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**THE INFLUENCES OF UNIVERSITY INTERNS' JOB
CHARACTERISTICS, WORK VALUE, AND JOB
PERFORMANCE**

Chun-Fu CHEN

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The Influences of University Interns' Job Characteristics, Work Value, and Job Performance

Chun-Fu CHEN¹

Abstract

In modern leisure and tourism industry, interns have become part of indispensable human resources. In internship, interns' external job characteristics and internal work value are the main factors of their future career selection and development. This study conducted a questionnaire survey on interns of the tourism and leisure department in technological and vocational schools of Taiwan, in order to evaluate the relationship among job characteristics, work value, and job performance in internship from the perspective of interns. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed, there were 445 valid samples, for a valid return rate of 89%. The results suggested that interns' job characteristics have partially significant difference on work value and job performance. Interns' job characteristics and work value have significant and positive correlation on job performance. Based on the findings, this study proposes suggestions and future research directions for academia and business circles.

Keywords: job characteristics, work value, job performance, leisure time

Introduction

In recent years, with the progress of technology and economy, leisure time is increased. Due to the upgraded level of quality of life, people start paying attention to tourism and leisure activities, which results in the vigorous development of tourism and leisure service industries. Currently in Taiwan, tourism and leisure service industries are rapidly growing, thus, tourism and leisure education becomes popular as the demand for quality and content of tourism and leisure increases. As the development of tourism and leisure industries encounter more

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challenges, the demand and management of a professional labor force becomes urgent. In the tourism and leisure industry, the service sector is the most critical, and values the hard power of related knowledge, as well as the soft power of interpersonal interaction and personality traits. Personnel must have a high degree of service enthusiasm, reaction, and passion at work. Hence, as they must be more patient and friendly, in comparison to other industries, the industry is highly labor-intensive and employees' turnover rate is extremely significant.

Schools provide the basic knowledge, theories, and skills of the tourism and leisure industry through courses of technical operations or role playing. Students can only imagine customers' reactions, and in the workplace, customers' characteristics, personalities, and reactions are different. In order to allow students of tourism and leisure industries to understand the actual operations of business circles, schools and business circles assign internships for cooperative education. Students can demonstrate their learning in actual jobs of the tourism and leisure industry. Students are expected to have in-depth learning of related industry courses during the period of study and be prepared for more challenges in the workplace upon graduation.

To allow students to connect theory with practice, tourism and leisure related departments in technological and vocational schools mostly arrange off-campus internships of half year or one year. By internship, students can realize whether they have the intention or interest in jobs of tourism and leisure service industries. Internship is a bridge between classrooms and the workplace, where students can review their skills, interests, and career options in an actual workplace.

Past related research suggested that the main factor refers to the significant gap between perception in reality of the workplace and interns' expectations before entering the workplace. The possible related factors are low salary, low welfare, inadaptability to rotation, poor work environment, lack of interest or challenge at work, overloading work, lack of work guarantee, and supervisors' excess demands or neglect. These factors lower professional commitment and influence their intention to participate in the industry in the future. Therefore, this study probes into the relationship between interns' job characteristics, work value, and job performance during internship, and propose related suggestions for consideration of training industry talent. This is the priority at present for schools and management. This study aims to propose effective principles to retain talent at enterprises and enhance the tourism and leisure market in Taiwan.

In off-campus internships of the tourism and leisure department, it is extremely important for students to perceive the actual experience. Previous research on the relationship between job characteristics, work value, and job performance of students' off-campus internship did not explore tourism and leisure. Thus, this study attempts to explore students' off-campus internship experiences, and treats university students majoring in tourism and leisure in Taiwan as subjects for analysis and validation.

Literature

Job Characteristics

Job characteristics are originated from 4 principles of science management, as proposed by Taylor (1911): (1) job professionalism; (2) job systematization; (3) job standardization; (4) job simplification. Work efficiency is enhanced by job simplification; hence, factors or attributes related to jobs can be called job characteristics. The job characteristic model, as proposed by Hackman and Oldham (1975), is commonly adopted to analyze the basic framework of job characteristics. In other words, when tasks are assigned, completeness of work and a variety of skills for tasks are required. Employees will perceive the importance of a job to an organization. Employees are fully empowered, task autonomy is enhanced, and feedback of task execution is frequently provided. Hence, employees will perceive job significance and responsibility, and will enhance job performance. In addition, in the model, various job characteristics will influence job perception and feelings, which further affect individuals' values, behavior, and attitude. Higher perception will enhance internal motivation and performance. The factors include skill variety, task identity, task significance, task autonomy, and task feedback, which directly or indirectly influence employees' reaction toward jobs and work results.

