

# Value of industry mentoring and resource commitment to the success of an undergraduate internship program: A case study from an Australian university

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Internships are becoming more relevant to universities as they provide students with practical skills that can be aligned with their career aspirations. Typically, successful undergraduate internship programs depend on the efficiency and design of the university internship program; the student commitment to the internship; and host organization's level of resource commitment to the program. Currently, there is very little empirical research conducted to examine how host organization based factors influence the quality of a good internship from a student interns' perspective. The Transaction Cost Economic (TCE) model was the theoretical lens used to address this research. The study used a survey (n=83) of an undergraduate internship program at a university in Australia. The findings indicate that the host organizations' resource commitment has a significant positive influence on the interns' perceived success of the internship. Findings from this research can help to align organizational resource commitment with the students' expectations.

Keywords: Internship, higher education, organizational resourcing, mentoring, student experience

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Research has shown that there is a strong correlation between students' involvement in internship programs and the success of recent graduates when transitioning to a full-time job (Matthew, Taylor & Ellis, 2012; Shoenfelt, Kottke, & Stone, 2012). An internship eases the transition from classroom-based learning to the professional world, as well as increasing both discipline competencies and self-confidence (Shoenfelt et al., 2012). Matthew et al.'s, (2012) study found that successful experiences in a work placement program are associated with a smoother transition to an entry-level job upon graduation and this is supported by research conducted by Callanan and Benzinga (2004). The study showed, on average, students that undertook an internship were offered jobs faster than students who had not completed an internship (Knouse, Tanner, & Harris, 1999, as cited in Knouse & Fontenot, 2008).

From an employer's perspective, internships provide organizations with opportunity to engage more experienced graduates or use internships to seek out new recruits (Lloyd & Bristol, 2006; McDonald, Birch, Hitchman, Fox, & Lido, 2010). From a student perspective, university students gain particular skill sets for their future careers that may not be easily taught in the classroom, such as interpersonal skills, negotiation skills, and preparation for the real-world of work (Kelley & Bridges, 2005; Kim, Kim, & Bzullak, 2012). In addition, students may be exposed to ethical issues and global perspectives that are difficult to apply to the real-world from a classroom setting (Kim et al., 2012).

Although there is much literature published on the importance of internships, there is very little research conducted on factors that influence successful internship outcomes, particularly on how the host organization resource allocation and commitment can influence the students' overall internship outcomes (D'abate, Youndt, & Wenzel, 2009; Liu, Ferris, Xu, Weitz, & Perrewe, 2014). Therefore the purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between the host organizations' resource

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commitment and the students' perspective of a successful internship. This research examined the literature on all three types of stakeholders (educator, student and host organization) and their commitment to the internship program and how it can influence the successful outcomes.

## STAKEHOLDERS COMMITMENT AND ITS INFLUENCE ON INTERNSHIP OUTCOMES

### *Educator Commitment*

The goal of an internship program is to provide an opportunity for students to acquire knowledge and skills that are not easily taught within the classroom environment, such as, interpersonal skills and the ability to apply theoretical concepts to real world situations. To do this, educators must be aware of industry needs and must be willing to provide industry with quality, competent individuals upon graduation (Petrillose & Montgomery, 1997). Furthermore, to maximize the benefits for everyone involved, internship programs should provide opportunities for students to develop and grow the skills needed for their future career goals (Velez & Giner, 2015). This requires extensive efforts from the university, course instructors and participating organizations. Studies indicate that "maintaining a quality internship program requires adequate resource commitment, the coordinators genuine interest in the students' learning experience, customized work that fits students' needs and a good evaluation system" (Cutting & Hall, 2008). Similarly, the educator needs to establish and build good relationships with work organizations that would: host and create internship programs; provide relevant career service resources; and provide career consultation (Knight & Yorke, 2003) and design the course curricula to include the integration of the internship program (Wan, Yang, Cheng, & Su, 2013).

