

REPORT ON THE WORK PLACEMENT ICM-342

Filippo Gottardello – Student No: 30844754

i) A presentation/overview of the organisation, its principal activities and the role/activities of the department(s) you were part of. [5 marks]

The organisation I took part in, namely SLSC S.R.L., is a company that counts two master accountants and several junior analysts. The business was started more than 25 years ago when the founder Dr. Stefano Russolo founded the company. During the first days of this experience, I had the possibility to investigate what moved him to start the company and what justifies his specialisation in farming companies. He told me that back in 1993 he had just received a master's in accountancy when he saw the possibility of opening a profitable accounting and consulting company whose aim was to focus especially on farms and agricultural firms. Two elements made Dr. Russolo confident about this choice:

First, he has always been keen on agricultural knowledge, in particular, he loves wines and their production.

Second, his family came from the outskirts of Venice, a territory that lived mainly thanks to harvesting and farming. This particular fact gave him a closer look at the clients he would have worked with and, in his words, made him aware that there was the possibility of starting a business that centralised the needs and helped these firms.

Today the company is divided into two departments: The first one is mainly focused on reviewing the accounting numbers of many firms, especially those of the so-called primary sector; The second one carries out consultancy in terms of strategy and mergers and acquisitions. I took part in the consultancy department and I followed five different cases during the five weeks I spent there. I will go through all the details in point five of this discussion.

ii) Sector analysis and competitive position of the employer. [5 marks]

The company I worked in, is one of many small players on the territory. The quintessence of this work is finding new clients through personal relationships and keeping on feeding earlier rapports so that they can continue to be profitable in the future. Everything works through the personality of the two master accountants, who are also the sales manager of the company since they spend most of their time haunting new clients and visiting the firms of older ones. The sector is profitable, in the sense that there is still a high profit margin despite the presence of an almost perfect competition environment. This is possible only because all the small players decided to set up a confederation, where they choose a range for the price of services so that nobody is allowed to lower it and gain market power.

iii) Analysis of employers' growth prospects, as well as challenges and threats facing the employer. [5 Marks]

The company had great growth during the first ten years. Initially, Dr. Russolo worked alone in a unipersonal company, then during the years he hired six new employees and decided to look for another Master in Accountancy, who could help him run the company. During those years many

initiatives like SLSC were born in the territory and this inevitably led to a decrease in growth. Nowadays, despite operating in a very competitive market, Dr. Russolo manages to keep his clients and thanks to his charisma and competence, the company has slightly growing for what concerns revenues during the last five years. In my opinion, this equilibrium is possible thanks to a couple of main factors:

First of all, most of the clients experience what is called a Lock-in effect by Management students. They are bound to the personality of Dr. Russolo and the costs of looking for a new accounting specialist would be high in terms of the personal reliability and confidence they put on Dr. Russolo.

Second of all, Dr. Russolo managed to become a point of reference for the territory. He had been vice president of the Master Accountant Association for many years, he took part in innumerable events organized by the Prosecco Consortium, so he managed to make himself visible and reliable to the eyes of new potential clients. This is what, in my view, made him progress and overcome the competitors even if he works in a crowded market.

**iv) Discussion of the carbon footprint and sustainability of the employer's operations
[5 marks]**

For what concerns the sustainability of the company, I would divide this section into two parts.

In the first part, I will describe what the company does in order to reduce its carbon footprint. Recently, Dr. Russolo decided to change the company vehicle, which is used by him to move toward clients, events, lawyers, courts, etc. Previously (Until June 2022) he used an old diesel alimented vehicle, which was not that efficient and very costly in terms of sustainability. Now he drives a new-generation hybrid Vehicle, which allows him to move much more efficiently from an environmental point of view. Moreover, the office has changed over the years: Lately, the old light bulbs have been changed to brand new LEDs, the air conditioning implant has been renewed and the whole office makes use of recycled paper.

In the second part, I would like to underline how the company has helped others, through its consultancy, to move towards a cleaner future.

Over the years the company did consultancy that helped implement renewable methods to produce energy such as solar power or biomass-produced energy. During my five weeks, I bumped into the case of a consortium of farmers who decided, under the consultancy of Dr. Russolo, to install an enormous biomass energy producer. This was particularly fit for their business since they bred more than 2,500 caws. With these volumes of animals, they produced more than 40 cubic meters of sewage and byproducts from the fields. This biomass naturally ferments and has the potential to produce tons of energy. Just to give an idea, they produce an average of 8 million kilowatts per hour every year since 2009. This is enough to cover the energy needs of more than 2,000 families.

