

PROFESSIONAL READINESS OF STUDENT APPRENTICE PROGRAM (SAP) INTERNS IN SELECTED PARTNER COMPANIES OF FAR EASTERN UNIVERSITY- INSTITUTE OF ACCOUNTS BUSINESS & FINANCE: AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Professionalism in the workplace is always a constant challenge for managers, using this as a metric to determine engagement and performance. However, employees who may be performing their jobs and producing the requisite numbers but fail to deliver proper work place attitudes and behavior is a far better concern for both business unit managers and human resources leaders as well. In terms of students performing certain jobs as interns in different reputable companies, certain concern raised by their respective supervisors in terms of leveling up their behavior in a more professional set up is imperative. The most common concern fell squarely on the perceived professionalism of student-interns, in particular are work ethics, absences and tardiness of Far Eastern University – Institute of Accounts, Business & Finance (FEU-IABF) as huge areas for improvement. The same is observably true amongst students who have demonstrated such habits in the classroom and seemingly have carried it over in the work place. Such gap, according to managers, needs to be addressed in order to facilitate the proper growth and development of students prior to being hired as full time employees. The author has used a qualitative research by conducting focused group discussions (FGD) and formal interviews to gather and interpret pertinent data requisite for this research. The information the researcher has gathered has been interpreted accordingly to fit the aforementioned research proposal.

Keywords: Professionalism, work ethics, performance, human resources

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1.0 RESEARCH BACKGROUND

In order to further prepare the graduating students with the rigors and demands of the professional world, the Far Eastern University – Institute of Accounts, Business & Finance (FEU-IABF), business administration students in particular, are deployed to different companies all over the Metro Manila area where they are immersed in different work facets. The students are therefore assigned faculty members who make sure that their jobs are appropriate to the skill sets, competencies and program goals of the university. To fully and objectively assess the performance of the interns, faculty members are given a set of metrics to serve not only as a guide for the grades, but most importantly it serves as a gamut for students to determine certain areas of strengths and weaknesses. While the students generally enjoy laudable and noteworthy remarks coming from their respective mentors and immediate superiors, one glaring item seems to stand out. And this is the professionalism of the students who undertake the professional immersion program.

The professionalism of interns may come in the form of work ethics, attitude and behavior, and education and job competency matching. All these three have been identified elements of how professionalism may be gauged by managers on the students under the apprenticeship program. This study therefore builds its significance on the fact that it aids the business administration department in further developing the professional image and behavior of its students, prior and during deployment to partner industries.

Work Ethics & Professionalism

Work ethic is not a new jargon in the corporate world as this has been a concept that has been echoed by social scientists to enhance working relationships and performance of an organization. Since the 20th century, the works of scholar Max Weber has been contributing knowledge in the development of management systems in the capitalist world, and this would later on be known as the Protestant work ethic (Van Ness, Melinsky, et al, 2010). In his early studies, Weber would give emphasis on the value of commitment while raising his questions as to why some people are putting in a lot of emphasis on work and their conscientiousness into it than other people.

As commitment has been mentioned by Weber, other literature have been sought in order to shed light into what is known as professional commitment. This professional commitment is often times referred to as organizational commitment, where an employee is able to fully understand and establish a buy-in with the organization's goals, vision and mission, and a dedication to fully achieve all of the aforementioned (Van Ness, Melinsky, et al, 2010).

Employee Attitudes & Behavior

Recent studies have gained ground on the topic of human resources especially on the area of employee attitude and behavior. On the area of employee attitude and behavior, recent years of research have touched on job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), (Lomoya, Pingol and Teng- Calleja, 2015).

Education & Competencies

Given that this trend is rising, it is of course only proper that universities look into this from a perspective of preparing students on what to expect when it comes to the corporate world. One of the initiatives that has been greatly adapted by universities across the nation is the utilization and implementation of the apprenticeship program where students are required to render a certain number of hours in a partner company and hopefully learn what it takes to join the employment force of the professional main stream.

The industry today recognizes the importance of partnering up with different academic institutions to help bolster the adequate training that is supposed to respond to the particular needs that the organization faces, which they inherently need to respond to (Chavez, 2014). Companies nowadays are very much agog in coming up with linkages and hopefully plant seeds of productive people for them to be extended job offers in the future. It is of course a general perspective from leading organizations that for them to be successful, they need the requisite personnel to help them achieve their strategic targets (Chavez, 2014).