According to previous theories related to job characteristics (Sims, Keller & Szilagyi, 1976), enhancement of challenges, significance, and interest of jobs for employees are related to employees' satisfaction, and influences the performance of the organization and its employees. The stimulation of work satisfies employees' different degrees of needs. From work experience, employees can recognize the meaning of their work, and their morale and productivity are enhanced. Robbins and Coulter (2003) suggested that managers are interested in encouraging employees at work, thus, managers should carefully design work that reflects the changes of environmental demands, organizational techniques, technology, capacity, and employees' preference, in order to encourage employees to demonstrate their potential. Hence, individuals' psychological states caused by job characteristics will influence their work reaction, including internal work motivation, job performance, job satisfaction, absence, presence, and turnover, which are associated with workers and work results (Turner & Lawrance, 1965). According to literature on job characteristics and interns' needs, upon researcher's observations, this study treats 5 core dimensions, which skill variety, task identity, task significance, task autonomy, and task feedback, as commonly mentioned in previous research, as the content of a study on job characteristics.

Job Value

Values refer to the standards when individuals examine propriety, importance, and social significance of people and things. Based on this standard, individuals have value judgment, where work value is part of the overall values system. Thus, it has all attributes of values. There is a certain relation between work value and behavior, which is the individuals' preference related to work, meaning individuals' work intention and work tendency. It is a persistent belief and standard that will influence individuals' attitude and job satisfaction.

These values support or guide individual career selection, turnover, and job performance (Brown, 2002). In short, work value is a kind of ideal, purpose, and goal; it can be carried out at work, and is even the outcome of work. From the perspective of individuals' job selection, work value is the worker's subjective value judgment of the work, work processes, and work results (Robbins, 2004; Super, 1970). Career development master, Super (1970), suggested that although a person plays various roles throughout an entire life, job is the most important. Hence, people's career development is based on job. Work value forms an internal motivation system and supports or guides individuals' career selection of job orientation. Therefore, work value will influence a person's views and attitudes toward work, and guides work behavior and performance.

Orientation of the objective theory emphasizes that people select their jobs by external objective factors, and different jobs have different characteristics. Besides objective salary and welfare, we should realize that the attraction of the same job to different people can be different, as individuals have difference preferences. Traditionally speaking, psychologists did not agree to specifically define work value; however, they mostly suggest that work value is the basic framework in which individuals prefer different job characteristics. Ginzberg, Ginzberg, Axelrod and Herma (1951) indicated that it is a kind of internal support and current behavior guidance framework. According to job requirement and job satisfaction, this study suggests that work value is job importance and preference for individuals. It means their beliefs and attitude are reflected by their job behavior to accomplish goals. Hence, work value is defined as job conditions or outcome valued by individuals at work, and is the belief and degree of importance or preference of job characteristics to satisfy different levels of needs. Work value guides their behavioral intention. By considering social change and culture, this study probes into the work value of university students during internship.

Job Performance

Performance refers to the enterprises' measurement on the accomplishment of specific projects or actions. Individuals' job performance is the most important research criterion of organizational behavior, and is simply defined as "all kinds of behaviors at work" (Jex, 1998). It is grades, results, value, or achievement obtained from work. In the narrow sense, it is employees' productivity. In the broad sense, job performance is defined as the combination of efforts, skills, and results obtained, thus, it is important for employees and enterprises.

There are various and complicated factors of job performance. For instance, individuals' personality traits, involvement at work, satisfaction with work, organizational culture, and internal and external environment of work will influence their job performance. Tubreand Collins (2000) generalized the measurement of job performance as follows: self-rating, objective measurement, supervisor rating, and colleague rating. In practice, enterprises evaluate employees' job performance by combined methods. Generally speaking, when assessing individuals' performance, they first set performance items and goals according to their jobs. The employees rate their own performance. Supervisors score and examine them according to their performance. By self-rating, employees participate in examination of performance, which enhances individual and organizational development, and is significant criterion.

