

**CONVERSATIONS WITH COMMUNICATION INTERNSHIP SUPERVISORS:
INTERNS' READINESS TO THE WORLD OF WORK**

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Abstract

Internship programs are geared towards exposing students to actual work settings. However, studies show that during actual on-the-job trainings, interns fail to meet job expectations resulting in low level satisfaction among employers in work agencies. This is evident among the AB Communication interns of Leyte Normal University as they undergo internship program in different media agencies in Tacloban City. Employing the phenomenological method of inquiry, this study investigates the experiences of supervisors and managers handling the AB Communication interns of the university. Data were collected through documentary analysis, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with 10 supervisors and managers of different media agencies. Results of this study could aid for policy directions, guidelines, and practices in the implementation of LNU AB Communication program and, hopefully, in the communication internship programs of other academic institutions in the country.

Keywords: Internship, Supervisors and Managers' Observations, Job Expectations, On-The-Job Training, Phenomenology, Philippines

Introduction

Internship programs are geared towards providing hands-on and minds-on training to students that could equip them with knowledge, skills and values that are important to prepare them for actual work settings. Its thrust is to bridge the gap between theory and practice and provide the interns with rich background experiences in real work settings.

Martinez (2014) stipulates that on-the-job training provides a great opportunity for the students to understand and apply theories and principles relative to internship programs and apply them better through experience and practice. It provides various real-life learning

experiences that could be of great help towards the achievement of greater knowledge, skills and values necessary for job placement.

Academic institutions of higher learning try to ensure that the internship program provides the communication media interns with rich exposures and real-life background experiences during internships in order to ensure that as they graduate, they will display good work performance and become assets in the different workplaces that they will be connected to.

They are geared toward ‘constantly generating graduates who are capable of applying technology and knowledge-based information to the nature and demands of their work environment’ (Laguador & Dotong, 2013), which is aligned with the main goals of the internship. Thus, it is in this program that curricular programs and activities are carefully planned and undertaken to ensure that its thrusts and objectives are achieved.

Curricular-based internship opportunities provide students to attest their career interests, and solidify their career goals while gaining transferable skills sought by employers as well as managers to help students gain employment after graduation (Getzel, Briel, & Kregel, 2000). Institutions of higher learning offer the internship programs which not only aim at providing the interns with hands-on practical experiences but also in increasing the employment marketability of its graduates (Gault, Redington & Schlager, 2000; Kyzor & Pierce, 2000)

In order to strengthen the quality assurance system in Philippine higher education, institutions of higher learning were mandated to upgrade higher education curricular offerings in order to meet international standards (Valdez, 2012). However, one of the biggest challenges facing new graduates is the ability to meet the job requirements and expectations. Poor performance in work settings are oftentimes attributed to the kind of internship program provided by the institutions of higher learning. Patel (2015) stresses the importance of knowing the essential aspects of the internship program as an integral part of the experiential learning in order to bring about an overall success of the program.

Studies reveal that mass media interns were observed to be unprepared for the demands of actual work settings. Weligamagi (2003) poses that universities do not generate the required labour skills that university graduates should possess that would enable them to fit in real labour market situations. He added that the skill mismatch leads to more number of unemployable graduates. Thus, learning institutions should endeavour to create a smooth connection to bridge the gap and solve the problem.

Clapton & Cree (2004) discovered in their review of the literature on the social work discipline that the class work experiences had not adequately prepared the students for the real world practice. This study therefore points out the lack of readiness of the interns in real work settings. The results of the study of Schneider and Andre (2005) likewise revealed that students' preparation for workplace writing was inadequate. The students observed that the writing skills required in the actual workplace do not match with the knowledge and skills they acquired in the content courses. Dias and his colleagues (1999) also posed that the school-based writing simulation activities failed to prepare the students for professional writing due the level of complexity of writing skills and genres required in actual work environment.

The formal learning environment does not provide students with the complexities, problem analysis and solving skills that are involved in the real world of workplace (D'Abate et al.,2009). This in turn leaves the students at a disadvantaged standpoint unable to display with confidence their ability to perform tasks expected of them. In Malaysia for instance, Sahrir, et. Al. (2016) pointed out that most of the industry players in Malaysia look for potential workers with 1-3 years of working experience, making it difficult for fresh graduate students to compete with more experienced ones. Hence, it is deemed necessary for interns to go through the experience of actual work experience to prepare them for the demands of employers in work industries.

