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Research notes

The relationships amongst the intern anxiety, internship outcomes, and career commitment of hospitality college students

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ABSTRACT

Cultivating the practical experience and skills of students through internships is beneficial, but a student's anxiety when transitioning from student to intern is often neglected. This study analysed the changes in student anxiety to determine the relationships among intern anxiety, internship outcomes, and career commitment. A cluster sampling method and questionnaire survey were used to collect data from third- and fourth-year college students from hospitality-related departments. The effective sample sizes were 255 (preinternship) and 245 (postinternship). According to the data, intern anxiety slightly decreased after internship. Intern anxiety and internship outcomes were determined to influence career commitment significantly, although no relationship was found between intern anxiety and internship outcomes. This paper provides additional suggestions for designing an off-campus internship curriculum and improving off-campus intern guidance.

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1. Introduction

Internships have been described as apprenticeships, cooperative education, experimental learning, field work practica, practical work experience, industrial placement, placement learning, sandwich courses, service learning, and workplace learning (Auburn, 2007; Auburn, Ley, & Arnold, 1993; Leslie, 1991; Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2013). Since 2001, Vocational higher education in Taiwan has gradually increased its course offerings in the domain of hospitality, tourism, and leisure. According to the Ministry of Education of Taiwan (2013), the number of undergraduate programs has increased by more than 163 in present. Many such programs, particularly those in vocational higher education, offer an internship as a component of the curriculum (Wan, Yang, Cheng, & Su, 2013). Increasingly more lodging management educators are using student internship programs to close the gap between educational learner outcomes and industry expectations (Barrows & Bosselman, 1999; Domask, 2007; Solnet, Kralj, Kay, & DeVeau, 2009). Consequently, internships have become a crucial

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compulsory course in related hospitality departments. Internships enable students to connect theory (i.e., tacit knowledge) with practice (i.e., explicit knowledge) and increase the adaptability and competitiveness of students before graduation.

Few studies have focused on the effectiveness of cooperative education in the hospitality and tourism industries (Wan et al., 2013); instead, they have focused on the perspectives, expectations, satisfaction, and occupational choices of students (e.g., Chen, 2008; Cho, 2006; Ju, Emenheiser, Clayton, & Reynolds, 1998; Kuo, 2006; Lam & Ching, 2007; Lee & Chao, 2008; Tse, 2010). Regarding internship outcomes, some studies have indicated that off-campus internships could help students adapt to their jobs more effectively, enhance their understanding of the workplace (Lee, Chen, Hung, & Chen, 2011; Liu & Chen, 2000), acquire practical experience, communication skills, career development skills (Barrows & Bosselman, 1999), technical task skills, and the ability to apply knowledge, and improve their insights into reality (Busby, Brunt, & Baber, 1997). Dressler and Keeling (2004) proposed that by participating in joint education programs, students can receive opportunities to understand different occupations, which can benefit students who have yet to decide what to pursue in their careers, by informing them about what career choices are available. Through in-depth interviews, Mihail (2006) determined that students perceived internships as a way to improve time management, interpersonal communication, teamwork, task prioritisation, and job productivity. Kessels and Kwakman (2007) reported that workplace learning enables students to advance job-related competencies. Tse (2010) indicated that, through internships, students can improve their personal growth, career development, practical skills, core employability, decision-making ability, workplace relationship skills, and application of academic knowledge in the real world. Chiu (2012) found that vocational students generally provide positive feedback towards off-campus internships, and agreed that an internship could enhance employability, professional core skills, interpersonal skills, time management, and self-confidence, as well as equip students with behaviours and attitudes appropriate for the workplace.

Some people are likely to experience anxiety in an unfamiliar work environment, and college students participating in an internship are no exception. Research on intern anxiety is scant; previous researchers have focused on the anxious feelings of medical and nursing students or interns in the field of education (Bellini, Baime, & Shea, 2002; Herrick, 1987). Research on the anxiety of hospitality college student interns was not found. Anxiety, which can be defined as the complex emotional states of tension, worry, or depression, causes physiological and behavioural responses, which belong to a person's intrinsic and subjective nervous emotions such as fear of the unknown or unfamiliarity with places and tasks (Endler & Kocovski, 2001). Vickers and Williams (2007) proposed that anxiety can drive a person towards negative thinking, which induces nervousness or reduced self-confidence in performing a job. Internships connect academic learning with practical experience and constitute a useful part of an effective interdisciplinary curriculum (Domask, 2007); hence, understanding intern anxiety is crucial for researchers and teachers in establishing hospitality manpower cultivation plans.

Bellini et al. (2002) indicated that medical and nursing interns were likely to experience anxiety, and that anxiety persisted after the internship was complete. The anxiety of education interns was found to influence internship outcomes significantly. Those who participated in internship programs were likely to have lower anxiety and higher self-value in the workplace compared with those who did not attend an internship (Herrick, 1987). Questions remain whether people in the hospitality industry experience lower anxiety in the workplace if they have internship experience, and whether anxiety is an accurate predictor of internship outcomes.

Many studies have shown that negative internship experiences can lower student intentions to remain in the hospitality industry and pursue a career after graduation (Barron & Maxwell, 1993; Callan, 1997; Fox, 2001; Richardson, 2008; West & Jameson, 1990; Zopiatis, 2007). Zopiatis (2007) indicated that many hospitality intern programs lacked well-established protocols. Low-quality internships can alienate students from a career in hospitality when their expectations do not match reality. In a low-quality internship, students might be assigned meaningless tasks, be left unsupervised, receive unequal treatment by managers compared with other interns, or have wage discrepancies. Any of these factors might cause a student to leave the industry after an internship (Callan, 1997; Richardson, 2008). Barron and Maxwell (1993) addressed the differences between students' expectations and their internship experience. After attending an unsatisfying internship, many students leave with a negative perception of the career opportunities, monetary rewards, training prospects, and job satisfaction in the hospitality industry. Lee and Chao (2013) suggested that host organisations that provide benefits positively enhance a person's desire to stay and commit to the industry. West and Jameson (1990) found that supervised work experience is a major force in determining whether graduates pursue hospitality careers. Therefore, both the hospitality industry and educational system must become involved in further research to understand the stages at which student interns decide against full-time hospitality employment. However, successful work experience or job satisfaction can positively influence a student's intentions to pursue a career in the hospitality industry (Domonte & Vaden, 1987; Fazio, 1986; Wan et al., 2013). Chen, Lin, and Kuo (2011) determined that internship outcomes, as perceived by hospitality college students, show a slightly positive association with career commitment in the hospitality industry. Zopiatis and Theocharous (2013) indicated that the level of gained internship benefits or outcomes, as perceived by students, exhibits a significantly positive association with the perceived success of an internship.

Questions remain how the anxiety of interns change, and whether a significant relationship exists among internship anxiety, internship outcomes, and career commitment. Whether anxiety disappears after an internship, or whether it remains and causes employment anxiety, thus affecting future career development, remains uncertain. These concerns are worth further exploration. The current study focused on the transformation of anxiety before and after an internship to determine the relationships among intern anxiety, internship outcomes, and the career commitment of hospitality college students after an internship. Accordingly, the hypotheses are listed as follows:

Hypothesis 1. Hospitality college students will experience significantly lower anxiety after an internship.

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