

**UNIVERSITY INTERNSHIPS IN SPAIN: WHAT IS
MISSING FOR ITS STAKEHOLDERS?
PRÁCTICAS DE EMPRESA UNIVERSITARIAS EN ESPAÑA:
¿QUÉ ECHAN DE MENOS LOS PROTAGONISTAS?**

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the performance of the current university internship programs, with a particular focus on the present needs of the main stakeholders: the students and businesses. The study draws on the interpretive perspective of organizational culture (Berger and Luckmann), which stresses the difficulty of integrating subworlds with different codes, practices and habits. The results of a case study on the program run by University of Cadiz are then presented through a qualitative analysis. Otherwise, the conclusions have been compared with those obtained in recent research conducted by Spanish universities (Granada, UNED, Politécnica de Valencia, Politécnica de Madrid, Carlos III and Lleida).

Key words: internship evaluation; graduate employment; university-business cooperation; organizational culture.

Resumen

El propósito de este estudio es abordar el actual desempeño de los programas de prácticas de empresa universitarias, tratando de enfatizar en las actuales necesidades de sus protagonistas: estudiantes y empresas. El trabajo se basa en la perspectiva interpretativa de la cultura organizacional (Berger y Luckmann), que resalta las dificultades que implica la integración de submundos

regidos por diferentes códigos, prácticas y hábitos. Para ello se exponen los resultados de un estudio cualitativo basado en un programa desarrollado en la Universidad de Cádiz. Sus conclusiones han sido, a su vez, contrastadas por las obtenidas en otras investigaciones recientes en universidades españolas (Granada, UNED, Politécnica de Valencia, Politécnica de Madrid, Carlos III y Lleida).

Palabras clave: evaluación de prácticas de empresa; empleo universitario; cooperación universidad-empresa; cultura organizacional.

1. RESEARCH APPROACH

Internship programs for university students were not regulated until 1981 (Spanish Royal Decree 1491/1981) and their presence in Spanish society was consolidated in the 1990s. The first internship programs arrived at a time when the pressure of unemployment and the complexity of university students' paths into their first job were conducive to strengthening their training and adaptation within the labor market. The sphere of intern placements also arose as a result of social and educational change, with a sudden increase in the number of university graduates in the population, a phenomenon that contributes to the normalization of internships as a transitional phase before employment. The OECD indicated in its *Education at a Glance* report (as per the version of the Spanish Ministry of Education in 2012) that 30% the Spanish population aged between 25 and 64 years old were university graduates, a rate that reaches 39% in the case of 25- to 34-year-olds. The Spanish figure reveals our distance from the EU-27 average (40% of the population aged 25 to 64), though it has evolved constantly since the 1990s (the figure was 24% in 1995). However, the same report also underlines the devaluation of our qualifications; in other words, the quantity has not been matched in quality. There has been no miracle.

With the arrival of the new European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in 2010, universities have attempted to respond to the new trends, expanding – formally at least – the sphere of business participation in academic life. Businesses, meanwhile, have entered an era in which they must assume new roles: investing partner, planner and demander of services. The aim is for businesses to go from being merely a peripheral collaborator to become a central part of academic life. This process necessitates a change in attitudes in both institutions so that they enter into a process of cultural assimilation which, in practice, is very complicated. However, though they are two subworlds with different agendas, they share interests (Vallejo Peña, 2010). Business's workforce (students) start training long before they come into contact with the workplace and, at the same time, the modern university cannot design its pro-

grams of study without considering the emerging demands of business. The cultural change is served: Listen to the other party, before planning, acting and converging (*ibid.*). Muñiz and Fonseca-Pedrero (2008: 15) also touched on a convergence of interests when they indicated that those “legitimately involved in the evaluation of the university are also outside of the classroom, namely society and its institutions that subsidize the university (...) through public taxes, regardless of whether they have children at university”.

