

# Determinants of Internship Conversion Among Management Graduates: Evidence from India

**Carol Chiramel & Pushendra Priyadarshi**

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*Internship is a mandatory 2 months' industry stint stipulated in the curriculum of the two-year MBA Program in India. Successful interns are given a pre-placement offer (PPO) to work in these organizations as full-time employees. This paper examines the experiences of interns of a top public business school in North India to understand the factors which impacted their success/failure in securing a PPO. Results show that proactivity to overcome adversities, networking and innovative solutions to practical business contexts as important determinants of internship conversion. Poor organizational processes, unfair practices and poorly crafted internship programs resulted in unsatisfactory internship experiences of the students. This study identifies methods by which students can gauge their job-fit and thereafter identify key success factors to secure a PPO.*

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## Background

Internship as an integral and foremost means of transfer of knowledge between academia and practice has somehow been overlooked by researchers in the past (Narayanan and Olk, 2010). Post-graduate management student internships in India is not just a mandatory course requirement or avenue to gain practical knowledge in a specific domain, but a key means of career exploration or in other words securing a pre-placement offer (PPO). Baron & Kreps (1999) defines internships as temporary work arrangements that employers use to train and select future employees. For organizations, internships are an important means by which they attract and identify talented future employees. This high level of orientation towards suitable employment emerges as a win-win situation for both interns and employers. Lately, the emphasis on internships by employers in India can largely be attributed to their ability on the one hand to provide host organizations with the opportunity to evaluate potential job applicants in

actual workplace settings prior to formal employment, while on the other it also allows interns to evaluate their fit with potential employers and vocations prior to making a long-term career commitment. Companies, hiring summer interns from business schools, are increasingly giving pre-placement offers (PPOs) to students of top B-schools based on their performance during summer internships. If this trend continues, the short 30-40 minutes' interview during final placement, the traditional method of campus recruitment, may soon take a back seat and become the second most-preferred way for hiring future managers India. Current estimates suggest that one in every three business schools undergrads is going to be hired through PPOs (Basu, 2018).

Moreover, the student is keen to secure a PPO early to relieve oneself of the stress of finding suitable job opportunities a year later or improve their bargaining power with respect to recruiters when they complete their program.

### Context

In Indian business schools, internship is a mandatory 8-9 weeks' industry stint stipulated in the curriculum of the two-year MBA Program. There is no restriction concerning the nature or field of internship. Students are expected to submit a report to the business school on returning describing the nature and objectives of the internship. The placement committee of the school coordinates the interview processes for the various companies looking to hire summer interns in

a single week and has historically been successful in placing all applicants. Students may even choose to find internship employment opportunities on their own off campus, but seldom choose to. The internship commences post completion of the first year of the course. Since a student may not have prior knowledge of the sector or specific domain, the internship can also act as a check to see if the job is a fit with one's personal attributes and work style. However, in practice, there are only a few students who either rejected a pre-placement offer or chose not to actively work towards it after having joined the internship and not liked the nature of work.

Generally, the recruiting firms hires a large pool of interns, out of whom they will be looking to hire anything from 10% to 100% of all interns. The variation depends on the nature of the domain, job openings, business performance and attrition. Consulting, for instance, has a history of a very high intern to PPO conversion rate.

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The main deliverable of the internship is generally a specific project, whose work expectations are set by a supervisor. Some roles in consulting and finance however, require the candidate to do the work of a regular employee, under the guidance of their Supervisor and not create any specific report.

Interns are given mentors with whom they are encouraged to share their difficulties and experiences. These mentors are generally more experienced executives in the middle to senior level of designation in the firm. The project is very structured with fixed timely deliverables and a final presentation to a panel of evaluators. The final presentation is typically presented to a panel of CXO level officials in the firm. The final presentation, team review, mentor inputs and supervisor reviews are combined to arrive at a decision to recommend for PPO or PPI (Pre-Placement Interview). In the case of some consulting firms, this process may be skipped altogether. The supervisor and team will be asked for feedback and internal consensus reached as to a decision to give a PPO or not. There will be no 'evaluation round'. The candidate will only be intimated of the final decision.

Though generally structured, internship programs may or may not be well monitored. If the process of review and evaluation is set aside, not all organizations actively assess the quality of interaction between the organization and the intern. The most well-planned programs required 360-degree feedback to check if the interns were suitably engaged with their mentors/ supervisors.