In addition, job performance allows organizations to realize employees' contributions to organizational objectives to serve as reference for human resource decision making, evaluation of employees' training and development, and base of reward, promotion, and employment. For employees, organizations provide feedback on their past performance. Individuals are clear about the organization and task objectives, but also adjust their career by realizing their advantages and disadvantages (Robbins, 2004). Measurement of job performance aims to allow employees to understand and care about execution of organizational goals and strategies and enhance team work by performance management. Thus, enterprises or organizations can make continuous progress in order to meet terminal goals.

Method

According to literature review, this study infers that university students' job characteristics and work value upon internship influence their job performance. Based on the research purposes, literature review, and generalized outcomes, the research framework is as shown in Figure 1.

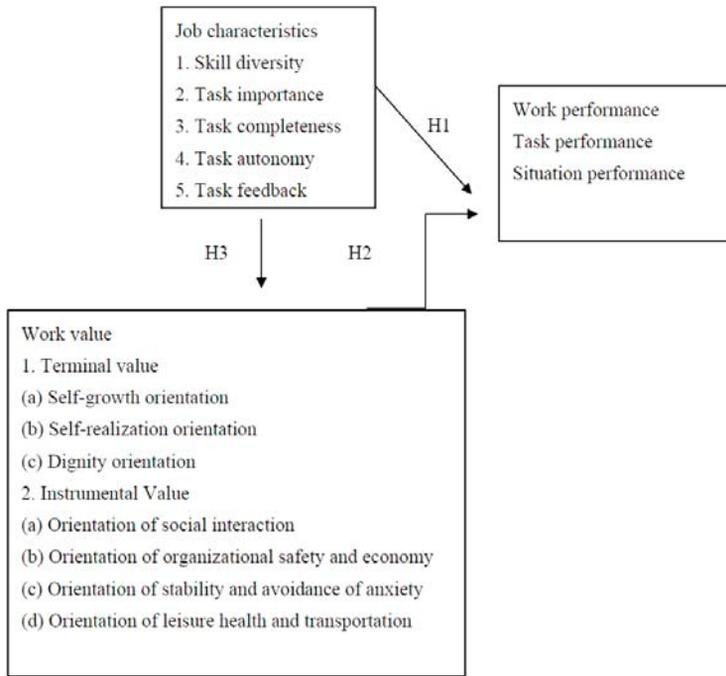


Figure 1. *Research Framework*

Hypotheses

Based on the research framework above, 3 hypotheses are proposed as follows:
 (1) H1: Job characteristics significantly and positively influence job performance;
 (2) H2: Work value significantly and positively influences job performance; (3)
 H3: Work value significantly and positively influences job characteristics.

Measurement Tools

Questionnaire includes basic information, interns’ job characteristics, work value, and job performance. Items are designed according to literature review and research related to interns and works. Item job characteristics is based on five core job characteristics, as generalized by Hackman and Oldham (1975), skill variety, task significance, task identity, task autonomy, and task feedback, to directly probe into interns’ performance in the five items of job characteristics. Item work value is based on the modification and adjustment of research purposes and content, as based on literature review. Work value is categorized into terminal value and work value, with 7 items, including self-growth orientation, self-

realization orientation, dignity orientation, orientation of social interaction, orientation of organizational safety and economy, orientation of stability and avoidance of anxiety, and orientation of leisure health and transportation, to test interns' work value during internship. Finally, job performance is based on the modification of reality, as based on dimensions proposed by Bormanand Motowidlo (1993). Job performance is categorized as task performance and situation performance. The measurement is based on a Likert 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Participants and Procedure

By questionnaire survey, this research scope was university students of tourism and leisure departments in Taiwan. The subjects were four-year college students of departments majoring in tourism and leisure related department's who completed half year or one year off-campus internships in technological and vocational schools of Taiwan. By convenience sampling, this study selected the samples and treated interns in technological and vocational schools as the subjects. From the perspective of students' internship, this study attempted to determine the correlation among job characteristics, work value, and job performance during internship, hence, distributed questionnaires after students completed the internships and returned to school. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed in October 2013, and retrieved 480 samples, for a return rate of 96 %. After coding, there were 445 valid samples, for a valid return rate of 89%.

Statistical Procedure

Data obtained by this study were analyzed using SPSS 21.0 for descriptive statistics and One-way Analysis of Variance. Moreover, regarding research questions, regression analysis was conducted on job characteristics, work value, and job performance, in order to analyze the effects of job characteristics and work value on job performance.

