AIS Research Newsletter

AUCKLAND INSTITUTE OF STUDIES NEW ZEALAND

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Featured researcher: Erwin Losekoot

Doctoral meanderings or What really really happens in a PhD

In 1999, I started my academic life as a lecturer in hospitality at The Scottish Hotel School, University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, UK. On my first day, I was told we either needed to have a PhD or be registered for one – so sign on the dotted line! That one-page proposal (something to do with 'Outsourcing in hotels', if I remember correctly) sat on file for ten years while I taught classes in Glasgow, Tehran, Helsinki, Hong Kong and Harbin, ran the alumni network and was Director of Teaching (but it never got touched again).

My departure from Strathclyde in 2009 was the result of a reorganisation – and everyone without a PhD was first out of the door. But luckily I found a role I liked at Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand very quickly. At the forefront of my mind this time was "No PhD – no job". This time, it **had** to be a priority.

The new topic was 'Factors influencing the airport customer experience'. This came from many hours of sitting in airports and finding myself wondering, "Can airports be hospitable places?" The importance of airports as a gateway to a country is obvious to most people, but very large numbers of independent organisations need to work closely together to make that experience happen smoothly. Some of these are government departments, some are national security, some are commercial, and others are voluntary bodies. The link with my original research topic was, "How do these organisations work together to create a seamless visitor experience?" within a piece of national infrastructure that is crucial for tourism, business and the overall economy of a country (at least 70% of international visitors to New Zealand come through Auckland airport).

My previous qualification had been an MBA, and so when my thesis committee suggested an Ishikawa 'cause and effect' type model, this seemed a reasonable starting point. It would identify the key factors influencing a person's airport experience and then perhaps discover the sub-components of that.

An Ishikawa 'cause and effect' type model is used for when you have a problem, because it is important to explore all of the factors that could cause it, before you start to think about a solution. It is named after Kaoru Ishikawa, who pioneered quality management processes in the Kawasaki shipyards. It is also popularly called a fishbone diagram, because of its shape.
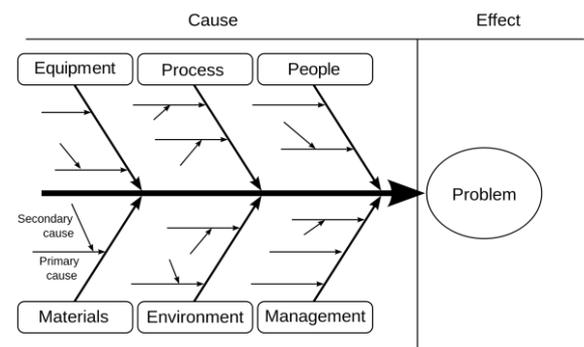
Wellington airport

A committed PhD researcher in search of a contribution to knowledge

Ethics approval was obtained, and data gathering commenced. Ten interviews were carried out with management of organisations at the airport (for information but also to obtain their support and understanding for what I was trying to achieve) before I then conducted 120 interviews with individuals while they were actually using the airport. While the original plan had been to interview people at check-in, in the foodcourt area and at arrivals, it very soon became clear that people are far too stressed out at check-in and far too tired at arrivals. I therefore focused my attention on the landside upstairs foodcourt area (by the departure gate – or as airport personnel call it "the wailing wall"). Despite all the dire warnings I had received about rejections and refusals, to get those 120 interviews I only had to approach 130 people – so a response rate in excess of 90%! While some of these 'interviews' were extremely short, some ran for 30-40 minutes. They were conducted over 4 months in 2012/2013, and stopped when I felt I was not hearing anything new (theoretical saturation). All interviews were conducted, recorded and transcribed by myself, so I was definitely 'immersed' in the data. Questions were deliberately vague as I wanted to get away from people responding to pre-set management agendas – asking people to score 'security' on a 1 – 5 Likert scale in a 30

question survey might give you lots of data, but is security really what people are thinking of when they come to an airport? And if you had not asked them about the availability of luggage trolleys, would they have come up with this as a measure of satisfaction with their airport experience?