Tens of these cases happened during the years and keep on happening, that explains why I indirectly consider this point among the carbon footprint sustainability projects somehow encouraged by the company.

Lastly, Dr. Russolo has taken part in the refurbishment projects of the buildings of several companies, which allowed them to diminish the emissions due to heating and fostered the use of natural sunlight during the daytime.

All the measures listed in point two have a huge impact if compared to the limited saves derived from the green conversion of SLSC office and equipment, and despite they do not impact SLSC

directly, they had to be mentioned when talking about sustainability measures since they behave as a sort of positive externality.

v) A critical, reflective, self-evaluation of your role and tasks, and ways in which they contributed to the goals of the organisation. [20 marks]

Since my work placement would have lasted five weeks, Dr. Russolo decided not to assign me to the Accounting division (which means dedicating almost a month to learn how to use the accounting software), but he wisely chose to add me to the Consulting division, which was also my favourite choice between the two. Once I got introduced to my colleagues, Dr. Russolo told me what would have been the structure of my five weeks there: Essentially the idea was to assign each week a case on which I would have worked in close relation with him and the colleagues. The cases, as we will see, will cover very different parts of my knowledge and five different clients.

The first week was dedicated to the creation of a contract, the so-called “Contratto di rete” under Italian legislation, which corresponds to a sort of “network contract” where the parts (Firms) commit to share some equipment and, in this specific case, a variable percentage of their harvests. Since my previous knowledge on this topic dates back to four years ago, I was given a draft of a similar contract to become familiar with the task. This is a very typical contract and in most cases, the common draft needs just to be slightly adjusted to fit the specific case. Since this was my first case I decided to analytically revise all the discipline of contracts, which I was told would have been beneficial for the upcoming weeks. Therefore, I spent the first three days revising what are the elements of a contract, what causes voidability and what causes nullability, and all the basics that I learned during my bachelor's, focusing in particular on the network contract case. During the last two days of the week, I got in contact with the client to ask them whether they wanted to put certain terms in the contract and I thoroughly verified that every mandatory element was present. Then, I submitted the work to a colleague who gave me a feedback the day after. On Friday I sent the contract to Dr. Russolo, for the last check before being delivered to the client.

The second week was probably the toughest one since I had to face a very peculiar case. The fact was the following: After an extraordinary act of law by the Italian State, agricultural firms are allowed to transform from limited liability company to unlimited liability companies at the price of paying a substitutive tax, which would in turn allow the companies to avoid every type of taxation (both on personal income and on capital gains) in case the company will decide in the future to sell some property plants and equipment.

The problem here is that the client was originally a limited liability Company with some characteristics that made impossible the transformation. Specifically, the law permitted the transformation only if the limited liability company was a so-called “*Società di mero godimento*”, which means a company that does not have a commercial scope but exists only to serve the purpose of managing its assets. To solve this problem I suggested selling a branch of the company (Made of some PP&E that were exclusively commercial) which was guilty of making the transformation impossible. I discussed with my colleagues this option and we suggested it to Dr. Russolo. I received during week five a notification which said that the transformation would be done by the end of September, following what I and the team suggested during week 2. In fact, except for the amount of liabilities that will be transferred to the newborn company, Dr. Russolo decided to implement a solution very similar to the one suggested by me and the team, which makes me extremely proud of what we did.

The third week was a peculiar one. A client wanted to invest part of her salary in a Retirement fund and wanted to know everything about its characteristics. The client was a commercial agent and wanted to take part in ENASARCO, which is an integrative Italian pension fund for commercial agents. It was a demanding week from a studying point of view since I had to revise what I knew about the Italian retirement Income and how it works, and then integrate my knowledge with this fund, which is exempted from the payment of certain taxes since it is recognized by the State. At first glance, this can look like an overwhelming task, but after a couple of days of studying, I was able to produce an Excel and Word document that illustrated everything in detail. Initially, I had to deliver the work on Friday to Dr. Russolo, who had scheduled an appointment with the client on Friday afternoon, to talk about this topic. Since there was an overlap I was told to deliver the work by Thursday morning. I had to work until late hours on Wednesday night because my work was scheduled for Friday. Anyhow, I managed to overcome this little inconvenience without impacting the quality of my work.

Week four was a bit more classic, in terms of tasks. I was given a case where a client was considering acquiring another company and asked for a suggestion on how the numbers were. The only difficulty was that, as a finance student, I am used to companies that exchange their stock in public markets. This is a big advantage because being quoted means satisfying a long list of accounting requirements and mandatorily publishing financial data quarterly. In my case, the company was an agricultural unlimited liability company, which in Italy is not supposed to gather regular accounting data.

