

Research Paper

The Impact of Internships on Students Undertaking Tourism and Hospitality Programs

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Abstract: This paper investigates student's perceptions of their internship within tourism or hospitality courses. The main purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of what the current generation of students think about the internship process. Much has been written about the different learning models that are applicable to the education system, as well as the relevance of experiential or work-based learning to the education system. The paper will identify why experiential or work-based learning is considered a vital part of modern day university undergraduate degrees and how universities can best utilise workplace learning as a recognised part of the curriculum.

Keywords: Generation Y, hospitality, internship, Malaysia, perceptions, students, tourism

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Introduction

The tourism and hospitality industry has been confronted with the global problem of attracting and retaining quality employees. This has led to a shortage of skilled personnel to staff the growing number of tourism and hospitality businesses (Deery & Shaw, 1999; Ferris, Berkson & Harris, 2002; Freeland, 2000; Hinkin & Tracey, 2000; Powell, 1999; Tourism Division, 2002). According to Lucas & Johnson (2003, p. 153) "attracting and retaining well-educated, skilled, enthusiastic and committed workers is a chronic

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problem for the hospitality and tourism industries in the developed world.” This issue is highlighted by studies indicating that the proportion of tertiary educated workers in the tourism and hospitality industry is much lower than most other industry sectors (ABS, 2006; Purcell & Quinn, 1996). There are also reports of many tourism and hospitality management graduates leaving the industry or even failing to enter the industry upon graduation due to a variety of reasons which include: low job satisfaction, poor employment conditions, and an absence of motivating factors. Such problems have resulted in high staff turnover and wastage of trained and experienced personnel (Doherty et al., 2001; Jenkins, 2001; Richardson, 2010b).

According to Domonte & Vaden (1987) the factor that had the greatest influence on career decisions of potential hospitality employees was the role of work experience. They argued that student work experiences in a particular industry significantly influenced their decision to pursue a career in that same employment sector in the future. For this reason it could be argued that work-based learning needs to play a significant role in the education of tourism and hospitality students. Work-based learning, whether structured or unstructured, should encourage the student to discover many different aspects of the business (Aggett & Busby, 2011; Baum, 2002; Boud, Solomon, & Symes, 2001; Mulcahy, 1999). However, it is suggested that if students are given menial or mundane tasks during their work placements, the experience may actually lead to the student not pursuing a career in the industry at all (Aggett & Busby, 2011; Baum, 2002; Boud et al., 2001).

Fraser, Mohd Zahari, Othman & Radzi (2007) claim that “one of the many challenges facing the Malaysian hospitality industry is the attraction and retention of young people in a highly competitive employment market. Beside other issues, the low numbers and poor transfer rate of graduates into the industry were found to be the most critical problems in the country”. One of the key ways in which industry can attract these graduates is to offer them the chance to pursue an internship in the organisation whilst studying and then offer the student a full-time position upon graduation. However, for this strategy to work, students must have a meaningful and enjoyable experience during their internship. This research identifies the factors that are crucial to the success of the internship program to allow both students and industry to achieve maximum benefits of such programs.

Work-based or experiential learning, commonly referred to as an internship, is the term used to describe placements that involve students being placed temporarily in the workforce. Internships are designed to facilitate opportunities for students to experience new learning outcomes (Boud et al., 2001; Chang & Hsu, 2010; Singh & Dutta, 2010). Boud et al. (2001) claim that if these experiences meet the needs of the student, they can additionally contribute to the host organisation’s long term development. For purposes of this study, the term internship will be used to describe students’ experiential or work-based learning programs.

This research was undertaken in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and observed students studying in a School of Hospitality, Tourism and Culinary Arts. All students studying in this School must undertake several work-based training periods as a formal requirement for their program. Typically, students participate in one internship during their diploma studies (2-year program), another internship during their higher diploma studies (1-2 year program), and a third at the end of their degree year (1-year program), if they choose to continue their study to this level. The internships play a significant part in the academic program for every student and the university has a full-time career centre which plays an integral role in securing work placements for more than 1,000 hospitality, tourism and culinary arts students every year. The career centre which supports the School has developed a close working relationship with major hotel chains, tourism organisations, food and beverage outlets, government agencies, event management companies and convention service companies both locally and internationally. Students are therefore able to take advantage of these relationships to seek industry experience and potential career opportunities with these prestigious potential employers.