### *Student Commitment and Motivation:*

Understanding the impact of a student's intrinsic motivation and self-determination can help to explain their commitment to their internship. According to Deci and Ryan (1985, p. 231) self-determination begins with a motive, and in the case of the student intern, ends with a successful internship. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a framework for understanding conditions that enhance or decrease the motives that individuals possess when engaging in activities for pleasure or goal satisfaction (Deci & Ryan 1985, Broaddus, Przygocki & Winch, 2015). Deci and Ryan (1985) identified that intrinsically motivated individuals were motivated to engage in activities for pleasure and satisfaction, whereas extrinsically motivated individuals engaged in activities for gain from external rewards. The intrinsically motivated individual possesses autonomous motivation, which occurs when an individual identifies with the value of the activity, and this value becomes part of his or her own value set. For instance, when students are in the final stages of their business degree and are looking for a competitive advantage, it can have an impact on their intrinsic motivation to do an internship (Reeve, Deci & Ryan, 2004).

Self-Determination Theory identifies three basic psychological needs of competence, autonomy and relatedness, which are considered universal necessities (Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989). According to Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Ryan, (1991), and Ryan and Grolnick (1986) in educational settings autonomy has been linked to intrinsic motivation and this is positively correlated to decreased anxiety and enhanced academic outcomes. This is confirmed by a study, which found that student attitudes towards internship programs are critical predictors for successful outcomes, as opposed to prior course work and grade point average (GPA), (Beard & Morton, 1999 as cited in Kim et al., 2012).

In terms of the program, the successful outcome of the internship can partly depend on the students' level of motivation and effort they make to gain the maximum benefit from the industry internship

opportunity. For instance, if preparation workshops (CV building, developing interview skills, and researching about the internship host organization) were attended before commencement it was found that it assisted enthusiasm and motivation to engage at the internship and that this can influence the overall successful outcome of the internship (Freestone, Thompson, & Williams, 2006).

#### *Host Organization's Resource Commitment*

Organizations acknowledge the strategic importance of developing human capital as it is the essence of competitive advantage especially in the information and knowledge based economy (Linnehan & De Carolis, 2005; Solnet, Kralj, Kay & DeVeau, 2009). Firms that are more effective in developing their capabilities, (i.e. human capital and knowledge based skills that are necessary for the future of the organization) in relation to their competitors will be able to develop a better competitive advantage against their rivals in the future (Chi 2015; Degrauel 2011; Galbreath 2005; Halawi, Aronson & McCarthy, 2005; Makadok, Piga, McWilliams, & Segel, 2002; Watjatrakul 2005). One of the key resources organizations can use to create such capabilities is internships (Degrauel, 2011; Velez & Giner, 2015). The injection of fresh and unbiased views and skills from the intern provide an opportunity for the host organization to turn these ideas into reality and for some of them to become included as part of the decision making process of the host organization.

To do so, firms would need to commit resources so that they can create specific human capital that is developed through on the job learning (Dierickx & Cool, 1989; Solnet et al., 2009). As such, investment in learning and mentoring is an important aspect that is required to develop the human capital and requires joint contribution to the understanding of complex problems (Teece & Pisano, 1994; Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997; Watjatrakul, 2005). Mentoring can help interns adjust to the demands of the required work and maximize learning outcomes (Kim et al., 2012). Organizations that offer internship programs must be willing to put in the effort and time required in order to produce a successful program for students.

This means host organizations would need to develop the supervisory and mentoring quality of the managers and supervisors of the organization. For learning to occur, student interns require continuous feedback and ongoing mentoring support to develop their human capital skills and potential (Dunne & Bennett, 1997; Velez & Giner, 2015; Wilkin, 1992). The provision of these resources will enable the host organization to leverage the new knowledge of the intern. This requires good leadership through role modeling in areas of enthusiasm, work commitment, ethics, customer centeredness and communication skills (Solnet et al., 2009). However, sometimes organizations see internship programs as a way to source cheap or even free labor (Holyoak, 2013). It becomes difficult or even impossible to create an effective internship experience when the participating organization lacks interest and time for interns because the learning and development opportunities for students are just not there.

