

## MODELING MARKETING INTERNSHIPS

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### ABSTRACT

Experiential learning has become an effective teaching technique to increase learning potential. Internship as an experiential learning technique is not as readily embraced by the academic community as are other experiential learning techniques. One of the reasons has been the effort necessary to provide academic legitimacy to internships through intellectual growth coupled with problem-solving, objective-setting and decision-making activities. A model is presented and discussed as a method for achieving legitimacy of marketing internships.

### INTRODUCTION

Experiential learning techniques are currently being cited as a means for increasing teaching effectiveness and maximizing learning potential. Role playing, cases, simulation games, projects, and internships have all been documented as examples of experiential learning whereby the student learns primarily from personal experiences (Cohen, 1988; Dovel and Dayan, 1982). Relevant participant learning potential issues accorded to student readiness or preparedness at the undergraduate level indicate a diversity in maturity. Maturity levels are reflected in the students perception and assessment of the realities associated with managerial and supervisory responsibilities germane to experiential learning. Thus, the real challenge associated with experiential learning is to structure experiences such that students at different maturity levels can maximize learning potential.

Experiential learning is not new or unique. However, it appears there has been a particularly significant increase in the adoption process at the university level within the past 5 to 10 years. Sigmon, Palmer and Heinemann (1981) noted more than 2,000 experiential learning programs in two- and four-year institutions across the country. In this paper, the specific experiential learning procedure of internships in the marketing discipline will be investigated. A model is proposed which empowers both student and faculty to create a successful marketing internship experience.

### THE INTERNSHIP REVIEW

Terms like internship, practicum, field experience, and cooperative work study are utilized to describe situations where students receive on-the-job experience and academic credit. The components and benefits of collegiate on-the-job work experience programs have been well documented in the literature. Many authors in the early 70's discussed the values of internship programs (Tyler, 1971; Beinstein, 1976). Then articles began to focus on the faculty's role (Williams, 1976), how to integrate internships into the curriculum (Cowdin, 1978; Satariano & Rogers, 1979) and the role internships played in bridging theory and world practice (Groves, Howland, Headly, & Jimison, 1977).

The benefits discussion ranges from student benefits (Bales, 1979; Haviland, Weaver, & Taylor, 1983) to academic benefits (McCaskey & Fedo, 1985; Zigli, 1981; LeTourneau & Summey, 1982) and some combination of the above (Perenich, 1978; Nevett, 1985; Dobandi & Schattle, 1984). Structured internship programs for academic units have been discussed (LeTourneau & Summey, 1982; Stretch and Harp, 1991). Student evaluations of internship programs before (Hite and Bellizzi, 1986) and after (Breslin, 1980; Marling, 1983) have been addressed as well.

Successful experiential learning programs have been evidenced in both professional and applied disciplines. While there is apparent widespread acceptance of the experiential learning technique in university curriculum, the development and implementation of internship experiential learning is not accomplished without considerable amount of faculty effort and commitment. For this reason, it is believed that the academic community has not embraced internship programs as readily as other experiential learning techniques.

The literature indicates that in order for experiential learning to have academic legitimacy, it should provide some type of intellectual growth and include problem-solving, objective-setting and

decision-making (Gallagher 1976; Kendall 1983; Thomas 1975). Supporting evidence shows participant expectations play an important role in the behavioral patterns exhibited by the participants (Bounous 1986). By accurately specifying and operationally defining the observable behaviors to be exhibited by each member, a framework is established from which all members can work. Such clarity helps to avoid misunderstandings and wasted time spent determining whether members have performed their assigned tasks, and make the monitoring and documentation of behavioral changes easier and more objective (McHugo & Jernstedt 1979).

In this paper, specific experiential learning procedures for a collegiate marketing internship are examined. The discussion focuses on a structured, concept and theory driven approach to internships designed to maximize teaching effectiveness and student learning potential. A Role Clarification/Determination Model (RC/DM) is described which, when used with a structured instructional component within a supportive atmosphere, can empower and enhance the professional growth of student interns while enabling the internship to be facilitated with ease.