Literature Review

Jan Figel, the European Commissioner for Education, Training and Youth, cited in Gibbs & Armsby (2010, p. 185), stated that practice-orientated and work based learning are among the key priorities in European Union education and training policies. Mr Figel highlighted that work-based learning is integral to the future of European educational architecture. Recent research (Aksu & Koksal, 2005; Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000; Kusluvan, Kusluvan & Eren, 2003; Richardson, 2008; 2009; 2010a) has highlighted the fact that poor experiences in the tourism and hospitality industry is one of the main reasons why graduates leave or even fail to enter the industry.

A growing number of educators have also identified experiential learning as the way to revitalise the university curriculum and meet the new challenges facing higher education with increased pressure being placed on institutions to be accountable in other parts of the world as well (Brodie & Irving, 2007; Dunn, 1999; Karia, Bathula & Abbott, 2011; McDaniel et al., 2000). A study by Hicks (2004, p. 3) found that the majority of educators surveyed claimed that experiential learning could effectively boost academic achievement. This was supported by the finding that nine out of ten survey respondents agree with the notion that experiential learning was either 'somewhat effective' or 'very effective' at raising student achievement. Sweitzer & King (2004) suggest that whilst some undergraduate courses have several internships, for most students, the internship will occur near the end of their studies. In theory, this should provide the student with the chance to link together the theoretical knowledge they have gained through their studies with the actual skills that are required to perform

adequately in a working environment. Raelin (2010, p. 10) agrees with this notion stating “work-based learning epistemology has demonstrated that knowledge may be equally, if not even more effectively, acquired through reflective discourse within the very activity of practice.”

There have been a number of theories espoused to explain the learning process. This study focuses on experiential theory which offers a substantially different view of the learning process than behavioural theories of learning or traditional educational theories on the conduct of education, the interactions of learning, work and other life activities and in the creation of knowledge itself (Kolb, 1984). Kolb (1984) argues there are two reasons this form of learning is described as experiential; firstly to link it with the intellectual origins of Dewey, Lewin & Piaget; and secondly to emphasise the role that experience plays in this type of learning. Karia, Bathula & Abbott (2011) claim that experiential learning has many features that distinguish it from other forms of learning with the most common features being that it is task focused, collaborative, occurs in a social, political and economic context and is cognitively different to class based learning as it is of a practical rather than theoretical nature.

There are many benefits that have been found to support the inclusion of work-based learning programs in university degrees. Canter (2000) implies that employers require graduates to possess a set of key skills which enhance their employability. While some of these skills, both applied and generic, can be developed in traditional academic courses of study, a great number of competencies can only be acquired in the workplace. Coll, Taylor & Nathan (2003) and Ruhanen, Breakey & Robinson (2012) agree that internship programs provide graduates and the potential leaders of tomorrow with the skills necessary to rapidly advance in companies and assume middle and senior management positions. Similarly Busby (2001) found that internships in tourism- and hospitality-related degrees in the UK played an important role in ensuring graduates had the skills required to ensure future employability.

Mulcahy (1999) claims that the internship program may benefit all three major stakeholders: universities, students and the industry as a whole. First, it benefits universities as students can learn about the industry in a formalised setting with the university controlling the structure of this experience to enhance programs offered. Second, it additionally benefits the students as they gain invaluable work experience. Third, it benefits the industry as there will be a higher number of good quality graduates available for employment. Ruhanen et al. (2012) and Eames (2000) state that there are a number of benefits an intern (student) can obtain from participating in an internship or work-based learning program. These include providing the student with an opportunity to use and enhance existing knowledge and skills, the acquisition of new skills and an opportunity to develop new expertise. Students undertaking work-based learning programs are given the opportunity to see first-hand the on-the-job operations

of the company and be exposed to a number of different specialties within the company. The experience will also help the students to assess career goals, gain experience that can be added to their resume, and it may additionally expand the students' business network (Eames, 2000; Jack, 2011; Ruhanen et al., 2012).