In the local setting, the Leyte Normal University conducts an internship program for AB Communication students deploying the interns in different work stations in Tacloban. However, initial feedbacks from supervisors from the media agencies revealed that interns fell short in meeting job expectations; they were observed to lack characteristics and skills that are necessary for job placement. No studies have been conducted yet to find out the level of preparedness of the AB Com interns towards actual work settings, hence this study was conducted.

This study aimed to draw pertinent information regarding the job expectations of the supervisors and managers and their observations on the interns' strengths and weaknesses in their respective work assignments. It likewise tried to trace the level of preparedness of AB communication interns to actual work scenarios.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the job expectations of the supervisors and managers in the different media agencies?

2. What are the observations of the supervisors and managers handling the AB communication interns?
3. What aspects need to be developed to prepare the interns for actual work settings?

Review of Literature

Internship programs or on-the-job trainings serve as avenue in providing the students a first-hand experience of the real world of work. Learning institutions provide on-the-job trainings (OJT) to their students to ensure that the graduates possess the competencies, skills and knowledge that are necessary to prepare them for work. Armed with these competencies and skills, the graduates are able to showcase the best in them, which in turn makes them highly employable and are most likely to sustain the challenges faced at work.

It is one of the mechanics of Higher Education industries in developing the needed competencies of its graduates. The goals and objectives of the on-the-job (OJT) training is to serve as a guide in developing the needed competencies for a particular job, and translating the training into a gainful working experience (Ylagan, 2013). As an essential part of the Higher Education curriculum, the on-the-job training provides an avenue in ‘developing the knowledge, values and skills of the students before they brace the challenges of the work environment’ as mandated in the Higher Education Curriculum (Ebreo et. al., 2014). The Lyceum of the Philippines University, for instance, educates and trains students to be competitive by providing them with applied learning opportunities that require talented workers and rank among the best in the world in terms of productivity, career, attitude and technical skills (Felicen et al., 2014).

The curriculum is developed to integrate an in depth academics, laboratories and field internship programs that will ensure the efficiency and quality to meet worlds class standards (Mejia, Manzano & Menez, 2014). The curriculum should be designed to prepare the graduates and demonstrate the core competencies expected of them in the workplace (Valdez, 2010). An initial interview between the intern and on-site supervisor is an excellent opportunity for the potential intern and faculty supervisor to determine if the placement offers appropriate experiences. Together, the intern and on-site supervisor can develop shared expectation that can be recorded in an internship objectives document during the first week of the placement (Shoenfelt, Kottke & Stone, 2012).

Insights from industry-partners are essential input to the development of program curriculum in order to determine the concerns of the employers regarding the required qualifications of the graduates (Laguador & Ramos, 2014). Allowing the graduating students

to apply what they have learned from books in a work environment would develop their work values and attitude necessary to achieve the ultimate goal of education to produce efficient and effective leaders and professionals in cross-cultural and multidisciplinary undertakings (Laguador, 2013a).

The study of Felicen, Ylagan & Buted (2014) which aimed to determine the on-the-job training performance of the AB Mass Communication students during SY 2012-2013 in terms of Personal Characteristics, Attitude towards the job, job performance, adherence to company policy and competence and their final grades in Advertising Principle and Media Marketing; and to test the relationship between the academic and OJT performance of the students. Results revealed that the Mass Communication students obtained an excellent performance rating in terms of personal characteristics, attitude towards the job, adherence to company policy and competence while very good rating in terms of job performance was achieved. They obtained a high academic performance rating in media marketing and average in Advertising principle. Students with high academic performance in Advertising Principle also obtained high training performance and vice versa except in adherence to company policy. The university may continuously upgrade facilities and laboratories to enhance further the knowledge and skills of the students necessary for the future work assignments.

The results of the study of Weligamage & Sienthai (2003) about the gap between employer expectations and job expectations of Sri Lankan university graduates reveal that universities do not generate the required labour skills for the society, undergraduates lack the knowledge about the reality of the labour market situation, and graduates lack the key skills sought by employers. Private sectors, which become the conventional employers of university graduates, began to decline in their demand for graduates. It was widely observed that current education and training does not produce graduates to meet the private sector needs.

As mentioned in the previous study, potential employees need to know the different skills that employers expect from them in order for them to meet work demands. According to the Career Services 2002 about the employers' needs, the most common skills that new employees need to possess are as follows: time management, self-understanding, learning skills, teamwork skills, leadership skills, problem solving, working with diversity, career planning, understanding workplace, and risk assessment management. Similarly, the University of Sydney (1997) believes that graduates of any faculty, board of studies or college of the university should possess the following skills for them to become more

employable: knowledge skills, thinking skills, personal skills, personal attributes, and practical skills. Thus, interns and later on graduates should manage to possess these skills in order for them to meet the demands of the employers and for them to become more employable in different work institutions.

