

CURRICULAR INTERNSHIPS: FROM GLOBAL CITIZENS TO LOCAL INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract

Global internship placements have long been recognized as valuable learning experiences that can enhance professional competency and candidacy, offer comprehensive cultural immersion and amplify the study abroad experience. The evolution of the global citizen concept frequently informs the outcomes expected of placements abroad yet little thought has been given to institutional local responsibility in terms of the disruption created by incoming interns on curricular programs. This paper offers a historic snapshot of current curricular internships abroad and proposes communities of practice as a way to reconcile key stakeholders within the local, host environment.

Keywords: curricular internship, global citizens, community of practice, global placement, pedagogical design

Introduction

While international curricular placement opportunities re-evolve out of remote roles to hybrid and in person positions, organizations are returning to more robust training and learning initiatives and indicate the need to sustain these learning ecosystems. After the pandemic enforced refrain to structural organizational learning and the focus on online communication and technological skills, the learning organization is reappearing in culture, practice and operation. In the U.S.A. upskilling and reskilling have formed the basis of training with 67% of organizations implementing increased training budgets in 2022 while 79% of organizations see a focus on learning and development for 2023 as a competitive differentiator (McKinsey Global Institute, 2022). U.K. workplace learning is identified as a crucial growth factor with technology pointing toward targeted, comprehensive virtual onboarding for newcomers including interns (LinkedIn, 2021). Earlier this year, Greece saw an introduction of performance related training initiatives across several sectors (Cedefop, 2020) while European Union States have followed the post pandemic Education Response to support tertiary learner preparation transitioning to work place experiences (Reimers & Schleicher 2020).

These long sought after, promising changes can construct the ideal learning environment for employees and interns on the job, complimenting academic design and learning pathways created by placement intermediaries. Yet this shift also signifies a new institutional direction for global placement intermediaries, that of socially responsible stakeholders and drivers beyond their primary educational role. Examining this responsibility, it is important to recognize how educational institutions, placement intermediaries, can be seen as drivers of mutually beneficial interactions

in their collaboration with host organizations, placement providers, and the broader local context. Collaborative global placements can be seen as opportunities for:

- 1. Academic institutions (intermediaries) to remain up to date on learning tools and methods in historic real time due to professional context exposure for interns.*
- 2. Organizations to model output, change and growth with the input of interns and therefore academia.*
- 3. Regulatory bodies and assessors to ensure coherence and selective practices in order to enhance the above organic or structured exchanges*
(Cascinelli & Simos, 2021)

Theory, practice and preexisting historical landscapes

Literature suggests that mutually beneficial internships have long been considered in academic inquiry (Fiori & Pearce, 2009) yet global placement learner experiences reveal that the two key stakeholders may not be benefitting from these outcomes (Wrye et al., 2019). In practice, for Mediterranean countries like Greece, the zeitgeist of internships as exploitative youth work is very much still present while the value to host cultures is still questioned given the disruptive impact to already strained employment markets (Mihail, 2006). Moving from the constant and valuable focus on pedagogical design and benefit to the lesser referenced privilege of mobility and access to global opportunities and the consequential local disruption creates a more comprehensive understanding of the host. In Greece, for decades paid placements have combatted youth exploitation (Mihail, 2006) and empty professional experiences and the introduction of the credit bearing non paid placement creates significant tension. Only carefully designed educational exchange is an acceptable resolution.

Typically, mutually beneficial placements include cooperative forethought and planning (Wry et al 2019), dialogue between providers and intermediaries and more rarely, stake holder analysis.

A segway into organizational needs and benefits during the initial placement process can inform the broader host context and shift attitudinal barriers.

Global citizen success stories

There is no question that global placements raise awareness and enhance cultural understanding through the development of interns as global citizens and geopolitical contexts present these successes. Both the USA and UK have long traditions of promoting the interactions of theory and practice (Gartrell & Gartrell, 2003) making it no surprise that these two countries offer higher competitive placements that can focus on talent management and curating. Establishing interculturally enhanced work experiences are the domain of Greece (Kapareliotis et al., 2019) and Spain (Pareja de Vicente et al., 2021) while Greece's geographical location on the immigration route to the EU and growing responses to the humanitarian crisis has enhanced social responsibility (Nikolaidis et al., 2016) through placements.

Considering immediacy between the intern, industry and professional cultures, the English speakers UK USA, Ireland, Scotland and Australia rate the highest (Rubin, 2009). In terms of enhanced social interaction, Bhutan (Baikady et al., 2016). Nepal and Central India rate highest (Khankeriyal et al., 2022) with faith based practice taking place during the work day. It is clear that the sociohistorical characteristics for each local placement location frequently become a challenge as much as a benefit.\

A way forward; communities of practice

The principles that define communities of practice, described by Wenger & Snyder (2000) as community-based approaches to organizational knowledge, can also define the structural exchange necessary between curricular internship stakeholders. With a starting point of communal invested interest for the placement intermediary and placement provider, perhaps the most challenging part of the process, a CoP foundation can transform how interns evolve into global citizens and create the space for local institutional responsibility to materialize.

Communities of practice are defined as groups of people sharing a concern (domain) or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better (practice) as they interact regularly (community) (Wenger, 2004).

The underlying principles consist of community support and assistance, inquiry into best practice, knowledge management and innovation and can be visualized using the chart below.

A Snapshot Comparison				
Communities of practice, formal work groups, teams, and informal networks are useful in complementary ways. Below is a summary of their characteristics.				
	What's the purpose?	Who belongs?	What holds it together?	How long does it last?
Community of practice	To develop members' capabilities; to build and exchange knowledge	Members who select themselves	Passion, commitment, and identification with the group's expertise	As long as there is interest in maintaining the group
Formal work group	To deliver a product or service	Everyone who reports to the group's manager	Job requirements and common goals	Until the next reorganization
Project team	To accomplish a specified task	Employees assigned by senior management	The project's milestones and goals	Until the project has been completed
Informal network	To collect and pass on business information	Friends and business acquaintances	Mutual needs	As long as people have a reason to connect

(Wenger & Snyder, 2000)

Research suggests that the use of these principles as a prompt can reconfigure stakeholder approaches into collective initiatives. These outcomes impact the academic institution, stakeholder triad and placement structures. (Simos, 2022). More specifically,

- An institutional shift decreasing the gap between administrators and instructors, creating a more comprehensive and supportive learning experience for global interns and perhaps more importantly a characteristic aware-

ness and understanding of the local context nuances, needs and therefore institutional responsibilities to the host environment.

- A collective exchange can involve all primary stakeholders through critical understanding, enhancing their interactions as 1, prepared host organizations 2, informed providers/ intermediaries and 3, engaged learner interns.
- Interaction with the local environment becomes one of embodied experience rather than cultural exposure and immersion.
- Hybrid structures as an enhanced norm: placement culture that are more resilient, flexible and favourable to innovation and creativity.

There are 3 identifiable key factors that contribute to the success or detriment of a CoP defined approach when addressing curricular internships, the evolution of global citizens and organizational responsibility:

1. Contractual learning agreements appropriately designed for each stakeholder.
2. Ongoing complex evaluation with criteria based assessment post placement.
3. Willing partners and functional relationships (Simos, 2022).

Conclusion

It is clear that the necessary shift to institutional responsibility of global curricular internship providers poses a number of challenges associated with local context impact. Exchange between key stakeholders is crucial and can be attained through establishing communities of practice, or adopting basic CoP principles to facilitate these exchanges.

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