Whilst the benefits of work-based learning are numerous, there are many challenges facing the introduction of work-based learning courses within university degree programs. Higher education typically encourages specialisation rather than the generalisation effect work-based learning can have on educational programs (Fensham, 1980; Kings, 1990; Kolb, 1984; Tse, 2010). Kolb (1984) claims that this is one of the points that have traditionally stifled university education from moving into a work-based curriculum; however, integrative development is important for both personal fulfilment and cultural development. The difficulty universities face is deciding on how to best facilitate this development while addressing the needs of universities to provide the specialist knowledge expected of modern graduates (Kolb, 1984). Moreover, Kolb (1984) argues that experiential learning offers educators a means of addressing this dilemma, in a variety of ways, including through work-integrated learning.

One major problem that impacts the success of an internship is the student's level of technical and social skills. Bartkus (2001) claims that while universities are in a position to provide formal training in both these areas, they seldom do. This problem is increased as universities have often been criticised for their inclusion of work experience in an academic program with some academics claiming that the work component is not 'academic' enough (Beckett, 2001; Eames, 2000; Solnet, Kralj, Kay & DeVeau, 2009). As Van Gyn, Cutt, Loken & Ricks (1997, p. 72) point out, "the traditional view is that cooperative education is an effective training strategy rather than an educational strategy." Thus, developing courses to help increase students' technical and social skills, as well as finding a way to measure the social skills of students, has proven highly difficult to facilitate (Bartkus, 2001).

A further challenge facing tertiary educators is finding an appropriate setting and style in which the internship program will operate (Warren, Sakofs & Hunt, 1995). No individual falls into a single category of learning style with each student using different techniques to learn. Such a dilemma makes the process of finding an appropriate setting more difficult (Dennison & Kirk, 1990). To ensure the success of the work-based learning program, companies must ensure that the work environment is capable of supporting learner-managed, reflective learning at an appropriate level (Lester & Costley, 2010). According to Lester & Costley (2010, p. 568) "the value of high-level work-based learning to employers does appear to depend on the ability of the work context to respond to individuals who are undergoing rapid personal and professional development". Whilst this may be the case, universities are also facing

considerable issues in finding positions for students undertaking internships. Moreover, Baum (2002) claims that at present there are not enough companies involved in the internship process and that more companies should make themselves available to participate in these programs as part of their long term planning and recruitment goals.

When specifically assessing internships in the tourism and hospitality field, a recent study highlighted that “existing internship practices lack sufficient clarity and purpose, appropriate academic assessment and industry recognition, and effective integration with the rest of the hospitality curriculum” (Zopiatis, 2007). Zopiatis (2007) claims that most institutions focus on ensuring students have work placements and do not focus on the other issues such the type of work or the overall experience that students will be provided. This problem is further exasperated by the fact that hospitality organisations are failing to provide interns with quality experiences and do not provide positive working environments that will allow interns to develop personally and professionally resulting in hospitality internship practices failing to deliver the anticipated opportunities sought by interns (Zopiatis, 2007).

There have been a number of educational models proposed to describe the experiential process by which people learn. John Dewey’s ‘Model of Learning’ is seen as one of the best models for experiential learning and it examines the developmental nature of learning by describing how learning alters the impulses, feelings and desires of concrete experience into focused action (Kolb, 1984). Kolb (1984) developed an adaptation of Dewey’s model which can be used to develop the internship program. A graphical representation of Kolb’s adaptation of this model can be seen in Figure 1.

