Satisfaction with External Internships: Do Students Acquire the Professional Skills Necessary to Improve their Employability?

Miguel-Angel Acedo Ramírez, Economics of Business, University of La Rioja, Logroño, Spain
Esperanza Azcona Ciriza, Economics of Business, University of La Rioja, Logroño, Spain
Consuelo Riaño Gil, Economics of Business, University of La Rioja, Logroño, Spain
Francisco Javier Ruiz Cabestre, Economics of Business, University of La Rioja, Logroño, Spain

ABSTRACT

This paper evaluates the level of satisfaction of students enrolled in the Degree in Business Administration and Management (DBAM) who have completed external internships and of the companies that have hosted them, with the aim of improving both formal and training components of these internships. The authors’ findings reveal potential for improvement in the administrative management of internships, and the existence of a discrepancy between the skills acquired by undergraduates in university lecture halls and the practical skills necessary for the performance of work. There was also found to be limited potential for applying acquired knowledge during the internships. The evidence therefore suggests that the training offered by universities is not always sufficiently geared towards the demands of today’s society and labour market. Nevertheless, company internships meet one of its fundamental objectives, in the form of increased employment opportunities, and this is particularly significant given the extremely high youth unemployment rate at the present time.

KEYWORDS

Business, Internships, Management, Professional Skills, Satisfaction

1. INTRODUCTION

Amongst the changes brought about by the implementation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is the possibility of including professional internships within degree programmes, with the aim of improving future graduates’ employment prospects. Many of the degree programmes available compete in their offers of internships with companies or institutions, also known as external internships, since these are frequently the key to employment opportunities (Marhuenda et al., 2010; Freire et al., 2013). Furthermore, these internships complement the student’s training within an environment which is consistent with the daily reality of their future professional field.

External internships enable students to acquire the necessary knowledge and expertise to increase their chances of finding employment and to succeed in the performance of their work. This is beneficial for the students, the community and the economy in general (Yorke, 2004), especially given the bleak outlook of the 53.1% unemployment rate amongst young Spanish people in the 16-24 age group (Ministry of Employment and Social Security, 2015).

This concern over employment has been highlighted in studies such as Martínez (2009), which examines the relationship between the education system and employability, and comes to the conclusion...
that, in line with the new EHEA, the competences that students acquire through degree programmes must be more closely related to the professional skills that they will use in the business world once they have graduated (March et al., 2006; García and Perez, 2008). It is absolutely imperative, therefore, that there is an alignment of the skills acquired by students through the learning process they undergo at university and the skills that they will put into practice during external internships (Montoro et al., 2012). These professional skills include basic academic competences and skills related to the attitudes and behaviours required by technological and productively demanding societies (Marhuenda et al., 2010; Freire et al., 2013). It has sometimes been claimed that the training offered by universities is not suited to the demands of today’s society and labour market (Freire et al., 2013), hence the need for continuous evaluation of the adequacy of the skills included within degree programmes in comparison with those required by the labour market. Recently, the work of Michavila et al. (2016) on employability and employment of Spanish university students shows, among other things, the most demanded professional skills for employment, and those in which universities provide the closest level –and the farthest level– required for employment.

Furthermore, in the field of virtual placements, it is worth noting the Semester of Code programme, which is an initiative arising from the European Project Virtual Alliances for Learning Society - VALS and proposes a framework for the organization and implementation of a virtual internship programmes for students of computer sciences and other related areas from European universities in a global professional context and related to the Open Software (García-Peñalvo et al., 2015 and 2016).

The University Students’ Statute (Royal Decree 1791/2010 of 30 December) sets out, within the framework of university teaching, the availability of external academic internships and their general characteristics. Royal Decree 1707/2011 of 18 November states that their objective is to enable students to apply and complement the knowledge they have acquired through their academic training. Within this regulatory framework, the University of La Rioja has fully endorsed the aim of preparing students for their future integration into the professional world. To this end, the university strives, where relevant to the degree programme, to ensure that students complete their education by means of internships in companies, entities and institutions, in order to provide them with professional experience and facilitate their incorporation into the labour market.

In recent years, external internships have been extended into the realm of university studies, demonstrating the importance of universities in terms of employability (Garcia and Perez, 2008; Freire et al., 2013). Concern over this issue, however, has not gained sufficient support within the academic community and references to it are scarce (Martínez, 2000; Marhuenda, Cros and Giménez, 2000; Marhuenda et al., 2010), which contrasts with the advantages that can be gained from external internships linked with the real world of business. Inclusion of external internships in educational provision is therefore a distinguishing feature which provides significant added value (Marhuenda et al., 2010). Hence those involved consider that internships connected with the business world enhance the quality of education (Alemany, 1990; Freire et al., 2013).

In this context, this paper analyses the level of satisfaction of companies and students enrolled in the University of La Rioja’s Degree in Business Administration and Management with regard to the external internships awarded during the 2013-14 academic year. The overall objective is to improve these internships, both in terms of processes (allocation mechanisms, time periods, etc.) and academic aspects (design of the training programme, monitoring, assessment and supervision). This paper therefore aims to help expand knowledge about internships within the new bachelor degree studies which have been introduced following the implementation of the EHEA, providing a more global vision that can ensure their proper development and quality, and the achievement of the proposed learning objectives.
An Application of Knowledge Management and Human Capital Valuation: The Case of Credit Unions
Sarah Robertson (2016). Quantitative Multidisciplinary Approaches in Human Capital and Asset Management (pp. 201-233).
www.igi-global.com/chapter/an-application-of-knowledge-management-and-human-capital-valuation/140621?camid=4v1a

Diversity and the Need for Cross-Cultural Leadership and Collaboration
www.igi-global.com/chapter/diversity-and-the-need-for-cross-cultural-leadership-and-collaboration/132628?camid=4v1a