



THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT IN THE AREA OF INTERNSHIP OF CUSTOMS ADMINISTRATION STUDENTS IN THE NORTHERN PHILIPPINES: CHALLENGES AND APPROACHES

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ABSTRACT

Getting a job is not easy nowadays, and adapting to the real-world workplace through OJT programs is an essential phase in an employee's career. Getting started in a new job can be quite stressful for them because of the potential challenges that are present at the working environment in their company. Thus, internships help to bridge the gap and convert interns to professionals by giving them actual work experiences and learning strategies to deal with various challenges that may arise in the customs administration industry. This study determined the strategies and challenges encountered by the ISAP Customs Administration interns in the working environment of their respective area of internship. Specifically, it aimed to determine the profile of respondents in terms of age, gender, company affiliated and religion to determine the strategies and challenges encountered by the interns, to test the significant difference when grouped according to their profile and to test the significant relationship between the strategies and challenges encountered by the respondents. Descriptive inferential method is utilized using questionnaires to gather data from a sample of 40 Customs Administration interns batch 2022. The analysis encompassed the utilization of frequency count, percentage distribution and weighted mean calculations. Results showed that interns encountered some challenges in terms of business ethics and employed strategies in terms of business management and leadership and company policies. Also, strategies and challenges encountered by the respondents with regards to the working environment are not affected when grouped according to their profile variables. However, there is a significant relationship between the strategies and challenges encountered by the respondents when regards to the working environment. The researchers recommended that the institution must conduct seminars together with the guidance office, on topics linked to challenges that may occur in a working environment to help the students develop competent qualities, and to help them be committed in creating effective coping mechanisms to address issues that may happen in their future workplace as interns and future professionals.



Key words: *Approaches, challenges, Customs Administration, student, internship, working environment*

INTRODUCTION

Internship is a period of time in which students can gain work experience related to what they have learned in their study program and applying them to a practical work environment. The researchers came up with the study, "The Working Environment in The Area of Internship of Customs Administration Students in the Northern Philippines: Challenges and Approaches", due to the interest of seeking answers whether there are problems and strategies in the working environment encountered by the interns during their internship and if they would result in poor performance and productivity, a loss of one's career interest, a decrease in happiness or satisfaction, stress, and a variety of mental health issues. From there, the researchers wanted to find out the strategies and recommend solutions to lessen the challenges that the interns faced which can help them to improve their intention to work and to view their future profession as licensed customs brokers.

A workplace is typically an environment where individuals who have different personality, communication styles, and worldviews commonly meet and interact. These subtle distinctions can be a source of professional conflict and inevitably cause stress and anxiety for all people involved. Even while it is the right of every worker or trainee to feel safe and treated fairly at work, some employees may still sometimes experience bullying, harassment, and/or discrimination.

Students spend almost a large portion of their time at work as interns, and stress related to the workplace is common for them. And it is difficult to create a working environment where everyone gets along well and there is no conflict between their positions, expectations, and personalities. Because some workplace problems like these that occurs to every customs brokerage firm may lead to negative and unwanted mental health problems to the interns, and may also lead to having different beliefs in their career interest.

Nowadays, a lot of customs brokerage firms provide internship opportunities. There are advantages for both the company and the intern, and they might vary in length, level of responsibility, and career development opportunities. Additionally, participating in an internship might help them develop experience in a profession and open doors for future employment. However, becoming a hosting organization for an internship program comes with a number of responsibilities, like making sure the workplace is safe and creating a positive and pleasing working environment.

College graduates who already have some job experience in the form of an internship stand out to potential employers, which is one of the most significant advantages of internships. Employers use internships as a training opportunity, a long interview, and (often) a method of hiring for open positions. For internships during the school year, they tend to be more flexible in managing their time because



students are balancing schoolwork, extracurricular activities, and internship hours. That's why it is really important to give them a workplace that is safe from risks and dangers to lessen the challenges that may influence the student-intern's beliefs in providing customs-related operation services in the near future.

