

Students' Expectations and Perceptions of Internship Programs: The Example of China-Beijing BIEM Students in Continental-grand Hotel for Internship

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Abstract

This paper is aiming at observing the internship students' intention and behaviors during the period of hospitality internship. In this case, both the employers and school organizers can purposely treat them effectively in order to take their three-parties advantages. To be up to the grade of three-wins, the internship work should be more workable and valuable through the integrated system of hospitality management. This paper also tells us that knowing well about the internship students can help both the employees and employers manage well.

JEL classification numbers: F15, D84

Keywords: Hospitality internship, expectations, intentions, integration

1 Introduction

This Since 2005, the students of BIEM have been processing the internship work in line with the vocational education system. The tourism department students usually take this internship in some 4or5-star hotels, like Lido, Westin, Regent and Continental-grand hotel. Among the 300 students' survey, most of the students are not willing to do this in hospitality establishments. The reasons are different. Some worry about the heavy labor and long hours. Some dislike the repeated work etc. A sustainable survey has been conducted for several years, the recent one is more reliable than ever. It referred that the students' idea and views subjectively play more important role in terms of the impact of their mood and behaviors. It quite influences more about the students internship work.

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1.1 The Survey Conducted Last Year

Table 1: Students' expectation and perception of internship programs

		Mean expectation score (E)	Mean perception score (P)	Mean difference (P-E)	Significant level	Standard deviation (S.D.)
1.	Good salary	2.9544	2.7557	-0.19870	0.001	1.05855
2.	Enhancement of my resume	3.6287	3.4919	-0.13681	0.001	0.72818
3.	Sufficient training	3.7068	3.5147	-0.19218	0.162	2.40075
4.	High social status	3.3616	3.2020	-0.15961	0.001	0.85402
5.	Job secured	3.4691	3.2866	-0.18241	0.000	0.88522
6.	Good coworkers relationships	3.6775	3.5505	-0.12704	0.394	2.60846
7.	Broad experience	3.8143	3.7296	-0.08469	0.056	0.77501
8.	Interesting and challenging work	3.6091	3.5570	-0.05212	0.292	0.86540
9.	Good working environment	3.5896	3.4104	-0.17915	0.001	0.96193
10.	Sufficient supervisory support	3.4430	3.3127	-0.13029	0.020	0.97483
11.	Reasonable boss	3.5733	3.2866	-0.28664	0.000	1.06147
12.	Many fringe benefits	3.2769	3.1205	-0.15635	0.006	0.98102
13.	Good coordination between schools and employers	3.5309	3.0814	-0.44951	0.000	0.93928
14.	Many chances for self-development	3.4729	3.1987	-0.27362	0.000	0.97855
15.	Proper appreciation and praise for work done	3.4919	3.3779	-0.11401	0.044	0.98851
16.	Feeling of being involved	3.6384	3.5440	-0.09446	0.098	0.99715
17.	Sympathetic help with personal problems	3.3681	3.1564	-0.21173	0.000	0.89523
18.	High autonomy	3.3388	3.1987	-0.14007	0.004	0.83818
19.	Acceptable work pressure	3.5309	3.4658	-0.06515	0.228	0.94402
20.	Encourage innovative ideas from staff	3.3094	3.0945	-0.21498	0.000	0.96645
21.	Stable working hours	3.2932	3.2801	-0.01303	0.830	1.06327
22.	Be able to transfer theories to real situations	3.6840	3.3811	-0.30293	0.000	0.98821
23.	Identify and develop interests through trial	3.5961	3.3616	-0.23453	0.000	1.02758
24.	Higher chance for future employment	3.7329	3.4788	-0.25407	0.000	0.93267
25.	High team spirit	3.5603	3.4756	-0.08469	0.119	0.94937
26.	Be able to define own strength and weakness	3.5505	3.5147	-0.03583	0.479	0.88673
27.	Develop own communication skill	3.7166	3.6580	-0.05863	0.265	0.88673
28.	Have chances to get involved in supervisory work	3.3779	3.1140	-0.26384	0.000	0.91990
	Total average	3.5106	3.4635	-0.04711	0.107	0.50998
	Overall satisfaction level of internship program	3.5896	3.4300	-0.15961	0.001	1.09310

1.2 The Survey shows that the Students' Perception Influences the Internship Greatly

After SPSS, a total of 28 job attributes are included in this survey through which students are asked to rate their perception (P) and expectation (E) for each job's attributes. Comparisons are then made to check if there are any gap differences before and after their placements. The result is shown that by Figure 1. where the expectations and perceptions for each attributes have been given, followed by their corresponding mean differences (P-E). Total averages have been calculated after summing up all the mean scores for each attribute. An overall satisfaction level rated by respondents is also provided to get a general pattern of how students expect and perceive about an internship program.

