

CROSS-CULTURAL
UNDERGRADUATE INTERNSHIPS

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CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERGRADUATE INTERNSHIPS

A Toolkit for Empowering the Next
Generation

EDITED BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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EDITORS' NOTE

The editors would like to specify that this book is organized into three sections, all of which consist of chapters and boxes. Concerning the sections, the first one is merely theoretical, the second deals with a case study, and the third offers a toolkit based on the presented theory and case study. Concerning the chapters, each one offers a final, in-depth box on the topic, written by an author who is (in almost all cases) different from the author of the chapter. The box, therefore, complements and integrates the discussion of the chapter.

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PREFACE: A LOOK FORWARD TO THE FUTURE OF INTERNATIONALIZATION

As is well-documented in many international business texts, the expansion of global business in the last two decades was unprecedented. Trillions of dollars were exchanged every day; more than half a million people were in the air at any given moment; and the globe was covered with millions of miles of fiber optic cable that gave businesses to access new markets, new talent pools, and new partnerships. However, in recent years, much of that progress came to a halt with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. In essence, the world ground to a halt. Even prior to the pandemic, the geopolitical forces associated with nationalism had taken root, and the world community seemed to shy away into their respective corners.

Because I travel around the world so much on business with the institute, I have been asked the same questions many times over: “Given the receding tide of globalism, is it worthwhile to send students abroad to gain practical experience? Are international experiences worth the effort?” Without hesitation, my answer is always “yes.” There are many reasons for this positive answer, but I will elaborate on a few key elements that shape my attitude.

First, professional life is difficult due to the influence of VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) environments. These VUCA environments require high levels of self-regulation and grit for successful mission completion. Students who gain experience abroad must continuously adapt to local cultural norms and expectations. While students can prepare for these experiences, culture cannot be learned from a book. They must jump into the deep end of the pool and swim. This real-world experience requires a tremendous amount of self-regulation in terms of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral control necessary to navigate a new culture. Self-regulation is often described metaphorically as a muscle. The more self-regulation is used, the stronger the muscle becomes. Thus, students who learn from overseas experiences come back home stronger and better able to contribute in VUCA environments.

Second, experiential learning is far superior to formal learning in the acquisition of complex skills. In executive development, coaches have long

relied on McCall's 10-20-70 model of learning: 10% of learning should occur in formal settings, 20% through relationship-based learning such as mentoring, and 70% through experiential learning. Of all the executive development methods commonly employed, perhaps the most demanding and most impactful is the international "stretch" assignment. Both long-term and short-term overseas assignments are viewed as a way to expose high potentials to different business units and give them a chance to lead an organization far away from the friendly confines of home. Important skills linked to international job assignments include building a professional team, practicing influence skills across cultures, and managing competing agendas from local and global stakeholders. This sounds like the perfect internship to me.

Third, cross-cultural skills are simply good people skills, and, as such, they will broadly generalize to domestic settings. When working abroad, one of the first skills one must develop is listening. This skill may be necessary due to differing accents or a differing pace of speech. However, I find my focus is greatly increased in international settings, as I am listening not just to what is said but to *how* it is said, while observing who is (and is not) in the room and the nonverbal behavior of the speaker (and audience). In these settings, listening is conducted at a whole different level, and the skills developed as a result will continue to benefit the listener no matter where they are working. The same is true for other cross-cultural skills such as perspective taking and withholding judgment. While they help abroad, they help at home too.

Fourth, cultural diversity is not the only kind of diversity students will face. The modern workplace is incredibly diverse. We are constantly surrounded by people who are different from ourselves. These differences may fall into the realm of surface diversity (e.g., age, sex, race, etc.), but we also must work across professional lines. Engineers must talk to marketing people, and executives must talk to managers. In some cases, such conversations may be more difficult than those between people in Shanghai and Sao Paulo. Students who can only speak to like-minded peers will see their careers stymied, dooming them to individual contributor roles. Conversely, students who can speak to people who are different from them will become future leaders.

Finally, the problems of the world are getting bigger, and a single company or country cannot solve them alone. Challenges such as future pandemics lie on the horizon. We are one subvariant away from reliving the isolation of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the last pandemic, a vaccine was mobilized (a process normally taking a decade) within a year. This rapid advancement of medicine required talented minds from across the world collaborating to advance science. Other problems, like global climate change, will need the same kind of

collaborative response. Powerful professional networks of the best talent will be needed, and such networks are established through personal relationships.

I have taught at winter and summer schools overseas for almost 20 years, and I have observed that the development of students who spend time abroad is accelerated, with those students reaching skill levels exceeding those of students who only train in their home countries. International professional experiences are a critical part of this development.

Yes, international experiences are receding now. However, our contact with other countries and other cultures is very much like a pendulum. Now, we are retreating toward our own countries, but that means we need to get the limited number of interactions we have right, because we might only have one chance. The pendulum is still swinging, and before too long globalization will return to prominence. Just like in the days of the Silk Road, we will exchange goods and services, art, ideas, and more. When we do, we will want that generation to be ready for the days ahead.

Good experiential learning opportunities, especially international ones, do not “just happen”; they are carefully and purposefully designed. This book provides a roadmap for the development of the next generation and provides the tools necessary to craft effective learning experiences to develop the future cohort of scientists, business people, and leaders. We cannot sit back and merely hope learning will occur. We must design these overseas experiences or risk facing global challenges unprepared. This book is an important step in that design thinking.

Richard Griffith
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It is our pleasure to thank those who believed in this project, as much and perhaps even more than ourselves. Starting from the authors of the individual contributions, who are scattered across the four corners of the globe and have shared our enthusiasm and passion since day one when we started chatting about it: “Do you know what could be useful? A text on internships abroad and their evaluation. . . .”

A special thanks to our families, who have been extremely understanding and supportive despite the time we took away from them; to our colleagues at Sant’Anna Institute, who have acknowledged the reasons for our commitment and our motivation; to the companies that partner with our Institute by welcoming our interns, for having provided us with fertile ground for the growth of our project. And, of course, to our students, with their achievements, energies, complaints, cultural discomforts, and some setbacks during their internships, who have paved the way by convincing us that, perhaps, our time was well invested, or at least we hope so.

This text is to summarize our long-standing commitment in the field of international education, as well as our modest contribution to this sector, in a moment of such quick and deep evolution. If it can be of support to any colleague in making an internship abroad program more meaningful or to any student in living their international experience in a more conscious and less frustrating way, our goal will be considered achieved.

Davide de Gennaro and Marco Marino