Theoretical Framework

This study anchors itself on some theories which serve as the foundation of this study. One of which is the Social Constructivism Theory, which refers to the study about interaction of people in the society where they undergo different experiences and in turn result to learning. It is closely associated with the developmental theories of Vygotsky and Bruner, and Bandura's social cognitive Theory (Shunk, 2000).

Social constructivism as a philosophical approach suggests that "the natural world has a small or non-existent role in the construction of scientific knowledge". Freudian psychoanalysis is a good example of this in action. In this study, the "natural world" could be the actual world of work while the "scientific knowledge" could stand for the classroom training (Boudry & Buekens, 2011). Dwelling on pragmatic constructivist discourse, Gordon (2009) points out a concept of constructivism that is pragmatic, that integrates thinking and doing, which means theory and practice. This putting of theory into practice is now a major goal of higher education to help college students in coping with real-world problems (Choi and Lee, 2008).

The said theory emphasizes the importance of the interns' interaction with people in the work settings; how they are able to live up to the expectations of the workplace and the people they are dealing with brings about the learnings through direct experience.

This study likewise draws inspiration from the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT). This theory provides a holistic model of the learning process and a multilinear model of adult development, both of which are consistent with what we know about how people learn, grow, and develop. The theory is called "Experiential Learning", which emphasizes the central role that experience plays in the learning process, an emphasis that distinguishes ELT from other learning theories.

The experiential learning theory is defined as the process wherein knowledge is attained through one's direct exposure to the real world. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (Kolb 1984, p. 41). The said theory points out the role of experience that will bring about changes. Hence, it clearly aligns with

the goals of the internship program which aims at providing hands on experience for the interns on the actual demands of work. Another reason the theory is called “experiential” is its intellectual origins in the experiential works of Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget. Taken together, Dewey’s philosophical pragmatism, Lewin’s social psychology, and Piaget’s cognitive-developmental genetic epistemology form a unique perspective on learning and development. (Kolb, 1984).

This study upholds these theories giving much weight on the formulation of new knowledge based on the actual experiences of the interns in their workplaces as well as their interaction with people and the work environment.

Methodology and Design

Research Design

In order to determine the level of preparedness of AB Communication interns based on the observations of supervisors and managers of media agencies regarding their work performance during internship, the researchers conducted the qualitative research designed to elicit an exhaustive description of the phenomenon regarding the observations of the media supervisors in handling AB Communication interns in the different field of agencies where they undergo internship.

This study applied Collaizzi’s phenomenological method of data analysis. As cited by Shosha (2012), the Collaizzi’s seven step method are: 1) each transcript is read and re-read in order to obtain a general sense about the whole content; 2) from the transcript, significant statements that pertain to the phenomenon under study were extracted and recorded on a separate sheet noting their pages and lines numbers; 3) meanings were formulated from these significant statements; 4) the formulated meanings were sorted into categories, clusters of themes, and themes; 5) the findings of the study were integrated into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon under study; 6) the fundamental structure of the phenomenon were described; and, 7) validation of the findings were sought from the research participants to compare the researcher's descriptive results with their experiences.

Sampling

This study is centered on the different media agencies in Tacloban City where the AB Com interns of the university were taking their internship program. To determine the respondents, a purposive sampling method was employed to involve all the internship

supervisors and managers in the different media agencies where the AB Com interns were assigned to.

Data Collection

After submitting a letter of intent to the different offices, permission was granted on the exploration of the research topic at hand. A meeting was set to hold the focus group discussion regarding their observation on the internship experiences and performance of the AB Com Interns.

The following research tools were used to gather the desired information, namely: (1) focus- group discussion, which helped generate pertinent information provided by the interns; (2) audio-recordings, which helped record the focused group discussions with accuracy; (3) focused group discussion guides or questionnaire, which were used to validate the responses and information given by the respondents during the focused group discussion; (4) archives, which include the records, files and documents relative to the internship program of the AB Communication Program.

Participants were encouraged to talk freely and to tell stories using their own language. The focus group discussion conducted by the researchers lasted for nearly an hour. At the end of the focus group discussion, the researchers reminded the participants about the need for a second contact with them to discuss the study findings and to make sure that the study findings reflect their own experiences. The level of data saturation was determined by the consensus among researchers.