To increase the likelihood that the internship process will succeed, Weber, cited in Berger (1991, p. 30), claims that one of the first elements that must be considered before the students begins their internship is to draft a job description as “it sets the standards that the students, school and organisation must live by. It becomes a management and evaluation tool during and at the completion of the semester”. Berger (1991) claims that Weber’s internship job description is an excellent model to follow and it consists of the seven steps which can be seen in Table 1.

Methods

This research used an evaluative approach to determine the benefits and effectiveness of work-based learning within one university tourism and hospitality program. Qualitative methods were used to collect data utilising face-to-face semi-structured interviews with students. Rather than structured questions, a prompt sheet was used with exact interview questions evolving naturally as the interviewing process progressed. The interview structure followed Patton’s (1990) advice to allow for free-flowing

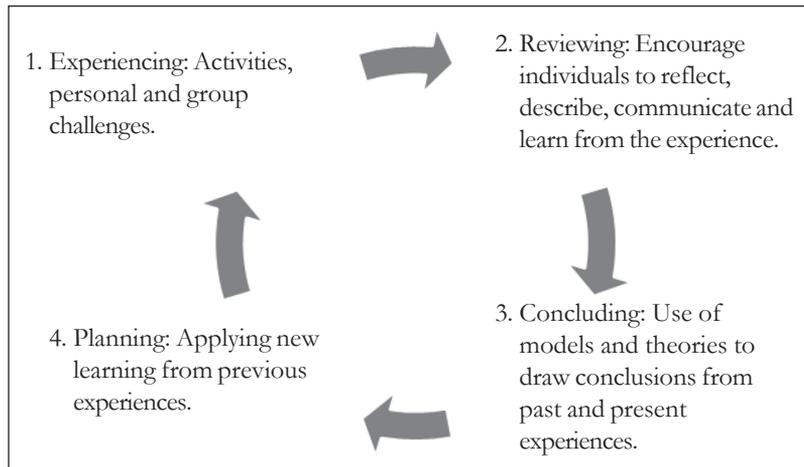


Figure 1. Kolb’s adaptation of the Dewey model

Table 1.
Weber’s internship job description

| Policy | Procedure |
|--------------------------|--|
| Key results | Describing the educational value of the program |
| Basis for accountability | Describing all the student’s responsibilities |
| The organization | Describing the reporting structure of the internship |
| Nature of the position | Describing in general terms what the student should be expected to learn from the internship |
| Relationships | Describing the different internal and external publics, the student will interface with on a daily basis |
| The knowledge | Education and skills required by the student |
| Predominant tasks | Outlining day-to-day activities |

comment and clarification by the participants. While the interviewer attempted to use the same wordings and order of the questions with each interviewee, at times it became necessary to modify them in order to solicit more responses from the interviewee.

All participants were required to have undertaken at least one internship of a minimum 10 weeks duration. These interviews ranged from 5 minutes to 20 minutes depending on the number of internships the respondent had undertaken with the majority of interviews lasting approximately 15 minutes. Denzin & Lincoln (1994) suggested that qualitative methods of research have been identified as a ‘crucial perspective’ because they offer an alternative way of understanding social phenomena

which a quantitative approach could not. Veal (2006) agrees, suggesting that while qualitative research is often seen to be limited to small numbers of participants, it does have the potential to divulge a 'rich' seam of information which is unobtainable via a quantitative approach.

Prior to the conduction of interviews, students were asked to fill in a short quantitative survey to obtain demographic data and some data on their internship experiences. The face-to-face qualitative interviews were used to identify the significant experiences of students during their internship(s). A prompt sheet was used and the interview structure followed Patton's (1990) advice to allow for free-flowing comment and clarification by the participants. The interviews were audiotaped using a digital recorder, with the approval of the participants and then transcribed (within a few days of the interview).

In a qualitative interview, validity and reliability are derived throughout the whole process of data collection and analysis, "from the researcher's presence, the nature of the interaction between researcher and participants, the interpretation of perceptions, and rich, thick description" (Merriam, 1988, p. 120). Field notes were taken that were both descriptive and reflective with an emphasis on ideas, impressions, constant comparisons between field notes, speculations about what the outcome of the study was going to be, about the themes and patterns emerging, or connections between pieces of data.