As BS Customs Administration students, it would be a great help and benefit to have a background in workplace issues and how they are handled, and even strategies faced by the interns during internship. This knowledge helped them foresee and prevent problems from occurring in the future, as well as served as a basis for developing potential solutions for more successful and improved delivery performance of services on customs-related operations.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized the descriptive-inferential design of research to identify the difficulties faced by the interns in the working environment of their respective area of internship and to make inferences from these data to more general conditions.

Respondents of the Study

This research study is composed of customs administration interns of International School of Asia and the Pacific for the A.Y. 2022-2023 to be the target respondents. There are a total of 43 BSCA level IV students in the said institution. The researchers randomly selected 40 respondents from the population using the simple random technique.

Data Gathering Tool

For data collection, this study used a self-structured survey questionnaire which served as the principal research tool of this study. The questionnaire dealt with the approaches and challenges encountered in the working environment in the area of internship of customs administration students in the Northern Philippines. The first part of the questionnaire includes personal questions about the profile of the respondents. The second part consists of different approaches and challenges encountered by the customs administration interns of International School of Asia and the Pacific in the working environment of their respective area of internship.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers asked permission from the research adviser to conduct the study through formulating the questionnaire that is signed and approved by the research adviser and dean of the Customs Administration Department. Upon the approval of the constructed questionnaire, formal letters are created and presented to the respondents which were attached together with the questionnaire.



The researchers distributed the questionnaire through google forms to obtain responses shared by the respondents.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from the questionnaire are tallied, tabulated, and interpreted using four data statistical tool. Frequency count and percentage distribution is used to analyse and determine the respondents' profile variables in terms of age, sex, company affiliated, and religion. Weighted mean is assigned to interpret responses of the respondents on the strategies and challenges they encountered during internship in their working environment. One-way ANOVA is used to determine if there is a significant difference between the strategies and challenges encountered by the respondents with regards to working environment when grouped according to their profile variables. And lastly, Pearson's r is utilized to identify if there is a significant relationship between the strategies and challenges encountered by the respondents with regards to working environment.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The assessment of the respondents on the approaches employed and challenges encountered in their working environment in terms of workplace issues on a social diversity, business management and leadership, company policies, business ethics, and safety and security.

TABLE 1. APPROACHES EMPLOYED IN THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT IN THE AREA OF INTERNSHIP CA STUDENTS IN THE NORTHERN PHILIPPINES

Working Environment	Categorical Mean	Interpretation
Workplace Issues on a Social Diversity	3.17	Agree
Business Management and Leadership	3.41	Strongly Agree
Company Policies	3.48	Strongly Agree
Business Ethics	3.43	Strongly Agree
Safety and Security	3.02	Agree
Overall Mean	3.30	Strongly Agree

The table reveals the approaches employed in the working environment in the area of internship of CA students in the Northern Philippines in terms of workplace issues on a social diversity, business management and leadership, company policies, business ethics and safety and security with overall mean of 3.30, in which implies that the CA student were strongly agreed that they have a strong engagement in applying different approaches in their working environment and were fully aware of the importance of these approaches in helping them deal in working and applying their learnings from a classroom setting into a new working setting in terms of these five dimensions.

The findings as to the approaches employed in terms of workplace issues on a social diversity (Mean :3.17, "Agree") showed that interns agreed to show and give respect to each other and their colleagues regardless of their social differences to avoid possible factors that may potentially contribute to violence



while dealing with their colleagues. These findings were aligned with the statement of Gold and Carbon (2003) which states that through the increasing respect for human rights and the influence of trade unions in many parts of the world, violence at work is no longer considered acceptable in the present times.

Next, on the findings as to the approaches employed in terms of business management and leadership (Mean :3.41, "Strongly Agree") indicated that the respondents consider strictly obeying instructions from their supervisors and also consider having good supervision from them while working confidently in their duties as interns. This result was supported by a 2013 Gallup "State of the American Workplace" study which mentions that the most important factor influencing an employee's job satisfaction and engagement in their work is their employers. More importantly, this finding proved previous study findings that "managing up" is a strategy that an employee might adopt to develop a positive, productive working relationship with their supervisors.