Research Reflexivity

Reflecting the facts derived from the lived experiences of the intern supervisors and instructors bring philosophical assumptions in determining the level of performance among AB Communication interns during their actual work settings.

Ethical Issues

The researchers sought the approval of the respondents in the study. Throughout the FGD the researchers tried to keep the best interests of the student at the forefront. Utmost confidentiality of the information shared and audio recordings were observed all throughout this study. The names of the participants were substituted with pseudo names in the transcript.

Results and Discussions

Based on the different research procedures conducted in relation to this study, relevant findings were generated to extensively present the experiences of the media supervisors and managers handling the internship program.

Job Expectations of Agency Supervisors and Managers Among Interns

As the interns enter into the actual world of work, internships supervisors and managers make it a point to orient the interns about the internship experience. This is done by means of the orientation programs for the interns to acquaint them about the nature of the job, the setting of standards, expectations and requirements. These are deemed necessary to serve as guide in maintaining good and acceptable performance as they go through the internship.

The supervisors and managers have identified the following most common requirements, classified into two, namely: personal attributes, knowledge skills and abilities relative to work:

Personality Attributes

- Punctuality and professionalism
- Self- discipline and good manners and right conduct
- Commitment and dedication to one's assignment
- Initiative in performing assigned tasks

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

- Efficiency in the delivery of assigned tasks or work
- Good communication and social skills
- Meet job expectations – ability to meet the demands of work relative to the print, audio, broadcast, and related tasks/assignments
- Holistic knowledge on nature and demands of work, societal issues, current trends
- Wide exposure and experience to field work
- Ability to produce quality outputs in giving press releases and information dissemination, and making brochures and write ups relative to top issues
- Appropriate use of language for different functions
- Meet deadlines even with limited working time

At the beginning of the internship, the interns undergo an orientation and observation of what the internship supervisors and managers want from the interns. Very important for them are the interns' personal attributes which defines good work ethic and characteristics. They likewise demand from them a sense of responsibility in taking the tasks and assignments seriously, as some of their outputs and assignments may likewise be considered official and permissible releases/activities of the station or agency.

The internship supervisors make it a point to emphasize to the interns all their expectations to ensure that expected outcomes will be observed.

“When they enter in our office, we expect them to be able to augment the coverage of the activities... there is an orientation of their function... we tell that they should have the output within the week...”

Such expectations mentioned by the supervisors were primarily on the personal attributes that they want to see from the interns. For them, such personal attributes help them to get along well with co-workers and superiors. Moreover, internship supervisors and agency managers expect the interns to possess the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities required of them in the work place for them to be able to efficiently carry out the tasks and assignments expected of them.

Agency Supervisors' Observations of the Interns' Performance

As the interns undergo internship in various media agencies and work stations, they were closely monitors by the station managers and supervisors, who guide and supervised them in their work. The interns displayed strong and weak areas, such as the following:

Strong Points:

- Satisfactory performance in group assignments
- Initiative in performing assigned tasks
- Strong grammar sense.
- Some interns excel in print, while others in TV or radio, and broadcast
- Interns' receptiveness in field work that involves travel or tour
- Ability to cope with radio broadcasting
- Ability to adjust to the language used and required in work settings
- Interns who were later taken in the media agencies were observed to possess easy coping mechanisms
- Interns were trusted in doing interviews

Weak Points:

- Inability to meet some requirements necessary for the agency/work stations
- Arriving at the work station anytime they like; tardiness is a problem most specially every Monday
- Informing proper authorities why they can't arrive on time or why they cannot report to the station
- Not following the advice of authorities even if they were previously reminded and reprimanded by supervisors
- Inability of the interns to shift to the right format in radio broadcasts (when exposed to different radio stations)
- Inability to meet deadlines with unacceptable reasons despite early assignments
- Weakness in certain tasks is blamed upon the lack of exposure to it in actual teaching in the classroom
- Negligence in performing some assigned tasks
- Inability of the intern to focus on the assignments due to conflicting schedules with school requirements and special assignments in school
- Inability to report to work assignments due to some personal or school-related matters without the direct approval and consent from the internship coordinator
- Lack of confidence of some interns to perform tasks
- Limited knowledge on the use of materials or facilities in the work stations due to lack of exposure in academic preparations
- Inability of the interns to write even short feature stories or feature articles
- Lack of knowledge about social and environmental issues; lacks time for orientation about the social and environmental issues such as climate change and the like
- Interns are sometimes shocked with their experiences in the actual work settings which are sometimes far from what are taught in the classroom.
- Needs more training on packaging incorporators; still fail in terms of production of information materials, production and packaging of such materials

The above-mentioned statements define the internships supervisors and managers' observations of the interns' performance in the actual work settings. It could be gleaned in the

results that a big fraction of their weakness lies on the knowledge aspect which could be traced back to their lack of exposure in their academic preparations.

