

Final Internship Report
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Overview of the Internship

I interned at ReD Associates for 12 weeks during the spring of 2011, from early April until the end of June. Founded in 2005, ReD Associates is a rapidly growing, anthropology-based innovation consulting firm with offices in Copenhagen and New York.

I found the internship to be intense, with days that started at 8 am and sometimes went until after midnight. Although it was very different than I had expected, I learned an enormous amount. The experience has already helped me redefine my goals for senior year and beyond, and I'm extremely grateful to Dickey for that.

Projects + Types of Work

During my internship I worked on two projects. The first project was for an international spirits company interested in re-positioning one of their brands to young consumers (ages 21-29) in the U.S. For this project, I researched how young Americans use alcohol—to bond with friends, to define their identities, or to escape temporarily from lives that are often in flux – and how their beverage choices are influenced by brands. One week after I arrived in Copenhagen, I was sent to Boston for 10 days to do fieldwork. Each night, I would interview a different respondent, and then observe their night out, including what role alcohol played, which brands they chose, and why. It was like creating a mini ethnography each night. I got to know the respondents quickly and sometimes very intimately (I was often considered a friend almost immediately, and respondents were remarkably candid with me). Other consultants did fieldwork on the project in San Diego and Austin.

I found fieldwork to be physically exhausting – I was out every night from 5 pm to midnight or later with respondents, and then I needed to be ready for conference calls at 9 am (which was 3 pm back in Copenhagen, where my boss managed our project remotely). In addition to daily calls with the home office, I created comprehensive field notes about each respondent, including maps of their social networks, their music preferences, and which media they used.

After fieldwork, I returned to Copenhagen where – with the help of the field notes – we started “pattern recognition,” the process where we discussed the 20 respondents from Boston, San Diego and Austin and started to look for patterns in their behavior. Through this analysis, we formed a story about what life is like for young Americans between college and when they start their families. We then used this information to develop a strategy for the spirits company to re-brand itself and appeal more to this group's aspirations.

My second project was for a leading toy manufacturer studying entry into the Chinese market. I joined this project at a much later stage; when I was assigned to the team, the researchers had already come back from the field and were analyzing data. My first task was to organize all of the transcripts and video they took in the field using Atlas.ti, a

software program which allows users to code data by theme, speaker, location, income level, etc. This task required reading every transcript from every interview in the field, and cutting them into snippets based on different topics. For example, we coded every time respondents talked about the importance of quality, every time they talked about perception of Chinese v. international brands, etc. I got to know the data extremely well (and learned how to use Atlas, which is a software program frequently used by anthropologists when coding data). Knowing the data well proved invaluable later in the project when I helped create slides about various competitive products, and why they appealed more than our client's products. I also created a short summary video from the best field clips to give our client a sense of what life is like for middle class Chinese families.

While the first project focused on getting to know our respondents well, understanding who they were and how they defined their identity through alcohol, on the China project we looked at the market more broadly, including analyzing past market failures (the "Asian trap," as its called, is the infamous early exit of businesses trying to break into the East Asian market). I think that part of what convinced me that ReD does excellent work was seeing how our insights from the field could lead to specific recommendations for this company so they didn't enter the market blindly. I found myself intrigued by the possibilities of applying cultural anthropology to international business challenges for my career.

Expectations vs. Experience

This internship was very different than I expected, in part because of my own naïveté about business. This was one of my first experiences working in a business environment, after working with non-profits and a small family-owned business. I was surprised by the types of projects. Based on ReD's website, the internship advertisement, and conversation during my interview, I expected that ReD's clients were working on green energy, healthcare, and cultural differences in the workplace. ReD does do some work for healthcare companies; ReD has done more than 19 projects for a global supplier of diabetes supplies. However, most projects in the shop were not about selling clean energy; they were about re-branding alcohol or next generation cell phones. Perhaps this was the timing of my internship, the timing of the economy or simply the flow of work for this season. I don't think it is necessarily bad to rebrand alcohol so that you might sell more, although at first I wasn't too excited about helping a company sell more liquor! I came to believe that if you can re-brand alcohol, you can re-brand anything, and the skills I learned in understanding a consumer could be applied to selling things I'm more passionate about, like better health behaviors (wearing bike helmets, eating healthfully, etc).

