

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF A GOOD INTERNSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Internship can be an effective link between classroom education and practice. Certain kinds of technical and practical skills are best learned in the workplace itself, under the guidance of experienced professionals. Many students anticipate that internship will provide a significant credential for their future employment. However, the experiences of interns vary. Some are given unchallenging work while others are receiving meaningful mentoring and training. A questionnaire was given to each intern to evaluate the level of learning, working environment, level of support and training, level of responsibility, and level of satisfaction concerning the internship. This study seeks to identify the elements that students find most important in a good internship. While the study is limited to business students in a local state university, the author hopes that the findings will help to improve the quality of internship.

INTRODUCTION

Most universities and colleges in the United States have internship program offering students practical experience during their junior or senior years. Many of these programs help students learn the meaning of teamwork, taking initiative, strengthening the communication skills, applying academic knowledge, as well as the general dynamics of how company works. In fact, there are increasing number of scholars that have suggested a new paradigm for higher education NCCE, (2004). They emphasize a cooperation among universities, industry, and government, as these institutions break down barriers and forge new alliances that will benefit student, industry, society, and the economy; Freeland, et. al. (1998). Businesses and industries are now emphasizing education and training of the future workforce. Partnerships between colleges and both public and private sector employers are abounded; McGiothlin (2003). Students normally expect their internship functions as a link between formal education and practice. A well-planned internship can be beneficial to both students and employers. Surprisingly, internship experience has received little attention from researchers. Given this, our knowledge of internship is mostly speculative and individualistic. This study tries to shed some light on student's view of a good internship.

METHODOLOGY

A total of 343 students in a college of business who participated an internship program between fall of year 2000 and summer of year 2003

completed a survey concerning their internship experience. Questions include working environments, skills used, opportunity on training, level of support, student's major, would recommend it to other students (Y/N), would accept it as a permanent job (Y/N), wages, and rating of the experience. Several descriptive statistics are calculated; cross tables are constructed, and rule induction is used to find the most important factors for a good internship perceived by students.

RESULTS

Data shows that accounting major has the largest number of interns followed by marketing, finance, decision science, and then MIS. Majority of interns (61.2%) rate their internship experience as excellent, 31.4% as good, and 7.4% as fair or poor. When asked whether or not they would recommend internship to other students, 92.3% indicated they would, 6.5% said no and 1.2% was not sure. Survey also asked interns if they would accept a permanent position with the employer. The result showed that 70% would, 22.2% would not and 7.7% were not sure. Surprisingly, opportunity to use academic skills, training and support received are not found to have major impact on experience.

Rule induction is used to find the most important factors for a successful internship experience. They are 1) supervisor provides feedback on job progress, 2) interns are given opportunities to demonstrate writing abilities, 3) interns are encouraged to ask challenging questions, 4) employer provides clear job description, and 5) interns are given opportunity to development critical thinking skills. The model predicts excellent experience the best with 89%

accuracy; good experience the second with 84% accuracy, and fair or poor experience the worst with 63% accuracy.

Rule for an excellent internship experience is found to be a good supervisor feedback on job progress followed by sufficient writing opportunity and being encouraged to ask challenging questions. Rule for a good internship experience is found to be an adequate supervisor feedback, being given the opportunity to develop critical thinking, having clear job description, and sufficient writing opportunity.

CONCLUSION

Although this study provides useful insights into issues concerning internship experience perceived by students, it has certain limitations. Its failure to include certain variables, such as GPA, gender, length of internship, size of company, and wages may misses an opportunity to explore the effects of these factors and their interactions on the experience. In addition, the results reflect only the perceptions of students from one university. Nonetheless, the study shows that students generally anticipate a positive and meaningful internship experience. They are willing and eager to learn, to be trained, and to be challenged. They are also ready and open to supervisor's feedback concerning their progress and performance. Thus, it is necessary for the employer to identify those elements of the internship experience that contribute most to student learning and a worthwhile internship experience.

REFERENCES

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