This interpretivist and hermeneutic search for the meaning of people's airport experiences was undoubtedly messy, slow and confusing. However, by interrogating each interview transcript with the question "what does this interview tell me about this person's airport experience?", a number of key themes did start to emerge after 20 interviews, became more prominent at 50, and were clearly supported with the evidence after 70 interviews. Carrying on to 120 was perhaps more a reflection of the fact that wandering around the airport talking to people was fun and rewarding (people thank you profusely for taking the time to listen to them!).

This was also a low-point in my research – after the fear of not getting the data in and then interviewing, transcribing and evaluating manically, I slowly had to admit to myself something I perhaps already knew subconsciously. The data did not 'fit' my Ishikawa cause and effect model preferred by my thesis committee. People's experiences at the airport did not fit into a formula because people are

individuals with hopes, fears, previous experiences and unique circumstances.

Fate seemed to intervene because I then happened to have a conversation with a colleague from another university who pointed out that what I was doing was about 'place and space' and that everything I was finding made perfect sense seen through a social geography lens, rather than from a business/management perspective. I also found myself (through another friend) in a 'study group' of Heidegger enthusiasts (the German philosopher) who talked of his concept of 'da-sein' or 'being there' in the moment – exactly what I had asked my respondents at the airport to describe to me.

At the same time I read Alain de Botton's (2009) book *A week at the airport*, describing the people he met while at London's Heathrow airport and also Augé (1995) *Non-places: An introduction to supermodernity*, Derrida (2000) *Of Hospitality,* Foucault (1997) *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*; Geertz (1972) *The interpretation of cultures*; Heidegger (1953) *Being and time,* Nouwen (1975) *Reaching out*, Relph (1976) *Place and placelessness* and van Manen (1990) *Researching lived experience.* None of these had been part of my laboriously crafted literature review carefully written two years earlier!

So what did I find? That people are incredibly passionate about 'their' airport – both the staff who work there and the people who use it. It is a very emotional place (as shown so movingly in the opening scenes of the movie *Love Actually*). A policeman working at the airport explained the paradox of airports to me by taking me to one particular spot at Auckland airport. He said "If you stand here you can see one area embedded in sadness (departures) and another down there embedded in happiness (arrivals)".

My final model is in the format of a pyramid (not unlike Maslow's hierarchy of needs model as someone pointed out just before my viva!). At the base is *physical environment* (the place must be clean, well-lit, a good temperature and not too noisy or crowded). Next is *processing* which should be efficient but courteous, logical and above all perceived as fair. The perception of fairness derives from the way in

which airport users are treated by the *people* who work at the airport. Once people have been processed in a hospitable manner by those staff, airport customers find themselves waiting, and they would prefer to do this in a space that has an identity or as I called it *placeness*, that means something, that has a connection to the place it is geographically located in. Finally, at the top of the pyramid, was a category called *Personal Travel Philosophy*. In my research I found a group of people who suffered the same travel indignities and inconveniences as everyone else, but somehow seemed to rise above them, to be able to detach themselves from the things others found so annoying. If more airport customers could be like them, would airports not be nicer places to spend time in?

Have I made a contribution to knowledge? I think so. We live in a very complex postmodern consumer society where we are

constantly renegotiating public and private spaces, and airports are places of constant flow but also with the potential for security restrictions and detention. The movie *The Terminal* starring Tom Hanks is based on the real-life experience of an Iranian man stuck at Paris' Charles de Gaulle airport for 18 years.

Is what I found rocket science? Definitely not!

And what have I learned from the whole PhD process (all 16 years of it since I first sat down and signed a research proposal)? How little you really know. And (hopefully) to be tolerant of others as they make their personal research journey – as my supervisors were tolerant of me (thanks Prof Nevan Wright!).

Dumbest question? Being asked by my thesis committee 'what are you going to find?' – if I had known that at the start I would never have got to where I did in the end!

Roz Kelly awarded Masters

Roz Kelly graduated with her Masters in International Hospitality Management (with first class honours) from AUT. She also won the top student award from the School of Hospitality and Tourism.