### **Past Research on Internship**

Diverse theoretical framework has been used in earlier research to understand and explain internship. Literature concerning socialization, job design, recruitment and selection and training has been used to understand various dimen-

sions of internship. Recruitment literature suggests that internship saves an intern from the entry shock and help them to develop realistic expectation from the job resulting in reduced disappointment. The socialization literature (Feldman, 1976; 1988) indicates the interns to develop better understanding about the congruence between their skill level and the requirement of the job. The selection literature (Dipboye, 1982; Schmitt & Coyle, 1976; Fisher, Ilgen & Hoyer, 1979) directs the intern to have better understanding about the career path in the organization in comparison to a short interview. The job design literature (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Taylor, 1988; Weitz, Sujan & Sujan, 1986) shows that interns who are intrinsically motivated by the work itself tend to be more positive when making longer term decisions about whether to pursue careers in that field or jobs in the organization.

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MBA internships are a valuable, economical way of managing talent in organizations. This unique 'try before you buy' approach to employment means that internships are becoming a workplace context of increasing relevance to organizational and vocational researchers alike (Gomboá, Paixão & Jesus, 2013; Zhao & Liden, 2011, Coco, 2000). Despite the prevalence, little research exists on MBA internships in general and India in particular. Instead, the sparse internship literature focuses on under-

graduates (Gruman, Saks & Zweig, 2006; Taylor, 1988). In fact, with the exception of a recently emerging stream of literature (Hurst, Good & Gardner, 2012; Zhao & Liden, 2011), the research on internship has been dominated by studies conducted from the intern's perspective, focused largely on learning outcomes (Hynie, Jensen, Johnny, Wedlock & Phipps, 2011; Mihail, 2006), or widely on the career benefits of internship participation for interns in general terms (Cheung & Arnold, 2010; Linn, Ferguson & Egart, 2004).

### **Value of Internship**

There is a good value proposition of internship for organizations and interns. Whereas, an intern ends up earning opportunity to get the feel of working in the company, getting to know the fit with the firm and developing marketable skills (such as, communication, time-management, self-confidence, and self-motivation) the company gets to evaluate intern's capabilities and fit before considering for full time employment.

Knouse et al. (1999) reported that business students who completed an internship obtained jobs more readily than students who did not. Besides, the work experience gained through internship programs provides a plausible way to soften the reality shock of making the transition from the world of academics to the world of work (Garavan & Murphy, 2001; Collin & Tynja"la", 2003).

Converting good interns into full-time employees upon completion of the intern-

ship-program is becoming the preferred path to permanent employment for many interns and employers (NACE, 2009; Stevens-Huffman, 2006). Increasing internship conversion rates is beneficial to the employer for a number of reasons, such as a significant amount of money saved in both hiring and training costs (Pianko, 1996); interns are a partially trained workforce that can contribute to the organization immediately (Dixon et al., 2005); and interns typically experience higher levels of job satisfaction than non-interns (Gault et al., 2000). Given that interns represent a viable pool of potential new hires (Sessions, 2006), and internship conversion rates remain low (Gardner et al., 2008), understanding the specific variables/factors that contribute to increased conversion rates would be beneficial to internship offering companies and academicians.

### **Supervisory Support**

The supervisor's role is crucial to the intern for several reasons: first, supervisors control the degree of structure, ambiguity, and conflict in the work itself, second, supervisors provide informal and formal feedback to employees regarding their performance and work behavior, and lastly, supervisors control rewards and possible job security that may benefit employees (Krackhardt et al., 1981). These job experience factors are important for interns as they familiarize themselves with a new organizational environment and culture (Van Maanen, 1975). New hires experience many ambiguities regarding their job-duties, their co-workers, and their supervisors.

Babin and Boles (1996) in their study found that increased perceptions of supervisory support reduced employee role conflict and role ambiguity while increasing job satisfaction. In addition, Jamrog (2002) found that the supervisor was the key influence determining whether young employees remained with the company. Supportive supervisors are critical because they can enhance job satisfaction and facilitate the pursuit of one's future career intentions (Knight et al., 2006). Lack of proper supervisory support can result in an untrained, unmotivated workforce and is a potential cause of increased absenteeism, low morale, poor customer service, and increased employee turnover (Knight & Crutsinger, 2003). Conversely, a workplace with high levels of supervisory support can have a positive impact on job performance, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions (Babin & Boles, 1996).

