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# Is internship really important while doing an MBA?

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One recurrent debate in management pedagogy has been about whether management courses should focus on training in management skills or limit themselves to sharing knowledge. The proponents of skill development suggest that skills are learnt hands on. They can only be inferred and imbibed through actual experience.

While people supporting the other view believe that knowledge imbibed through classroom teaching and case studies primes the minds of students to understand possible business problems, making them better equipped to handle similar real life situations when they actually encounter them.

The practice of internships as part of the MBA training, allows students to bridge this gap dividing the two schools of thought. In fact, 'skill' is defined as an individual's ability to carry out a task well. And this skill is a combination of an individual's general ability, specific aptitude required to carry out the task, knowledge of the domain and a lot of practice.

The general ability of candidates is tested during the admission process itself and the domain knowledge is imparted through the classroom sessions. The summer internships then become a very useful means to allow students to discover and test their aptitude for certain kinds of tasks, and also practice what they have known theoretically.

## **Gaining 'relevant' work experience**

Most business schools today are focusing on taking people with past work experience. The assumption being that these participants bring with them an innate understanding of workplaces and how work really happens there. However the problem is that 'work experience' in this context doesn't always translate to 'relevant' work experience. Almost 90 per cent of the MBA candidates in Indian Business schools have experience in the Information Technology industry. These individuals aim to branch out and specialise in areas like marketing or finance etc. Their past work experience adds negligible (if any) value to the jobs they seek. Internships help students practically apply what they have learnt in the various courses and gain work experience that will be 'relevant' for their future work roles. Internships therefore play a crucial role in determining the student's professional worthiness.

## **Self- Exploration**

Despite the fact that many students enroll for a MBA programme after working in the industry for a while, most are confused while deciding on their specialization. Self-knowledge is critical to success at work. Internships allow students this space for self-exploration. Interns get a hands on feel of 'real' jobs in their chosen fields of specialization, and this experience comes with no direct responsibility. This makes internships the most conducive time to know what one likes and is good at. Many a times we get students coming back after an internship and saying they are confident that this is 'not' what they want to do! Knowing what one doesn't want, is an equally important aspect of self-exploration too. These subtle elements of an internship experience make them irreplaceable in management training.

### **Network Building**

Finally, an added advantage of working as an intern is the opportunities it provides for interaction with others in the same field of work -- other working professionals, co-interns from different B schools and (if one is lucky) well-known figures in the business world too. Building and nurturing networks is one key skill for any working individual. These contacts built early in one's career remain helpful for us over a lifetime.

Skill and knowledge are inseparable and equally important for making people employable. It is not surprising then that the practice of internships remains such a critical component for any kind of professional training and education.

***(Authored article by Prof Anuradha MV, Organizational Behaviour and Human Resource Management, Great Lakes Institute of Management, Chennai)***

Read online at - <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/education/story/mba-internship/1/1088390.html>