Jennings (2010) claims that when choosing a sampling method in qualitative research there is confusion due to the lack of clear guidelines on principles for selection of a sample. Morse (1991, p. 127) provides the example of a researcher who used random sampling to select a small sample in a qualitative study and points out that this "violates both the quantitative principle that requires an adequate sample size in order to ensure representativeness and the qualitative principle of appropriateness that requires purposeful sampling and a 'good' informant (i.e. one who is articulate, reflective and willing to share with the interviewer)". Therefore theoretical sampling, as opposed to random sampling, was chosen as the preferred sampling method for this research question, as it involves deliberate selection of individuals within a population that are expected to provide diverse, relevant, useful or clarifying insights into key issues in the research (Bryman & Burgess, 1999; Jennings, 2010). It is a common method of subject selection in qualitative research, and involves a small number of information rich cases, rather than a large, more representative sample. While this approach has the potential to create a biased sample, it was considered appropriate for the current study for two reasons. First, time and resource constraints prohibit a large sample, and second, the purpose of this research question is to conduct a preliminary exploration of a new area of research. As such, this research question does not purport to be an exhaustive examination of all tourism and hospitality students' internship experiences,

rather a starting point to give an insight into how internships should be structured. A total of 56 students were interviewed providing a wide range of responses and information. The key findings will now be critically analysed and discussed.

Analysis

Quantitative Demographic Survey

As described above, all respondents were asked to complete a short survey before the interview began to obtain demographic as well as internship specific information. Table 2 highlights that 53.6% of the interviewees were male, with the majority of respondents (78.6%) being bachelor degree students; more than half (51.8%) had completed 3 or more internships; and nearly three-quarters (73.2%) were domestic (Malaysian) students. When it came to choosing a workplace for their internship, the most important factor was 'location of the job' (44.6%), followed by 'best training/career development' (16.1%) and 'most interesting position' (10.7%). The majority of students worked in hotels (58.9%) or restaurants (32.1%) with the vast majority (91.1%) working in frontline positions, reflecting that the University's industry partners' value the internship process; only one respondent claimed they would not recommend their internship employer to future students.

When analysing the impact the internships had on students, 67.9% claimed it had a positive impact on their desire to pursue a career in the tourism and hospitality industry, with only 12.5% stating it had negatively impacted their perceptions of careers in the industry. More than three-quarters of respondents suggested that they would definitely (39.3%) or more than likely (37.5%) pursue a career in the industry. This is reinforced by the discovery that only two (3.6%) respondents claimed that it was unlikely that they would work in the industry. Moreover, only one (1.8%) stated that he/she definitely would not work in the industry on completion of studies. Highlighting how important work-based learning can be, 94.6% of respondents claim that their internship experience has helped them to clarify their career goals and all believe it will be either be very important (66.1%) or important (33.9%) to their future career.

Interviews

As described in the methods section above, the primary goal of this research was to gather rich data about the experience students encountered whilst undertaking their internship(s). The interviews were designed to solicit advice respondents would give to future students to ensure they gain maximum benefit from their internship, as well as provide advice for both the University and their industry partners on ways to improve the program.