■ 2.0 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Twelve (12) student-interns received low scores and had concerns raised by their respective supervisors that greatly centered on their professionalism and work ethics. These 12 students were deployed in five different companies, and had essentially five different supervisors who gave them negative feedbacks and identified immediate areas for improvement. The purpose of this paper therefore is to determine, explore and analyze the possible reasons as to why student-interns may have been displaying certain work ethics that are unacceptable per company standards, and why their level of professionalism has been subject to criticism by professional business unit supervisors and managers. With this, the author aims also to create awareness among all student interns, not limited to the university, of what business unit managers are expecting from their apprentices reporting for work. In one way or another, this should assist them in their respective preparations in building their professional careers.

This study is greatly limited only to the the responses made by supervisors covering the 12 students who have been identified to have seemingly exhibited a low level of professionalism during the rendering of their on-the-job training hours. As a result, this paper may be greatly used as a point of reference by human resources practitioners, business unit managers, academic officials and college students.

■ 3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Work ethics are normally deeply rooted and associated from an employee's perception on how they do their work. They question and discern which is ethical from the unethical. One's work ethics has a direct effect on one's performance in the work place, according to the study of bin Salahudin, bin Alwi, binti Baharuddin & binti Halimat (2016).

Furthermore, today's work place has rapidly changed and as such, ethics has been considered to be one of the hottest topics discussed by managers and human resources practitioners. That being said, according to Wood (2000), ethics is one of the critical issues discussed in the human resources function. An organization is expected to provide a good

direction in determining ethical practices and culture in the organization in order for the firm to become united and ethically sound. Albeit the studies done, the caveat is that there are no specific norms that are so absolute that a company can use as a universal guide. One's norms and policies help determine what is ethically acceptable or not. In order to determine what is right or wrong, the human resources department establishes what is known as a code of ethics in order to serve as a guiding principle for everyone (Wood, 2000).

These behaviors need to be checked and balanced by the human resources department. The HR function has grown dramatically in contrast to how it was known for before as only a function for hiring and terminating employees. In the research of Sumathi in 2017, she cited the work of Nadler, "Human resource department is a series of organized activities conducted within a specialized time and designed to produce behavioral change" (Sumathi, 2017).

The changes in the dynamics of how an organization collectively behaves through its employees can be attributed to the growing function of the human resources department with respect to organizational development. Companies today have turned to professional consultants to help reshape their respective cultures with hopes of somehow reshaping the employee mindset.

The former coincides with the thought that the human resources function, which is at the very heart of the organization, sees human factors to be a crucial success for any organization which endeavors a change in the attitudes and behaviors of personnel (Ravangard, Sajjadnia, et al, 2014). These changes therefore can only be successful if the beliefs and attitudes of employees if they are challenged because after all, employees are the main core components of an organization. The study of their psyche, characteristics, interactions and motivations are of great importance for an organization to understand.

Such work ethics are all in the context of professionalism. In common parlance, the concept of being a professional is commonly understood to the point where an individual performs his chose profession ethically and commendably to the best interest of the client (Evans, 2013).

Taking it from this perspective, professionalism therefore does not only refer to a person who has taken up a certain job in an office and performs certain tasks assigned to him. Any individual therefore who performs a job, while putting in mind the delivery of these tasks to help the organization achieve its goals is to be considered a professional. All actions that go along with it are to be considered traits of professionalism.

The question now becomes, why is professionalism so important in the workplace? The answer is best discussed by Warnock when he mentioned in his research published by the Canadian Journal of Surgery in 2008. The primordial reason for professionalism and collaboration is to promote the safety of all patients in the hospital (Warnock, 2008).

This is of course universally true, especially in the world of business when not only the individual stakeholders are kept responsible for their own actions, but they are given the opportunity to come up with decisions that help shape the overall performance and culture of the organization. But how can professionalism be further explored?

Professionalism, as postulated by Evans in 2011 has three main components, namely behavioral, attitudinal and intellectual (Evans 2011). This concept has been further discussed by Evans and Homer in 2014. The behavioral component of professionalism relates to what practitioners physically do at work. Its sub-components are: the processual, procedural, productive, and competential dimensions of professionalism, which relate respectively to: processes that people apply to their work; procedures that they apply to their work; output, productivity and achievement (how much people 'do' and what they achieve); and their skills and competences (Evans and Homer, 2014).