#### *Using Transaction Cost Economics to Assess Success of an Internship Program*

Transaction Cost Economics (TCE) is a framework that can be used to assess the economic exchange between two parties, in this case the student interns and the host organization (Crook, Combs, Ketchen & Aguinis, 2013; Weber & Mayer, 2014; Williamson, Wachter, & Harris, 1975; Williamson, 1981). The model provides a platform for organizations and individuals to make rational decisions and better understand the efficiency or the value of a given transaction (Crook et al., 2013). Transaction Cost Economics explains organizational decision making process and resulting performance. The motivation for the industry or host organizations to engage and collaborate with educational institutes

would be to gain access to inexpensive and qualified labor (Pianko, 1996 cited in Velez & Giner, 2015). From the perspective of the student interns, if the host organization fails to provide a suitable position that generates an opportunity to learn and develop their skills, then it can signal that efficiency of the transaction needs to be re-evaluated (Velez & Giner, 2015). According to Weber & Mayer (2014) if the parties' goals are misaligned it can damage the relationship or it could lead to an early exit from the transaction (in this case the internship program). If an organization demonstrates low commitment to the internship program due to a lack of resources, or no strategic plan to manage the internship program in the organization, then it is possible that the success of the internship program is questionable for both the student and the host organization (Crook et al., 2013; Solnet et al., 2009).

Many organizations are hesitant to commit resources to internships due to financial concerns (Cappelli, 1998; Watjatrakul, 2005). Particularly, this is a key concern for small organizations where most times, employees in such organizations tend to take on more than one role especially, the owner/manager (Degrauel, 2011). Interns can bring new skills to the organization such as tacit knowledge (from university studies), technological and administrative skills which are beneficial to both small and large organizations (Solnet et al., 2009). However, there seems to be less concern about what the interns gain out of this exchange. For instance, host organizations may not be able to commit the required level of supervision and may not have resources to commit to the learning and mentoring of the intern. This can mean that although organizations can be the beneficiaries of the exchange, there is greater potential for the student interns to lose value particularly due to the resource limitation of the host organization. Therefore, this study aims to understand how the resource commitment by the host organization (quality of supervision and mentoring) can determine the overall quality of the internship.

## METHOD

In order to explore the research question 'How does the host employer based resource commitment influence the students' perception of a good business internship?' We undertook the following methodological approach.

### *The Context and Demographics*

The internship program has been offered to business students since 2008 and has grown to have over 50 business partners and 200 students annually. It is designed to combine academic content with work-integrated learning. The study initially involved 83 student participants, 50 female and 33 male students that were undertaking a business internship program at an Australian university. The students were predominantly under 30 years of age with 73 students aged between 20 and 25 years, 9 students aged over 25 years and only 1 student less than 20 years old. This age bracket is typical for undergraduate students at Australian universities (Year Book, Australia, 2008). The surveyed students were undertaking degrees within the Faculty of Business studying the disciplines of marketing, finance or accounting, human resources, management, economics, international business, public relations, business law, psychology, supply chain, law, and business innovation.

### *Instrument*

There has been ongoing data collection to assess the success of the program, however, this paper will specifically use data collected from students surveyed in the second semester of 2014 based on the survey questions asked (refer to the Appendix for survey questions). Initially the researchers gained support from the University to develop an online feedback tool as it was thought by the researchers that this tool would reach these students in an easy and efficient way, and literature suggests that this

is the main mode of communication for this age group (Tess, 2013). However, after multiple attempts at engaging the students in the online tool in the previous semester, it was deemed inappropriate. The response rate was low, with only two students from the cohort of 90 participating.

