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Education

Internship: A New Dimension

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UNEXPECTED challenges and a sense of ambiguity are common at the work place environment. On the other hand, for students challenges are limited and more or less defined in their own academic institutions. A sudden leap from the protected environment of the academic sphere to the competitive corporate world's environment is frustrating and difficult. This difficulty is somewhat reduced by the presence of a buffer-zone-like arrangement called internship.

Internship is supervised work experience for students. Seniors or graduating students doing internship in organisations are called interns. The concept of internship was nurtured, and flourished, in the developed world and is being adopted world-wide because of its utility. It is practical. It enriches empirical knowledge. It has the potential to transform a student to a semi-professional. Internship provides some degree of experience to fresh graduates. Training may be provided in the form of internship to graduating students who are future job seekers. It is vital in today's world as experience is essential in the job market.

Recently internship has become an academic component in many universities. Whereas previously only doctors worked as interns, now-a-days, particularly BBA and MBA majors are doing internship to fulfil their degree requirement.

Internship may comprise research work and/or field trips, banking, accounting, marketing, computer programming or assistance with projects and programmes. Host organisations assign an employee as supervisor intern(s). As internship is a degree requirement, universities assign a faculty advisor to guide students with project reports. North South University is the only university in Bangladesh which has a structured internship policy monitored by a full fledged department with permanent staff called the Depart-

ment of Career Services. It maintains regular contacts with more than 135 companies to ensure placement of its interns. It places 20 students per semester on an average.

Internship may be local or international. So far universities in Bangladesh have been dealing with local internship only with a few exceptions. Institutions like IBA, NSU, and IUB are regularly placing students at banks like American Express, ANZ Grindlays, World Bank, Citi Corp, in NGOs like Grameen Bank and BRAC, in multinational and national organisations like Square, Beximco, BTC, ACI, ADCOMM, and other companies. Companies usually pay a nominal pocket allowance to interns which helps to cover the cost of food and transportation during internship.

In Europe and America, international internship has become very popular among university students. Students go for internships to African and Asian states with historical, archaeological and cultural significance like Egypt, Ethiopia, Senegal, Morocco, Israel, Lebanon, Oman, Kuwait, India, Nepal, Thailand, and many other developing countries. Interns travel to developed cities as well. Main attractions are Rome, Paris, London, Barcelona, Moscow, Berlin, Bern, Geneva, Kiev and Ankara. International internships usually encompass a year long programme. Others usually cover a semester.

Today budget constraints impact the intention and method of imparting training to staff in companies. Training period is incorporated into the system of many organisations to improve quality. Internship is often treated like a training period both by the companies and the interns as it is reasonably feasible. This is a way of enhancing the quality of human resources.

A diligent worker is desired by companies and universities try to produce good graduates. Until recently a component was missing in

this equation. Internship is the mission component. As higher education somewhat guarantees a job for many, it is high time that both academic institutions and corporate world take the initiative to bridge the gap between a graduating student and a potential employee. Internship can play the role of such a bridge, because it works as a transitional period in which interns avail the opportunity to work in organisations and get the feel of working environment. At the end of the internship, students not only become graduates, they are also graduates with work (internship) experience.

Now-a-days, employers are pre-occupied with the concepts of rational decision-making and cost-benefit analysis even during job interviews. Internship teaches interns to influence employer's rational decisions and project oneself as the most essential element in the cost-benefit analysis during job interviews.

As an Internship Planning and Placement Officer at North South University, I have noticed that students with internship experience feel more confident, competent and comfortable during job interviews and in working environment than students without any internship experience. The prominent underlying reason is that internship experience enhances inter-personal skills. The more the interpersonal skills, the better the projection capacity of positive image. Positive image impresses employers and thus they offer jobs to positive image projectors.

Internship has established such strong footing in the US that it has become extremely difficult in some bigger cities like Washington, DC, San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles, and many other places to get a job without at least one internship experience. Internship is gaining recognition and popularity world wide for the following reasons:

1. Internship works like a transitional period from academic life to

working life.

2. It gives students the feel of a real-life working environment.

3. It combines theoretical knowledge with practical experience and strengthens the concept of empirical learning.

3. It teaches students the basics like official etiquette, decorum, structural hierarchy, accountability, adherence and maintenance of confidentiality. In other words, it helps to adjust in an office environment and professional attitude is cultivated in the process.

5. It helps to network and establish contacts.

6. Connections established through an internship might lead to a job offer in another company or absorption by the same company in the long run.

Organisations and interns both mutually benefit from internship programmes. Organisations benefit in the following two ways:

1. Interns work full load like permanent employees. Organisations do not pay them at the scale of regular salary. Though organisational output is same, cost incurred is nominal because interns were assigned to do the work and were provided with a nominal pocket allowance.

2. When organisations absorb interns as their employees at the end of the internship, organisations are able to

a) save the cost of advertising in newspapers

b) save the trouble of screening and interviewing new candidates,

c) minimise the cost by avoiding training period as interns had already been trained;

d) maximise benefits by having indoctrinated interns as employees.

Interns also benefit from the arrangement as internship serves five vital purposes.

They are:

1. As internship is an academic component, it fulfils degree requirement. (To be Continued)