Data Analysis

Sample Analysis

This study analyzed valid questionnaires collected by the Chinese version of SPSS for Windows 21.0. There are 445 valid samples, including 169 males (38%) and 276 females (62%). Table 1 shows the demographic information of our sample.

Table 1. *Analysis of Demographic Information*

	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	169	38
Female	276	62
School Type		
Public	132	30
Private	313	70
Time of internship		
6 months	343	77
One year	102	23
Industry of internship		
Tourism hotel	162	36.4
Leisure hotel	96	21.6
Theme park	36	8
Chain restaurant	78	18
Independent restaurant	60	13
Others	13	3
Salary		
Less than NT\$ 18000	113	25.4
NT\$ 18000-19000	156	35.0
NT\$ 19001-20000	152	34.2
More than NT\$ 20000	24	5.4
Intention to enter related industries after graduation		
Yes	269	60
No	136	31
In consideration	40	9

Reliability Analysis

Reliability refers to the reliability or stability of the scale. When reliability is higher, it means errors will be lower. This study measured internal consistency by Cronbach’s α . When $\alpha > 0.7$, it has high reliability. According to research analysis, all variables are higher than 0.8 which suggests a high degree of reliability.

Difference analysis of job characteristics between work value and job performance

By variance analysis, this study tested the differences of subjects’ job characteristics on work value and job performance.

Difference analysis of job characteristics on work value

By One-way Analysis of Variance, it tests the difference of different “job characteristics” on different dimensions. The result is as shown in Table 2. According to research findings, regarding interns’ work value, terminal value and instrumental value do not have significant difference on different job

characteristics. In other words, they are not different because of interns' different "work value". However, regarding work value, interns of different "task autonomy" are significant on work value ($F=3.40$, $p<0.05$).

Table 2. *Variance analysis of interns of different job characteristics on work value*

Dimensions	Names of factors	Work value		F value	P value
		Terminal value	Instrumental value		
Job characteristics	Skill variety	4.05	4.03	1.11	0.33
	Task significance	3.98	3.95	0.70	0.49
	Task identity	4.07	4.20	0.57	0.57
	Task autonomy	4.04	4.37	3.40	0.04*
	Task feedback	4.17	3.99	1.13	0.32

* $P<0.05$, ** $P<0.01$, *** $P<0.00$

Difference analysis of job characteristics on job performance

By One-way Analysis of Variance, it probes into the differences of different "job characteristics" on job performance. The result is as shown in Table 3. According to findings, interns' task performance and situation performance do not have significant difference on different job characteristics. In other words, they do not differ because of interns' "job performance".

Table 3. *Variance analysis of interns with different job characteristics on job performance*

Dimension	Names of factors	Job performance		F value	p value
		Task performance	Situation performance		
Job characteristics	Skill variety	4.07	3.86	2.80	0.06
	Task significance	4.11	4.07	1.49	0.23
	Task identity	4.08	4.18	0.57	0.57
	Task autonomy	4.06	4.25	3.24	0.32
	Task feedback	4.21	3.89	2.53	0.26

* $P<0.05$, ** $P<0.01$, *** $P<0.00$

Correlation Analysis of Variables

Table 4 shows the mean, standard deviation, and correlation coefficients of the variables. Correlation analysis of the dimensions is as shown below: (1) *Correlation between work value and job characteristics*. According to the table, the dimensions of work value are significantly and positively related to those of job characteristics. Hence, when interns’ work value at work is higher, their job characteristics will be better; (2) *Correlation between work value and job performance*. According to the table, the dimensions of work value are significantly and positively related to those of job performance; hence, when interns obtain higher work value at work, their job performance will be more significant; (3) *Correlation between job characteristics and job performance*. According to the table, the dimensions of job characteristics have significant and positive correlation with those of job performance, which shows that when interns’ job characteristics are better, their job performance will be more significant. Correlation analysis can generally indicate the relationships between the dimensions in this study; however, as the inference result in this study should be tested by other statistical methods, this study adopts regression analysis in order to more precisely validate correlation among the variables.