Second, I was surprised by the differences between theory and practice in doing research and analysis. ReD calls itself "science-based" and boasts about hiring anthropologists and other social scientists. ReD's approach was very different than anything I'd experienced before. Over time, I came to appreciate the approach and see why – on the timeline

clients expect – research must be expedited, but it was jarring at first to experience ReD’s version of applied ethnography.

Work Environment + Cultural Differences

I was shocked by how different Denmark is culturally from the U.S.

I thought there was *no way* that Copenhagen would be a bigger change than say, Namibia or India (where I spent my fall and winter terms, respectively), but it was *so* different. I realized that in Namibia and India there were big, highly visible differences so I expected things would be different, and then I wasn’t that surprised when they were. Further, because of the setup of the programs (I was part of Dartmouth FSPs), I don’t think I ever got to know locals that well. Although I made acquaintances with them and was friendly, I already had a group of Dartmouth students to rely on socially.

Copenhagen, however, is filled with people who look like me, dress like me, and like the same bands as I do. I didn’t think they could possibly be *that* different. This façade of sameness caught me off guard when differences emerged. I was greatly assisted in my relationships with Danish work colleagues; they allowed me to get to know them and a bit of Danish culture.

Some major differences:

- Very informal work atmosphere. Even though it was a consulting company, people dressed extremely casually. This also extended to drinking/social life...
- Danes value wit over being nice. Whereas I’ve heard in the U.S. about the importance of setting people at ease, there seems to be a value with Danes of seeing who has the sharpest sense of humor.
- It was totally fine to get drunk with your colleagues... in fact they would probably be suspicious if you didn’t. The first Friday I was in Copenhagen, one of our colleagues was moving from our Copenhagen to New York office, so an email was sent out to everyone saying that we’d meet at the corner bar for drinks at 6 pm, after work on Friday. I assumed this would be drinks with colleagues, maybe from 6-8 pm. I was amazed when the night went on until 4 am (so I heard).
- Very egalitarian environment. We had open workspaces (no offices, no cubes) where partners would sit next to first year consultants, managers, or even interns.
- Total disregard for political correctness. Danes say the darnedest things.

Work Life Balance (or, rather Imbalance)

One of the hardest things about my internship was how intense it was. I felt like I had very little life outside of the office. In some ways this was OK, because I learned so much and loved getting to know the people I worked with (who also made work their life), but I often longed to get out of the office to see Copenhagen, or even just rest and have personal time.

One thing that made me kind of sad was that at our company party, it was announced that the only female senior consultant would be leaving ReD to spend more time with her family (she has two young boys). At the company party where this was announced, one of the partners said (after a few glasses of champagne): *“Now all you young women out there – don’t have kids! And if you do, get an au pair, get a system, deal with it.”* (Did I mention that Danes can be brazenly politically incorrect in a delightfully honest and open way?)

I found the office and my colleagues to be generous and supportive. I realized this is/would be crucial for me since returning to ReD would mean long hours and significant time with my work colleagues.

Challenges, Personal Growth + Skills Learned

I learned about business, corporate culture, and consulting in particular, and I developed specific skills with Atlas, iMovie, and PowerPoint (I thought I knew how to do a good presentation before this internship, but you should see me now!).

I improved my ability to balance assertiveness with being a “team player.” At one point, I was frustrated when I felt like I was being assigned tasks without being part of the team... I explained that I’d really like to understand the scope of the project and the big picture so I could see how my tasks fit into that the project, and things did improve.

I learned to work in the European/Nordic business culture, which is quite different than American business culture, and I learned a lot about building social relationships with colleagues so I could work more effectively with them.

Lasting Impact

Working at ReD gave me a good picture of what working in international consulting is like. The experience has stimulated reflections on career, work life balance, and where I want to live after graduation. I also have a lot to think about as I complete my degree about how I want to mix academic vs. applied approaches to anthropology and ethnography in my early career.