Moss and Hendry (2002) discussed various factors affecting the response rate of an online-based survey. These factors include: completion time indicated by the invitation; timing of reminder notices; access to the survey; perceived anonymity and confidentiality of responses; and reward. Research also shows that online surveys typically yield lower response rates than surveys administered during class (Dommeier, Baum, Hanna & Chapman, 2004). The researchers concluded that, whereas, the main mode of communication for this age group was electronic (Tess, 2013), this did not mean that the students were happy to use it for all communication, and became selective when asked to perform a task that they did not see any personal gain for themselves (i.e. the task had a mark or bonus attached to it or was not social). This understanding is supported through various studies undertaken by Tess (2013).

The researchers then undertook a printed survey during the tutorial workshop in weeks 1, 6 and 12 (2014) to ensure the highest rate of participation. Students were informed that their participation was optional. A well-known limitation of using student participants in research is the potential for abuse of power, coercion, and lack of confidentiality and absence of meaningful consent, which may result in harm to the student (Clark & McCann, 2005). Therefore, a survey was deemed more appropriate than face to face interviews as it may be less confronting to students. Further, ethics approval (HE14/044) was obtained on the basis that an independent research worker conducts the survey and de-identifies the participant information. The data was only given to the researchers (teaching team) after the results were released.

The weeks the surveys were conducted correlated closely with the stage the students had achieved in their internship process. The early-internship stage data was collected to determine the students' initial expectations of the internship. Mid-stage surveying was aimed at discovering whether initial expectations have changed for the student and gauge the level of mentoring/supervision within the internship experience and its impact on the student experience. The internship/subject completion stage data was to discover the growth of knowledge and experience, as well as, the student satisfaction with the supervision/mentoring experience.

#### *Data analysis*

The survey data was analyzed using the *Statistical Package For Social Science* (SPSS) to understand the correlations between the dependent and independent variables (Muijs, 2004). Additionally for the qualitative comments a thematic analysis was utilized to better understand the patterns of student involvement and expectations (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013).

## RESULTS

### *Student Expectations of the Internship*

In week one of the session, we asked students what they aimed to achieve through the internship experience. They were able to select all their relevant reasons. The most selected reason (n=68) was 'to gain real life work experience in their current field of study'. The second most selected reason (n=52) was 'to increase their knowledge and experience' while the third most selected reason (n=40) was 'to validate their career choice and see if they were really suited for the type of job they were currently

being trained for at university'. It is interesting to note that all of these reasons selected would require supervision and mentorship to develop the students' knowledge and experience value, demonstrating a link between student motivation and mentorship. This is further validated by 78 students who answered 'yes' to the question which asked them whether mentoring is considered by them as a key element that creates a good internship program (refer to the Appendix for survey questions).

It was determined that the interns expectations in the midst of the internship should be reviewed to understand their perception of the experience. During the week six face-to-face workshop, which coincided with the mid-way point of the students' internship experience, 83 students completed the survey. The students were asked a series of questions to determine if their expectation of the internship was being met, 50 of the students said their internship experience was better than they expected while 24 said their internship experience was in line with their previous expectations, 8 students thought that the experience was worse than original expectations and one student chose not to answer. Of the students who said their expectations changed, the most stated reason was the realization that their internship was not necessarily related to their study discipline. This demonstrates that there was a transaction between the organization and their career choice, resulting in a misalignment of the internship outcomes. This realization was potentially subjective and dependent on multiple factors such as the internship project and the organizational resource allocation.

In the final stage of the survey, a total of 80 students participated in the study where the students were asked if their expectations for the internship had been met. This stage was delivered during the week 12 face-to-face workshop held at the end of the Business Internship Program. Of the 80 students responding, 64 indicated that their expectations of the internship were met. The 16 students who stated that their expectations were not met stated reasons, such as, lack of alignment of internship role to the students' chosen discipline; given tasks that were more mundane and a lack of opportunities to learn; and lack of mentoring and guidance from their assigned supervisor.

Some of the factors that influenced successful internship outcomes from the students' perspective were the critical aspects needed for this positive internship experience include, quality supervision; an organization's practices and policies; reward programs; a good evaluation system; resource commitment; and genuine interest in a student's learning experience (Kim et al., 2012). Therefore according to Kim et al. (2012) the importance of the commitment the host internship organization must have in order to create a positive internship experience for students must be addressed by the organization.