The attitudinal component of professionalism relates to attitudes held. Its sub-components are: the perceptual, evaluative, and motivational dimensions of professionalism, which relate respectively to: perceptions, beliefs and views held, (including those relating to oneself, hence, self-perception and identity); people's values (not only 'grand' values, such as equity and justice, but also the more mundane things that people value in or about their work – the minutiae that matter to them); and people's motivation, job satisfaction and morale (Evans and Homer, 2014).

The intellectual component of professionalism relates to practitioners' knowledge and understanding and their knowledge structures. Its sub-components are: the epistemological, rationalistic, comprehensive, and analytical dimensions of professionalism, which relate respectively to: the bases of people's knowledge; the nature and degree of reasoning that they apply to their practice; what they know and understand; and the nature and degree of their analyticism (Evans and Homer, 2014).

Therefore, putting all of these different elements together helps create a mindset of how an employee, or any member of an organization should behave in the workplace. This can of course be further reinforced by HR and OD practitioners through proper onboarding procedures.

However, one may contend that ethics of course stems from how a child has been raised or perhaps educated. Therefore, one may contend that one's practice of ethics, and its corresponding behaviors can indeed be molded and with the proper guidance, an individual during one's formative years becomes enhanced.

In the research of Prerryer in 2006, the author made mention that the use of proper ethics education allows students to have a different take on ethics and behaviors easily in stark comparison on those who may have not had the proper orientation (Perryer, 2006). The author would continue on by citing that managers with higher degrees of education at the tertiary level are a better source of example in shaping the ethical mindsets of students as they are perceived to have higher ethical standards.

Such is the trend in looking at professionalism and ethics today, that research attempts to explain and highlight the growing importance of professions and the organizations to which they are identified to serve with (Brock, Leblebici and Muzio, 2014).

According to Chavez (2014), competency models can be of big help in this endeavor. Competencies are identified knowledge, skills and abilities that impact the success of work performance of an employee. With the presence of a well-grounded competency model, the performance of an employee becomes better and as such, the human resources is able to source for succession planning and career development.

Furthermore, according to Wellman (2010), an emphasis on the skills needed to match employability should allow an individual to have better performance in the workplace. This claim by Wellman is the same concept of human resources in creating job analyses where practitioners of the function avoid job mismatches.

This proper matching of jobs can be successfully done of course through proper analysis and better preparation of employees. What better way to do this than to start the training and shaping of employees in the academe. As such, this only heightens the strong need of the academe and the corporate world to craft core competencies that can aid the student in preparation for future employment.

Students in the tertiary education level are expected to be able to balance theory and practice in a course called on-the-job training. They are expected to absorb different kinds of experiences, practices and an immersion on the corporate culture, all of which are dedicated to help them become employable. This hands on experience aims to put into practice the knowledge they have gained from classroom interaction, enhance the attitudes and behaviors and perhaps hone the technical skills of the students through relevant on-the-job experiences (De Chavez, Lumanglas, Rondilla, et al, 2016).

The immediate superior of the trainees give out specific directives for better supervision of identifying requisite learning objectives and performance or output assessment. Student – trainees are highly encouraged to have active participation in almost all facets to familiarize themselves with the functions of the office, while perhaps looking at potential talent. It is in this immersion that they achieve a better sense of corporate culture and what it means to work in multi-disciplinary teams. Working in a multidisciplinary team is also being given emphasis to see its importance of performing the duties together with the other workers from different departments with different educational backgrounds and discipline (De Chavez, Lumanglas, Rondilla, et al, 2016).

■ 4.0 METHODOLOGY

The researcher conducted structured interviews through focused group discussions (FGD) on selected supervisors of twelve (12) students interns who were deemed to have low scores or voiced out their concerns regarding the professionalism, performance, work ethics and behaviors of students while they rendered their on-the-job (OJT) hours in that particular office. Due to confidentiality, these five supervisors from different companies shall not be named, along with the student-interns they handled. Their responses were taken in verbatim by the author and would later on seek validation from three practitioners, who shall also not be identified for confidentiality purposes. Part of the validation team of experts are, an operations manager from a business process outsourcing/office (BPO) in Quezon City, Philippines, where she had the experience of handling five trainees from a different university. She has expressed the same concerns on behavior and professionalism among millennials in particular. The other two experts who helped in the validation of the data are both human resources practitioners. Both of them are working in the same office, where one of them is a human resources supervisor, and another is an associate directly handling student interns. It is noteworthy to mention that both of them were former student leaders of the Far Eastern University during their collegiate days.