Then, respondents assessed CA student of Northern Philippines as strongly agreed in terms of company policies (Mean: 3.48) this finding implies that interns strongly acceded that they are obediently considering adhering to the policies of the company which is one way to comply on what is acceptable to do so and on what is not to be tolerated. This is congruent with the study of Mark Snell of Polestar Plumbing, Heating & Air Conditioning, employees should be trained on ethical behavior to avoid misconduct. Employers must hold everyone accountable for adhering to policies and promote an environment of honesty and transparency and encourage them to report and address any misconduct immediately and consistently. This will highlight the company's commitment to code of conduct while also emphasizing the importance of adhering to policies.

Furthermore, the finding as to approaches employed in terms of business ethics (Mean: 3.43, "strongly agree") signifies that the respondents understood and showed high adherence to the policies, ethical standard and culture imposed by the company they were affiliated with. This simply shows that the respondents were ethically driven while they are on their respective workplace. This finding was paralleled by Rakesh Soni of Login Radius, that companies should prioritize the promotion of an inclusive, respectful, and ethical workplace culture. This may entail creating policies and procedures that promote diversity and inclusion, as well as cultivating an environment of open communication, feedback, and accountability.

Finally, the findings as to the approaches employed in terms of safety and security (Mean: 3.02, "Agree") implies that interns seem to have strong safety awareness skills and have passive engagement on general safety rules that apply to their work situations and that they recognize these in their company. This is according to the study conducted by Shao et al., 2004 that employees' attitudes toward safety, perceptions of management commitment, and/or workplace safety atmosphere have been shown by some researchers to be essential for both the adoption and maintenance of safety work practices, and for reported occupational incidents.



TABLE 2. CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT IN THE AREA OF INTERNSHIP CA STUDENTS IN THE NORTHERN PHILIPPINES

Working Environment	Categorical Mean	Interpretation
Workplace Issues on a Social Diversity	2.12	Somewhat Challenge
Business Management and Leadership	3.02	Challenge
Company Policies	2.31	Somewhat Challenge
Business Ethics	3.39	Very Challenge
Safety and Security	2.65	Challenge
Overall Mean	2.70	Challenge

The table reveals the challenges encountered in the working environment in the area of internship of CA students in the Northern Philippines in terms of workplace issues on a social diversity, business management and leadership, company policies, business ethics and safety and security with overall mean of 2.70, in which implies that the CA student were challenged that the CA students were challenged during their internship in their working environment and face some issues while they were under specific rules and supervision of the company in terms these five domains.

The findings as to the challenges encountered in terms of workplace issues on a social diversity (Mean :2.12, “Somewhat Challenge”) showed although they were interns and became part of the organization, they were new with the organizational climate of the business and how it is being managed. Thus, the interns were challenged as to the factor of business management and leadership in their working environment. In a study conducted by [Zehr, S.M.](#) and [Korte, R.](#) (2020), it was mentioned that students failed to look for connections between the classroom and the workplace, making it challenging to apply their skills from the classroom setting to their practical work environment. Many interns undertake their very first working experience while participating in an internship, and are often expected to participate at the same level as an organization’s full-time employees, despite their lack of on-the-job training. This can lead to stress or feelings of being overwhelmed, which may deter some individuals from realizing their true potential in their career. Therefore, Barker and Camarata (1998) highlights in their study that learning organizations can be built through enriched relationships that are created and enabled through communication. And that communication classes, by continuing to give the required theory and skills from a relational perspective, can play a significant role in fostering student appreciation and acceptance of learning places of employment.