Given these difficulties, I had to proceed by setting assumptions over assumptions, and in some cases, this was not even enough, since assumptions cannot substitute data that do not exist. As a consequence, I could not reorganize the balance sheet from a financial point of view and therefore I could not compute some ratios and margins. Overall, I managed to conclude a discrete work in terms of completeness and Dr. Russolo himself recognized that it was not possible to do any better with the data I had. This case took me back to the accounting courses I followed during my path of study. In particular, during the Master's I was always told by professors that it all goes back to the quality of the data you have, but I never really grasped what that meant, because I was used to well-organized and scholastic cases. It was during this week that I understood what my professors were trying to teach me: You can be the best analyst in the world and carry out the best possible analysis, but if your data lack completeness and coherence your analysis can end up being pointless.

Week five was devoted to a peculiar case of valuation. An agricultural firm that has been making Prosecco wine for almost half a century tragically lost one of its founders, who owned 40% of the shares and an equal portion of voting rights. The remaining two owners decided to acquire the quotes from the son of the entrepreneur who passed away, and my role was to carry out an equity evaluation in order to establish the right price for the quotes. In this case, I received a draft of the work made by my colleagues and my role was to check that everything was right, from the assumptions to the conclusions. It took me three days to fully analyse the numbers and come out with positive feedback. Immediately after I gave positive feedback I realized that the team forgot to account for a relevant part of the goodwill so I sprinted to Dr. Russolo to explain to him what in my view was to be changed. Technically, I noticed that the goodwill we computed did not take into account the fact that the company already has location contracts in place for the locations of the fields where the Prosecco is produced. Since these fields are by law limited to a very restricted area, the same existence of the contracts is value added to the company and must be accounted for when evaluating the equity. The very last thing I did on this work placement was

receiving an email from the clients who said that they were satisfied with the evaluation we carried out. It was a success and I congratulated the team for what we did.

vi) An overview of the challenges you faced and how you resolved them. [10 marks]

Since Dr. Russolo is a very committed businessman, initially I found it difficult to dive into a new job without someone constantly guiding me. The other elements of the team were available in case I had any doubts or questions, but sometimes I found them to be a bit superficial, and since I consider myself very meticulous, I thought their explanations were insufficient at times. Moreover, some of them were not reasoning on the specific case but tended to apply what they did in the past as a rule, without considering any possible change due to the specificity of the singular case. I recognize that this approach allows you to save a lot of time but it can be harmful in the long range. Once I realized what the situation was, I decided to ask Dr. Russolo as much as possible and study individually what was not clear.

The consequence of this approach (Which in my opinion was the only one possible to gain the maximum from this experience) was that I had to work under very tight time constraints which became even tighter because I dedicated a part of my time to learning and studying the objects I was dealing with. Some days in particular have been demanding, but I think it was a good benchmark for what I will see in my future jobs.

vii) A critical overview of the employability skills you developed as part of the placement and tasks you were assigned to. [20 marks]

After I finished the placement, I took some time to reflect on what I learned and I was shocked by the amount of information, knowledge, and know-how you get exposed to in just five weeks. I can claim that this experience gave me way more than what I expected both in terms of hard and soft skills. In order to fully answer this point I decided to isolate the achievements I have reached.

First of all, I have learned how to live in an office environment. This was something absolutely new to me since I had no previous experience. During the weeks I have learned how to interface with colleagues and clients in a professional yet clear manner, how to talk to your boss and your peers, how to respect their schedules, their duties, and their timetables. Moreover, I have learned how to write formal emails, how to enter a small office without altering the equilibrium, how to understand what might be asked and when, and what to deepen and understand individually. Reflecting on these small things makes you aware of the impact you have on an office and allows you to decide, to a certain extent, how you will be seen by your colleagues. I think this is something crucial and underestimated by new employees, especially those in an early phase of their careers. At the end of the placement, we drew the sums with Dr. Russolo who was happy to share with me the idea that my colleagues had of me. He said they considered me the ideal colleague for my behaviour because I possess all the ideal characteristics mentioned above. He also said that even if they have almost ten years of experience with internships, with more than 50 students, it is extremely rare to find a prepared student who also knows how to behave in a formal context and how to be respectful, clear, and frank. These are things that he as an employer, considers necessary for an optimal candidate. This made me even more convinced that you have to take care of your soft skills as much as you take care of the hard ones, and made me glad to have done such work placement.