In this climate, internship programs must contribute to closing the gap between two worlds as different as university and business. It is a challenging goal, because the transition from one to the other is rarely exempt from abruptness. “Contact with the world of work marks a switch from laboratory training to reality” (Martínez 2003: 234). In addition, the evidence provided by the university system for the advisability of these programs is increasingly compelling. In a study conducted by the *Centro de Orientación e Información al Estudiante* (the ‘Student Guidance and Information Center’, COIE), 65% of professors believe that graduates are not adequately prepared to meet the demands of the business world, and the main reason for this is the lack of a practical dimension to training (COIE 1997: 67-68). In other words, running and improving internship programs – with stronger involvement of universities – would help to end the situation of “the dog chasing its tail”. The foundations introduced by the EHEA have also served to remind us that there should be an even greater commitment from all parties to fixing this faulty connection in the education system.

This paper analyzes the results obtained in the internship program of the *Francisco Tomás y Valiente* Center (Algeciras, University of Cadiz) in the period 2002-2006, on the basis of a qualitative design that interprets the evaluation of the experience by the two main groups involved (students and businesses). The main task is to analyze this critical reflection from the two sides on the contribution of the experience both in terms of work, strictly speaking, and life in general. The study is also approached from the perspective of organizational culture: two subsystems (university and business) merge in a thorny process in the first few years (recruitment, training and work placements for new candidates), generating an inevitable culture shock that eases over time. However, both institutions must formulate procedures that facilitate the integration of the two worlds, given the social significance in a society like ours of the insertion into the workplace of young university graduates.

To this end, below we present the most relevant aspects of the theoretical framework, the methodology of the study, the results of the experience and the main conclusions reached.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Previous studies on internships in Spain generally highlight the gulf that exists between the academic system and the needs of businesses. The lack of a genuine climate of cooperation is identified as one of the causes. As Alfonso and Borrego (2009) stress, the reality is that agreements are reached but they do not generate truly mixed workplaces. However, this does not mean that no satisfactory results have been achieved in the last thirty years; in fact, a study recently conducted at the Polytechnic University of Valencia (UPV) by Hervás, Ayats, Desantes and Juliá (2012) indicates that business owners and management value internships very highly, stating that they would sooner employ a candidate who has been an intern in their company than appoint someone more qualified but unknown. This has not gone unnoticed by students, who in a study conducted by the University of Granada highlighted both the need to improve these cooperative programs and the importance of making internships mandatory (García, Fernández, Calero and Luzón, 2011). In short, all of those involved, whether they are business owners, management, university administrators or students, share the perception of internship programs as something essential, and something, therefore, that must be furthered. However, having confirmed the usefulness and purpose of the model, we must deal with the factors that limit its ability to generate added value.

As far as evaluative approaches to the system are concerned, the study published by García Delgado in 2002, *Lo que hemos aprendido después de 20 años de prácticas de empresa en España* ('What we have learned after 20 years of work placements in Spain') examines the structural defects of our internship programs which, from his point of view, can be summarized as follows:

- Placements are poorly planned, with improvisation predominating.
- Supervisors in the businesses indicate that the universities are barely involved in planning and overseeing the internships; they indicate that it is as if the universities consider their job to be done once the placement has been agreed.
- Measures are required so that students arrive at the workplace with a better idea of how to get the most out of the experience. (García Delgado 2002: 8).

As a result of these deficiencies, cooperation between universities and businesses in internships manifests itself as a system that has huge potential for growth but is still immature. Vilanova and Tarruella (2011) highlight the fact that businesses have given their University of Lleida students the highest rating for willingness (81.4%) and ability to integrate (75.7%), but this rating goes

down to 54.3% when asked about their skills and 31.9% in the case of their previous training. The students are even more critical in response to the latter question, with just 16% believing that their previous training is very good. In this regard, professors also expressed pessimism in a previous study. As mentioned in the study approach, 65% of professors believe that graduates are not adequately prepared to meet the demands of the business world, claiming the lack of a practical dimension to their training as the main reason (COIE 1997: 68). The message that these figures send out should be a wake-up call for both institutions, which urgently need to build the networks and procedures required to fill this gap in training.

