

Reflective placement log report – international coffee organisation (ico)

[Business](#), [Industries](#)



Introduction

This report reflects on my experiences during my two-month placement at the ICO. It will consider my expectations of the company and my role within it; and whether these expectations were met. Firstly, it will address the company itself by identifying such aspects as its mission, its influences, its key actors and whether or not my role co-incident effectively with such aspects. To help organise the report, a series of questions will break up the content to properly address each subject.

The ICO

This section of the report will consider the organisation itself.

1. What is the role of the organisation?

On the company website, under the ICO's "mission statement", the organisation has described itself as the "main intergovernmental organisation for coffee"; claiming that they bring together exporting and importing governments to tackle the challenges of the international coffee sector. Governments who are members of the ICO represent 97% of world coffee production and over 80% of world consumption. Since the organisation is governmental, its mission is therefore highly monitored by international representatives. Its influences are as a result, very broad.

Established in 1963 when the first International Coffee Agreement (ICA) was put forward, the organisation has since expanded under many successive agreements, and still advocates the same ethos: to promote coffee's sustainable expansion and to convert it into a marketable industry that takes

every party's interest at heart. The first ICA applied a quota system to coffee consumption, which meant that supplies that were in excess of consumer requirements were withheld from the market to increase worldwide consumption. This mission had a knock-on effect, and it has consequentially been agreed that the organisation will help to reduce poverty in developing countries that depend mostly on coffee as their primary export market. The ICO seeks to help these countries to receive the profit that they deserve from their exports and to give their population a better standard of living. To carry out this mission, the ICO:

Enables governments and the private sector to exchange views on coffee matters, market conditions and orchestrate new policies based on these collective views

Develops projects that will benefit the world's coffee economy

Provides economic, technical and scientific information on the world coffee sector to make people more aware of its importance

Promotes a Coffee Quality Improvement Programme (CQIP)

Promotes market transparency by regularly publishing statistics of the international coffee sector

Since coffee is produced in over 60 countries and provides jobs and living standards to over 125 million people, the ICO is of great relative importance and provides training and information programmes to many countries with the interest of education and the sharing of technology at the forefront of the agenda.

How is the ICO structured?

At the head of the ICO is the International Coffee Council (ICC). It is composed of representatives from each member government in the organisation. The council meets every March and September to discuss their plans, approve or decline strategic documents and consider advice given from advisory bodies and committees. This authority is therefore a very democratic one, and does not obey the laws dictated by a hierarchy. It is instead oligarchic, and appears to observe the interests of every participant involved; even outside sources (advisory bodies, etc.). To highlight this, every decision made by the council is determined by consensus – further evidence that the company is idealistic, and post-positivist[1]. The ICO recognises that governments who take on the researcher role can themselves be influenced by their own specific backgrounds. It therefore seeks to override this by including as many representatives and opinions as possible.

Whilst the ICC is at the top of the organisation, there are other departments that are made up of other ICO staff:

Consultative Form on Coffee Sector Finance

This forum is used to collect topics and opinions related to finance and risk management in the coffee sector; using small to medium-scale producers' interests as a basis for discussion.

Private Sector Consultative Board (PSCB)

This board is comprised of 16 leading industry representatives from exporting and importing members. It discusses such matters as increasing the value and volume of international consumption of coffee; communication, sustainable development and supply chain issues.

As well as these, there are four committees dedicated to various aspects of the organisation that make recommendations to the council. For instance, the Projects Committee recommends the submission and appraisal of projects, whilst the Promotion and Market Development Committee recommend issues on the promotion of consumption and market matters. There is also the Finance and Administration Committee and the Statistics Committee, which deal with matters detailed respectively.

As of November 2011, Mr. Roberio Oliveira Silva has acted as the Executive Director of the ICO, and is responsible for the administration and operation of the ICA.

It seems that employees have a set of tasks that are personally required to carry out (usually in groups). In light of this, and because the company is governmentalized, it appears that a career path is not visible, as each board is made up of members from a variety of governments. The company has influences all over the world, and as such requires a dedicated team of researchers on each committee it upholds. Past this, however, it seems that one would require a job in government if they wish to be on the ICC.

My Personal Experiences

This section of the report will consider my own experiences of the placement.

What were my expectations of the work placement?

