

THE EFFECTS OF INTERNSHIP ON HOSPITALITY GRADUATES PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Internship is viewed by many academicians and the industry as an important element in hospitality curricular. Furthermore, a comprehensive internship program will create and develop a very marketable personal that is going to enter the hospitality industry upon graduation. As a result, the industry and the hospitality organization in particular, will receive a competent personal to further enhance their organization, while at the same time, reducing many issues like employee turnover, discipline and performance below par. The study measures students take had gone through their internship in the hospitality organization using a survey method. A Likert scale is use in the survey consisting of items that measures communication, interpersonal skills, teamwork and leadership. At the same time, the working atmosphere and work delegation are seen as moderating variables that can influence the performances of students doing their internship in the given organization. A multiple regression analysis is performed to measure the significant attributes that are successfully being developed during internship. However, certain attributes that are not successfully being nurtured are also discussed in the study to see the possibility of improvising the internship structure in the future.

Keywords: internship, hospitality, manager, personal development, communication, interpersonal skills, teamwork, leadership

1. Introduction

The study in the field of hospitality has been on the rise in Malaysia for the past 30 years. This is due to the fact that the hospitality industry which comprises of the tourism, service, foodservice,

hotels and lodging industry have been producing a steady income to many country's economies. This naturally leads to the demands of a much more skilled, knowledgeable and highly competent workforce (employees). As a result of that, there have been tremendous growths of educational institutions related to the hospitality industry in Malaysia, including both private and the government sector.

In developing educational institutions to cater for the hospitality industry, academicians should take into account the needs and demands of the industry itself, and only then would be able to construct a comprehensive curriculum that can fit the graduates right into the ever expanding and growing travel and tourism industry.

The travel & tourism industry continues to be one of the world's largest industries. The total impact of the industry means that, in 2011, it contributed 9% of global GDP or a value of over US\$6 trillion, and accounted for 255 million jobs. Over the next ten years this industry is expected to grow by an average of 4% annually, taking it to 10% of global GDP, or some US\$10 trillion. By 2022, it is anticipated that it will account for 328 million jobs or 1 in every 10 jobs on the planet (WTTC, 2012).

Given this magnitude, it is critical that existing and new travel and tourism education curricula develop and expand training, educational courses, and programmes that produce quality graduates competent to perform in these organizations (William and Buswell, 2003). Without professional preparation in higher education, this lucrative industry risks a stunt in its growth (Rothwell, William & Kazanas, 1994).

In the 1970s and 1980s, many institutions provided experiential education programs. Experiential education gives the opportunity and the environment for students to experience inside and outside classroom activities and functions that directly relate to the application of knowledge (Petrillose & Montgomery, 1998). These types of experiences often take place in the form of an internships or practical training.

Wildes and Mount (1998) cited that internships could provide students with an experiential learning opportunity to improve their skills through active learning. The traditional classroom and placement of students in internships positions provides an opportunity for students to apply knowledge gained in the classroom to professional situations.

In general terms, an internship is viewed as a short term practical work experience in which students receive training and gain experience in a specific field or career area of their interest. According to Whitney (1984), internships are "Industry Experience" course that connects experiential learning with prior coursework and encourages students to share the experiences they have had in the industry. Although industry experience is only one component of the hospitality curriculum, it provides the balance between working experience and learning theory in the classroom.

The benefits of internships are many as viewed by the stakeholders comprising of the industry, academic institutions and the students itself. According to Petrillose & Montgomery (1998), recruiters of students highlighted that those possess internship experience, will be very likely to have supervisory/management skills, industry operation knowledge, communication skills, analytical and decision making skills, and human relation skills more in comparison with those that does not have internship experience. The students who are in the internship program can improve workplace morale, empower a company to select for future managers, and help the company to build a strong relationship with universities and the community (Petrillose & Montgomery, 1998).

However, industry professionals claim that the major point of a successful internship program is making the position a real job and the student a perfect employee – not just a glorified offer. In other words, by providing work delegations, empowerment, and responsibility, the correct skills and attitudes could be mould and polished. At the same time, if proper empowerment, responsibility and work delegations are not given to interns, the internship program could not be as successful as it was anticipated (Ramus, 1997).