Equally, the new scenario of coexistence and work taken on by students in the business world involves a degree of culture shock, with only partially shared interests and objectives between them and the members of the organization. Vilanova and Tarruela's study (*op. cit.*) captures the opinions of students who rate the leaders within the business in reverse to their hierarchical position. The workers around them received the best ratings, with middle management receiving slightly lower ratings, and the managers and executives receiving the lowest. This situation reveals that students are affected by the asymmetry of their relationships in the business. The role of the intern is subject to certain dangers in the environment:

One danger is the stereotypes that are entrenched in society – which, like all stereotypes, have some basis in reality – of the intern who is only entrusted with photocopying, data entry, making coffee, etc. and who, ultimately, is used, in the worst sense of the word, as cheap manpower for routine and uninformative tasks. Other clichés, which fortunately are less widespread, could have a much more damaging effect, such as supervisors training the person who will sooner or later take their job. García Delgado (2002: 7-8).

Unfortunately, symptoms of the degradation of the role of intern have been confirmed, though we should be mindful not to over-generalize the phenomenon. In practice, although these programs are intended to reduce distances between two subworlds as different as university and business, the leap from one to the other is unlikely to be free of abruptness.

Contact with the world of work marks a switch from laboratory training to reality. On many occasions it breaks down myths that become entrenched at university in relation to usefulness, job opportunities and the role to be played in the workplace. (Martínez, 2003: 234).

Another aspect addressed in the recent research is the lack of a more active and involved administration by some universities to monitor and tutor the stu-

dents. Likewise, in some organizations the figure of the company supervisor tends to be diluted, leading to the students being left unattended. If to the cultural gulf we add a lack of supervision, the dysfunctions in their coexistence are obvious (Ballesteros, Manzano and Moriano 2001; Martínez Martín 2003). García Delgado (2002:8) also indicates that some of his research findings suggest deliberate use of internships as a way to recruit cheap manpower by some businesses.

Spanish universities and their students concur when it comes to identifying its contribution to graduate employment as the main purpose of internships. In this regard, Martínez Martín, following his evaluation of the Work-Experience Program of the University of Granada, argues:

Graduate employment has thus become one of the primary objectives of internship placements. The vast majority of University of Granada students state this when requesting and undertaking placements. They do in fact constitute a good opportunity in that they improve credentials and social networks, and allow the students to enjoy the advantages provided by internal job markets. (Martínez Martín: 2003:232).

The data on employment obtained to date in various studies conducted in Spain reveals clear signs that internships have become a path into graduate employment, though the results vary widely between studies.

The study conducted at UPV by Hervás et al. (2012) concludes that 17.7% of their students find employment in the company where they were interns. However, the most significant figure presented is on the employability of graduates who were interns (a difference of 9.6% in their favor over those who did not undertake internships, measured 6 months after completing their degrees). In the case of the University of Granada's evaluation of internships (Martínez Martín, 2003), 28.8% of interns go on to have a working relationship with the business after the period of collaboration. A similar figure was obtained in the study by Martínez and Valero (1999: 39), who indicate that 32.7% secured an employment contract. This result is almost identical to the one presented by the internship evaluation conducted at UNED, which reveals that the activity translates into a contract in a third of cases (Ballesteros et al. 2001). In contrast to these studies that demonstrate modest levels of placement, other analyses show a more optimistic outlook, which suggests that there is significant variability in the phenomenon depending on the case being analyzed. This is the case of the Carlos III Foundation of Madrid, where 50% of graduates from its university obtain stable employment in the business where they were interns (Servicio de Orientación y Planificación Profesional 1996: 30). Similarly, the study by Prof. Delgado states that 72% of the sample of graduates analyzed

found employment through the internships (García-Delgado and Pastor, 1999). This disparity in results could be explained by the variety of contexts in local job markets, the networks and contacts made by university centers, and the various possibilities for employment associated with the qualifications offered in each case.