Although mandatory course requirement for MBA, there has been hardly any attempt to understand internship in India. Studying internships, as a pivotal career transition point in an employee's career life span, is needed in order to provide insight into the factors contributing to conversion of interns to employee. There has been a growing trend among organizations in India to select employee from a set of MBA interns. This study generates insights about key factors contributing to successful MBA internship program.

### **Procedure & Sample**

We selected a balanced mix of students who were successful and unsuccessful

in securing a PPO. 15 had received and accepted their PPOs, 2 were offered but chose to reject them, 3 were offered Pre-Placement Interviews, which they could not clear and the remaining were neither received interview calls nor offers. The interns were moderately distributed across 6 key domains mainly Operations (3), Consulting (5), General Management (5), Marketing (6), IT (6) and Finance (5).

Firms from across the spectrum were selected from those who give offers to only a small percentage of interns to those who give PPOs to most interns. Significantly, 23% had converted a PPO even in a highly competitive environment of less than 1 offer for every 4 interns. 53% respondents had between 25 and 40% conversion rates (intern to PPO) in their organizations. 24% respondents had a higher than 60% conversion of interns at their respective organizations.

**Most respondents received PPOs despite working in an intensely competitive environment.**

In order to ensure that all PPO holders were not under the high conversion segment (companies who are looking to hire most of the interns) a very healthy mix of PPO holders was selected. Most respondents received PPOs despite working in an intensely competitive environment. Only 23% respondents were from firms which look to hire all interns (discounting outliers). 65% respondents who received PPOs were from firms with a less than 60% Intern-Job Offer Ratio.

Conversely, in order to ensure that all non -PPO holders were not under the Low Conversion Segment (companies who are looking to hire very few of the interns) a very healthy mix of non-PPO holders was selected. About 39% respondents with no PPOs were from firms which had less than 25% Intern-Job Offer Ratio. Outliers were deliberately included to give a fresh perspective.

### Measures

A semi-structured interview schedule was prepared and used for the study. Factors critical to the internship was identified through previous studies (Feldman & Weitz, 1990; Hurst, Good & Gardner, 2012). A pilot study was conducted on 10 interns who were asked to rank these factors in order of importance and asked to describe their experiences in relation to each of these factors. The factors emerged were: project delivery, approach, role of supervisor, role of evaluators, role of mentor, person organization fit, diversity, access to alumni and reputation of the institute. The pilot study resulted in the removal of some redundant questions concerning supervisory support and internship design. To understand the relative importance of these factors students were asked to rate these factors and suggest reasons for some being perceived more important than the others.

Some potential external factors were also identified and students were asked to describe whether they perceived them to be of any importance and if so, how.

These factors included the impact of work experience and location. Interns were also questioned about their interest in the domain, particularly their inclination towards continuing in the field. Finally, they were asked to describe about what went right, what went wrong and a piece of advice they would like to give to interns going in for an internship at their firm.

### Organizational Processes

Good facilitators are critical to a good internship program. Unclear roles cause stress (Jackson & Schuler, 1985; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek & Rosenthal, 1964) which, in turn, reduces the interns' available attention to process new information and respond to novel task demands (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989). To this end, the Supervisor played an important role in empathizing with the intern and brought clarity of role and task. An important issue brought up in the analysis was the impact of a long period of absence of the Supervisor. Since the internship clashes with the summer holiday season, several interns reported this as an issue. The role of the supervisor is very crucial not just from a project delivery perspective, but also from an evaluation perspective. A long period of absence can lead to lack of clarity on how to go ahead with the project and who to approach. One intern noted that her supervisor was absent for

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2 weeks out of 8 during which she had many doubts about how to move ahead in the project. The same supervisor who had praised her work substantially prior to his leave of absence started criticizing her work on arrival with only 2 weeks left for completion of the project.

Two respondents felt that their project itself was not well conceptualized. One of them felt that it had been created 'at the last minute' with little work to be done or insufficient scope. In one case, the supervisor himself told the intern that the problem was too difficult to solve and this was something they had internally discussed a lot, unsuccessfully. When the intern submitted the final recommendations much on the lines of his supervisor's insights, they were deemed unimplementable by the evaluator in the final evaluation.