← Roz with Semisi Taumoepeau

Roz with her husband John who also graduated with his MIHM on the same day →

Creating an online presence as an academic

Dr Michael Watts, Head, IT programme

There are several reasons an academic might want to establish an online presence. The first is good old-fashioned self-promotion; this is especially important for early-career academics. No-one else is going to promote your work, so you have to do it yourself. Carefully building an online presence that connects your name with your area of expertise is one way to build your profile and to get your name known and associated with a particular field of research.

I have quite a common name: *Michael* and *John* are something like the second or third most common given names for males of my generation, and *Watts* is one of the most common surnames for people of English ancestry. However, if you google for "Michael Watts computational intelligence", 42 of the first 50 hits are either my pages or pages that specifically mention me, such as committees I serve on. So, as far as Google is concerned, my name is linked pretty strongly with computational intelligence –certainly more strongly than it is with ecological modelling (26/50) which is what I got paid to do for a long time.

Secondly, communicating your work to other researchers and to the public is at the heart of what researchers do; idealistically, our work is done to benefit humanity, but it cannot do that if no-one knows about what you do. Of course, the primary means of communicating with other researchers is via papers and conferences, but papers are not very accessible to the general public; they are written for other researchers, that is, they can be quite abstract and hard to read, and papers can be hard to find, that is, locked behind pay-walls. An online presence, however, can be made much more accessible. It does not need to be written in the strict "academic style", it can include links to supporting material to assist reader comprehension, and it is freely available.

Having a website[1] is a good start, and is a good place to put things like software[2] and teaching materials[3] that you want to make available for others to use. Websites are by nature more static, however. Software and teaching material (or at least teaching material that you want to publish to show off your teaching skills) are updated infrequently. Although there are also plenty of content management systems out there, or web hosting services with user-friendly authoring tools, having a dedicated website, especially on your own domain, still requires some technical knowledge.

If you have something to say a bit more frequently (and every researcher should have something to say), then a blog is an excellent way of saying it. Blog software makes it easy to publish new material, and they don't require as much technical knowledge as websites. There are many blog hosting sites in existence, with the two biggest ones being Wordpress and Google's Blogger. As blogs are more dynamic, they take more effort in terms of producing content regularly. It takes me an hour or two per week to produce new content for my own blog[4], which I personally think is time well spent.

There are many social media and networking sites out there, and it is worth your time to establish profiles in as many of them as you can. The obvious ones are Facebook*, LinkedIn[5], Twitter[6] and Google+[7]. Twitter is useful for sharing links to interesting articles or online resources, usually with a short commentary on what the link is, or your own thoughts on the material. Facebook, LinkedIn and Google+ all allow for longer articles, but posts to these sites are usually restricted to summaries of articles posted on a website or blog. Some studies have found that papers that are Tweeted about receive more citations.

There are also a number of networking sites specifically for academics. The big ones are Academia.edu[8] and ResearchGate[9], but others are Epernicus[10], KES International[11], iamresearcher.com[12], and researchr.org[13]. Networking sites for academics seem to come and go with a remarkable frequency, but the big ones seem to be lasting quite well. These sites also give you statistics on things like which of your publications people are reading, who is finding your profile via search engines, and what search terms brought them there.

The final group of websites for academics is publication trackers like Google Scholar Citations[14] and Researcher ID[15]. These sites find the citations to your publications, and calculate citation metrics such as the *h*-index. Scholar Citations is widely considered to be the more comprehensive of the two, and has the advantage of automatically finding your publications. It can also send alert emails when new citations to your work are published. It is important for a researcher to set up a presence on these sites as they are searchable; any researcher who claims to be well-published or well-cited needs to be able to back such claims up with a well-curated online citations profile to be taken seriously.

Most networking and social media sites allow you to specify a research interest and a home page, so I always list computational intelligence and point them all to my own website. This has the effect of creating a lot of points on the web that, firstly, associate my name with computational intelligence, and secondly, associate my name with my website. This boosts my name in the search engine results. It can be a lot of work to set these profiles up, especially if you have a lot of publications, but maintenance after that is limited to updating sites when you publish new papers.