Furthermore, outside of Spain, other studies like those of Smith, Clegg, Lawrence and Todd (2007) in the United Kingdom place the possibility of achieving high academic performance in internship placements over employment aspects. A group of students previously trained in organizational analysis skills demonstrated an excellent ability to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the organization after completing their internship. However, other British studies concluded that there were some deficiencies in the model. Both Callender (2000) and Curtis and Williams (2002) highlight the detrimental effect on academic results that a lack of time devoted to studying can have among students during their internship placement. Moreover, Blasko (2002: 48), in her study conducted in Bristol for the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI), warns of the questionable value of short periods of collaboration, since she only finds a link between undertaking internships and graduate employment in the case of long placements (8 months or more).

Attempting to address these difficulties in the collaborations between university and business, we will adopt the interpretative approach of organizational sociology. This envisages business as an agent with little influence on the socialization of individuals; their role is essentially as a secondary agent. Subjects access organizations at an adult age when their personality has already been formed through prior socialization (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). All of this implies that, within the organization, cultures and countercultures are developed with various adaptations to their patterns (Lucas, 2002). This phenomenon is due to the diversity of group interests (social class, level of education, income, profession and ethnicity), which sometimes leads to conflict. Organizations must therefore see themselves as collections of subcultures that are difficult to manage and integrate (Reygadas, 2002).

Moreover, if a particular subsystem (university) tries to integrate itself into a broader cultural system (organizations and business), it must enter into a process of adaptation that will prove to be harsher the stronger the parent culture. These processes require time to adapt, but also management and monitoring, something that is frequently neglected by organizations of all sizes. Universities have not yet fulfilled their potential in the formation of business networks in their natural environment. These networks can create a great deal

of social value, not just through active management of internships, but also through comprehensive collaborative actions that contribute to closing the gap between the two worlds. Alfonso and Borrego (2009) note that, beyond the internship, we should also integrate professionals into universities' postgraduate courses, create mixed forums and participate in work-linked training programs, which combine training periods with collaborations within businesses.

Work-linked training has a strong tradition beyond our borders with significant development in the United States and Nordic countries. In Spain, notable professional training initiatives have been run, albeit with less impact in universities, though there have been occasional actions, such as the programs implemented by the Autonomous University of Madrid and the University of the Basque Country. The philosophy of this activity consists of integrating candidates into real organizations while strengthening their theoretical-practical training through provision of the required modules, always in keeping with the career offered by business (Sulmont, 2004). The modules or seminars may be taught by the university, the business or both at the same time. External collaborations may also be accommodated. The model has previously been applied in business schools thanks to the participation of companies in their management, and in some cases large corporations even run their own business school with work-linked training programs. This is the case, for instance, of Maersk, who offer a specialized master's degree at their own business school in Copenhagen, training specialists and executives from all over the world.

This said, recognition of the existence of such a culture shock and the lack of progress in their management does not mean that students do not see internships as a positive step for their career prospects. Alfonso and Borrego (2009) argue that students believe internships are the best way into employment, making them more competitive, and that they should begin earlier (first academic years).

3. METHODOLOGY

The basic purpose of the case study is to analyze the results obtained in the 'Francisco Tomás y Valiente' University Center's internship program based on a qualitative design that will facilitate the evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the activity from the point of view of the main stakeholders in the interaction: students and businesses. These evaluations will, in turn, enable us to reflect on the recent performance and contribution of internships in a broad sense (social value), as well as draw comparisons with the results obtained by similar studies in Spain (already mentioned in the theoretical frame-

work). After the required reflection on the results obtained, it will be possible to make some suggestions to guide future management of work placements by the agents involved, avoiding dysfunctions and making them more effective. Given the theoretical foundations that underpin the research (interpretative approach), there will be a particular focus on aspects that reveal the culture shock involved, given the differences in the prevailing idiosyncrasies of the two worlds at present (business and university).

