An Empirical Investigation of Internship Employers’ Satisfaction and Future Hiring Intention

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Due to a plethora of benefits to all associated parties, the internship, the most widely used form of experiential learning, has become an essential part of sport management curricula (Schoepfer & Dodds, 2010; Southall, Nagel, LeGrande, & Han, 2003; Parkhouse, 2001). Interns can acquire a variety of practical knowledge and skills along with networking opportunities through internships. It is obvious that students who garner internship experience will have competitive advantage over those who do not (Dees & Hall, 2012; Gault & Leach, 2010; Schlager, 2006). Furthermore, new employees with internship experiences tend to receive considerably higher starting salaries and a greater level of job appointments than their non-internship counterparts (Gault, Redington, & Schlager, 2000; Schuurman, Pangborn, & McClintic, 2005).

The practical job experience and experiential learning gained through internships prior to graduation can also be important in the eyes of employers (Shrum, 2016). Employers who hire interns gain considerable benefits in expanding their available work force, utilizing the latest academic information and skills, and recruiting new employees in the future (Knemeyer & Murphy, 2002). According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) (2015), around seventy-five percent of employers preferred to hire students with internship experience, and more than 90% of employers prefer to hire interns who have worked for their organizations (Auon, 2010).

Despite the fact that internships provide numerous benefits to all related parties, if internship programs are not carefully planned, they may result in negative outcomes (Cook, Parker, & Pettijohn, 2004; Cannon & Arnold, 1998; Hite & Bellizzi, 1986). NACE (2015) reported that although employers demonstrate high interest in hiring interns as full-time employees in their organizations, only about fifty percent of eligible interns are hired as full-time employees in the organizations where they interned. One of the major reasons for such a relatively low conversion rate is due to the discrepancy between employers’ expectations and interns’ performance.

An expanding body of anecdotal literature exists regarding internships in the area of sport management. The majority of studies were conducted from the students’ perspective, and there is a dearth of empirical research on internships from the employers’ perspective. The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the antecedents and consequences of internship employers’ satisfaction with their interns’ performance. Specifically, this study examined factors that influence internship employers’ satisfaction and future hiring intention. Additionally, this research attempts to provide faculty and staff in sport management valuable insights that will help create and tailor more effective internship programs.

Data were collected from 171 students who completed internships in the field of sport management. The instrument for the study was a survey. The initial survey was developed through interviews with internship employers and a review of related literature. The number of survey questions was later reduced from 29 to 25 from the results of the pilot study and factor analysis. In addition, five major factors (Professional attitudes, communication skills, practical knowledge, leadership, and goal orientation) were identified through the factor analysis. The employers’ satisfaction was measured with a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree). The hiring intention was measured with 2 questions on a 5-point scale (1 = Definitely not hire to 5 = Definitely hire). The composite reliabilities (Cronbach’s α) of the five factors ranged from .81 (Leadership) to .89 (Professional Knowledge). The average variance extracted (AVE) of the five constructs ranged from .53 to .68, which exceeded the threshold .5 and greater than the squared correlation (.434) between the five constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Hence, the discriminant validity was also supported. For the convergent validity, all estimated loadings of indicators for the underlying constructs were significant. The CFA goodness-of-fit statistics (χ² = 156.36, p < .01, CFI = .93, GFI =
.90, and RMSEA = .67) showed an adequate overall fit, and the five antecedents explained 64% of the variance in internship employers’ satisfaction.

Descriptive statistics revealed that supervisors’ overall satisfaction and hiring intentions were 4.13 (M = 4.13) and 3.85 (M = 3.85) respectively. The results of a path analysis using AMOS 22 indicated that the five predictor variables explained 61% of the variance in the satisfaction. Specifically, Practical knowledge (β = .51, p < .01), Professional attitudes (β = .342, p < .04), and Communication skills (β = .332, p < .05) were found to have significant influences internship employers’ satisfaction. With regard to the relationship between the satisfaction and the hiring intention, the satisfaction had a significant effect on the hiring intention (β = .642, p < .001, R-square = .341).

The findings of this study provide valuable insights for students and faculty in sport management. Students and faculty members should be aware that employers use internships as tools to screen and recruit potential hires, and internship employers’ satisfaction with interns’ performance plays a critical role in the future hire. Students should strive to acquire and improve practical knowledge, professional attitudes, and communication skills, because this study found that these three factors significantly influence internship employers’ satisfaction, which in turn influences future hiring intention. Faculty in sport management should focus on developing academic programs that can enhance students’ practical learning experiences. It is strongly recommended for faculty members to work closely with practitioners when developing programs. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first attempt to investigate internship employers’ satisfaction and their future hiring intention. Thus, this study can contribute to the emerging literature on internships and sport management curricula.