An important outcome of the internship experience is to provide an opportunity for the students to validate their career choice. Of the 80 students responding, 68 said the internship experience validated their career choice and the experience cemented their interest and passion in their discipline. Comments from the students to support this high response included "loved the work", "definitely what I enjoy doing", "enjoyed it and feel qualified", "demonstrated that I have been studying the right course", "I'm passionate about working in HR", "up to the challenge of making a difference", "challenging and interesting", and "it is an industry with so many opportunities". On the other hand, 11 students indicated that they were no longer keen to work in their chosen discipline and provided reasons such as, "found the work very tedious", "didn't fit their personality", "didn't want to work 9-5 at a computer", "accounting is not for everyone" "found out I don't enjoy it", "prefer economics", and "did not get the chance to experience marketing". This highlights the importance of the alignment of university studies to the internship experience therefore operationalizing the students' discipline knowledge with practical experience.

Of the 80 students surveyed, 71 students said they gained more communication skills, 53 students said they gained teamwork, relationship building skills, and interpersonal skills, 28 students reported that they gained experience in managing real life ethical dilemmas, and 24 students gained negotiation skills. From the student results, negotiation skills and ability to manage real life ethical dilemmas were least evident, while communication skills were gained by almost all students. This result correlates with other research showing that the most common skill clearly identified from an internship was communication skills (Bonnie, Graham, & Mike, 2010). In addition, the second most established skill gained was teamwork, which is consistent with other research observing skills gained during an internship. Bonnie et al. (2010) stated that many students recognized that teamwork and collaboration with others were imperative to completing tasks, even though initially they felt uncomfortable working in teams and would rather work individually.

The two lowest identified skills gained from the internship, negotiation skills and ability to deal with ethical dilemmas, may be less apparent as students are not always in a position to negotiate or able to identify even small ethical dilemmas as the internship was only for 16 days and the skills of negotiation and ethical reflection take longer to personally develop. On the other hand, perhaps these two skills were lowest due to the mere fact that communication skills, teamwork, relationship building skills, and interpersonal skills are more apparent and imbedded in every aspect of a university student and internship experience (Bonnie et al., 2010).

Past research has shown that one of the major key disappointments of an internship experience included missing opportunities when an important project was not given, therefore not feeling involved enough (Freestone et al., 2006). Based on this, students were asked if they were involved in developing a new project or process during their internship. Results showed that 47 students were involved in doing a new independent project. Those who were involved with a project were asked to provide a short outline of what they were involved with and if it was successful.

The types of projects included: creating a media press release; template creation; promotions for a new car; conducting and streamlining induction processes; report for a new wellness program; drafting strategic objectives in the policy; developing a new retirement village in Queensland; brainstorming then completing a privacy compliance matrix; and, establishing a weekly segment on a website. Other projects included: research for several projects; creating a prototype; tailoring manuals; developing an entire marketing strategy; creating a design that was actually used and printed; creating a recruitment calendar; creating a PDF for a self-guided tour; developing a customer journey story board; data analysis; generating a risk assessment and confidentiality policy; debt recovery; and, contributing to ongoing projects. The resource commitment of internship planning by the host organization prior to interns being placed is reflected in the range of projects undertaken by the students. Therefore, resource commitment, such as an identified project, from the host organization enables student interns to transform the university gained knowledge into job ready skills. As part of Freestone et al.'s, (2006) study, it was found that about half of those who participated in the internship program ultimately secured part-time jobs with their host internship organization or a similar organization. It is quite common and desirable to students to be offered employment at their host internship organization. Students were asked if they were offered employment by their host organization. Results indicate that 16 students were offered some form of paid employment post internship. In addition to the paid employment, 9 students were offered an extended internship. Thus, it demonstrated the value of resource input from all stakeholders into the internship program, in particular mentoring, supervision and opportunity for the student to practice their skills.