To conduct this analysis, two essential sources of qualitative information have been used. First, the institutional information on the internship program gathered by the center itself, and second, the external fieldwork, carried out in the two main companies that collaborate with the organization: Maersk and Cepsa (see Table 1). As for the sources gathered at the university itself, the study drew on the center's record of activities and the internship reports that both parties complete at the end of each placement. In total, 61 student reports and 41 company reports were analyzed, though these sources were used for purely descriptive purposes. Our analysis centers on external fieldwork (businesses), which made use of materials corresponding to the study entitled *El análisis de la cultura de una multinacional: el caso Maersk* ('Analysis of a multinational's culture: the case of Maersk'; Vallejo Peña, 2007). This includes six discussion groups (one of managers, another of operatives, three by departmental division and another exclusively of interns) and various in-depth interviews with specialists and managers of the multinational Maersk – fourteen in total. This information is also complemented with two interviews with Cepsa managers, which were used for the fourth chapter of the monograph, describing the industrial activity of Campo de Gibraltar (Table 1). The two companies accounted for over 60% of the internships analyzed, hence our particular interest in this fieldwork, despite its limitations in terms of coverage of the target population of the study. These techniques include a discussion group exclusively for interns, while the rest encompass various classifications and categories of management, and technical and operational personnel of the organization who evaluate the company's activity in general (including the internships themselves). Analysis of the data provided by these sources – both internal and external – centered on identifying the predominant discourses and sub-discourses in the testimonies of the stakeholders in their overall evaluation of internship collaborations, attempting, in turn, to compare their views of each problem or circumstance with the perception of the other party: (university *versus* business). For the implementation of the study, Miguel Vallés' qualitative research manual (1997) was considered a basic methodological source.

Table 1. Materials used and fieldwork**Company internships in Campo de Gibraltar (materials used)**

Use of the university's own materials (qualitative analysis)

- 'Francisco Tomás y Valiente' University Center: Institutional records (2002-06)
- Internship reports issued by students (61)
- Internship reports issued by businesses (41)

Fieldwork conducted in companies

The qualitative phase of the study *El análisis de la cultura de una multinacional: el caso Maersk* ('Analysis of the culture of a multinational: the Maersk case', Vallejo Peña, 2007), which includes

- **Discussion groups:**

1. Management
2. Operatives
3. Departmental division A
4. Departmental division B
5. Departmental division C
6. Interns.

Technical details: duration: 80-100 minutes, digital recording, semi-structured script, conducted in the company's own meeting rooms.

- **In-depth interviews** at technical and management level: 14 conducted at Maersk and 2 at Cepsa.

Technical details: duration 60-80 minutes, digital recording, semi-structured script, conducted in the offices or premises of the employees themselves.

The University of Cadiz's internships were evaluated using the triangular evaluation system that is currently widespread in Spanish universities, described below. Each work placement organized is evaluated from three perspectives: the university tutor's, the company supervisor's and the student's. To complete and certify each collaboration, these three stakeholders must give their views and therefore evaluate the action as a whole. The three stakeholders must issue a written report at the end of the period in which each of them evaluates the other two parties and the activity as a whole. Finally, after analyzing and digesting the various evaluations, we generate a summary of results in which we attempt to digest the company's views on the contribution of the students and also what the students think about the recipient companies, and naturally, the opinion of both stakeholders on the program as a whole.

Given the evaluative nature of the research, no hypothesis was put forward. The aims of the study are captured in four basic questions:

- How do the students rate their experience at the company and the program as a whole?
- What do the students want from the partner companies?
- How do the companies view the internship experience?
- What do the companies want from the students and university?

As for the classification of the study from other perspectives of interest, it should be noted that it is a diagnostic, instructive and internal analysis. Diagnostic in the sense that it collects data on the social reality of the activity in order to perform the appropriate evaluations, highlighting strengths and weaknesses; instructive in that it consists of an evaluation whose results may guide the processes to be immediately undertaken by the stakeholders involved; and finally, it is considered internal, given our university background and involvement in the activity under analysis (Trinidad, 2006).

Based on the above, we hope to arrive at a balance that captures the difficulties in the relationship and communication between university and business, as well as the notable achievements and positive aspects of the internship program. Finally, this paper aims to compare its results and conclusions with those obtained by the research conducted by other universities (see theoretical framework), providing a broader overview of the phenomenon.