Table 2.
Demographic and internship information

| Variable | Category | Sample % |
|---|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Gender | Male | 53.6 |
| | Female | 46.4 |
| Level of study | Diploma | 5.4 |
| | Higher Diploma | 16.1 |
| | Bachelor Degree | 78.6 |
| No. of Internships completed | One | 30.4 |
| | Two | 17.9 |
| | Three | 50.0 |
| | More than 3 | 1.8 |
| Domestic or International | Domestic | 73.2 |
| | International | 26.8 |
| Factors in choosing Internship employer | Personal connection to the company | 3.6 |
| | Location of the job | 44.6 |
| | Best training/career development | 7.1 |
| | Advice of friends/family | 16.1 |
| | Efforts/attitude of the recruiters | 3.6 |
| | Prestige/reputation of employer | 5.4 |
| | Highest salary | 1.8 |
| | Most interesting work/position | 10.7 |
| | Best benefits package | 3.6 |
| People at the company | 3.6 | |
| Area worked in longest | Hotel/ Front Office | 25.0 |
| | Hotel/ Food and Beverage | 17.9 |
| | Hotel/ Other | 16.1 |
| | Restaurant/ Café: Kitchen | 21.4 |
| | Restaurant/ Café: Front of House | 10.7 |
| | Bar | 3.6 |
| | Travel agents | 3.6 |
| | Airlines and their offices | 1.8 |
| Type of position | Frontline | 91.1 |
| | Supervisor | 1.8 |
| | Low level manager | 3.6 |
| | Middle manager | 1.8 |
| | Senior manager | 1.8 |

Table 2.
Continued from previous page

| | | |
|--|-------------------|------|
| Influence on desire to pursue a career in the industry | Positively | 67.9 |
| | Negatively | 12.5 |
| | Neither | 19.6 |
| Are you likely to work in the in the first year after tourism/hospitality industry graduation? | Definitely | 39.3 |
| | More than likely | 37.5 |
| | Undecided | 17.9 |
| | Unlikely | 3.6 |
| | Definitely not | 1.8 |
| Would you recommend your internship employer | Strongly | 26.8 |
| | With reservations | 71.4 |
| | Would not | 1.8 |
| Did the internship experience help clarify career goals? | Yes, very much | 46.4 |
| | Yes, a little | 48.2 |
| | Unsure | 5.4 |
| | No | - |
| How important do you think your internship will be to your future career? | Very Important | 66.1 |
| | Important | 33.9 |
| | Not Important | - |

Positive Outcomes

Many respondents suggested that the internship(s) they had undertaken yielded many positive outcomes. This is consistent with the findings of the quantitative survey which found 67.9% of respondents claimed the experience to have a positive impact on their desire to pursue a career in the tourism and hospitality industry. Some of the positive comments espoused included the opportunity to enhance existing knowledge; the chance to acquire new skills; access to new expertise; an opportunity to see firsthand the job operations of the company; and the exposure to a number of employment opportunities within the company. Four main themes appeared to emerge. The opportunity to learn new things was the most commonly cited experience amongst interviewees. One respondent claimed that “during my internship I learnt many things I would not have learnt at the university” whilst another stated that “the best thing about the internship was to get the opportunity to do tasks that I had never done before.” Additionally, a respondent also spoke about learning new things and stated

“Training in Sales & Marketing was my favourite part. The Senior Event Manager was willing to teach and guide me throughout my 6 weeks there.

From computer systems like Opera, Delphi, sending emails in the proper way, meeting clients, preparing contracts, organising events and following up. I learnt many new things which I did not learn at my University. It helped me to build up my confidence and communication.

The second theme to emerge was that students found the opportunity to meet new people very useful. One respondent stated that “I’d say the best part of my internship was having the best working colleagues ever. Working in a team is where I gained most of my experience. Having a good relationship in the team keeps me motivated”. Others responses related to meeting new people included “getting to know the different people on the job was definitely a plus point” and “the thing I enjoyed most was having the opportunity to talk to and consult with current employees from various departments in different companies about their jobs and experience.”

Recognition and undertaking ‘real’ tasks were two further themes that also surfaced. In regard to recognition, some of the responses included “being recognised for the things I did was very satisfying” and “knowing that my employer valued my presence and guided me throughout my internship period made me proud. Some of the comments related to real tasks were “being assigned to complete a meaningful task independently allowed me to evaluate the nature of the job more intimately. This invaluable observation and input helps me in choosing my career path” and “experiencing the real hospitality industry life, dealing with real customers in a real situation was the highlight for me.”