Next, on the findings as to the challenges encountered in terms of business management and leadership (Mean : 2.31, “Challenge”) indicated that the respondents consider strictly obeying instructions from their supervisors and also consider having good supervision from them while working confidently in their duties as interns. This result was supported by a 2013 Gallup "State of the American Workplace" study which mentions that the most important factor influencing an employee's job satisfaction and engagement in their work is their employers. More importantly, this finding proved previous study findings that "managing up" is a strategy that an employee might adopt to develop a positive, productive working relationship with their supervisors.

Then, respondents assessed CA student of Northern Philippines as strongly agreed in terms of company policies (Mean: 3.48, “Somewhat Challenge”) this finding implies that in the workplace,



providing the practical skills and knowledge, and work-related exposures to the interns has not been a problem. This orientation is anchored to Senate Bill No. 377 or also known as, “Interns’ Rights and Welfare Act of 2022,” which states that the Internship Contract shall be accompanied with an Internship Plan and that, “The Internship Plan shall include the following: identification of skills to be acquired, job scope and specifications, guidelines on the supervision and mentoring of the interns, monitoring of the interns’ progress, timeline of the internship and the respective performance indicators to be achieved, among others.” Deshpande (2016) also mentioned that a varied workplace provides more than just exposure to people from other cultures and backgrounds. Employees learn from coworkers who have different work methods and attitudes toward work than they do.

Furthermore, the finding as to challenges encountered in terms of business ethics (Mean: 3.39, Very Challenge”) signifies the hosting company is firmly devoted and true to their vision, mission, and core values, and that the company proves to have a clear sense of purpose, direction and identity. In the study of Brătianu and Bălănescu (2008), they concluded that more and more research shows that vision, mission, and core values statements play an important role for successful businesses. Also, Wolf (2017) mentioned that organizations typically build a vision-mission system to generate orientation, identity, and identification. They create it into a vision-mission statement and communicate it to internal and external stakeholders with some effort.

Finally, the findings as to the challenges encountered in terms of safety and security (Mean: 2.65, “Challenge”) implies that the company offers support and protection to interns within their premises. According to Senate Bill No. 377 or also known as, “Interns’ Rights and Welfare Act of 2022,” one of the additional guidelines on internship programs states that, “Social protection shall be provided to the interns and are encouraged for consideration by the institutions such as accident insurance, as they may be applicable.”

TABLE 3. RELATIONSHIP ON THE ASSESSMENT OF THE RESPONDENTS ON THE APPROACHES EMPLOYED AND CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN THEIR WORKING ENVIRONMENT

VARIABLES		CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT					
		WORKPLACE ISSUES ON A SOCIAL DIVERSITY	BUSINESS MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP	COMPANY POLICIES	BUSINESS ETHICS	SAFETY AND SECURITY	
Approaches Employed	WORKPLACE ISSUES ON A SOCIAL DIVERSITY	r- value	.202	.532	.337	.311	.333
		p- value	.211	.000*	.034*	.051	.036*
	BUSINESS MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP	r- value	-.179	.335	-.068	.507	-.003
		p- value	.270	.034*	.676	.001*	.986
	COMPANY POLICIES	r- value	-.402	.368	-.207	.528	-.169
		p- value	.010*	.019*	.200	.000*	.297
	BUSINESS ETHICS	r- value	-.359	.389	-.167	.517	-.117
		p- value	.023*	.013*	.303	.001*	.470
	SAFETY AND SECURITY	r- value	.268	.596	.450	.151	.421
		p- value	.094	.000*	.004*	.351	.007*

Based on the data above, there is a significant relationship between the strategies and challenges encountered by the respondents when regards to the working environment. It can be