4. Results

4.1 Some notable figures

Addressing the vital aspect of the employment of the students who undertook internships. According to the figures provided by the human resources department of Maersk España (a company which hosted over 40% of our internships), the placement rate of the interns in the company itself was 17% across the period (2002-2006), taking into account appointments made within six months after the activity. According to figures provided by the university center's records, the rest of the collaborations in private enterprises (50%) involve a somewhat lower placement rate (13%). Moreover, collaborations undertaken in the public sector (which accounts for just under 10% of the total) have not been considered for these measurements, since they are activities with other paths into employment (temporary employment banks, competitive examinations and formal selection processes). The overall student placement rate in the companies where the internships were undertaken stands at around 15% of

the collaborations in private enterprises. It should be noted that, in the coordination of the program, indirect appointments were also detected: sometimes the students find work in subsequent months in other businesses which they approach with references or recommendations from the company where they undertook their internship. However, this is an aspect that is difficult to define and quantify, since on occasions the company mediates actively in the appointment, while in others it merely informs students of their options in the local market. In this regard, it should be noted that the detected climate of cooperation was positive, intense and with some good results in terms of informal career guidance (Vallejo Peña 2010).

4.2 Strengths and weaknesses of the internship program

Besides what the descriptive data on the program shows, the impressions of the two main stakeholders involved should be examined. The results obtained when asking the students about their impressions and experiences relating the companies and programs, and those of the companies in relation to the students and the university, are summarized below.

a) Impressions of the students in relation to the companies and program:

- **The difficulties that supervisors and their companies encounter when it comes to devoting time to students, listening to them and planning their activities.** Planning for the integration of interns in small enterprises is poor, and they often resort to improvisation. In the case of the large participating corporations, internships are coordinated and planned, but in the day-to-day, in a context in which urgent tasks override other important aspects, it is difficult to ensure fluid and daily communication with the intern, or to persuade staff to set aside time to train interns. The role of supervisor is often diluted, or in other words it is shared between several people, or there is one formal official supervisor and another real one. Managers themselves confirm some of these difficulties and limitations:

The problem is that the training takes place during working hours and that creates a number of conflicts. Work has to be set aside for it, and there is also a lack of motivation and awareness among staff and difficulty creating a suitable environment for it. (Middle management, service sector, in personal interview).

An intern girl went to ask for help with something and received a sarcastic comment and it was something that caught the attention. (Intern, service sector, in discussion group).

- The tendency to use internships to cover certain routine and unpopular tasks among employees: filing, photocopying or updating databases. There is also the potential danger that some companies deliberately allow unwanted tasks to accumulate in the hope that the intern students will arrive to “clean up”. This is undoubtedly a factor that adds and will continue to add workload to the university students.
- The summer exodus: Summer is an excellent time to do internships in terms of academic organization (there are no classes), so at this time of year university collaborations in companies intensify. However, rotation for annual leave and the slower pace does not help the company show its best side to the university students.

Yes, in summer the company's filled with people doing courses and internships; we have an agreement with the University of Cadiz, but also with other universities. (Manager, industrial sector, in discussion group).

You have to answer the phone and you find that it's a call from the other side of the world asking you for something... you don't know how to reply. (Intern, service sector, in discussion group).

- Difficulties achieving optimum job placement through internships: Students want a stronger connection between the internship program and the organizations' recruitment. The low placement rate in the participating businesses has not gone unnoticed by them. This circumstance creates some difficulties maintaining a high level of motivation in their daily work.

Clearly, if they give you a task that's always the same and it's also something that's only done here... something you're not going to be able make use of if you don't stay here, then you're demotivated and you begin to fade. (Intern, service sector, in discussion group).

b) Impressions of the company in relation to the students and their university:

- Poor language skills (valued highly in the local job market): Companies believe that students lose potential in terms of job placement, and are unable to take on certain roles or tasks that require these skills. Though it is a fairly widespread deficiency, it is even more acute in this case as it is a border region: international business and in particular relations with Gibraltar and Morocco (priority English and French).

Languages are what matters here. It's all very basic and I learned the programs here. Everything like procedures and filing is learned on the job, what's missing is that, English. (Technical employee, service sector, in discussion group).