Negative Outcomes

Respondents were also asked to identify the worst aspect(s) of their internship. A common concern students revealed was that the internship was not structured enough. Several implied that they were assigned no ‘real’ tasks and the following response was highly representative of these students: “I was not given a proper job, all I did was run errands, and data entry because they thought I was incapable.” A number of other comments were made including

“I was assigned to admin in Front Office for two weeks whereby I only needed to update the Duty Manager’s Log into the computer, updating the stock requisition and to photostat material. I learnt nothing other than understanding the feedback from the guests and what is happening in the hotel according to the Duty Manager’s log.”

and

“Being dispensed to any department and assigned as an insignificant frontliner, general worker or casual helper. The responsibilities and tasks given were of inferior standard and impeded my learning and skills development process.

Time and effort were wasted and I could not contribute my knowledge or skills to the benefit of the employer.”

Weber, cited in Berger (1991, p. 30), argues that one of the first elements that must be considered before the student begins internship is to draft a job description. Weber states “It [the job description] sets the standards that the student, school and organisation must live by. It becomes a management and evaluation tool during and at the completion of the semester.” This is one procedure that needs to be put into place so that students and companies providing positions know exactly what is expected from each party.

Other reasons for negative experiences included managers being rude and uncaring; feelings of being treated like ‘cheap labour’; and a lack of communication between the intern, the hotel and the university. The problem of communication was an important issue as this is one particular area that must function effectively in order for the internship program to operate successfully. Comments made in this area included “senior managers had no idea what to do with me and did not talk amongst themselves, therefore I was taking orders from a number of managers” and “my company didn’t really communicate with the university.” If an internship program is to be successful, it is imperative that there is constant and constructive communication between all parties.

Advice for Internship Employers

Next students were asked to provide some advice to their internship employer. Whilst a number of comments were made, the main theme to emerge was that respondents believe that their internship program was inadequately structured with insufficient training opportunities provided. Some of the comments included “create more programs/assignments/task for interns to develop their skills”; “be more willing to teach”; and “develop a proper schedule.” Whilst these comments are brief, some students provided much more comprehensive feedback including:

“Have a structured internship program that covers each area comprehensively. Empower interns with meaningful tasks and significant responsibilities. Also assign challenges to interns such as suggesting or proposing solutions to problems or risks existing in the operations and also to provide interns with feedback and suggestions to improve or encourage their performance.”

and

“Prepare a schedule or flow chart for the whole internship. That would help a lot in order for an intern to learn things in sequence. It would be easier for the intern to see a whole clear picture of what is going on in the company.”

Many students also commented on the lack of training opportunities including “I would like to advise the hotel to give the trainee more opportunities to take part in the hotel activities and training” whilst another stated “I wished the hotel would pretend trainees were permanent staff in the hotel and provide the same training opportunities.”

Advice for Universities

The final topic discussed with students was what advice they would give universities in order to improve the internship process. The most dominant theme to emerge from the interviews were that interns need more support from the university, particularly in finding the right internship employer. Some of the comments in relation to this included “The Career Centre should be a bit more concerned about the welfare of the trainees. Never was I once visited by the university despite being promised so. Sometimes it really feels like the career centre does not care at all.” “Help us through some difficulty when comes to applying for visa or applying for overseas internships.” Another statement was “Make sure the career department prepares a list of blacklisted companies to ensure students avoid applying for an internship with them.”

Recommendations

Whilst students clearly understand the benefits of an internship program and most have had positive experiences, there are a number of recommendations that can be made to ensure the success of an internship (work-based learning) program.

Recommendations for Universities

The first of these recommendations are for any institution offering programs involving work-based learning. One area that students identified as crucial to the success of the program was communication. More effective relationships between the university and host organisations need to be fostered by increasing the communication between the university and host organisations. A system should be devised whereby staff from the educational institution should visit internship sites on a regular basis. There should also be regular contact between the university and students during the internship to monitor any problems. One way this can be done at low cost is to set up an area where students can communicate with each other, as well as teaching staff, during the internship. This could be done by creating a discussion board on the institution’s e-learning management system.