2 Expectation

Generally speaking, the average expectation score stands at around 3.51, which implies that students are having moderately high expectations about their internship programs. By examining the mean expectation scores among the 28 job attributes, it is obviously seen that 'good salary' (2.95) is the only job attribute which obtains the lowest score below 3.00. It can reflect the reality that students do not set quite a high expectation in this attribute due to what the market price have been set in the industry. This voluntary nature of internship program has therefore, generally lowered the common expectation of students in getting paid for their internship training. Similarly, 'many fringe benefits' (3.28) is a related issue other than 'good salary' which stands in its second lowest position within the group. Again, students do not have too high expectations on the fringe benefits being provided by the employers as they may think that the durations of placement are usually not long which may only last for about 3 months. Employers would only consider such cooperation as a temporary contract or part-time basis where fringe benefits would not be comparable to those full time staff.

Although it seems that students do not have quite high expectations on those explicit advantages such as salary and fringe benefits, their expectations on some implicit benefits are quite high indeed. For example, 'broad experience' (3.81), 'higher chance for future employment' (3.73), 'develop own communication skill' (3.72) and 'sufficient training' (3.70) are those job attributes which win the highest ratings of expectation in this research. In the students' point of view, all the top four job attributes are more or less the main objectives of participating the internship program. Gaining more work experience is necessary for students, especially in the field of hospitality where high quality service is a main concern which should be backed up by practices and experiences. Besides that, through the internship process, it can be a mutual opportunity for employers and interns to get known with each other. Internship can be considered as a credible means to land the first job. Students who get the chances to perform well in the training period can always increase their likelihood of being employed again by the placement companies and take it as a stepping-stone to get entrance to the field. Developing own communication skill is also one critical component in equipping oneself for future careers, especially in the business and service environment. Instead of just reading the text-books and passing the exams, the placement environment can always provide them with great opportunity to learn how to be more communicative with both internal and external customers where school environment could never provide. Learning of some technical and professional

skills are also highly expected by students during their placement due to the lack of essential facilities and equipments that can be provided by most hospitality institutions in Beijing. For example, most institutions would not install a hotel room in the campus for teaching housekeeping procedures but would include it in the placement program. It more or less can explain why students are having quite high expectations in these four categories.

The average perception level of students remains at around 3.46. Once again maintaining itself as the lowest position, 'good salary' (2.76) is the only attribute which cannot reach to the neutral level of 3.00. It implies that students do really show their dissatisfaction about the pay after taking their placement. Sometimes they expect much more tips from the guests by their heart-and-soul service. 'Good coordination between schools and employers' (3.08) takes its second lowest position in students' perceptions which is then followed by 'encourage innovative ideas from staff' (3.09) and 'have chances to get involved in supervisory work' (3.11). Getting a mean score of around 3.00 represents those students would only have a fair perception instead of a very good one in those mentioned areas.

2.1 Students' Expectations

Same as the case in expectation, 'broad experience' still remains in its first position with the highest perception score of 3.73. It therefore, means that students are quite happy that the placement companies do really provide them a chance to gain and widen their field experience. The job attribute of 'develop own communication skill' has moved up to the second highest position in perception rather than its third in expectation, with mean score of 3.66. Quite similar to what have been expected by students before, placement does really provide them the opportunities to develop their communication skills and special techniques which enable them to deal with the external and internal customers in many business environments. 'Interesting and challenging work' takes its third highest position among the group with mean score of 3.56. It indicates that although students cannot get a very high pay and many fringe benefits during the internship process, they still have found some interesting and challenging ingredients in their positions which can be an alternative motivator during their placement period.