- The collaborations have short working hours, which do not always suit the real needs of the company (Monday to Friday, 9 am to 2 pm, or atypically afternoon/evening shifts. No more than 25 hours a week are permitted under the regulations. Some companies are unhappy that they are not able to regulate working hours themselves and that the intern students must have different hours to ordinary employees. The organizations explain the difficulties in adapting the students to deadline- and target-driven professional situations. Likewise, the fact that not all collaborators have the same hours leads to a lack of coordination and extra difficulties.
- The need for excessive supervision in some tasks, due to the gaps in knowledge and skills of some students. A common complaint in companies is that students no longer write as well as they used to. The moment the supervisors have to devote “too much” time to polishing the work of the intern students, they cease to perceive the collaboration as productive. The culture shock caused by the different nature of the activity of the agents (university and business) is added to another factor that widens the distance: the generational gap. In many cases the company describes the collaboration as a zero-sum game.

Here, to run operations, you can't be paternalistic. I can't waste my time explaining a job; I know how it happens and why it happens, and it's not the time to explain it. I'm interrupting a transmitter. The key here is to produce, there's no time to paraphrase. (Technical employee in service-sector company, in personal interview).

- Difficulty posed by finding students trained in the knowledge and skills that the company needs to meet urgent requirements. By linking the rank of university student to the term “qualified”, there are high expectations in the companies that, sometimes, are disappointed. They explain the difficulty of fulfilling their demand for internships, since they cannot plan them in the way required by candidates for the job market.
- The company as a moving train: The perception of the dynamics of the business as a subworld that continually tries to respond to its environment and is often unprepared to train and integrate interns properly. A variety of facets of the program are affected by these impressions, the effect on recruitment being the most significant. A large proportion of students still have too many credits left to complete before they complete their degrees and this has been a hindrance to earning a contract at moments of high demand (the company prefers a particular graduate, but is not prepared to wait).

We have a great ability to improvise. When there's a new program we send a delegation of employees who imbue themselves in the course for a week, then we set up shifts to cover 24 hours in which they are shared out in order to train the rest. So they travel to the course with a great deal of responsibility (...), it's just that we don't have two workforces. (Manager, service-sector company, in discussion group).

Here, when they change a program, they give you a manual and leave you to your own devices; when they give you a new one you might have three hours to figure out how it all works. No one explains anything to you. (Technical employee, service sector, in discussion group).

As for the favorable aspects perceived by those involved, the most frequently mentioned by the companies and students are as follows. Among the companies, there is a widespread impression that the program is a good way to meet new candidates for potential positions at a reasonable cost and without resorting to a more binding employment relationship. It is also believed to be a good tool to meet periods of strong demand for personnel. For the students, the program is an opportunity to have a "first experience of work", it facilitates learning and experiences that are beyond the reach of the classrooms, enables them to build a *résumé* – at least it's no longer empty – and make some contacts that can guide them on their prospects in the job market. The students highlighted this fact due to the insecurity involved in going out in search of job opportunities with no experience behind them.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings obtained after analyzing the selected case at the University of Cadiz lead us to share various impressions with those obtained in the collated studies referred to above. There is a shared impression that the culture of internships in businesses is still poor (as underlined by studies like those of Ballesteros et al. (2001), García-Delgado (2002), and Martínez (2003). This circumstance is justified in part by the short period of time since the introduction of the first programs (25 years ago), though we must assume that it is also a result of insubstantial and insufficiently interventionist management by universities and in many cases the businesses. As a result, there is still a strong tendency to include the students with the rest of the workers with a lack of awareness that the aim is to foster a means of collaboration beyond labor relations. Furthermore, this does not happen only in SMEs; symptoms are also found – albeit to a lesser extent – in large corporations. This leads to a large number of statements from students alluding to undertaking tasks unrelated to their academic background (which is understandable), or even unrelated

to their preliminary work plan (less understandable). However, the results of these studies indicate that this does not mean that the “students waste their time”, because, in short, all of these “off-script” aspects enable them to gain a realistic experience of the world of work, where there is a big gap between theory and practice, learning methods that have received little stimulation before then (participant observation) and acquiring knowledge and social skills that can only be gained through first-hand experience. These are the reasons for the apparent contradiction that occurs in students who, in repeated reports, criticize the pointlessness of the tasks assigned to them, before underlining the importance and usefulness of company internships, recommending them to their peers.