Motivation and expectation of the outcome too play a good deal in the minds of interns. One respondent recollected that before going into the internship itself he was not very optimistic, given the fact that they generally absorbed very few interns. This was reinforced after his interaction with his seniors who had interned there. Despite the erstwhile interns being known high achievers on campus, they had given him feedback that it was altogether impossible to get an offer from there. His negative bias was reinforced on joining when they criticized his performance and set benchmarks which he believed to be unrealistic.

In certain cases, poorly designed internship program and their improper

implementation severely affected the learning and employment prospects for the interns. For instance, lack of experience of a mentor resulted in the absence of proper guidance for an intern throughout the project. For another intern who did not receive PPO despite good reviews observed that he had heard that since there were several good interns recommended and only a few openings, only those whose alumni were pushing for them got selected.

Large organizations typically have informal means by which they try to remove the ambiguities of qualitative assessment processes. For instance, one of the respondents said that the evaluation in his firm was on the basis of a 5-point metric and consideration for PPO is contingent upon candidate securing above threshold level. This metric used Likert scale with 5 being 'exceptional' and so on. The candidate would be considered for a PPO only if she/he received an 'exceptional'. However, instances of lack of awareness of such a policy was also found. In one such instance, the supervisor was not aware of this policy. Even though he believed the candidate deserved PPO and recommended her for a PPO his evaluation put her at 'Very Good' rather than 'Exceptional', and this minor glitch resulted in the candidature not being considered for a PPO. In the end, large organizations hire several competent interns from top notch B-Schools across India competing for limited openings. In such a scenario ambiguous informal processes often come into play to decide about the interns being considered for PPO.

Notwithstanding the lacunae in the internship program, the study elaborates some best practices observed across organizations. The present study found internship program where projects were typically well conceptualized with great deal of planning and effort prior to launch. The nature of the evaluation of the interns was clearly defined and communicated to both the management and the interns. In order to bring transparency in the system, 360 degree appraisals were followed to ensure that the interns were comfortable with the supervisor, mentor and team. The internship and training were even included in the KRAs of the management and weekly status updates taken on the progress of the project assignment. The availability of the supervisor was ensured for the complete duration of the internship. In case of the Supervisor being on leave, the intern was given a “Go-To Person” for deliverables or assistance during the Supervisor’s absence.

In order, to get an impartial view of the candidate, feedback about the intern’s performance was taken from multiple sources rather than just the Supervisor. The final evaluation was undertaken typically by a panel of CXO level employees who had never worked with the candidate before. The process was transparent where interns were evaluated based on their merit only and not through impact of external influencers (such as alumni, friends etc.). The final rounds also drilled interns on communication and soft skills to check candidate’s fit with organization and job.

### **Key Success Factors (KSF)**

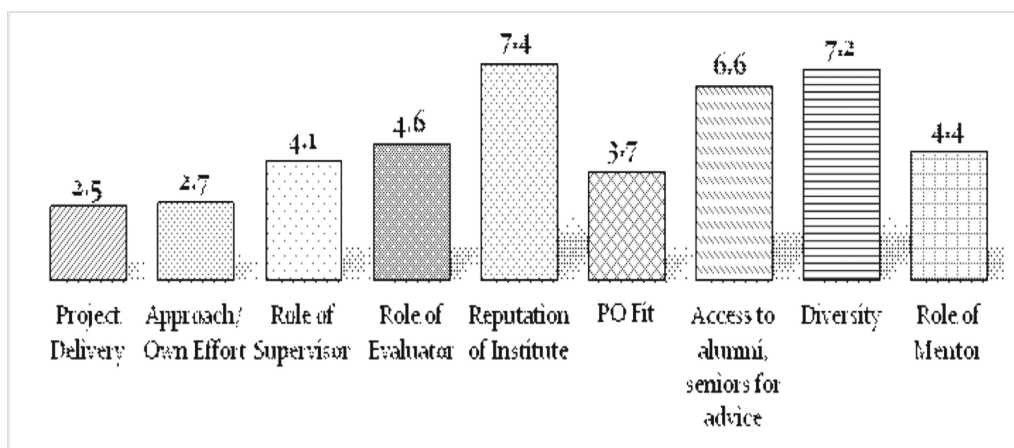
Significant similarities were found in the rankings of key success factors by PPO holders and non-holders. Project delivery was ranked highest as the most important factor in a recruiter’s mind showing a clear orientation towards results which are objectively measurable. Interns’ approach was rated the second most important factor. Approach, here is seen as a reflection of planning, self-development, time management and dealing with stress. The next most important factor was the person organization fit. These factors were more strongly evaluative than taken by interns prior to the internship. While in some cases interns are grilled on the same during the pre-placement interview (PPI), some are subject to final round psychometric tests. Largely however, this attribute is evaluated based on peer feedback from within the organization. The next most important factors were the role of the Supervisor, Mentor and Evaluator. The last 3 factors: reputation of institute, access to alumni and diversity were relevant only under exceptional circumstances.