#### THE INTERNSHIP CHALLENGE

To establish the framework for the purpose of this discussion, internship will be defined as controlled experiential learning where a student receives academic credit while employed by an organization in a chosen marketing area. Emphasis is placed on the integration of concept, theory and practice.

Based on this definition of experiential learning, the major objective of the internship should be to integrate concepts, theory and practice while exercising academic control over the student's experience. Control is exercised over what the student learns not what the student does. To achieve this purpose, concepts and theory must be related to reality. Students must first be taught what the field is: what it is like, how people work, and what pressures and problems exist. Students are provided with elements of knowledge in an academic setting and should receive a structured written component designed to engage them in search behavior and reflective thinking about field realities related to conceptual and theoretical bases. A properly modeled internship ensures productive learning for students in supervisory and managerial positions as well as vicarious learning for those in the participant-observer role.

#### INTERNSHIP PARTICIPATION ROLE

A primary vehicle for achieving field experiences related to conceptual and theoretical bases is the series of processes involving the internship triad (university supervisor, employment supervisor, and student intern). The Role Clarification/Determination Model (RC/DM) illustrated in Figure 1 assumes the use of selected problem-solving and objective-setting skills and details specific steps for carrying out collaborative, goal-oriented marketing internships. Experiential learning research and a conceptual and theoretical base serve as the foundation for The Role Clarification/Determination Model (RC/DM).

The model's name implies a process through which student interns clarify their internship roles and being to develop conceptual, theoretical and practical-based objectives in applied marketing settings. RC/DM focus is on the role and responsibilities of triad members to enhance the interns' skill development and personal growth. Practical application ideas are defined to enhance the intern's perception of themselves and the internship process. Conceptual and theoretical application are defined to provide the concept and theory base for the internship. Depending on the marketing function emphasized, a different plan could be utilized. A particle list of ideas is included in the model.

The use of the RC/DM empowers students to structure the internship experience while maintaining quality based instruction and learning potential. Application of RC/DM assists the instructor in overcoming inherent managerial issues encountered in classes with large student enrollment and facilitates in the individualization of the intern's experience in diverse marketing environments. Employers perceive empowered students as self-motivated employees committed to well defined goals and realistic expectations.

The initially the RC/DM involves the process of problem-solving. Students clarify their internship role by determining what type of learning and participation behaviors (managerial/supervisory, participant observer, or a combination) are possible within the marketing environment selected for the internship. During this process, the foundation for the internship triad member relationship is laid.

Participation patterns established here affect the course of the internship because during this early stage the interns should be oriented to both the internship program and employment site.

The second process inherent to the RC/DM involves objective setting. Members of the internship triad begin the process of diagnosing and identifying prescriptions for integrating concepts, theory and practice that enhance the quality of the experiential learning program. Included here is the interns' ability to pinpoint personal strengths and weaknesses as well as organizational opportunities and problems, and to reassess and restructure appropriate objectives through the course of the internship. Interns should investigate the breadth and depth of the marketing concepts and theoretical application germane to potential internship employment practical application. The immediate objective is for interns to establish viable field experiences related to conceptual and theoretical bases and increase learning while fulfilling employer objectives. The long-range objective is for interns to develop and demonstrate search behavior and reflective thinking related to career development within the marketing environment. The effective implementation of the model rests on the existence of a structured instructional component which foster individualized participant role behaviors consistent with academic standards and the selected marketing environment.

#### INSTRUCTIONAL COMPONENT

The primary purpose of a instructional component is to focus and structure the undergraduate collegiate internship toward a controlled experiential learning program. To ensure that the participants (university supervisor, employment supervisor, and intern) needs are serviced and learning is achieved, the design of the composite instructional materials should be centered around two important criteria: (1) the "curriculum" must incorporate theories and concepts from academic study into practical application in the marketing context; and (2) the "method" must result in increased individualized information gathering through problem-solving, objective-setting, and decision-making while fulfilling employer objectives.