### *Feedback and Mentoring*

The students were asked to assess and rank the factors that were most important in creating a good internship experience. They ranked the key aspects that helped them as interns have a positive internship experience. Results showed that the highest ranked option was quality of supervision at the workplace, with 36 of the 80 students. This result was then followed by 17 students ranking the key aspect as resource commitment from the internship organization and 16 students ranking the key aspect as a good evaluation system and motivational feedback.

Students were also asked to comment on the level of feedback and mentoring from supervisors and the host organization at the mid-stage of the internship. Of the 83 participants, 40 students had received constant feedback, while 22 said they somewhat received feedback, and, 21 did not receive any feedback at all. With regards to mentoring provided to the student, 49 said they were being mentored, while 29 believed they were somewhat mentored, and five students did not receive any mentoring at all. There is an overall indication that feedback and mentoring were both components that were an integral part of the internship and majority of the students have received some form of feedback and mentoring during their internship.

Students were asked if they had any negative experiences during their internship and how they coped with the situation. Results showed that 55 of the students did not encounter any negative experiences. Of the students that did have a negative experience, some of the key reasons included the routine and unchallenging nature of tasks allocated to them; the unstructured internship role and lack of preparation of the host organization to have an intern on board. When students encountered a problem, the most common way they dealt with their problem was by speaking to their supervisor. Other methods used were students did more research, asked questions, and took a positive attitude by understanding that the mundane tasks were important in the overall scheme of things. This demonstrates a link between mentoring and supervision and a positive internship

### *Resource Commitments, Supervisor Mentoring/Feedback and Student Perceptions of a Successful Internship*

Results show that there is a positive correlation between level of being mentored by host supervisor and three variables of level of being offered a job, skills gained by student and experiencing fewer disappointments during the internship. The strongest correlation is between the level of being mentored by host supervisor and fewer disappointments with correlation coefficients of .417 and .481 from Pearson and Spearman tests, respectively.

Similarly, when the host organizations design internship opportunities where they assign work tasks which enable students to acquire job skills, then it had a positive correlation with being offered a job, skills gained and experiencing fewer disappointments during the internship. The strongest correlation is between host organization design of internship opportunities where they assign work tasks, which enable students to acquire job skills, and skills gained by student with correlation coefficients of .542 and .534 from Pearson and Spearman tests, respectively (refer to Table 1).

TABLE 1: Organizational resource commitment and perceived success of the internship

| Variable   | Test                | Correlation Coefficient |
|--|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Being mentored by host supervisor (Q4) & Student offered a job (Q13)   | Pearson Correlation | .254* (.020)            |
|  | Spearman's rho      | .248* (.024)            |
| Being mentored by host supervisor (Q4) & Skills gained by student (Q2)   | Pearson Correlation | .396* (.000)            |
|  | Spearman's rho      | .353** (.000)           |
| Being mentored by host supervisor (Q4) & Student experienced fewer disappointments during the internship (Q3)                | Pearson Correlation | .417** (.000)           |
|  | Spearman's rho      | .481** (.000)           |
| Opportunities for students to acquire job skills (Q9) & Student offered a job (Q13)  | Pearson Correlation | .340** (.002)           |
|  | Spearman's rho      | .349** (.001)           |
| Opportunities for students to acquire job skills (Q9) & Skills gained by student (Q2)  | Pearson Correlation | .542** (.000)           |
|  | Spearman's rho      | .534** (.000)           |
| Opportunities for students to acquire job skills (Q9) & Student experienced fewer disappointments during the internship (Q3) | Pearson Correlation | .417** (.000)           |
|  | Spearman's rho      | .292** (.007)           |

## DISCUSSION

Today's university graduates increasingly face complex demands from society more than ever. The job market is highly competitive, while the population and workforce are becoming increasingly diverse (Hurst & Good, 2009). Internships are becoming crucial to create a competitive advantage for university graduates about to enter the labor market. Within this context, much of the previous research has examined the benefit of the internships to host organizations (Linnehan & De Carolis, 2005). However, very little research has been done to understand the significance of resource commitment from the host organization and its relationship to the students' perspective of a successful internship (D'abate et al., 2009; Liu et al., 2014). Therefore the purpose of this research was to examine the relationship between the host organizations' resource commitment and the students' perspective of a successful internship. To this end, we used the Transaction Cost Economic model to better understand the internship relationship between the host organization and the student.