In order to fully conduct the focused group discussion, the researcher has prepared a series of questions for the respondents to answer. In order for the researcher to avoid difficulty in the retrieval, interpretation and analysis of data, the researcher has taken down notes as the interview went on. Whenever possible, the researcher made follow up questions to get additional information that were relevant to the study. These were gladly answered by the supervisors who expressed disappointment or concerns among OJT students.

■ 5.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS

The author, through the conducted structured interviews and focused group discussion has found out that while the overall perception of student interns from the business administration department are superlative, there are still a handful of students who have displayed a negative attitude, behavior and work ethic that have been raised as great concerns by supervisors. Being that professionalism has been an issue, it has been raised time and again during the FGD's that professionalism is indeed an issue for student interns this early in their budding professional careers. FGD results show also that professionalism and work ethics are attributes that hiring managers are looking for as possible traits in their prospective personnel. As validated by the panel of experts, most student interns who have raised red flags may have that dissonance in trying to transition from the possible lax academe culture that they may have gone accustomed to, in contrast to the office

culture of being on-time and focused on the job for about eight hours in a given day. Interview results show also that there are certainly plenty of other areas to improve on such as communication skills, interpersonal relationship skills, and computer skills (i.e. Microsoft office applications). As such, the author has broken down the research findings into the following main themes and categories: professionalism of student interns, competencies gained by student interns from their respective universities, while highlighting also the possible reasons why a student intern may be considered for a full time employment.

Research findings through the conducted interviews are shown in separate tables in order to show the verbatim responses of the five supervisors who participated in the focused group discussion (FGD).

Improved Professionalism of Student-Interns

Based on the results of the research done by the author, companies put a great premium on the professionalism of interns. They see interns not just as student but as strategic partners of the organization. The expectations of not only the human resources department, but most importantly by business unit managers are quite high when it comes to hiring interns because they are considered to be part of the work stream already. That being said, there are several common concerns that are being raised by supervisors that have reached the ears of the intern advisers and are taken into great consideration specially that the students are ambassadors of the university.

Concerns raised by the supervisors on professionalism include tardiness, absenteeism and inappropriate corporate behavior. The tardiness and absenteeism of interns is common because as observed by many, they seem to possess the mindset still of collegiate students who think that they can throw in all types of excuses like they would on their teachers and get away with it. According to the interviews done, that should not be the case. When an intern is hired, they are expected to be proactive, meaning to say they are in charge and held responsible with whatever it is that they are doing in the workplace. If an intern is assigned a critical job and they are absent or late for work, it has a domino effect in the work flow. Other people will then be asked to take on that role and it that should not be the case. Interns are viewed not only as added help in the office, but they are part of employment already in the organization.

The corporate behavior that supervisors expect from interns is that their mindset is all about work, and not an avenue for them to make new friends and chat their idle time away. Everyone in the office is busy and is therefore expected to produce a certain output. Having way too much time for themselves is like taking a break, and this should not be the case. Interns, according to the interviews done should practice appropriate work place behaviors that demonstrate a sense of professionalism even if they are not yet officially employed in the office.

Five supervisors were interviewed for the topic of professionalism, and were asked on how they perceived the professionalism, work ethic and behaviors of the students. According to one supervisor, her common concern with one intern is the attendance of the student. The student-intern has been tagged as someone who normally reports for work late, regardless of her excuse. As per the supervisor, this intern works with the payroll department, and her attendance being in question only puts her work load into a series of backlogs.

The second supervisor raised a concern on one intern being glued to her phone, meaning she is constantly seen exchanging text/SMS messages or hooked on to social media. In other words, time spent for office has been replaced with counterproductive activities.

The third, fourth and fifth supervisors expressed similar concerns not on work ethics, but more on their corporate communication skills. As cleared, the issue was not on how they speak English, but it is the proper use of jargons that are not appropriate in the office. This may come out to be as a culture shock for many student interns who have gone accustomed to certain lingo while in college that may not be welcomed warmly in the corporate world. These languages, or choice of words may come as quipped jokes, but they greatly border on being branded as someone who complains a lot, feels all too familiar with professional colleagues and being unprofessional.