To facilitate an individualized goal-setting and problem-solving internship, a theory or conceptual marketing base ( i.e. Marketing, Advertising or Mazur Plan) should be utilized to provide structure for three reports (Performance Goals and Learning Experiences

Report, Weekly Progress Report, and Final Internship Report) and should be included in the structured written component for the internship. Determining performance goals and setting learning experiences offers students the opportunity (1) to emphasize the relationship of concept and theory to practice by applying it to experiences rather than viewing theory as something separate from reality; (2) to structure their own self-controlled, objective-based experience; and (3) to apply decision-making techniques. Weekly progress reports are designed so students must restructure on-the-job experiences and reflect logically and clearly in report form how theory relates to these experiences. Structure of the final internship report requires search behavior to assess the total internship experience against performance goals and learning experiences established, and to provide feedback on the overall internship success derived from the problem-solving process and decision-making systems.

The reports should be submitted throughout the term to facilitate written and oral communication among triad members. This monitoring and documentation underlie the entire internship experience and when applied to each phase of the RC/DM affords a supportive atmosphere that enhances the professional growth of student interns within a clearly defined, structured, and quantifiably measured internship. As students exist the internship, they have developed problem-solving, objective-setting, and decision-making skills to some prescribed criterion.

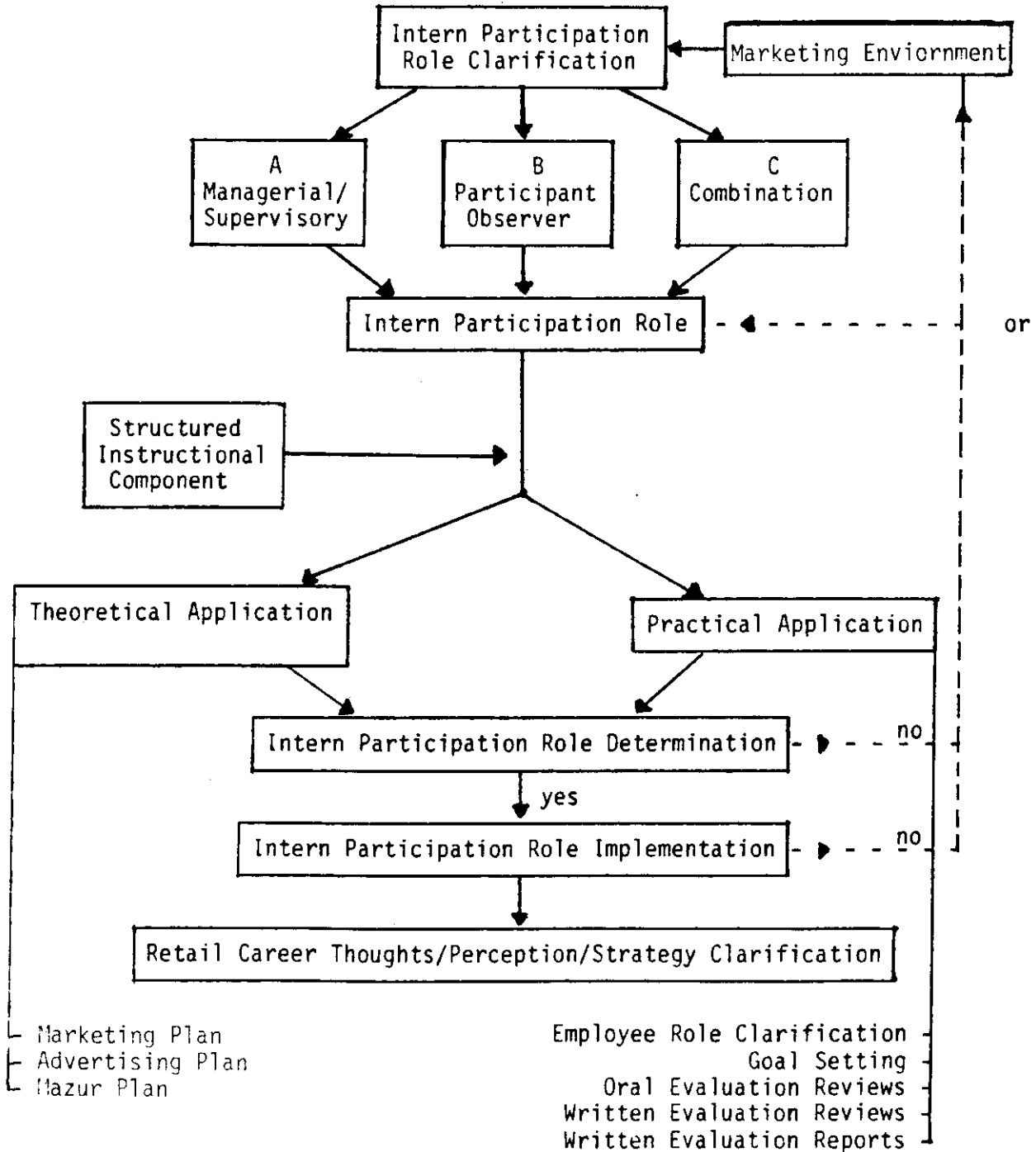
#### INTERNSHIP BENEFITS

The benefits of a structured, concept and theory driven internship program that allows students to develop individualized self-control models and information gathering processes are numerous. Four benefits are summarized.

1. Experiential Learning Efficacy. Internships are often designed to provide students the opportunity to experience and acquire an operating comprehension of marketing functions and career options. Empowered students are positioned to gain exposure to a greater number of marketing personnel and related functions. Students who have participated in structured programs tend to voice more concern about what happened in the

Figure 1

Role Clarification/Determination Model\*



\*Includes the problem-solving and objective-setting phases of the collegiate retail internship.

internship and place greater emphasis on personal growth and future employment related issues rather than receiving academic credit.