The second thing I have learned is how to deal with pressure. Although I had been already exposed to close deadlines as a student, I realized that the amount of responsibility that you have when you are a student is nowhere close to the one you have on the job. Initially, the idea that everything should be done perfectly and in time kept me up at night. This was a completely new feeling to me since I was not used to feeling that much pressure when I was a student. Instead, in this case, I felt a sort of sense of responsibility towards my colleagues because I knew that the quality of my work could have influenced the company's results. Week after week I started to get more confident in my abilities and this anxiety slowly vanished. After all, I think it was sprung by a mix of emotions I felt during the first weeks which got me into this feeling. Now, I can say this is something that normally decreases over time, but at the same time, I think it can take several months to go away.

The third thing I think I have learned is to apply an analytical approach to real-life cases. In fact, during the placement, I came in contact with cases I had never seen before, and this tested my ability to approach new problems. In approaching them, the method was the one I have been using during my studies, that is to say, the analytical one. Being exposed for so long to a scientific approach to problems gave me a sort of mental map of how to proceed when facing new ones. As I mentioned above, I have learned by myself most of the things I have learned during the placement and this was only because I faced new problems. It was there that being able to decompose large matters into simpler ones, learning individually, being proactive, and asking for specific and crucial notions came in.

viii) An overview of any academic skills you acquired during your degree that were particularly relevant for your placement and how the placement helped you build/enhance these skills further. [20 marks]

I would split this point into three, where I try to describe what in my view I acquired in terms of skills and how the placement helped me to consolidate them.

Analytical Approach and Problem Solving:

During my academic journey, I developed a strong analytical approach to problem-solving, which was highly relevant during the placement. This skill allowed me to break down complex problems into manageable components, facilitating a structured approach to finding solutions. The placement further honed my ability to adapt this skill to real-world scenarios, exposing me to a diverse range of cases that challenged my analytical attitude. This practical experience allowed me to refine my problem-solving techniques, consider multiple perspectives, and provide valuable insights to clients and colleagues.

Time Management and Meeting Deadlines:

Time management is another crucial academic skill that translated seamlessly into my placement experience. Throughout my studies, I did various assignments, exams, projects and I learned to prioritize tasks and meet deadlines effectively. This skill became even more vital in the fast-paced office environment, where projects had real-world implications for clients and the performance of the company. The pressure to deliver accurate and timely work highlighted my time management abilities. I learned to allocate time for different tasks, adapt to shifting priorities, and ensure that my contributions aligned with the project timelines. This experience reinforced the importance of meeting deadlines and managing my workflow efficiently.

Independent Learning and Proactivity:

My academic journey demanded a significant degree of independent learning and proactivity.

Researching, studying, and mastering new concepts are essential aspects of high-level education and they are possible only if assisted with independent learning. In the placement, I encountered new challenges that required me to delve into unfamiliar topics, regulations, and industry specifics. I had to move from the theory side to the practice one and this absorbed a large slice of my time. My ability to independently acquire knowledge and proactively seek answers played a vital role in completing the projects I was given. In doing so, I think I demonstrated my initiative to approach complex issues with curiosity and a willingness to learn. This autonomy enhanced the quality of my contributions to the company and facilitated my personal growth.

ix) Reflection on your career opportunities in the firm/sector. [10 marks]

Although this was only a five-week internship, I have to thank Dr. Russolo for the incredible opportunity he gave me. I think this experience was extremely helpful since it gave me an idea of what I will work on in the future. In fact, in September I will join a well-known consulting group in Luxembourg, in the Auditing division. As a finance student, I did not think I would have found the consulting side of finance such interesting. As I had written in the Emerging Leader in Finance module assignment, when I started my studies I thought I would work for a trading floor or generally on a market side one. By the time, the opportunities that my path unveiled, the modules I took, and this same internship moved my interests towards Consultancy and Auditing. After months of reflection, after having considered my work-life balance, my interests, and the opportunities I had, I decided to start my career in this branch of finance. I think this was the right move at the right time because I want to understand whether this could be my vocation or if I will converge back to my earlier aspirations.

It is almost impossible to draw conclusions at this time, since these processes can last years, and it can take very long to have a bigger-picture view of your career. What I can say is that I am satisfied with the choices I took until now and I once again want to thank SLSC for the amazing five weeks we spent together.

ANNEX A: Student Work Placement Diary (to be completed by student and employer on a weekly basis)

Student ID (SPR code): 30844754

Student Name: Filippo Gottardello

Organisation: SLSC S.R.L.

WEEK: 1

Dates: 03.07-07.07

Summary of work undertaken and events attended during week:

This week was devoted to the development of a network contract for a client, starting from a draft. The parts were three firms and they wanted to share some equipment and a part of their harvests. Once I understood what was the request I started analysing the draft. I immediately recognized I needed to revise the discipline of contracts, in particular the one of network contracts. Then, I made three calls with the clients to make sure everything was right and then I started modifying the drafts with the real elements. I sent the contract to my colleagues who gave me a feedback the day after.