2.2 Gap Difference

In order to have a closer look at the satisfaction level of students about the internship program, gap differences (P-E) should be investigated to see if perception levels can override the expectation levels. By referring back to Figure 2., it can be seen that even though both perception and expectation levels are moderately high with average mean staying at around 3.5, all the gap differences have shown a negative sign, indicating that student perceptions after placement fail to meet with what they have expected before. Gently speaking, the average gap is not quite large in width which only stays at about -0.05. Among the 28 job attributes, 19 of them have significant level less than 0.05, representing that there are significant relationships for such differences. 'Good coordination between schools and employers' causes the largest mean difference of -0.45. Although students expect good coordination and communication between schools and outside partners would more or less enhance the effectiveness of internship programs, it differs from what many students think after their placements that both parties do not

really taking their roles in ensuring close coordination.

'Be able to transfer theories to real situations' obtains a negative gap of 0.30. in its second largest position which is followed by the job attributes of 'reasonable boss' and 'many chances for self-development' with negative gaps of 0.29 and 0.27 respectively. It is quite reasonable that students find difficulties in applying theories being learnt from colleges in the real world situation, especially in the service industry where services are always intangible, facing the problems of non-uniqueness and uncertainties in many difference circumstances. 'Reasonable boss' in this case, means whether the supervisory or management levels are able to treat students fairly and delegate appropriate tasks or responsibilities to students according to their abilities. With a negative gap in this job attribute implies that students in certain extent, are not quite satisfied with the arrangement given by their superiors. For example, no further job rotation and integration after they have mastered a particular task or the supervisors do not follow the planned schedule and procedures as being agreed in the training program. Also, a mismatch of expectation and perception in the attribute of 'many chances for self-development' reflects that the opportunities to enhance their internal qualities are not as many as what they expect when they have passed through the training program. One possible reason may due to the fact that interns always start their positions at the entry level which just include some simple and repeated tasks, requiring students for physical involvements rather than mental ones, such as being a runner or usher in F&B operations, or a bellman in the lobby through which, students may not feel any self-development in the process. Actually, the self-development education is more initial for a student's growth both mentally and physically.

2.3 Other Gap Difference

Other gap differences that should be highlighted include 'have chances to get involved in supervisory work' and 'higher chance for future employment'. The gap difference of 'have chances to get involved in supervisory work' is a negative score of 0.26. It indicates that although students do have certain expectations to approach to supervisory or management duties during the placement, the reality is that they may not have any chance to do so. Possible reasons include that students are considered too young without any previous field experience which in certain extent, prohibit managers from building trust and empowering students to take such key positions within a very short period of internship schedule. 'High chance for future employment' stands with a gap difference of 0.25, implying that even students have high expectation of being easier to be employed in the future, it is afraid that some respondents would not have the same thought after undergoing their placement. Possible reasons may due to the fact that employment is always linked up with interns' performance and there is always an intense competition not only with other interns but existing labors in the hospitality industry.

3 Intention

Instead of just investigating the general intention levels for the whole sample, some factors such as respondents with different demographic backgrounds may cause some variations of intention levels among the others. One-way ANOVA has been conducted to

check whether the factors of ages, institutions, academic qualifications and work experiences would have any effects on students' intentions of joining the hospitality industry: Later on, this research will be conducted soon.

4 Conclusion

Most students are not willing to experience the hotel's internship. Because of the high-standard service and long work hours. Many services are supplied by the internship students; they nearly take pride of that difficultly. The feeling of reorganization is so low among the internship students. The attitudes of the internship students are quite easily to build up, especially the dynamical power and ability. After interviewing with the internship students, the researcher knows that having been through the internship, almost one half of students developed themselves with so much experience and professional knowledge. The internship, in a sense, helps them to understand more about hospitality and self-development. After the internship, a quarter of students have learned to solve problems, to communicate with the people and even the importance of team work [1]. At the same time , through the face-to-face interview with many internship students, the internship deserves. They learned from the teacher and understood deeply that the green hands have no right to negotiate the trade-off conditions because they are just learners and will-be experienced hands. They should learn and practice more.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: The helpers and internship students should be definitely appreciated and spoken highly in terms of the participation of the survey in Continental-grand Hotel in Beijing of China. Some students even took the SPSS data to analyze the scores as a very helpful assistant for the teacher. Thanks for their heart-and-soul help and co-operation. The researcher should acknowledge the financial support for the paper's publication as well.

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