2. Student Involvement. Professionalizing the experience with written contracts creates positive, salient attitudes which maintain and increase the intern participation role. Empowered students are more aware, involved, and committed and exhibit improved information gathering, problem-solving, objective-setting, and decision-making skills. Analysis is focused on the inter-workings of the organization versus the face value of the marketing environment. Overall, students more realistically assess the marketing environment, accept responsibility for their involvement in the internship process and triad membership.

3. Internship Equality. In most internship programs, students will not have identical internship experiences. Students equipped with identical information gathering structures which produce greater experiential similarities while the gathering information process remains individualized. This conditioning enhances internship equality. Experience sharing and networking among triad members increases exponentially.

4. Time Control. A structured self-controlled internship allows for group versus individual academic control and accommodates individualized learning experiences. The structured internship process affords each student individualized attention with less time control. The students' attention can be focused on defining realistic work related experiences and learning processes rather than course requirements. Triad members view the internship process as one of opportunities rather than an imposition on their time.

#### SUMMARY

When experiential learning is approached in the context described above, intellectual integrations and evaluation of career objectives is perhaps the most critical component of the marketing internship experience. Through the utilization of a conceptual, theoretical, and practical based internship, the match between the individual and field experience can be academically controlled to ensure triad members' needs are serviced and optimal learning is achieved. This expanded educational purpose helps to determine whether the internship experience is good or bad, educative or miseducative; and whether it tends to stimulate or inhibit the development of the individual.

The internship challenge remains. Whether the marketing academic community views internships as a potential differential advantage or a time-consuming, problematic endeavor is still not decided. There are appropriate sources of untapped information with potential instructional component development. It is our belief that the topic and educational implications for the marketing discipline warrant additional study.

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