Student comments on progress and issues arising:

The first week was a bit difficult, I felt overwhelmed by the tasks I was given and I knew almost nobody of my colleagues. Since the first moment, I felt that I would have to deepen certain topics where my knowledge was lacking. Overall, I managed to impose me to keep calm and optimistic.

Student targets for next week:

Next week I would like to start getting to know my colleagues better, get into the work rhythm of the job, and keep on being positive.

Comments/evaluation from host employer:

Filippo started very positively the experience. He is already understanding how the office works and how his colleagues move. He seems to be cautious.



<p>Summary of work undertaken and events attended during week:</p> <p>This week was really demanding. I followed a particular case of transformation of a company from limited liability to unlimited liability. This happened following a potential save in terms of taxes. In order to convince the client this was a worthy operation, I made an Excel that computed what the savings would be in case the transformation took place. It was a difficult work: I had to understand what taxes were to be paid, which were the exact rates and the value of the taxable totals. It took me some hours of serious study.</p>
<p>Student comments on progress and issues arising:</p> <p>After having handled the work I feel energized. I felt a bit abandoned at first, but then I decided it was not the case to complain and I started to find a solution.</p>
<p>Student targets for next week:</p> <p>Work more on a team basis. Consult more with the team when making small decisions.</p>
<p>Comments/evaluation from host employer:</p> <p>Filippo seems to work well. The task was not simple and he handled it in a clever way</p>



<p>Summary of work undertaken and events attended during week:</p> <p>This week was somehow similar to the previous one. I had to individually study the object I was dealing with, then I started making an analysis in order to highlight the pros and drawbacks of investing in the fund. The output has been an Excel file with all the computations and a Word file that summed up the numbers and commented on them</p>
<p>Student comments on progress and issues arising:</p> <p>There has been an issue with the deadline for handling the project. Anyhow I managed to overcome it without any additional problem.</p>
<p>Student targets for next week:</p> <p>Getting used to this way of working. Understanding the value of learning not only from my colleagues but also from my independent study.</p>
<p>Comments/evaluation from host employer:</p> <p>Filippo handled well the task and he managed not to impact the work when he got to know that the deadline moved 24 hours closer.</p>



Summary of work undertaken and events attended during week:

This week has been a bit easier than the previous two. The analysis I carried out was a bit more standard, so I relied more on my previous knowledge. The work consisted in analysing the accounting documents of a firm, in order to evaluate a potential acquisition.

Student comments on progress and issues arising:

Since the data I had were incoherent and sometimes completely absent I had to set up many assumptions. Setting assumptions is never simple because you never want them to be too stringent. In doing so, I have continuously worked in contact with an experienced colleague, with whom I discussed the work in the making.

Student targets for next week:

Since next week will be the last one, I would like to start drawing the sums and listen to what Dr. Russolo thinks of what I did during the last month.

Comments/evaluation from host employer:

Filippo seems to be fully inside his group of colleagues. He is working proficiently and his colleagues appreciate him for his reliability.



WEEK: 5

Dates: 31.07-04.08

Summary of work undertaken and events attended during week:

This week I carried out an equity evaluation with the help of the team. My role was to check that everything was alright and that the numbers were justified correctly.

Student comments on progress and issues arising:

We had a problem with the quantification of the goodwill but then we managed to decompose it in parts and justify it. It was thanks to an observation made by me that we found a way to justify an extra amount that seemed to be wrong up to that point.

Student targets for next week:

This was the last week and surely the one where I worked more with the team. I feel sad at the idea of leaving this office.

Comments/evaluation from host employer:

Filippo has finished his experience here. His colleagues are happy with him and they worked well together. I told Filippo that we will need some help in September because it will be a busy period. Unfortunately for us, he will fly to Luxembourg where he will start a new experience. Best of Luck!



ANNEX B: Statement of Completion of Work Placement *(to be completed by employer at end of placement)*

Dear Employer

One of our students has been undertaking a placement with your organisation as part of their degree course. We would be grateful if you could confirm how this person has performed during their placement.

Name of organisation: SLSC S.R.L.

Student ID : 30844754

Student Name: Filippo Gottardello

B.1. SATISFACTORY COMPLETION

This is to certify that the student, identified above, above has satisfactorily completed their work placement with our organisation from 03.07.2023 to 04.08.2023 (please add relevant dates).

Signed:



Date: 04.08.2023

Print name: Stefano Russolo

Position/Job Title: Master Accountant, Company Founder

Comment (if appropriate): -