The second area that needs to be carefully considered is the design of the program. It is recommended that tertiary institutions utilise Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle adapted from Dewey’s Model of Learning as the base model on which to build

work-based learning programs. Institutions should ensure that all internship programs focus on cross-training and allow students the opportunity to shadow as many supervisors or managers as possible to ensure students receive the full benefit of the internship experience. Ensure students and employers have an understanding as to what is expected of them by drafting a comprehensive internship description (job description) explaining what is expected of all parties during the internship. This should be written in partnership with the host organisation to ensure the needs of the organisation, the university and the students are met. It is recommended to use Weber's 7-step procedure to write the job description. Students should also undertake a structured training and development class prior to beginning their internship where information would be provided on what students should expect from the experience. This course should equip students with the necessary skills and understanding of professional behaviour in the workplace and further develop a range of graduate skills and attributes. This course should also provide students with an understanding of contemporary industry employer requirements and future employment trends within the industry. On completion of this course, students should possess skills required to competently market themselves to potential employers and to participate in the selection process for graduate positions in their chosen discipline. Students should also be employed in a variety of departments to ensure students gain maximum benefit from participating in the course. Other areas of concern for students include who they report to, their relationships with management and obtaining useful feedback. Therefore the program must have a reporting system whereby students primarily report to one manager within their internship employer as well as reporting on a regular basis to the internship program coordinator. To ensure a smooth relationship between the intern and the employer, a mentor system should be established whereby one senior staff member at each property participating in the program will provide assistance and guidance to interns. Finally there needs to be clear feedback mechanisms in place including a mid-program as well as end-of-program evaluation and feedback session.

Recommendations for Internship Employers

The next recommendations are intended for employers taking part in work-based learning programs. Students have commented on the fact that there was a lack of communication between themselves and the employer meaning that they did not feel welcome and they also felt sufficient training opportunities were not available to them. Therefore, the employer should provide increased access to management through regular meetings with department managers or supervisors so that students gain an understanding of how each department functions. The company should also ensure that each intern goes through a comprehensive induction session so that the

intern gets a clear picture of the company and understand their role and feel welcomed into the company. Finally, as mentioned previously, the employer should work in partnership with the university to prepare the internship description to ensure the needs of the organisation, the university and the students are met. This document must include cross-training as a focal point for the program and should indicate the training and development opportunities that will be offered to interns.

Recommendations for Future Students

The final set of recommendations is for students contemplating or undertaking an internship. The choice of organisation in which to undertake the internship is crucial, therefore the intern should choose the internship property carefully considering a number of factors such as location, best training systems, and the most opportunities for cross-training. Cross-training must be a major part of the program and students need to ensure they start it early in the internship. Students should also consider interning for a smaller company, where the opportunities for cross-training and management access may be enhanced. Whilst it would seem that these opportunities may be greater in a large establishment, this is quite often not the case, as larger organisations can be more bureaucratic making cross-training difficult. A final recommendation is that they need to have a positive attitude and be proactive to ensure they receive maximum benefit from the program and they should not rely on their employer or university to do everything for them.

Conclusion

This research has highlighted the importance of work-based learning in a higher education. This type of learning is of particular importance to tourism and hospitality education as often there is a disconnect between the courses universities offer and the needs (graduate skills and attributes) of industry (Wang, Ayres & Huyton, 2009; World Bank, 2007). By offering an opportunity for students to undertake a structured work-based learning program, encompassing challenging and demanding tasks, rather than basic, low-skilled, entry level tasks, students will feel a sense of responsibility and achievement. Rewarding students when they successfully complete tasks, will also result in students feeling valued and appreciated. Previous research has identified responsibility and feeling valued by the company as key characteristics of this generation of employee (Martin, 2005; Morton, 2002). If companies can offer students this type of learning experience, they are more likely to have a positive experience working in the industry, making it more likely that they will remain in the industry after graduation.

Limitations and Future Research

This study only focussed on the students views of the internship program. Obviously to gather a complete picture of the internship process, the other interested parties (industry and educational institutes) need to be considered. Future research will investigate the views of both of these parties.

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