In addition, if companies and internships are chosen carefully, interns can be a spirit in the industry and a cost effective addition to a company's working ability. Internships can provide entry level candidates whose skills and personalities have already been tested in the workplace which can reduce the recruiting costs (Maynard, 1997).

2. Materials and Method

This research uses interviews method in which it focuses on contemporary events and does not require control over behavior of events. A set of interview questions was developed and interview sessions were set up among students that had done their internship comprising of Diploma in Culinary Arts, and Diploma in Foodservice Management. A total of 89 students were interviewed over a course of one year. The questions comprises of their satisfaction towards the internship programme, the soft skills that they manage to develop or polish during their internship, the difficulties they faced during internship, advantages and disadvantages of internships, and their ability to foresee their future career in the hospitality industry after their initial internship period.

The study chooses students from these 2 particular programme since these two programmes are focusing on the back of the house training and internship, therefore it is only natural not to include those that are going to be exposed with the front of the house training programme like the students from Diploma in Hotel Management and Diploma in Tourism since they possess a different structure and approach of training in a hospitality organization.

3. Results and Discussion

The majority of the students possess an average CGPA of 3.00 to 3.33. A small 11% of the respondents possess a CGPA of 3.5 and above. The study found, majority of the students believe they were able to learn and develop themselves if the environment and the working atmosphere during their internship allow them to do so. However, a small portion of the respondents (15%) indicated that the atmosphere and the working environment could only helps if they themselves make it to their advantages, and no matter how difficult it could get, the survival during internships will make them much more valuable in the future.

In terms of communication, intellectual development and initiative buildup, majority of the respondents believe their internships really help in polishing these soft skills. However, the students perceive that their work attitude depends on their relationship with their immediate supervisor and working colleagues. If the relationship and working environment is positive, they could relate it towards be able to produce good work quality and work quantity, in which the majority of them (75.8%) agrees.

In another perspectives, 80.1% of the respondents believe their internships provide them a platform to learn and 76.5% of the respondents reaffirm the facts that their internships has actually enhance their work knowledge in particular and their knowledge on the hospitality industry in general. Another plus point that the respondents believe they were able to polish is creativity. 81.2% of the respondents believe due to immediate response required in

accomplishing tasks, speed that is required to complete a certain job and prompt response in fulfilling guest needs makes them more alert, creative, pro active and durable in nature, in comparison before their internship period.

However, in their perspectives, internships also fail to accomplish a few more things. 34.4% of the respondents perceive that their punctuality in terms of working time, work accomplishment and guest need's has not been fully developed. This is due to the fact that this minority has not been given a chance to take responsibility on accomplishing tasks and they are only assisting the person in charge. Therefore, their sense of responsibility has not been fully tapped. The same minority also highlights that they were less taken seriously, in terms of grooming. This combination of low development on grooming towards professionalism, punctuality on working time, work accomplishment and guest need's are due to not being given chances of being in charge or responsible in any given tasks. They are not being taken seriously in terms of work and are only treated as interns that assist the permanent workers. Thus, the development of leadership has also been disturbed due to this situation. Another crucial element that internships fail to serve is English proficiency among the students that go through their internships. The majority (83.5%) of them mention not being able to practice their English language due to the fact that their colleagues and supervisor mainly converse in Malay language and since they are only working at the back of the house operation, the possibility of meeting guest of the hotel on daily basis are minimal, although some of them (15.3%) possess this advantage by serving the guest of the hotel if the condition allows them to do so.

4. Conclusion

In many situations, internships seem to be functioning as a solid training ground for students in their preparation to enter the hospitality industry. The scope of training comprises of communication, soft skill development, interpersonal skills, teamwork, ability to merge information and language development, both written and oral.

However, the development of certain attributes seems to be more in comparison to other variables being studied. A point in perspectives would be, the training in leadership is less implemented in certain organization and the practice of English usage is difficult to be implemented in these organizations and their given environment. These are totally different than the communication skills, soft skills, teamwork, ability to merge information among others, which seems to be successfully practice and learned by the students undergoing their internships. These differences can be seem very visible in organizations that do not allow certain degree of delegation and place trust and responsibility of work or task in the hands of the students. As a result of that, the achievement of the students and their success does not only fall on their own hands alone, but it is also the responsibility of the organizations to construct a comprehensive and constructive plan of internships for the students so that both parties, especially the students, benefit from the agreement.

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