is largely influenced by task significance, feedback, learning opportunities, and supervisor support—factors I also found valuable during my own experience.

2. Communication and Team Collaboration

The second objective I set for myself focused on improving communication and teamwork. Working in a group of four students and alongside zoo staff meant that clear, respectful communication was essential. Initially, I found it challenging to assert myself in team discussions, especially when proposing

changes to our observation templates or seeking feedback. I tend to be quiet in unfamiliar settings, and I had to push myself to engage more actively in both formal meetings and informal conversations with staff.

Over time, I noticed a shift in how I approached collaboration. I became more comfortable asking questions, giving updates during our team check-ins, and checking in with keepers to ensure I was recording observations accurately. My supervisor noted that while I am "a quiet person," I "communicate well when required" and was "reliable and punctual with great communication with her team." This was reassuring and reflected the progress I had made.

Team collaboration was also essential during the analysis phase. We had to validate our data, share observations, and interpret patterns collectively. Tuckman's model of group development (1965) describes the process teams go through: forming, storming, norming, and performing. I feel our team moved into the performing stage by the end of the internship, working efficiently and with mutual trust.

The experience made me more aware of my communication style and how to adapt in a professional setting. It also taught me that collaboration is not just about talking more it's about being present, reliable, and open to feedback.

3. Recordkeeping and Ethical Responsibility

My third learning goal was to apply ethical responsibility in recordkeeping and data management. Accurate records were vital in our project. We were collecting live observational data on zookeeper activities, sometimes across multiple locations. If the data was poorly recorded, our analysis and insights would be flawed. This made me very aware of the ethical responsibility I held even in a student role.

My role required me to complete logs in Google Sheets, verify timestamps, clarify task descriptions, and later help clean and format the data for analysis in Python. I developed checklists to make sure my records were complete and accurate before final submission. This attention to detail was noted in my evaluation, with my supervisor commenting that I was "consistent with [my] record keeping and documentation" and "a driving force in choosing the correct method of data capture."

Ethical responsibility in data work includes integrity, confidentiality, and reliability. These align with the Australian Computer Society's (ACS) Code of Professional Conduct (2014), which outlines principles like enhancing quality of life, honesty, and professional development. Even though our data was internal and not highly sensitive, I treated it with care, ensuring that it would be usable for future reporting and operational improvements.

Professional Development and Feedback Integration

Beyond the three learning objectives, the internship helped me grow in areas I hadn't initially considered. One of the most important was initiative. My evaluation noted that I "demonstrated initiative in researching answers and applying responses as needed in new situations." This meant I didn't just do what was asked I sought ways to improve. For example, I suggested simplifying the activity log format to make data entry easier and more consistent, which the team adopted.

Another area of development was time management. I consistently arrived on time and met all deadlines, balancing the internship with university coursework and part-time work. Being rated "exceptional" for punctuality confirmed that I had built strong professional habits. Eraut (2004) suggests that time management and dependability are key informal learning outcomes in the workplace, and I experienced that firsthand.

I also learned to handle feedback constructively. When I received comments about inconsistencies in data labels or spreadsheet formatting, I corrected them and took notes for next time. As Brookfield (2017) notes, critical reflection involves examining your assumptions and being open to change. I learned that mistakes aren't failures they're part of the process.

Application of Theory

This internship helped me apply theory from my university studies in a real-world setting. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation was evident throughout the placement. I observed zookeeper routines (concrete experience), reflected on the efficiency and flow of those routines (reflective observation), brainstormed possible improvements (abstract conceptualization), and supported my team in testing those ideas through our reporting tools (active experimentation).

The placement also strengthened my understanding of workplace learning. Boud and Falchikov (2006) argue that most learning in professional environments happens informally through observation, feedback, and problem-solving not just through formal instruction. This perfectly aligns with my experience at Taronga Zoo. I often had to pick up new methods on the spot, clarify expectations directly with staff, and adapt my work based on real-time feedback from supervisors and peers. This hands-on environment taught me far more than a classroom could alone.

Importantly, this internship has been instrumental in my career development. While my Master of Business Analytics program has provided me with strong theoretical foundations in data handling, modelling, and visualization, this was my first opportunity to work with a live dataset in a dynamic, real-world environment. I applied Python for cleaning and wrangling observational data, collaborated with my team to build dashboards in Power BI, and helped shape a report that would be presented to zoo management. These were not hypothetical exercises they had purpose, stakeholders, and actual outcomes.

Having this level of practical exposure has significantly deepened my confidence as an aspiring data analyst. I now better understand the importance of clarity in data recording, the value of team communication when analysing patterns, and the responsibility that comes with presenting insights to decision-makers. The final presentation to Taronga Zoo management, where we shared our findings and recommendations, pushed me to think critically about how to communicate technical results in a clear and relevant way.

In short, this internship bridged the gap between theory and practice. It solidified my learning, tested my adaptability, and gave me a clearer sense of how I can apply my skills in a professional context.

Conclusion

Looking back, my internship experience was deeply rewarding and formative. I set out to understand sustainable animal care, improve my teamwork and communication, and apply ethical data practices and I feel confident that I made meaningful progress in all three areas. The feedback from my supervisors highlighted my reliability, initiative, and professionalism, while also giving me areas to continue developing particularly around communication confidence.

This placement not only reinforced my existing skills but also helped shape my identity as a reflective, responsible data analyst. I now have a clearer understanding of how to work within multidisciplinary teams, how to approach data collection with integrity, and how to continuously learn from experience and feedback. I will carry these lessons forward into future roles especially in data analytics and operational improvement settings.

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