The interns' inability to come up with the required outputs is due to the absence if not the lack of practice in the classroom setting. Hence, they lack confidence or they are unable to produce the outputs required of them.

Internship supervisors/managers are sometimes faced with problems on interns who were unable to perform the expected tasks in their workplaces.

"Sometimes they are poor in some aspects, such as in writing. Sometimes I ask them to do a research through the internet. They cannot do what we expect them to do."

Still, another pressing problem faced by them include:

"My problem really is on the deadlines... cannot submit right away, reasons are unacceptable... many of them really find it difficult to meet the deadline.."

To address the pressing problem, supervisors/managers do some mentoring to help the interns cope with the work demands. The close monitoring and supervision are likewise done to help uplift the efficacy of the interns in performing job expectations.

In order to bring about a positive improvement in the internship program which could best prepare the interns, the agency supervisors and managers posed for some important aspects that need to be strengthened, namely:

- monitoring in terms of interns' performance
- awareness on social and environmental issues
- well-designed scheduling and assignment
- early preparation and exposure to field of work
- internship based on specializations which is based on one's personal choice and personal interest, talents and skills
- let the interns submit application to some media agencies relative to their specialization

These are important inputs that may prove to be helpful in order for the institution to enrich the internship program and to further prepare the students for a more meaningful and fruitful internship.

The inputs from the statements of the internship supervisors and managers generated four general themes which comprise their expectations about the interns' readiness to the world of work. These could be categorized in the following key terminologies:

1. Basic Knowledge – knowledge on nature of work, functions, roles and responsibilities, vast knowledge of topics (current issues, and problems of the society, etc.), and technical know-how on the use of materials and equipment in the set/field.
2. Relevant Skills – necessary skills, abilities and competence that will enable them to efficiently perform assigned tasks, duties and responsibilities relative to the nature of their work.
3. Work Attitude – perseverance in performing tasks at hand by completing work assignments, meeting deadlines, showing appropriate work ethic in performing tasks on hand.
4. Value System – dedication, commitment, sense of responsibility and accountability for work.

These four big words clearly define what the interns are expected of as they prepare for the demands of actual work during internship.

As they are immersed in the real world of work, they are expected to be geared up with the *basic knowledge* of the nature of work that they will be doing so that they will be able to do what are expected of them. Basic knowledge includes awareness and adeptness about the nature of one's work, various tasks, work assignments, as well as on the technical know-how on the different materials or equipment used in performing different tasks.

Interns should possess the necessary *skills* that are relevant in their field of work to enable them to effectively accomplish the tasks assigned to them. These skills may include considerably good writing and speaking skills, expertise in the manipulation and control of various multimedia equipments, and knack in the artistic and creative presentations, among others.

Work attitude is one important factor that interns should possess in dealing with job expectations. It includes the willingness to perform assigned tasks, proper work ethic and right conduct relative to work. Internship supervisors and managers expect the interns to show punctuality, adherence to office policies, willingness and perseverance in performing the assigned tasks, and observing the proper ethic in work places.

And, lastly, interns are expected to have a deeper and stronger *valuing system* in terms of developing a sense of responsibility and accountability in performing their work. It is not just doing what they need to do or just simply showing the right attitude relative to the nature of their work. It is more of developing commitment and dedication to the kind of work one is in.

It is about working beyond their call of duty. As interns, possessing this would make them more employable for the work they desire to have.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Agency supervisors and managers set their expectations as interns enter the world of work. Based on their observations as the interns go through the internship program, interns were observed to possess some skills which enabled them to perform some of the tasks required of them. However, they noted of some aspects that need improvement, in terms of knowledge and skills as well as proper behaviour and conduct which are necessary in their line of work. To effectively prepare the interns for the work demands, it is advised that the institution will look into the improvement of the academic preparations of the interns. Moreover, the institution, needs to look into the aspects of strengthening the interns' exposure to the nature of their work, augmentation of the school facilities that could provide them with authentic hand-on experiences.

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