**Project delivery was ranked highest as the most important factor in a recruiter’s mind.**

### **Setting Expectations Right**

Emphasis was laid on understanding the project deliverables and being in constant touch with one’s supervisor for direction setting. In a few cases interns reported the unavailability of supervisors

Chart 1 Ranking Key Success Factors



for at least 2 weeks for personal reasons (vacation/ marriage/ill health etc.). Interns viewed this as a major stumbling block in a brief 2-month internship. Further, interns with a better support system in the organization, in addition to their supervisor, fared better during this period of absence. A proactive candidate (who also secured a PPO) foresaw the issue before his supervisor left and so asked for a thorough plan about his deliverables from her during her absence and asked for names of people he should approach for different types of problems. Other interns recommended raising the issue with a senior, an alumni or an HR so that it does not affect the evaluation.

### Business Sense

Despite limited understanding of the business, interns are expected to ask the right questions and be motivated to understand it better. There were some remarkable circumstances where some interns went above and beyond deliver-

ing value, beyond even those performed by the existing management. One intern significantly improved the distribution network in regional sales of a firm through intensively working with salesmen helping them pitch better, creating daily sales trackers of business development executives which were mailed to the regional sales managers, new incentive plans and training them himself. Another intern went out of his scope of identifying potential customers for his firm to actually confirming some and thus bringing in revenue.

### Innovative Yet Implementable Solutions

Interns received mix of praise for creating implementable solutions and criticism for giving idealistic solutions whose feasibility was questionable. Exceptions were also found where as in the case of an intern pursuing information technology project at an innovation centered IT firm was told to think only inno-

vation and forget about the implementation aspect.

### **Innovation/ Differentiation**

With the exception of consulting and marketing to some extent, projects given in finance, operations, information technology and general management were specifically to create a project report with a defined problem statement. Some projects had been done before in the past and expected some new value addition over those who had worked on it before. The scope of most projects was restricted to internal process improvements and strategy. Firms were looking for the interns to give a fresh perspective to old problems or develop new markets. Innovative solutions backed with evidence and utility were appreciated. Some arrived at these solutions based on competitor benchmarking, some by secondary and academic research and others by gathering information from internal sources.

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### **Organization Fit**

Organizations attempted to examine the fit with the intern in myriad ways. Some recruiters tried to understand if the intern is himself inclined towards joining and that they will stay in the firm for a while. In another case, they appeared to be looking for specific culture fit or skills. Firms with clients and divisions across the world and cross functional teams

value communication skills, eloquence and the ability to communicate without jargons. Firms which require long work hours, intense travelling or working in long rural stints look for interns who are intensely motivated towards these roles so that they can deal with the pressures associated with them.

### **Communication Skills**

Most internship roles being client facing, another important parameter is the ability to communicate effectively and explain technical terms with simplicity. Interns were appreciated for having an opinion or questioning based on their views, without sounding disagreeable or over-opinionated.

### **Role of a Sponsor**

All successful interns reported having someone who acted as their sponsor. This person was typically their supervisor. Exceptions existed of interns who received a PPO despite a seemingly ambivalent supervisor. In these cases, their team and their mentor acted as their sponsors in the final evaluation. On the reverse side, as high as 50% of interns with no PPO had sponsors who had given a very positive review in the final appraisal recommending selection. In some cases, they were not selected due to the supervisor's opinion not being factored and intensely competitive arena with offers exceeding number of good quality candidates. In the latter, the sponsor being more vocal of the qualities becomes essential.