These comments were later on validated by a panel of three experts as discussed earlier. As per the Operations Manager, she believes that professionalism is not only on work ethic and behavior, but also defines how you project yourself in the corporate world. This helps create your identity as you fit in with the culture, policies and work stream processes. The other two panel members who helped validate the paper and human resources practitioners share the same thought on professionalism, and that is the issuance of respect among all colleagues regardless of tenure and rank, and a sense of respect to the company policies set forth. For them, this should never be an issue at all since professionalism should be something that should come inherently.

This thought process on professionalism is greatly supported also by the study of Evans in 2013. For Evans, such work ethics are all in the context of professionalism. Simply put, being a professional is immediately put into context where an employee or any individual performs a certain job or profession in the most ethical means possible in order to be equitable with one's employer (Evans, 2013).

However, professionalism as mentioned in these series of interviews should not be limited to the work ethics and/or behavior of the employee, or in this case the student interns. The study of Homer and Evans further defines how professionalism in the work place should be viewed. In their study, they have identified these three main components of professionalism as behavioral, attitudinal and intellectual (Evans and Homer, 2014). As stated by the Operations Manager of

the panel of experts who validated the answers, professionalism should not be limited only to work ethics, but also borders on performance of an employee.

All of these cited literature give a theoretical and cognitive alignment with the practical and operational responses of the supervisors and the panel of experts who validated the answers of the respondents.

Education and competencies of student interns

As viewed by business unit managers and human resources managers, universities play a big role in preparing the students for corporate life. The internship program is just one of the many avenues that should be explored by the academe in creating a better workforce in the industry. One cannot detach the fact that professionalism in the office is the most common and perhaps easiest gamut to measure the slew of performance, work ethics, mindset and behaviors of students taking that leap into the corporate world. While for some being a student leader is a huge advantage, the bigger ratio belongs to students who have had little or no experience in dealing with extra - curricular activities that could have helped them prepare for corporate life. This is a challenge of course that is being seen by many organizations that universities should address.

Given that this trend of sending out student interns into partner industries and companies is rising, it is of course only proper that universities look into this from a perspective of preparing students on what to expect when it comes to the corporate world. One of the initiatives that has been greatly adapted by universities across the nation is the utilization and implementation of the apprenticeship program where students are required to render a certain number of hours in a partner company and hopefully learn what it takes to join the employment force of the professional main stream. However, a huge factor contributing to the performance of any student intern are their perceived competencies that actually contribute to the completion of jobs that a supervisor has given the OJT's. The HR function of actually looking for an alignment between the skill sets of the students and the job description they were given aids greatly in assuring that job mismatches are avoided.

Supervisors present during FGD were asked if the student-interns respective profiles and competencies fit the job. For the first supervisor, she assigned the student-intern in the area of compensation and benefits where admittedly the intern expressed difficulty at the start as this was something that was new to her. However, she was able to pick it up quickly but had to undergo extensive training first in order to understand the job itself.

The second supervisor was able to assign this particular student-intern in the insurance documentation. Being that the insurance industry is quite unique, the jobs that were normally assigned to the student-intern were quite mundane. In other words all that the student-intern worked on were clerical jobs, i.e. filing of documents.

The third supervisor meanwhile expressed that while the student-intern was a business major, she was not a one hundred percent fit. The office was a business engaged in human resources outsourcing, and therefore would have preferred to have a student-intern whose course in college was greatly focused on human resources management. But since that they were pressed for time, this supervisor had no choice but to hire someone warm bodily.

The fourth supervisor quipped that the student-intern assigned to him was both a match, and practically a job mismatch. The reason being was that the department that this particular student-intern was tapped to work with sales agents in charge of selling condominium units. Since the sales function is directly a business course, any student who has a background on business and/or sales is a fit. However, the competencies they would have preferred are those whose skill sets are greatly marketing related in order to aid the sales agents in their respective functions.

The last supervisor claims that the student-intern she handled is a perfect match. Their office was in need of a business student-intern with an idea of office management, and this particular intern fit the job requirement.