interpreted that the challenges encountered in the working environment in terms of workplace issues on social diversity, business management and leadership, company policies, business ethics, and safety and security are also affected by the approaches employed within the five dimensions, or vice versa, during their internship. The relationship is significant because the p-value of .000, .001, .004, .007, .010, .013, .019, .023, .034, and .036 were less than the demarcation criteria at the .05 level; therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This is consistent with the findings of Shahid, et al., (2016) in which they describe that diversity improves productive group processes and has a positive effect on business unit performance. Since workplace diversity principles and rules should thus be integrated into all aspects of human resource management by organizations, including workforce planning, recruitment and selection, performance management, learning and development, leadership development, workplace health and safety, and workplace relations (Deshpande, 2016). Also, identifying and improving our management and leadership strengths and weaknesses is the challenge for all of us. The challenge for organizations is to find and develop present and future organizational members, such as effective leaders, who possess the knowledge, skills, and qualities necessary for efficient management and leadership, as described by Patterson (2010). Moreover, Rahman, et al., (2020) believed that employees work harder to understand and follow the ethical ideals and strategies of top management when the organization rewards those who follow excellent ethical standards while punishes those who do not. Thus, Ugoani (2020) concluded that implementing business policies and strategies helps in good management strategies. Besides, according to several experts, many of us think of business ethics as a problem that just affects company managers, but the reality is that managerial decisions are intertwined with ethical issues. In respect to that, the Model Code of Ethics and Conduct of World Customs Organization (WCO) states that the public has the right to expect all Customs employees to be honest, unbiased, and professional in how they apply their skills, knowledge, experience, and official authorities. And to retain public trust, Customs employees must uphold the highest standards of honesty in their interactions with members of the public, the business community, and other government officials, as well as in their personal life. And among other things, in terms of safety and security, Boustras (2020) provided arguments through his study demonstrating that normal approaches of worker participation in the development of safety policies, such as the legally mandated formation of health and safety committees, might be replicated, toward the establishment of a security atmosphere in the workplace. Risk assessment is one of the things that should be standard for both safety and security practices.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that interns experienced difficulties regarding issues on business ethics while employing their approaches proficiently in aspects of business management and leadership, company policies, and business ethics based on the identified result of the study. Going beyond mere compliance with the standardized ethical norms especially in the context of business, either within or outside companies should be made most significantly with reference to their broader implications. And awareness on these effects help the students to better inculcate concrete ethical practices to make greater ethical decisions in dealing with actual ethical problems into their future workplace that just cannot be dissolved in mere compliance practices.



In the view of the findings of the study, it is also concluded that there is no significant difference between the strategies and challenges encountered by the ISAP Customs Administration interns in their working environment; however, they are significantly related. Beginning the transformative journey of an internship is a critical step in one's professional development. The transitional phase is not without its own set of problems. However, it was clearly and evidently overcome and engaged in effective approaches. The strategies employed by the respondents as well as their practical skills, knowledge and attitude during their internship are all necessary to adapt and deal in the changing industrial world of Customs Administration.

Recommendations

Based on the results and findings of this study, the following were highly recommended:

1. Students must engage in academic seminars linked to the customs administration course in order to improve their competency skills and learn more about the course that will be useful in providing customs-related operations services in the near future.
2. Interns must learn how to apply classroom learning experience into a practical work environment with an orientation or pre-on-the job training activities before actual work deployment.
3. Students should strictly consider the adaptation of the real-world workplace, particularly emphasizing the importance of introducing on-the-job training despite having uncertainties.
4. Interns should also strongly consider the practice of ethical principles and critical thinking skills in their day-to-day operation in the company in order to act accordingly and professionally whenever facing a problem that needs immediate solution and attention.
5. Department organization should maintain a strong and good collaboration and relation with the partner companies for more different customs field workplace exposures and employment opportunities to interns, as well as to address the concerns and potential enhancement to meet the requirements of the companies.
6. The institution must conduct seminars together with the guidance office, on topics linked to challenges that may occur in a working environment to help the students develop competent qualities, and to help them be committed in creating effective coping mechanisms to address issues that may happen in their future workplace as interns and future professionals.
7. Hosting companies must implement training and development programs exclusive for interns to encourage the commitment of the students on their chosen career and also to prepare them with a wide range of competency skills that will be helpful in becoming professional licensed customs brokers.
8. For future researchers who seek to conduct a similar or related research, the researchers highly recommend to consider a larger number of respondents and more variables. This research study can be utilized as a source of information for a comparative or correlational study.

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