The findings show that, when host organizations are hesitant to commit holistic resources to the internship program it can result in disequilibrium of the exchange between the two parties. For instance, when host organizations have not trained their internship supervisors in how to provide feedback and mentor the interns, it can result in interns' lack of satisfaction with the internship experience. Mentoring is a commonly accepted method of delivering meaningful learning experiences to students (Mellott, Arden & Cho, 1997). Previous studies found that mentoring students as interns is important for gaining a more valuable experience for the future (Callanan & Benzing, 2004 as cited in Kim et al., 2012; Velez & Giner, 2015). By providing a mentoring experience, students can adapt to the

various demands of intern work and amplify learning outcomes (Kim et al., 2012). The findings indicated that mentoring and feedback were particularly important during challenging work experiences and can help ease the transition from theoretical learning in the classroom to applying those theories in a professional environment (Matthew et al., 2012).

Similarly, when host organizations do not design the projects or internship role with clear goals and outcomes, this can result in ambiguous measurement of performance which leaves both parties unsure of the value of the transaction (Weber & Mayer, 2014). It is also possible that host organizational supervisors have not allocated or understood the time commitments required for training, supporting and mentoring the interns through the projects. Thus, host organizations may not be taking into consideration the cost of supervisor time for planning the internship projects/work roles and supervising and mentoring and providing necessary support during the internship. This can again tilt the transactional outcomes to be unfairly weighted against the interns.

From the perspective of the students, our findings also indicate that student interns undertake internships with the expectation that their internship experience will give them opportunities to validate their career choice, and help to develop work ready skills. When the internship does not provide the intern with opportunities for skill development and provide experiences to validate career choices, it can then influence the outcome of the transaction creating the disequilibrium and incite frustration for the interns and the host organization (Weber & Mayer, 2014). As such host organizations need to design the internship roles and provide opportunities and experiences for interns to gain new skills and validate career choices. This means host organizations need to plan the project or work role and allocate necessary resources (time and training) to ensure the transaction is successful to both parties. This can facilitate a greater opportunity for a more equal transaction for the intern and the host organization.

However, it is important that both parties are mindful of the commitment that the transaction represents and how the host organization should design projects to benefit both host organizational business needs and the students learning and career needs adequately. Particularly, students need to be mindful of the limitations of the resources that can be allocated by the host organization to the interns, especially in terms of supervisor time.

Finally, the success of the exchange can also depend on the alignment of the student intern strengths, their attitudes, motivation and the suitability of the intern's personality to do the project and how they fit into the organizational cultural values (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Reeve et al., 2004).

As such, our study further validates the importance of resource commitment of the host organizations and its alignment with the intern's skills, motivation and the requirements of the project/business needs. Particularly, we highlight the importance of organizations committing resources to learning and development opportunities, providing constructive feedback to the interns mentoring the interns and providing the resources to develop their workplace skills as crucial to a successful exchange. If the supervisors who are responsible for the interns are not trained and supported to mentor and provide feedback to interns, then there is greater potential for the interns to receive very little benefit from the exchange (transaction).

Therefore, the study illustrates the importance of planning and how supervisors may need to strategically assign relevant resources and opportunities for the interns to learn during their internship. Research has shown that the most important factors that motivate Generation Y (1982-1994) is the environment and interesting type of work (Kubatova & Kukelkova, 2014). If a host organization or the

supervisor has not made an effort to create a project goal, and does not have any particular milestones or learning outcomes for the intern, then interns who are placed in such organizations would have less opportunity to receive feedback and mentoring during the internship. When host organizations provide relevant resources in terms of good supervision, mentoring and set goals and projects for the interns, then there is greater potential for the interns to develop better work related skills and even receive employment opportunities within the organization. This is because, the interns are provided with an opportunity to use their knowledge to make a substantial contribution to the organization and be recognized for their contribution. When there are no clear goals, projects or outcomes to achieve, the interns have very little opportunity to learn and contribute to the host organization.