### **Understand the Processes**

In certain cases, lack of understanding of the formal/ informal procedure followed by the firm can be a make or break decision on being successful. Some examples:

- In some cases, where the evaluation is done by a metric (say a scale of 1 to 10), there is a tacit understanding among those who have mentored before that only scores above a certain grade are considered for a PPI (say a 9). These scores may be even inordinately high (say a 9 means 'exceeded expectations substantially'). If a supervisor is new to the firm or has never mentored before he may give that same intern say an 8, without understanding the relative importance of that score.
- If all mentors give positive reviews organizations find it difficult to distinguish between interns. In order to differentiate one from the other to get that coveted role, some supervisors may personally pitch for the mentors they find remarkable. In exceptional cases, there have been instances of biases towards interns of one's own alumni institute.

### **Networking & Impression Management**

Networking was cited as yet another critical factor in internship conversion even though verdict remained inconclusive about how much is required and to what extent. Organizations appreciated and viewed it positively when interns took

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initiative to get to know others. For instance, one intern interacted with people in another department and found out they had worked on something similar and so could use that information in her report. This was well appreciated by her senior as he himself was not aware that similar work was being done in the other department.

- Visibility across departments is also important in departments where interns are selected by divisional heads in the final round evaluation based on the quality of the candidate. Those who have interacted across departments are likely to be more familiar with the work happening in other departments.
- Another way of differentiating one's work is by understanding the best practices in the industry by benchmarking one's practices with competitors. This required interacting with people in other organizations, through personal contacts or cold calls.

For much of the project, the insight required to succeed is available within the organization. As one intern put it: it's essential to be prepared before every meeting, even with a mentor. He stressed on being clear on what information and insights were needed from the person.

- Finally, networking is important when you need to understand who can act as your sponsor in the organization. Though the sponsor is almost always the supervisor itself, those with unhelpful supervisors had to proactively seek support, guidance and visibility from others in the team and organization.

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### Dealing with Stress

- *Work Related:* Most interns reported a certain level of stress in the beginning of the project. Their internship required them to work in domains that were completely new for them. However, they could overcome the initial hiccups in the following weeks with better understanding of the project requirements and peer learning.
- *Team/ Supervisor Related:* Perceived as an important source of stress, few interns observed that their supervisors and/ or mentors were either too busy or too ambivalent causing demotivation among interns. Surprisingly, the PPO/PPI holders did not rate this factor very high. If one were to look at the rankings assigned, those with PPOs/PPI seemed to value the role of a supervisor less compared to others.

### Overtime

One fourth of those without a PPO had put in overtime, working weekends or working late; even though it was not explicitly asked for. However, two thirds of those who received PPOs worked over time, most of whom were expected

### Perception of PPO & Non-PPO Holders

PPO Holders valued approach above project delivery and gave less importance to the role of the supervisor and evaluator. They also attributed higher importance to a person organization-fit. In general, great deal of proactivity was observed from the PPO holders. These respondents seem to have taken the initiative in some way or the other to overcome challenges. Therefore, they have given more importance to their own delivery and effort over factors such as supervisor, evaluator etc. That is not to say they did not face any issues. Two PPO holders had supervisors who were not encouraging at all. They circumvented the issue by garnering support from their team and mentor who acted as sponsors on their behalf. Three specific cases have illustrated the proactive approach of PPO holders:

One PPO holder went one step ahead of his scope and brought in clients for their firm even though his job was only to identify potential clients and not actually convert them.

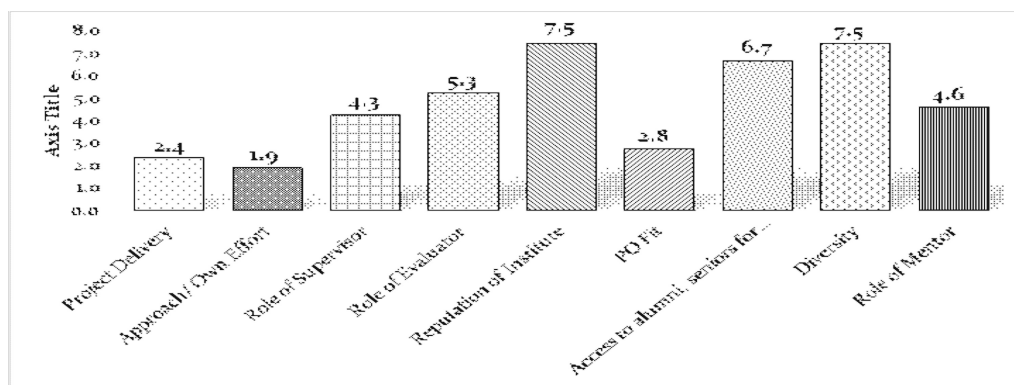
Another intern, working in marketing function was given the seemingly

