

Lemongrass room  
3.30-3.55pm

## Optimizing internship effectiveness

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The notion that internships can be a stepping stone toward high-quality employment after graduation (Nunley, Pugh, Romero, & Seals, 2016) has led to a vast rise in the number of undergraduate students that engage in formal or informal internships during their studies. In addition, more and more schools now formally integrate internships into their curriculum (D'Abate, Youndt, & Wenzel, 2009) and many organizations nowadays recognize the benefits of hiring interns, either as relatively cheap but enthusiastic and qualified workers (Goia, Marinaş, & Igret, 2017) or as a means to recruit, select, and groom their future employees (Gault, Redington, & Schlager, 2000).

Despite the growing popularity of internships, interns, educators, and practitioners have only limited insight in the factors that make internships effective (D'Abate, 2010; Dommeyer, Gross, & Ackerman, 2016). It is particularly important to study (antecedents of) internship effectiveness because early work-experiences have a substantial impact on individuals' career choices (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1990), work norms and values (Berlew & Hall, 1966; Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998), and even their future performance and career success (Berlew & Hall, 1966; McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988).

This research explores factors related to internship effectiveness. We consider internships to be effective when they provide opportunities for learning and development, are instrumental to interns' development, and increase their opportunities on the labor market. Effective internships also add value to the employing organization, in terms of high performance and potential future employees.

We conducted (a) a 10-day diary study in which we examined relationships between daily levels of qualitative and quantitative job challenge and interns' daily perceptions of internship effectiveness (i.e., daily perceptions of their job performance, learning, well-being, and mental health through daily levels of challenge and threat emotions); (b) a three-wave panel study in which we examined relationships between interns' qualitative and quantitative job challenge and actual internship effectiveness (i.e., supervisors' evaluations of interns' job performance, creative performance, potential, and the likelihood they would offer this intern a job upon graduation). Based on the information I obtained in these studies, I developed a seminar on optimizing internship effectiveness. Next, I conducted a quasi-experiment to test the effectiveness of this seminar.

The results of the first two studies indicate that (a) qualitative job challenge relates to perceived and actual internship effectiveness, (b) that quantitative challenge increases interns' perceptions of internship effectiveness but does not result in actual internship effectiveness, and (c) that a seminar on optimizing internship experiences increases the extent to which students intent to engage in qualitative job challenges.

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### Keywords

Internship, learning, career development, job challenge

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