#### *Implications for Practice*

The findings of this research will enable internship course designers to gain a greater understanding of the importance of the host organization resource commitment to the internship program. It allows organizations and educators to be mindful of the relationship between the appropriate training and development of supervisors required to ensure that they are equipped to provide feedback and mentoring to ensure better internship outcomes for the students. For example, many of the supervisors may not have undergone the necessary training on performance evaluations and or instruction on the best way to provide constructive feedback that is useful to student learning. It is also important that the host organization creates meaningful experience for the interns by designing a structured program that exposes them to the discipline practices and provides challenging and meaningful projects and tasks that will allow interns to expand the students' skills and future employability. Ultimately the internship transaction needs to provide mutual benefit to both host organization and the student interns.

#### CONCLUSION

The results of the study highlight the importance that the student interns placed on the industry mentor (supervisor) during their internship and on the positive impact of gaining real life work experiences; enabling students the opportunity to develop work relevant tacit knowledge. The findings indicate that although the majority of the interns were happy with the outcome of the internship experience, not all agreed that they received the level of mentoring and feedback to help them develop their work ready skills. Consequently, when students experienced a greater level of mentoring and received better feedback from their supervisors, then they claimed the internship to have been more successful.

The success of the internship can also be understood from the perspective of whether interns were able to develop relevant work ready tacit skills. For example the majority indicated that they gained skills in relation to team work, communication, inter personal skills, relationship building skills, negotiation skills and managing real life work based ethical dilemmas. Successful internships from the students' perspective meant that they were excited, gained real work experience, aligned with their career choice, increased their knowledge and experience, enhanced their communication skills and built professional relationships. According to the students, elements of unsuccessful internships were unchallenging work, lack of support or a specific project, and not being treated in a professional manner. In conclusion our findings support the view that internships have the ability to be successful if the appropriate organizational resource considerations are in place.

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APPENDIX: SURVEY QUESTIONS POSED TO STUDENTS UNDERTAKING THE INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

| Survey Questions for Internship Students  |
|---|
| <b>Survey One – Start of the Internship</b>   |
| How do you feel about the new internship opportunity?   |
| Have you undertaken any previous unpaid internships?  |
| How much relevant work experience, in your particular field of study, do you possess?   |
| What do you want to achieve at the end of COMM390 internship?   |
| Do you consider mentoring a key element that creates a good internship program?   |
|   |
| <b>Survey Two – Midway through the Internship</b>   |
| Is your internship (a) better than expected, (b) worse than you expected, (c) as per my expectation?  |
| Have your expectations changed about what you will gain from your internship experience?  |
| Did you receive constant feedback from your host supervisor that helped you to improve your job related skills?   |
| Do you feel that you are being mentored during your internship program by your supervisor and members of the host organization?   |
|   |
| <b>Survey Three – Completion of the Internship</b>  |
| Were your expectations of the internship met?   |
| Are you still keen to work within your chosen discipline?   |
| What are the key real life skills you gained during your internship? Choice of Negotiation skills; Communication skills; Interpersonal skills; Team work and relationship building skills; Managing real life ethical dilemmas.   |
| Reflecting on your internship experience, what do you think are the key aspects that will help an intern have a positive internship experience? Ranked response of quality of supervision at the workplace; organizational practices and policies; good evaluation system and motivational feedback; reward system; resource commitment from the internship organization. |
| What were the key disappointments of your internship? Choice of routine and unchallenging work; lack of feedback and support from supervisor; none, it was all good and relevant; other.  |
| Did you have any negative experience during the internship?   |
| Were you involved in developing a new project, process or product?  |
| Have you been offered employment by your host organization? Choose from part-time; full-time; casual; Extended internship; No   |