Table 4. *Correlation coefficients of variables*

	Terminal value	Instrumental Value	Skill variety	Task importance	Task completeness	Task autonomy	Task feedback	Task performance	Situation performance
Terminal value	1								
Instrumental Value	0.08**	1							
Skill variety	0.55**	0.63**	1						
Task significance	0.61**	0.74**	0.79**	1					
Task identity	0.47**	0.67**	0.67**	0.81**	1				
Task autonomy	0.38**	0.54**	0.60**	0.72**	0.88**	1			
Task feedback	0.59**	0.75**	0.75**	0.91**	0.80**	0.80**	1		
Task performance	0.61**	0.73**	0.72**	0.80**	0.70**	0.63**	0.87**	1	
Situation performance	0.50**	0.65**	0.65**	0.78**	0.73**	0.69**	0.87**	0.88**	1
Mean	3.78	3.76	4.10	4.02	4.11	4.18	4.08	4.05	4.12
Standard deviation	0.56	0.54	0.55	0.65	0.61	0.61	0.60	0.57	0.65

Regression Analysis of Variables

By regression analysis, this study tested the relationship intensity between two variables in order to validate the hypotheses of correlation among variables. Relationships among dimensions of interns’ job characteristics, work value, and job performance are shown, as follows.

a) Effect of job characteristics on job performance. The relationship among the dimensions is indicated, as follows and shown in table 5: (1) Skill variety significantly and positively influences task performance of job (β is 0.16 and p values are below 0.01). In other words, when interns’ skills are diverse, their performance upon requirement of firms will be higher; (2) Task significance significantly and positively influences the situation performance of work (β is 0.21 and p values are lower than 0.05). Hence, when interns’ perception of task significance is higher, their situation performance will be more significant; (3) Task identity significantly and positively influences task performance and situation performance of job (β are 0.25 and 0.24; p values are lower than 0.05). In other words, when interns’ task identity is high, their performance upon requirement of firms will be more significant. Moreover, their situation performance will be higher; (4) Task autonomy significantly and positively influences task performance and situation performance of work (β is 0.33, 0.17; p values are lower than 0.05). In other words, when interns have higher task autonomy, their performance upon requirement of firms will be higher. In addition, their situation performance will be more significant; (5) Task feedback significantly and positively influences task performance and situation performance of work (β is 0.98, 0.99; p values are lower than 0.05). In other words, when interns have higher task feedback, their performance upon requirement of firms will be higher. Moreover, their situation performance will be more significant.

Table 5. Regression analysis of job characteristics on job performance

Independent variable: job characteristics	Dependent variable: job performance			
	Task performance		Situation performance	
	β	t value	β	t value
Skill variety	0.16	2.94**	0.02	0.27
Task significance	0.17	1.83	0.21	2.17 *
Task identity	0.25	3.00***	0.24	2.76 **
Task autonomy	0.34	4.44***	0.17	2.12 *
Task feedback	0.98	10.92***	0.99	10.53***
R ²	0.79		0.78	
F value	148.79***		129.93***	

* $P < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.01$, *** $P < 0.00$

b) Effect of work value on job performance. Effects among the dimensions are introduced, as follows and shown in table 6: (1) Terminal value significantly and positively influences task performance of job (β is 0.17 and p values are lower than 0.05). Hence, when interns' perception of self-growth, self-realization, and dignity of job is higher, their performance upon requirement of firms will be higher; (2) Instrumental value significantly and positively influences task performance and situation performance (β are 0.55 and 0.41; p values are lower than 0.000). It means interns have certain value of work purpose, such as social interaction with supervisors or colleagues upon the instrumental value of the complete system within the firms. When their perceived value is higher, their performance upon requirement of firms will be higher.

Table 6. Regression analysis of work value on job performance

Independent variable: work value	Dependent variable: job performance			
	Task performance		Situation performance	
	β	t value	β	t value
Terminal value	0.17	2.53*	0.08	1.08
Instrumental Value	0.61	9.11***	0.59	7.64***
R ²	0.55		0.41	
F value	122.49***		71.49***	

* $P < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.01$, *** $P < 0.00$

c) Effect of work value on job characteristics. Effects among the dimensions are indicated, as follows and shown in table 7: (1) Terminal value significantly and positively influences skill variety and task significance of job characteristics (β are 0.21, 0.18 and 0.38; p values are lower than 0.01). When interns have more diverse knowledge and skills of work, their job performance, examination system, and sense of achievement will be more significant. Therefore, terminal value positively influences job characteristics; (2) Instrumental value significantly and positively influences dimensions of job characteristics (β are 0.49, 0.62, 0.69, 0.55 and 0.67; p values are lower than 0.000). When interns have higher value of work purpose, their job characteristics will be more significant and their identification with firms will be higher.