The areas for improvement of the internship programs suggested by the analysis include their contribution to job placement, frequently highlighted by students. This need is evident at the *Francisco Tomás y Valiente* center, with a placement rate in the company where the internship was undertaken of 15%, a similar situation to the one evident in the study conducted by Hervás et al. (2012) for UPV, with 17.7%. These figures are by no means widespread across the country (the Carlos III University of Madrid obtained 50% in 1999, for instance). However, the findings of the studies analyzed all downplay the importance of quantitative aspects and emphasize the importance of quality, seeking suitably structured activities that are meaningful for students in the medium term. Above all, the aim is for internships, within each curriculum, to be a differentiating factor and driver that is linked to other training and/or employment activities in the future.

Research conducted in the same context in the United Kingdom suggests that the academic potential of this experience is not being harnessed, as shown by the program presented by Smith et al. (2007) after previously preparing their students to analyze their organizations (just as one example). However, in respect of the barriers observed in the research conducted by Callender (2000) or Curtis and Williams, no parallels were found in the studies reviewed in Spain (including the one presented in this article). While in the United Kingdom it has repeatedly been observed that students struggle to balance academic studies with their activities in the business, this problem does not manifest itself among our students. In the absence of evidence we can speculate on the possible causes: It is probably due to the fact that our internship periods are short, they take place in the summer months and, furthermore, our students tend to prepare for their examinations at short notice. These are potential hypotheses to verify in later studies.

The results suggest that strengthening the cultural facet will be vital in the development of future programs. The aim is to nurture a cooperative cul-

ture between universities and businesses, recognizing their interdependence and how they can be mutually beneficial. This cooperation must take place both within the sphere of company internships and from a wider perspective (seminars, exhibitions, research contracts, bilateral projects, among others). This new approach will prevent centers organizing internships with businesses that they are unfamiliar with and which provide little instruction in their day-to-day work, leading to disappointment for the interns. Within these activities we want to stress the need to promote work-linked training actions, both for their value in terms of job placement and for their results. There is little history of these programs in Spain, despite the tradition that exists in the United States and Nordic countries.

All in all, in the current internship program landscape in Spain, the focus is on quality, as anticipated (García Delgado, 2002). The next step, in our view, is a cultural change. The mission of the universities themselves will be essential, since they must devise strategies to cultivate the various methods of collaboration (research, intervention, training, etc), raising awareness among all kinds of businesses, which, necessarily, will be a part of future academic life. In turn, the awareness of the universities themselves must be raised so that they develop a more flexible and open approach. Universities will have to consider a change of direction in their students' language learning, as well as imbue them, in the classroom, with the skills that are currently in demand in businesses, and equip them to work more efficiently as part of a team.

Returning to the interpretive approach of the organizational culture (Berger and Luckmann, 1967), when a subsystem is intended to be integrated within a broader system, the inevitable culture shock must be assumed primarily by the minority group (the university in the case of internships). In other words, without wishing to neglect the responsibilities of businesses, the university must accept its role as a foreign body and lead the way in order to close the gap. Mutual understanding between the two parties, it should be noted, is merely an additional requirement for a business, whose function is production; for the university, however, it is a core function (the training and employment of their students), making it the primary stakeholder. Thus, internship programs – the standard-bearer of university-business relations in the last 20 years – will be an ever greater focus of attention in the coming decades. It is time to learn from previous experiences and apply the results of our evaluations to new planning. In the new age – in all certainty – the pursuit of quality through stronger communication between the two organizations and intensive coordination will be crucial, and in turn this will translate into real and effective working groups. The future of university-business collaborations requires a

change of culture and mentality on both sides. They are two historical social institutions accustomed to existing at a distance from each other and, at the same time, with the perpetual obligation to understand each other.

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