

Investigating Internship Onboarding in Hospitality Establishments: Impact on Organisational Attractiveness

Alison Donnelly, Glion Institute of Higher Education, Bulle, Switzerland

Abstract

The purpose of this quantitative study is to examine how the onboarding practices of students' internship organisations influence their willingness to seek future employment with the organisation or recommend it as a place to work.

Five years on from the COVID-19 pandemic, the hospitality industry remains plagued by a significant talent shortage. One way to address the talent shortage is through student internships, which have long played a key role in hospitality education programs (Collins and Pearlmann, 2023). Smith and Green (2021) found that organisations invested in internships as a way to build a talent pipeline for future full-time roles. From a student perspective, internships provide them with a direct and realistic view of what it is like to work in a particular organization, which in turn may influence organisational attractiveness (Sekiguchi et al., 2022). Consequently, creating quality internship experiences is essential to an organisation's talent acquisition strategy, both directly and indirectly. As interns may be more willing to join the organisation after graduation (Neelam et al., 2018) and/or provide positive word-of-mouth to others seeking employment (Breitsohl and Ruhle, 2016), this is a crucial aspect. As socialisation of newcomers shapes their initial experiences (Neelam et al., 2018), onboarding takes on particular significance (Klein et al., 2015). Studies have shown that onboarding impacts factors such as commitment, engagement, and retention (Pico et al., 2024). The research problem of this study is that, despite the well-documented role of onboarding in enhancing organisational outcomes, little is known about how internship-specific onboarding practices influence interns' perceptions of organisational attractiveness and their willingness to seek future employment or recommend the organisation to other job seekers.

#Keywords

Hospitality, Internship, Onboarding, Organisational Attractiveness, Word-of-Mouth.

doi:10.2440/018-0001

This study addresses a key literature gap by shifting the focus from general internship experiences and satisfaction (Mensah et al., 2023) to the specific impact of onboarding on newcomer perceptions of the organisation (Díaz-Muñoz and Andrés-Reina, 2024), and in examining temporary employment relationships, which are crucial yet understudied (Kupczyk and Kubicka, 2018). By applying Klein and Heuser's (2008) Inform-Welcome-Guide (IWG) onboarding framework and analysing intern perceptions, this study aims to identify which onboarding practices have the most substantial impact on organisational attractiveness and word-of-mouth recommendations.

This study employs a quantitative research approach to examine the relationship between internship onboarding practices, interns' willingness to seek future employment with the organisation, and their likelihood to recommend the organisation through word-of-mouth. A survey-based design is used to collect standardised responses, enabling statistical analysis. Convenience and snowball sampling are employed, where final-year undergraduate students at several Swiss hospitality schools who have completed a mandatory internship will receive the survey questionnaire. Data will be collected through an electronic survey, incorporating validated scales from existing litera-

ture, including Klein et al.'s (2015) Inform-Welcome-Guide (IWG) categories for onboarding practices, Highhouse et al.'s (2003) organisational attractiveness measure, and Breitsohl and Ruhle's (2016) employee word-of-mouth scale. The study will utilise correlational analysis to examine the relationships between onboarding practices, interns' willingness to seek future employment with the organisation, and their likelihood to recommend the organisation to others. This analytical method is chosen for its ability to identify statistical associations between variables, providing insights into which onboarding practices are most strongly linked to interns' perceptions and experiences. By adopting correlational analysis, this study provides meaningful findings that can inform both academic research and industry practices in hospitality talent acquisition.

This research makes an original theoretical contribution by extending onboarding theory to the context of temporary employment relationships, specifically internships. While onboarding research has primarily focused on full-time employees (e.g., Klein et al., 2015), this study explores how short-term onboarding experiences shape long-term organisational perceptions and employer branding in the hospitality sector. It also extends the literature examining relationships between onboarding practices and newcomers' perceptions of the company itself, a research avenue which has been underexplored to date (Díaz-Muñoz and Andrés-Reina, 2024). The study also adds to the quantitative research on onboarding as previous studies have focused more on qualitative research methods (Pinco et al., 2024). By integrating internship onboarding with measurement of organisational attractiveness (Highhouse et al., 2003), this study develops a new perspective on how structured onboarding can function as an early-stage employer branding mechanism, influencing interns' career decisions and industry reputation. Given the limited resources organisations may have to invest in internship onboarding, examining the perceptions of students in relation to specific onboarding practices and organizational attractiveness will allow HR representatives to focus their efforts more effectively on practices which contribute to students' willingness to return after graduation. For higher education establishments, a deeper understanding of students' perceptions of their onboarding process will help strengthen partnerships with industry in designing a well-structured internship program that meets the needs of both students and hospitality establishments.