Table 7. Regression analysis result of work value on job characteristics

		Dependent variable: job characteristics									
Independent variable :	Skill variety		Task significance		Task identity		Task autonomy		Task feedback		
	β	t value	β	t value	β	t value	β	t value	β	t value	
Terminal value	0.21	2.71**	0.18	2.67**	-0.02	-0.28	-0.01	-.12	0.11	1.70	
Instrumental Value	0.49	6.34** *	0.62	9.31** *	0.69	9.27** *	0.55	6.41** *	0.67	9.88** *	
R ²	0.42		0.56		0.45		0.28		0.56		
F value	72.29***		129.61***		82.62***		40.14***		124.77***		

* $P < 0.05$, * * $P < 0.01$, *** $P < 0.00$

Table 8. Empirical result of hypotheses

Hypotheses		Supported/not supported
H1	Job characteristics significantly influence job performance.	Partially supported
H2	Work value significantly influences job performance.	Partially supported
H3	Work value significantly influences job characteristics.	Partially supported

Conclusions

This study probed into job characteristics, work value, and job performance. Based on the results, the conclusions are as follows. Regarding the relationship between work value and job characteristics, according to the results of regression analysis, the dimensions of work value positively influence those of job characteristics, meaning that when interns have work value, they grow and realize themselves through work, have dignity, and even a sense of stability, thus, their job characteristics will be better. Second, regarding the relationship between work value and job performance, according to regression analysis, the dimensions of work value positively influence those of job performance. It shows that when interns have work value, they grow and realize themselves through work, have dignity, and even a sense of stability; therefore, their identification and loyalty to firms will be higher. Thus, job performance is more significant. Finally, regarding the relationship between job characteristics and job performance, according to the results of regression analysis, the dimensions of job characteristics positively influence those of job performance. It means that when interns' skill variety, task significance, task identity, task autonomy, and task feedback of job characteristics are more significant, their job performance will be higher.

Suggestions

According to this study, enterprises should recognize and cultivate interns' work value in order to develop their high degree of loyalty and job performance. When interns are guided to have work value and develop terminal value (self-growth, self-realization, and dignity), and instrumental value (social interaction, organizational security and economy, stability, and avoidance of anxiety), in their work beliefs, they will fully demonstrate work skills. Hence, job performance will be enhanced. Employers of small and medium enterprises can provide better salary, welfare, and opportunity to stay for interns. In a positive cycle, business organizations will be expanded.

According to findings of this study, among the dimensions of job characteristics, "task feedback" influences work value and job performance the most. Therefore, "task feedback" is one of the key factors of job characteristics. Since the scales of small and medium enterprises are not as great as large enterprises, colleagues influence each other and conflict is inevitable. With positive task feedback, they are more likely to accomplish set tasks. Thus, it is suggested that the cultivation of task feedback can be based on emotional exchange and knowledge sharing during interactions with coworkers, rendering the two parties closer. When interns have positive interpersonal relationships in the work environment, they will be more relaxed and devoted at work, they will identify with work values, and their job performance will be more significant.

According to the findings, job characteristics positively influence job performance. It is suggested that when selecting talent, enterprises can quantify job characteristics as the indicators of selecting talent and be the base of educational training. In this study, the subjects highly perceive job characteristics, meaning that interns intend to have higher job performance or praise of supervisors. Moreover, they have high perceptions of task feedback, which means it is important for interns to have positive interactions with others at work.

Firms are associated with welfare systems, work content, and salary of internship, which influences interns' identification with a specialty. Currently, places of internship, as arranged by the department of tourism and leisure, are not limited to hotels. They also include private leisure industries, such as travel agencies and recreational places. However, schools must carefully select partners, and avoid low-quality partners, which might negatively influence interns' career. The questionnaire results revealed that low salary has been one of the key factors of the high talent turnover of the leisure industry, thus, this study suggests that firms should significantly consider this fact to retain a talented labor force. Finally, teachers in department of tourism and leisure should contact business circle more frequently and enhance practical background. When they apply practical experience to instruction, interns can demonstrate the functions of education received in schools.

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