As a follow-up question on the job matching of their student-interns with the job itself, the author asked them if they were looking for any particular competency amongst their respective interns. All of them brought up the notion that they were inclined to looking at the job requirements first, and matching it with the set of competencies that the student intern brings with him/her that were most likely learned from their classes in college. Therefore, they were dependent greatly on the courses and areas of specialization of the student-intern before being deployed to a particular department.

Part of the competencies, strictly speaking, are soft skills. The supervisors were asked of what particular soft skill they were looking for in student interns, and both the first and second supervisors maintained that they had no soft skills in particular to look for. The remaining three supervisors all quipped on leadership and communication skills, giving more proof on the importance of leadership and communication development.

In reference to related literature, the job competencies of student interns need to be aligned with their respective job descriptions in order for them not only to complete the expected tasks but also to be motivated and appreciate what they are actually doing. As mentioned earlier, the trend of having student interns is rising, and it is therefore only apt that students are strongly prepared for the tasks at hand with their partner companies. As presented in the review of related literature, the study of Chavez in 2014 postulates that many organizations today, especially in the Philippines, have very much displayed a strong eagerness in coming up with linkages in the academe and hopefully plant seeds of productive people from the college ranks, and hopefully have them extended job offers in the future. It is of course a general perspective from leading organizations that for them to be successful, they need the requisite personnel to help them achieve their strategic targets (Chavez, 2014).

Supporting this study of Chavez, the authors De Chavez, Lumanglas, Rondilla, et al have presented that Students in the tertiary education level are expected to be able to balance theory and practice in a course called on-the-job training. They are expected to absorb different kinds of experiences, practices and an immersion on the corporate culture, all of which are dedicated to help them become employable. This hands on experience aims to put into practice the knowledge they have gained from classroom interaction, enhance the attitudes and behaviors and perhaps hone the technical skills of the students through relevant on-the-job experiences (De Chavez, Lumanglas, Rondilla, et al, 2016).

These literature are in support of the claims of the supervisors and the panel of experts where the requisite skill sets, attitudes and behaviors of student interns greatly impact their respective performances. These expected corporate competencies also prove that student interns need to absorb a lot from their respective professors in college who have been showing a great deal of effort to prepare them for corporate life.

Employability of student interns with respective partner companies

Student interns of the Far Eastern University – Institute of Accounts, Business & Finance (FEU-IABF) are being well prepared for corporate life. Albeit the fact that interns pose certain concerns for many managers, the students possess strong points that are noteworthy to mention. They include their being inquisitive, adaptive, fast learners and tech savvy students. All of these of course allow supervisors to spot for potential talent in the office as they are viewed for future employment. As an intern renders his/her requisite amount of hours for on-the-job training, they do not only gain more knowledge and skills, but they are getting acclimated with the office that allows managers to view interns in a different light. They are seen as possible new hires that allows HR to lessen the learning curve's steep angle by a significant amount because they have been familiarized with the work stream and culture as well. FEU-IABF students in particular to this research have been heralded quite well by managers. They are seen to be diligent, hardworking and smart students who may be rough on the edges but definitely have a great potential in the world of work.

The author inquired furthermore on possible traits and other strong points for them to be considered as full time employees, regardless of the concerns they have raised on the student-interns they have identified to be problematic. Asked if there was anything specific that supervisors were looking for in student-interns to be hired, all supervisors replied that the course/area of specialization they have studied for in college are great factors. Their respective courses in college should have prepared them in terms of competencies and heightened levels of professionalism in the work place.

As per validation with the panel of experts, the Operations Manager prefers to hire interns who can display a high level of interest in learning work processes, especially in the fact that the BPO industry is a very unique process. They deal with foreigners and diverse business partners who may be tough to deal with. Therefore a “gung-ho” attitude and work ethic should be possessed not only by student-interns but all professional employees as well.

The HR supervisor looks for student interns with leadership potential. This is in line with their efforts on succession planning. However, the competency and professionalism they are looking for in student-interns with potential of being hired are those with excellent people relation skills. Being in the human resources profession, a great amount of emphasis on inter-acting with people is paramount.

For the HR associate who handles interns, she looks for student-interns with a great sense of personal leadership, determination and persistence to finish the tasks at hand. All these, according to her, are not only sets of competencies, but a level of professionalism that should be exhibited by student-interns if they want to be directly hired by their respective offices.

