

CON2013X Reflective Essay

In my second year of practical training, I was able to build on the foundational knowledge I gained during my first year by delving deeper into the construction industry. The invitation to work with the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure for over 100 hours provided me with invaluable exposure to public sector projects. Soon after, I took on a new challenge as a Tomorrow's Leader for the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB), which opened my eyes to the broader, global aspects of leadership in the built environment. These two experiences were pivotal in shaping my understanding of the construction industry, equipping me with both practical project management skills and leadership insights.

One of the most significant experiences in my second year was the opportunity to return to the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPW&I), where I had briefly worked during my first year. This time I was tasked with assisting the construction project manager with various administration tasks, including compiling documents for Close-out Reports and attending site meetings to take notes. These meetings covered different stages of projects, from the design phase to progress and handover meetings. I approached this opportunity with an open mind, I was intrigued to see how projects in the public sector are initiated and to observe the role of project managers within the department.

In the first week, the project manager and I recapped on the syllabus we were learning from school, and he wanted to see where my level of understanding was within the construction technology. My first task was to identify and track the projects he was managing, which gave me the chance to familiarise myself with project management software like Ms Projects. As we visited various sites, I saw firsthand how public sector projects progressed. One site that stood out to me was not focused on physical construction, but rather the challenges it faced during the documentation and procurement stages. This experience taught me the importance of involving the community when undertaking a project. I was introduced to new concepts, such as the role of the Community Liaison Officer (CLO), who acts as a bridge between the project team and the local community. The importance of their role in ensuring the projects success was eye-opening.

While my first major challenge in 2022 involved a physical mistake on site with a damaged cable, this time I was introduced to the complexities of the "behind-the-scenes" work that occurs before construction begins. It was a valuable lesson in how much planning, communication, and community engagement goes into ensuring the smooth execution of a project. This challenge involved the CLO advocating for the employment of additional local

community members. Before proceeding, the project manager had to consult with the stakeholders and eventually draft a revised schedule of works to accommodate the new hires. Observing the composure and professionalism required in such negotiations inspired me, showing me the responsibility and skill required to represent a client in stakeholder meetings. I began to see myself in that role, ensuring all parties leave with a shared understanding and mutual agreement.

As time went on during my practical work, I also had the opportunity to work alongside the electrical engineers within the department, this provided a different perspective on project execution. We visited sites at various stages of development, and I gained valuable insights into the engineer's role in design approvals and on-site decisions. I observed the process engineers follow when approving work before it is carried out. One fascinating challenge was dealing with client requests to change the layout of electrical outlets mid-project, which required coordination and adaptability from the entire team.

Another issue occurred when a sub-contractor's work failed to meet safety standards, such as leaving live wires exposed, creating a potential hazard. The engineer had to ensure the sub-contractor relooked at the work according to safety protocols. This was my first introduction to the concept of a "snag list", which outlined all the tasks the sub-contractor needed to address before receiving the certificate of completion from the construction project manager.

Witnessing these challenges reinforced the importance of attention to detail and accountability on site. The experience gained during my time at DPW&I was invaluable, exposing me to the complexities of public-sector construction sector construction projects and the importance of stakeholder collaboration, quality control, and community involvement. However, it was my involvement with the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) as Tomorrow's Leader that truly broadened my perspective on the global construction industry.

I became a member of CIOB in my first year of university. This happened when the CEO, Caroline Gumble visited our department and spoke to our class about CIOB and the role they played in the built environment. As I gained more practical experience, I began to understand the importance of registration and being recognised as a professional in the industry. This realisation led me to apply for the role of Tomorrow's Leader for the Cape Town Hub. I saw this as an opportunity to push myself beyond my comfort zone, immersing myself in the administrative side of the built environment.

Within my first week, I was inducted by Sophie Woods, the head of Tomorrow's Leaders. I was immediately involved in my first ever project, an event that was hosted by a colleague. This event involved industry professionals sharing their experiences with UCT students. The warm reception I received motivated me to engage more deeply with the group, and I began regularly attending monthly meetings where I contributed ideas for the Cape Town Hub. The major project we worked on during this year included the planning of Members Forum that'll take place in 2024.

During my time at CIOB, I had the privilege of interacting with professionals from various sectors, including banking, contracting, and property development. Each individual brought unique insights, which reinforced my desire to bridge the gap between students and industry professionals. These interactions provided a broader understanding of the industry and inspired me to further my involvement in initiatives that connect students with professionals. These interactions not only broadened my understanding of the industry but also helped me to build essential networks that I know will be invaluable as I move forward in my career.

As I continue my journey with CIOB, I am increasingly aware of the impact such an organisation can have on shaping young professionals like myself. The exposure to different components within the built environment has been eye opening, and while my involvement with CIOB is still ongoing, I look forward to further contributing to the Cape Town Hub and growing personally and professionally in the coming years

Reflecting on my second year in the construction industry, it's clear that my practical training and leadership involvement have both been instrumental in shaping my professional development. The hands-on experience with DPW&I gave me an in depth understanding of public sector projects, the complexities behind project execution, and the importance of engaging with various stakeholders. It allowed me to appreciate the different components of project management, from navigating community relations to ensuring safety standards and quality control.

At the same time, my role as Tomorrow's Leader for CIOB introduced me to a global perspective on leadership within the built environment. The connections I made and the opportunities I had to contribute to the Cape Town Hub have been invaluable, pushing me beyond my comfort zone and expanding my understanding of the broader industry. These experiences have laid a strong foundation for my future, equipping me with both the technical skills and leadership qualities necessary for a successful career in the construction industry.

As I look ahead to the rest of my journey, I am excited to continue learning, growing, and contributing both within CIOB and the broader construction sector. The experiences of my second year have not only solidified my passion for the built environment but also prepared me to tackle new challenges and opportunities in the years to come.