impossible task of doubling the distribution network in a region. He took a very hands-on approach and actually achieved the turnaround. He first plotted all the regions covered on a map and identified all the untapped regions. He then personally sat with the executives to understand why they were not covered. Following this he formulated a new incentive plan for untapped regions and allocated those regions to the sales representatives. Besides this he created a daily tracker of sales performance and sent daily mails to the Business Development executives, copying this information to the concerned ASM (Area Sales Manager) and RSM (Regional Sales Manager). The

ASM and RSM who were supporting him on this initiative would make it a point to reply to these mails. He would accompany sales representatives when they are on sales call during the first half of the day to train the sales executives on which products to sell to whom and how.

Another PPO Holder was only asked to develop an algorithm for his operations internship. He created several algorithms and ran them through his supervisors to identify the best one. He also validated them repeatedly. Finally, even after his algorithm was accepted, he convinced his supervisor there was a flaw in it, reworked it and created an even better algorithm.

Chart 2 Ranking of Key Success Factors by PPO holders



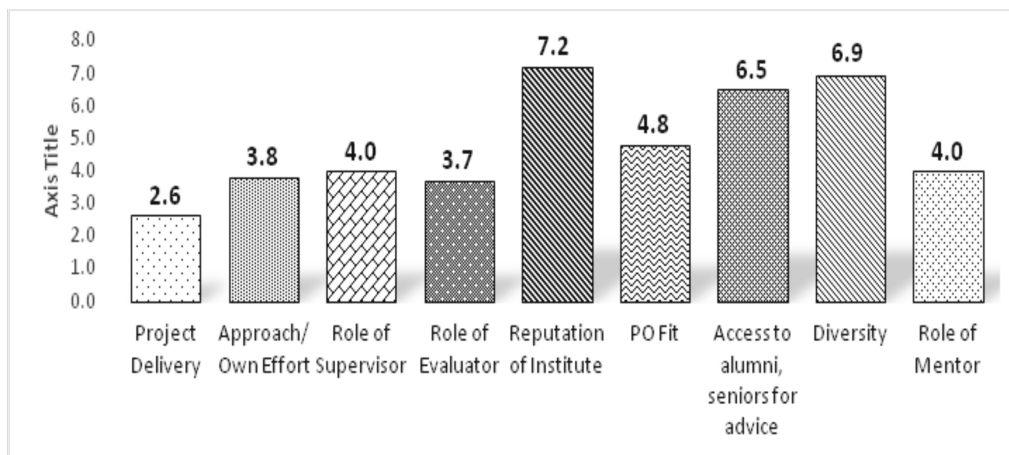
**PPO holders by and large were very proactive and attributed their success to their own delivery, approach and fit over the role of the supervisor, evaluator.**

It can be safely concluded from the above examples that PPO holders by and large were very proactive and attributed their success to their own delivery, ap-

proach and fit over the role of the supervisor, evaluator and so on.

Those without a PPO on the other hand, gave importance to project delivery but placed all other parameters secondary to the role of the supervisor and evaluator. The message conveyed was that only results mattered. Approach and the role of the team (supervisors, evaluator and mentor) were next with almost the same weightage.

**Chart 3 Ranking of Key Success Factor by Non-PPO Holders**



About half of the interns felt that the project was poorly structured. There was either a long period of absence of the supervisor, absence of objective performance measures, use of unfair practices or poorly conceptualized projects. Many of them felt these issues should have been raised with the human resource department but decided against it as they were afraid of speaking up and felt they couldn't handle the situation.

There were some interns who chose to reject their PPO because they did not like the nature of work undertaken. There were also some who had low inclination towards the task itself because they felt that they were not mapped to the domain of their interest at the start of the project. They had no interest in the internship domain to begin with and went on to dislike it even more as they started to work on it. This shows that the organization should act as an enabler to foster talent while interns must be proactive in choosing a domain of their interest rather than

reactively end up in a job they don't like. This message is reflected in the statistics, as non-PPO holders valued organization processes greater than PPO holders.