The employability as discussed here by the author through the FGD reflects the possible traits, competencies and level of professionalism that student-interns display. Therefore, one's immediate superiors are constantly looking at student interns who they believe have the ability to work within a particular and unique system or culture, while giving emphasis on abilities to work on teams. This has been discussed in earlier literature, whereby, the immediate superior of the trainees give out specific directives for better supervision of identifying requisite learning objectives and performance or output assessment. Student – trainees are highly encouraged to have active participation in almost all facets to familiarize themselves with the functions of the office, while perhaps looking at potential talent. It is in this immersion that they achieve a better sense of corporate culture and what it means to work in multi-disciplinary teams. Working in a multidisciplinary team is also being given emphasis to see its importance of performing the duties together with the other workers from different departments with different educational backgrounds and discipline (De Chavez, Lumanglas, Rondilla, et al, 2016).

■ 6.0 DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

The study shows the importance of the readiness of student-interns from the FEU-IABF, business administration department as a very vital role in the conduct of their early professional careers. While many of these student- interns have shown a great positivity of being employed right after graduation from the tertiary level, there are still some student-interns who have been identified as counter-productive, and displayed episodes of being unprofessional, as per definition. The study of

professionalism could not be more appropriate and timely given that the corporate world today is being flooded by employees who belong in the millennial generation who are cast at times in a negative light.

Professionalism in the work place

Based on the results of the research done by the author, companies put a great premium on the professionalism of interns. They see interns not just as student but as strategic partners of the organization. The expectations of not only the human resources department, but most importantly by business unit managers are quite high when it comes to hiring interns because they are considered to be part of the work stream already. That being said, there are several common concerns that are being raised by supervisors that have reached the ears of the intern advisers and are taken into great consideration specially that the students are ambassadors of the university.

Concerns raised by the supervisors on professionalism include tardiness, absenteeism and inappropriate corporate behavior. The tardiness and absenteeism of interns is common because as observed by many, they seem to possess the mindset still of collegiate students who think that they can throw in all types of excuses like they would on their teachers and get away with it. According to the interviews done, that should not be the case. When an intern is hired, they are expected to be proactive, meaning to say they are in charge and held responsible with whatever it is that they are doing in the workplace. If an intern is assigned a critical job and they are absent or late for work, it has a domino effect in the work flow. Other people will then be asked to take on that role and it that should not be the case. Interns are viewed not only as added help in the office, but they are part of employment already in the organization.

The corporate behavior that supervisors expect from interns is that their mindset is all about work, and not an avenue for them to make new friends and chat their idle time away. Everyone in the office is busy and is therefore expected to produce a certain output. Having way too much time for themselves is like taking a break, and this should not be the case. Interns, according to the interviews done should practice appropriate work place behaviors that demonstrate a sense of professionalism even if they are not yet officially employed in the office.

Importance of competencies possessed by student-interns

As viewed by business unit managers and human resources managers, universities play a big role in preparing the students for corporate life. The internship program is just one of the many avenues that should be explored by the academe in creating a better workforce in the industry. One cannot detach the fact that professionalism in the office is the most common and perhaps easiest gamut to measure the slew of performance, work ethics, mindset and behaviors of students taking that leap into the corporate world. While for some being a student leader is a huge advantage, the bigger ratio belongs to students who have had little or no experience in dealing with extra - curricular activities that could have helped them prepare for corporate life. This is a challenge of course that is being seen by many organizations that universities should address.

While professionalism remains to be broad and no universal definition can be given, what is common to all the managers in this research is that it is something that is tangible and helps define the readiness, work ethics and habits of an intern entering the corporate world. The school's policies may be bent from time to time, but an organization whose bedrock principles have been crafted strategically and lived whole heartedly by office stakeholders need to be fully understood by interns as something that is cast in stone. The readiness of many students in terms of professional and appropriate office behavior should be drilled in even better by the university in order for them to have no sense of "culture shock" or a having a difficult transition from campus life to real corporate world environments.

As professionalism is being addressed, the competencies of students need to be improved as may be evidenced in the different course outlines in the syllabi. As discussed greatly in the FGD's, having more real life problem solving activities in the classroom may actually help improve the critical thinking, problem solving and decision making skills of the students. This would allow them to interact better and ultimately aid in the attainment of strategic organizational goals.