Having a website isn't that expensive (I pay about $130 per year for the website and domain name). Blogs are free (unless you want to associate it with a domain name, which is still pretty cheap), as are the social media and networking sites I have described. The best thing is that many of these can be linked together so that an update on one site is propagated to others; when I publish a blog post on Blogger, a summary is automatically posted to Google+ and, by using a service like Twitterfeed, a summary is also posted to LinkedIn and Twitter.

Getting your name known within a research field, of course, leads to more opportunities to do research, which leads to more material to expand your presence online, which leads to more opportunities, and so on in a virtuous cycle. So, why not invest some time and a small amount of money, and start establishing your own online presence?

*You may notice that I haven't linked to my Facebook profile; this is because I mostly use Facebook to keep in touch with old friends and family members, who aren't particularly interested in research.

1.   http;//mike.watts.net.nz
2.   http;//software.watts.net.nz/
3.   http;//mike.watts.net.nz/Teaching/
4.   http;//computational-intelligence.blogspot.com
5.   http;//www.linkedin.com/in/drmikewatts
6.   https;//twitter.com/DrMikeWatts
7.   http;//www.google.com/profiles/watts.mike
8.   http;//ais.academia.edu/MichaelWatts
9.   https;//www.researchgate.net/profile/Michael_Watts/
10. http;//www.epernicus.com/mjw6
11. http;//www.kesinternational.net/member/mjwatts
12. http;//www.iamresearcher.com/profiles/michael.watts/
13. http;//researchr.org/profile/michaeljwatts
14. http;//tinyurl.com/77zufzd
15. http;//tinyurl.com/kd3c7gd

Conferences

2 - 4 March 2016
The International Conference on
Innovation, Management, and Logistics
Rydges Wellington Hotel, Wellington
www.iciml.net

3 - 4 March 2016
2nd International Conference on
Information Technology - ICIT
Hotel Grand Chancellor, Melbourne
www.icit.org/

10 March 2016
25th International Conference on
Education and E-Learning
Rendezvous Hotel Melbourne
iserd.co/Conference/Australia2016/ICEE
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18 April 2016
IIER 61st International Conference on
Advances in Business Management and
Information Technology
Stamford Plaza Hotel, Auckland
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ABMIT/

21 - 22 April 2016
19th Annual NZACE Conference
Cooperative Work-Integrated Education
Takapuna Boating Club
nzace.ac.nz/conference/

11 May 2016
28th International Conference on
Advances in Business Management and
Information Science
Rendezvous Hotel Melbourne
iser.co/conference/MelbourneAustralia/IC
ABMIS/

12 May 2016
44th International Conference on
Economics and Business Research
Rendezvous Hotel Melbourne
iser.co/conference/MelbourneAustralia/IC
EBR/

8 June 2016
36th International Conference on
Economics and Finance Research
Stamford Plaza Hotel, Auckland
researchworld.org/Conference/New_Zeal
and/2/ICEFR/

1 - 4 July 2016
International Conference on Information
Technology and Applications (ICITA
2016)
Hilton Hotel, Sydney
www.icita.org/2016/

10 - 13 July 2016
New Zealand Association of Language
Teachers (NZALT) conference
Nelson Girls' College.
www.nzalt.org.nz/conference/

11 July 2016
59th International Conference on E-
Education, E-Business, E-Management
and E-Learning
Stamford Plaza Hotel, Auckland
theires.org/Conference/NewZealand2016
/IC4E/

14-17 July 2016
CLESOL (Community Languages and
ESOL)
University of Waikato
www.clesol.org.nz

9 August 2016
66th International Conference on
Management and Information
Technology
Stamford Plaza Hotel, Auckland
academicsworld.org/Conference/NewZea
land/ICMIT/

7 - 10 February 2017
27th annual Council for Australasian
Tourism and Hospitality Education
(CAUTHE) conference
University of Otago
cauthe.org/services/conferences

Research outputs by AIS staff

Staff presentations at the 7th biennial CRIE conference 19-20 January 2016

Addison, A. & **Taumoepeau, S.** (2016). Tourism's place in the school curriculum: A case study from Tonga.