### **Busting Myths**

*Scheduling:* The interns did not find scheduling to be such a big constraint as lot of them were involved in research projects rather than actual on the job assignments. Interns generally worked with weekly plans because their work required a lot of meetings besides timings were contingent upon availability of the others. Supervisors were flexible with this if they felt more work was allocated than doable. That's not to say interns were allowed to slack off, but rather that the presence of contingencies made deadlines more flexible. The situation was quite different for consulting interns as having worked on full time assignments (doing work of regular employees), they were expected to submit timely

deliverables and made to interact with clients.

*Work Experience:* Work experience attracted mixed response. Five respondents found it irrelevant. Others felt it may possibly help but only in dealing with people. This was largely because most people were working in different domains from their work experience before joining business school. It is important to note that the composition of interns in the business school being studied and other Indian B-Schools is typically dominated by qualified engineers (sometime 85 to 90%). The interns with experience thus typically have technical rather than managerial experience which is rarely of use in their B-School internship. Among exceptions however, some respondents particularly in IT and Finance felt that previous knowledge of their domain of internship (work experience) was useful. As one respondent in the Finance domain put it: an MBA without Finance work experience could do the work just as well, but one with experience would save time, having been more familiar with the concepts. However, these are exceptional cases and did not define the general trend.

*Location:* Only 13% respondents found location of internship as important, saying that being in the head office may help if you need help or advice and lack people to contact or ask for help. It could also impact the frequency and quality of interactions with one's mentor if they are in a different location. However, for most respondents it did not matter. One candidate regretted being at the head office as she felt, it would have been better to

work out of the client office to get better client interface.

*Connecting with Alumni:* Alumni primarily help in direction setting and telling one what's important and what's not. In some organizations some interns got mapped to their alumni. This is very helpful generally, as alums are by and large more friendly and supportive to alumni of their own institute. However, interns felt that the impact of networking with alumni as an influencing decision in the PPO call is overrated. Alumni can act as facilitators to deserving intern but little more than that barring exceptions.

*Supervisor's Personal Perception:* Many respondents felt that their supervisors were not sufficiently impressed; yet either made it or received PPIs. This could be because the supervisor is by nature uncommunicative or otherwise someone else liked their work and pitched for them. It thus appears best to be optimistic and give it a best shot at every stage. Some students who gave up too early on negative criticism, sent wrong/mixed signals of losing interest/hope not knowing their names had already been forwarded for a PPI.

## **Conclusion & Implications**

Internship could be seen to have implications for socialization, selection and training of the interns. This study looks at three important aspects which hold good stead in internship conversion or securing a PPO. In the first element, we looked at organizational processes which act as enablers to create a positive and

productive work experience for interns. In this part, we suggest best practices which are implemented by organizations to ensure that the final selection of intern is optimal, fair and coherent. The focus is on direction setting to ensure role clarity and a positive, helpful environment which is suitably inspiring therein. Organizations having well designed internship program emphasized on regularity of the supervisor, clear communication of expectation, regular monitoring and feedback and transparent evaluation system for trainees.

In the second aspect, we looked at the relative importance of various factors in the final decision. It seeks as a measuring point of the softer aspects of recruitment related decision making, which are not always specified in internship induction programs. Students generally prepare themselves on this front by talking to seniors and alumni in the organization. It sets the context for the final section of the paper by establishing the prevalent norms in MBA internships. It is imperative to mention here that interns who were proactive and assumed more responsibility for making things happen achieved more success at internship conversion.

The final section of the paper looks at the crux at the article, namely, the key success factors to succeed in this domain. Among the most important factors identified were setting the expectations right, business acumen, innovation in solutions, practicability, organization fit, a credible sponsor, communication skills, differentiation, coping with stress, networking and quantum of effort.

### **Limitations & Directions for Future Studies**

The first limitation of the study is lack of participation from all stakeholders. Non-participation of supervisors in the study limits our understanding of key success factors of an internship program in India. Even though the nature of the study required in-depth interaction with the respondent, small sample size remains one of the major limitations of the study. The study has been conducted on a sample drawn from one business school which has limitation for generalization of the findings. Semi-structured schedule was used to gain qualitative insights about the critical factors of an internship program. Use of standardized instruments will provide findings which are reliable and valid.

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