Employment readiness of FEU-IABF student-interns

Albeit the fact that interns pose certain concerns for many managers, the students possess strong points that are noteworthy to mention. They include their being inquisitive, adaptive, fast learners and tech savvy students. All of these of course allow supervisors to spot for potential talent in the office as they are viewed for future employment. As an intern renders his/her requisite amount of hours for on-the-job training, they do not only gain more knowledge and skills, but they are getting acclimated with the office that allows managers to view interns in a different light. They are seen as possible new hires that allows HR to lessen the learning curve's steep angle by a significant amount because they have been familiarized with the

work stream and culture as well. FEU-IABF students in particular to this research have been heralded quite well by managers. They are seen to be diligent, hardworking and smart.

■ 7.0 CONCLUSION

Professionalism in the workplace should be viewed by interns in a way that is definitive behavior in the workplace. The interns should be able to demonstrate certain behaviors that are appropriate and at the same time distinctive of the office culture. The fact that interns have been hired for a specific purpose in the office already puts students in the light of the roster of employees in that particular office.

As mentioned in the study of Ravangard, Sajjadnia, et al, human factors are critical elements in the success of any organization which sees changes in the attitudes and behaviors of employees an imperative tool for organizational success (Ravangard, Sajjadnia, et al, 2014).

Passion, initiative and a sense of being proactive are just a few attributes of work ethics that constitute professionalism by which business unit managers and human resources practitioners are looking at interns rendering apprenticeship. All of these work ethics are necessary for an intern to succeed during the on-job-training hours. However, they also become positive work place aptitudes that can be their bargaining chips should they want to be employed in a particular office.

The former coincides with how work ethics is defined by Evans. Work ethics is a context of professionalism in the workplace. The notion of professionalism is of course conceived on how an individual performs a chosen profession and career that are ethically aligned to serve the interests of any business client (Evans, 2013).

The performance of an intern, while greatly reliant on one's conduct during his/her stay in an office for their respective OJT hours, can also be greatly enhanced by the university through proper work ethics education and/or preparation with relevant symposium.

Noting the research mentioned in the review of related literature, in the research of Prerryer in 2006, the author made mention that the use of proper ethics education allows students to have a different take on ethics and behaviors easily in stark comparison on those who may have not had the proper orientation (Perryer, 2006).

Professionalism and work ethics are very important topics today in the workplace as human resources manages put a very high premium on corporate culture. This can of course be done only when the appropriate behaviors of all members of the organization are acting in unison on pre-arranged ethics and policies. As such, the need for interns to fully digest and understand what professionalism and work ethics mean in the office are imperative.

This can be further reinforced by citing Brock, Leblebici and Muzio when they wrote that more and more research attempts to connect the importance of workplace professionalism and work ethics in the office are growing (Brock Leblebici and Muzio, 2014).

Job skills are important core competencies to avoid a job mismatch. Interns are placed in areas where they are expected to contribute strategically and perform jobs that fit their skill sets. According to Wellman, better workplace performance can be expected when skills match the expected outputs of employability, hence avoiding what is referred to as a job mismatch (Wellman, 2010).

Companies today partner up with universities in order for them to have quality interns who could one day be both parts of their respective succession and replacement plans. The preparation of the students in reference to their future performance in the office are greatly reliant on how the teachers and the university as a whole assure that the students will behave accordingly in accordance to the company's policies and work culture. This is so because interns are seen as ambassadors of the university wherever they go. This relates with the researched literature where it has been mentioned that the industry today recognizes the importance of partnering up with different academic institutions to help bolster the adequate training that is supposed to respond to the particular needs that the organization faces, which they inherently need to respond to (Chavez, 2014).

As students are immersed in the OJT function, one must not only be limited to performing tasks, duties and responsibilities that are covered by their respective job descriptions. They are often times taken out of their comfort zones and asked to perform jobs that cross with other departments. That being said, their adaptability, flexibility and ability to work with others is of prime importance.

This importance has been highlighted in the interviews and furthermore strengthened by research literature. Collaboration is key, and whenever one is tasked to work with multidisciplinary teams the emphasis to

see its importance of performing the duties together with the other workers from different departments with different educational backgrounds and discipline becomes heightened (De Chavez, Lumanglas, Rondilla, et al, 2016).

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