Initially, I expected that I might take on a practical role that dealt with secretarial tasks such as answering phones, replying to Emails and also relaying them to the relevant staff. Moreover, my main expectations surrounded tasks that include translation and interpretation, as they are key skills of mine. I presumed these skills would be called upon by the company and that they would be utilised, being as their mission statement includes the line: “[tackling] the challenges facing the world coffee sector through international co-operation”[2]. This denotes a vital need for efficient communication.

What tasks did you perform on a day-to-day basis?

During my two months of placement, the variety of tasks that I undertook did not fluctuate much. The one particular role that I had was administrative, and research-based. It required me to use the ICO’s personal online library (OPAC – Online Public Access Catalogue) and garner exhaustive amounts of information surrounding the issue of sustainable development, and strategies to minimise poverty in developing countries. Focussing on countries that are heavily dependent on coffee as their primary export, the task did directly relate to the company’s overall ethos – by making a “practical contribution to the development of a sustainable world coffee sector and to reducing poverty in developing countries”[3]. Although I arguably was not making a “practical” contribution at the time of my

placement, I completed the necessary steps to learn about the issue thoroughly and if I was to take on a full-time placement at the ICO, I would be fully prepared to pursue more hands-on tasks.

As well as this, I attended administrative meetings and conferences during my placement where the primary discussion entailed sustainable development and fair coffee economy. This greatly added to my placement experience as I was able to have direct interaction with important actors in the company and observe them convey the ICO's mission to a very truthful degree.

What were your aims and objectives prior to the placement? How did they change?

Prior to the placement, my primary aim was to broaden my research and writing skills, and to relate them to a realistic and professional environment. It became clear to me that collecting information is vital in the efficient running of a business; as without it, problems can't be determined and strategies can't be rightly organised. Employers and employees alike need research to be done so that they can exact the company's mission to a successful degree. So my objective changed slightly to a more specific one – to collect research effectively and arrange it in a coherent manner so that others will learn from it as I did. My 10,000-word report is therefore not only written to demonstrate my own skills, but to convey lessons and information for the benefit of the reader.

What do you think you did well during the placement; and also not so well?

I believe I excelled at receiving instructions and understanding them rapidly. For instance, any corrections that were needed on my report were carried out with accuracy, as well as haste. I was also able to ask pertinent questions without fear of being undermined by my superiors – something that I believe is imperative when first starting a new job.

Although this was the case, I admit that I was slightly nervous during the placement as it was my first time, and may have struggled with providing the highest quality research that I am capable of. The report was of significant length (10,000 words), and something that I have not tackled before, and as a result, professionalism was difficult to consistently portray. It was still a fantastic opportunity for me, and I have since learnt a lot from primary experience and will be far better prepared for next time. If the same task was asked of me again presently, I would take a calmer, more collected approach to its completion as I now harbour the experience necessary to do so.

What have you learned?

Perhaps the main thing I have learned is how to conduct myself within a professional environment. This involved adopting a “can do” attitude, with good manners and issue-relevant language that was necessary in the efficient running of the business. I also learnt the importance of meeting deadlines, being punctual and responsive to tasks and questions asked by my peers, as well as the difference between reports and essays. Reports are

the presentation and analysis of findings from practical research, whereas essays detail a question, and seek to answer that question through deliberation on that subject – arguments, if you will. My report on sustainable development therefore presented the facts on developing countries; what their main income is, and how the ICO is seeking the benefit them around the globe.

To compliment this, I have also seen first-hand the benefit of planning when attempting to meet strict deadlines, and self-organisation as a result of this. I feel that my writing style has vastly improved over the course of the placement, and that I have learnt how to adapt my academic style into a more informative reporting style that is necessary in this area of the working world.

Do you think you have achieved your aims and objectives?

Certainly, I have achieved my aims and objectives from this placement. My primary aim was to expand my writing skill and knowledge of working for a globally-influenced company, which I have definitely achieved over two months.

In conclusion, I can say that I do feel liberated by the opportunity to try out new skills in an unfamiliar environment. Whilst my primary set of skills (translation and interpretation) were under-utilised by the organisation, I feel that they have justified this with their giving of a writing opportunity; and the chance to attend meetings on the subject of sustainable development. As a result, I would consider a career with the ICO and feel like it would be a

rewarding one.

Bibliography

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