Albakry, K. & Hookings, A. (2016). Cultural views of cross-cultural group work in IT courses.

Brown, A. (2016). International students' reactions to e-textbooks.

Han, B. & Watts, M. J. (2016). An analysis of factors contributing to student success in an information technology programme.

Honeycombe, R. (2016). Changes and innovation in international education.

Jackson, K. (2016). From MDGs to SDGs: Where does education fit?

Kelly, R. (2016). Hospitality education training for tourism enterprises: A Tongan case study.

Ketu'u, S. & Archarya, D. S. (2016). Analysis of the requirements, designing and implementation of a cloud-based computer network laboratory to support AIS's IT Programme.

Khan, R. H. & Theresa, Z. (2016). Influence of culture on quality of service: Perceptions of service providers.

Khan, R. H. (2016). Attractiveness of digital learning environments: A gender lens perspective for New Zealand tertiary students.

Kushwaha S. & **Al-Shamaa, S.** (2016). A study on the impact of culture shock on Asian students in Auckland.

Petrichtcheva, T. (2016). Incorporating blogging into an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course for international students.

Peya, A. G. & **Ali, E.** (2016). Bangladesh import education from New Zealand: Opportunities and challenges.

Spring, J. (2016). How can feedback from the Real World be utilised heuristically? Exploring the ways public comments about students' performance as a tour guide in a practical assessment can be used in the classroom.

Taumoepeau, S. (2016). Incorporation of culture and heritage Issues into the Samoan Tourism Education National Curriculum.

Taumoepeau, S. Towner, N., Lal, B. & Pranish, T. (2016). Governance, intervention and outcomes for Pasifika students in New Zealand: A case study.

Watts, M. J., Albakry, K., Choe, K. W., Han, B., Hookings, A., Fonua, H., Kumar, R., Ahmadi, K. & Ketu'u, S. (2016). Experiences with a student laptop roll-out.

Wright, N. J. (2016). Bricks and mortar vs clicks and tricks: The future of online education.

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Other outputs

Brown, A. (2015). Syllable structure. In J. Levis & M. Reid (Eds.) *The handbook of English pronunciation* (pp. 85-105). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Brown, A. (2016). Integrating pronunciation with spelling and punctuation. In T. Jones (Ed.) *Pronunciation in the classroom: The overlooked essential* (pp. 154-168). Alexandria VA: TESOL.

Brown, A. (2015). Barriers to learning the English *th* sounds. Part I: Articulatory and acoustic considerations. *Speak Out! (Journal of the IATEFL Pronunciation Special Interest Group) 53*, 6-14.

Manu, S., **Taumoepeau, S.** & **Towner, N.** (2016). Where do remittances go? A Tongan case study. Working paper in conference proceedings of the 26th Annual Conference Council for Australasian University Tourism and Hospitality Education (CAUTHE) (p. 1239- 1248). Sydney, Australia, February 8 – 11.

Taumoepeau, S., Penrose, G. & **Kelly, R**. (2015). *Tonga mark report on services accreditation, December 2015*. Ministry of Commerce, Tourism and Labour, Government of Tonga, Nuku'alofa, Tonga.

About Auckland Institute of Studies ...

Auckland Institute of Studies is a unique tertiary institution with a distinctive international focus. Since its inception, this developing institute has attracted students and staff from countries around the world and has now developed a number of close relationships with leading educational institutions internationally.

Our programmes
Master of Business Administration
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Postgraduate Certificate in Business Administration

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Bachelor of International Business
Diploma in International Business (Level 6)
Diploma in International Business (Level 5)

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Bachelor of Information Technology
Diploma in Information Technology (Level 6)
Diploma in Information Technology (Level 5)

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Bachelor of Tourism Management
Diploma in Tourism Management (Level 6)

Diploma in Tourism Management (Level 5)
National Certificate in Hospitality (Cafés) (Level 3)

Graduate Diploma in Hospitality Management
Bachelor of Hospitality Management
Diploma in Hospitality Operations Management (Level 6)
Diploma in Hospitality Operations (Level 5)

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English for Academic Purposes
IELTS Preparation
Cert TESOL