References

- Breitsohl, H. and Ruhle, S.A. (2016), "The end is the beginning – the role of residual affective commitment in former interns' intention to return and word-of-mouth", *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 25 No. 6, pp. 833-848.
- Collins, M.D. and Pearlman, D.M. (2023), "Quality internships in the hospitality industry: A way to help address the labor shortage", *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality and Tourism*, Vol. 22 No. 4, pp. 562-585.
- Díaz-Muñoz, R. and Andrés-Reina, M.P. (2024), "Onboarding: Key to perception of the company as a great place to work", *Revista Electrónica De Comunicaciones Y Trabajos De ASEPUMA*, Vol. 25 No. 1, pp. 21-36.
- Highhouse, S., Lievens, F. and Sinar, E.F. (2003), "Measuring attraction to organizations", *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, Vol. 63 No. 6, pp.986-1001.

Klein, H.J. and Heuser, A.E. (2008), "The learning of socialization content: A framework for researching orientating practices", Martocchio, J.J. (ed.), *Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management*

(*Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management*, Vol. 27), Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Leeds, pp. 279-336.

Klein, H.J., Polin, B. and Sutton, K.L. (2015), "Specific onboarding practices for the socialization of new employees", *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, Vol. 23 No. 3, pp. 263-283.

Kupczyk, T. and Kubicka, J. (2018), "Temporary employees' assessment of onboarding", *Management Sciences*, Vol. 23 No. 4, pp. 35-41.

Mensah, C., Azila-Gbette, E.M. and Wireko-Gyebi, S. (2023), "Mapping Hospitality and Tourism Internship Research: A Bibliometric and Integrative review", *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, Vol. 36 No. 2, pp. 132-164.

Neelam, N., Bhattacharya, S., Kejriwal, V., Bhardwaj, V., Goyal, A., Saxena, A., Dhawan, D., Vaddi, A. and Choudaha, G. (2018), "Internship in a business school: expectation versus experience", *Higher Education Skills and Work-based Learning*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 92-106.

Pinco, O., Salanta, I.I., Beleiu, I.N. and Crisan, E.L. (2024), "The onboarding process: a review", *Vilakshan - XIMB Journal of Management*, [Preprint], available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/XJM-01-2024-0008>. (accessed 3 March 2025).

Sekiguchi, T., Mitate, Y. and Yang, Y. (2022), "Internship experience and organizational attractiveness: A realistic job fit perspective", *Journal of Career Development*, Vol. 50 No. 2, pp. 353-371.

Smith, K.N. and Green, D.K. (2021), "Employer internship recruiting on college campuses: 'the right pipeline for our funnel'", *Journal of Education and Work*, Vol. 34 No. 4, pp. 572-589.

Declarations

Author Contact Information

Correspondence regarding this article should be directed to A. Donnelly at alison.donnelly@student.eim.education.

Conflict of (Competing) Interest

The author declares that he has no (competing) financial or non-financial interests related to this study.

Funding

The author self-funded the research, and no external funding was obtained for its completion.

Author Contributions (CRediT taxonomy):

Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review & Editing: Alison Donnelly.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge Prof. Dr. Michael Neubert's (EIM) support in conceptualizing and proofreading this paper.

Data Availability and Supplementary Material

All data generated and analyzed during this study and the supplementary material are available upon reasonable request.

Prior Publication

The author confirms that this research was presented at the 18th Annual EMRBI Conference (September 10th-12th, 2025, in Porto, Portugal) under the title "Exploring New Horizons in Business and Management."

Ethics Statement

This study complies with the ethical guidelines of the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and adheres to the GDPR requirements for data protection. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of EIM, and informed consent was secured from all participants.

Responsible AI Ethics Statement

This study used artificial intelligence (AI) tools to support tasks such as identifying relevant literature, analyzing datasets, and editing textual content. These tools were employed solely to enhance efficiency, and their outputs were critically reviewed to ensure alignment with research objectives. The use of AI adheres to ethical principles outlined in the EU AI Act, the OECD AI Principles, and the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, emphasizing transparency, fairness, and accountability. The authors made all final decisions and retain full responsibility for the integrity, rigor, and conclusions of this research.

Copyright and Licensing Information

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0). This license permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.