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Workplace Learning

ASEM LLL Hub

Supporting Connectivity in Cross-border Vocational Education: the Case of Business Internship Advisors



Connectivity and Cross-border Learning

The combination of academic and workplace/work-based education is the (!)crucial challenge of all forms of vocational competence development, either at the secondary level (as in vocational education in a dual mode or in full-time vocational schools) or in higher education (professionalization in different fields as Medical Science, Law, Business Administration, Pedagogy, ...)

A lot of theoretical work has been and is currently done in this field. It is also described by the term ‚connectivity‘ (Tynjälä 2009) or with metaphors as ‚crossing borders/boundaries‘.

Common issues in this discourse are the search for relevant concepts explaining the processes of learning in cross-border-arrangements and getting a clearer view on key factors for quality assurance (on a learning, teaching or management level).

In this context also workplace guides/facilitators seem to get more attention in research. (see f.e. Berger & D’Ascoli 2012, Billett 2004, CEDEFOP 2011, Illeris 2011, Ostendorf 2012).



Description of the research project

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Business internships are one possible way of organizing a linkage between the world of education and the world of work.

In business internships students can immerse in a world of work. Internships can be interpreted as a ‚legitimate peripheral participation‘ in a community of practice in the sense of Lave & Wenger (1991).

Higher full-time business related vocational schools often use ‚internships‘ to offer practical learning spaces for their students (often besides simulated arrangements like training firms) with the hope of enhancing the integration of different kinds of knowledge.

Our particular focus of research was on business internship advisors of such a higher business oriented vocational school in Munich/Germany.



Description of the empirical field

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The focussed type of school (Fachoberschule for Business and Administration) enhances the development of vocational competencies to start afterwards a vocational education in the German dual system (particularly in ambitious vocations) or to continue learning in applied universities/universities (A-level exams).

To combine theoretical and practical learning students take a business internship with a duration of about 18 weeks during the first year. So every year the school organizes about 170-200 internships in Munich and surroundings.
(ca. 350-400 students in a job sharing model, 15 classes parallel).

Our problem: how to identify the real internship advisors (and not the formal operating people)?

We got a lot of help from the school because teachers have a network of contact persons in the companies which are directly involved in the guidance of interns. We were allowed to use this network for our research. The school also supported our research by sending a introductory letter to the target group.

We got 115 email addresses for our online questionnaire, return rate = 60 = 52 %

The questionnaire was online in September 2011.



Research intentions

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We wanted to gain more detailed knowledge particularly on:

- the kind of qualification business internship advisors have or would like to have
- their positions and functions in the companies and in internship advisory
business internship advisors' interpretation of their roles, their motivation and expectations
- their perspective on the usage of know how learned at school in internship workplaces.

The questionnaire encompasses only closed questions using ordinal measurement scales. It was written in German.



Selected findings: Qualifications and position

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About 70 % of the IA have managerial responsibilities, 25 % of them for at least 10 employees.

31 % hold a position as a skilled worker

29.3 % hold a position in the middle management

39.7 % hold a position in the higher management

That was a surprise for us. We doubted whether we got really the advising persons or only the ‚officials‘ after all.

But other questions showed that these persons are really deeply involved into business internship advisory.

For example: for about 86 % it is important to develop mutual trust with the interns.

Internship advisory seems also to be up to the bosses (about 40 % in higher management)!

Internship advisory is mostly voluntarily (about 88 %).



Selected findings: Qualifications and position

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Most of the internships have been offered by service companies (50 %), followed by finance institutions (15 %), trade companies (11.7 %), public administration (5 %), production (1.7 %) and others.

About 42 % of the IA hold a formal qualification (trainer licence for vocational education in the German dual system called “Ausbildereignungsprüfung”).

But about 44 % think that internship advisory needs no special additional qualification. 28 % think that it is important to have one.

Important or very important factors to do a good job as an IA are:

Experience in the job (70 %)

Pedagogical sensibility (81 %)

Explanatory skills (97 %)

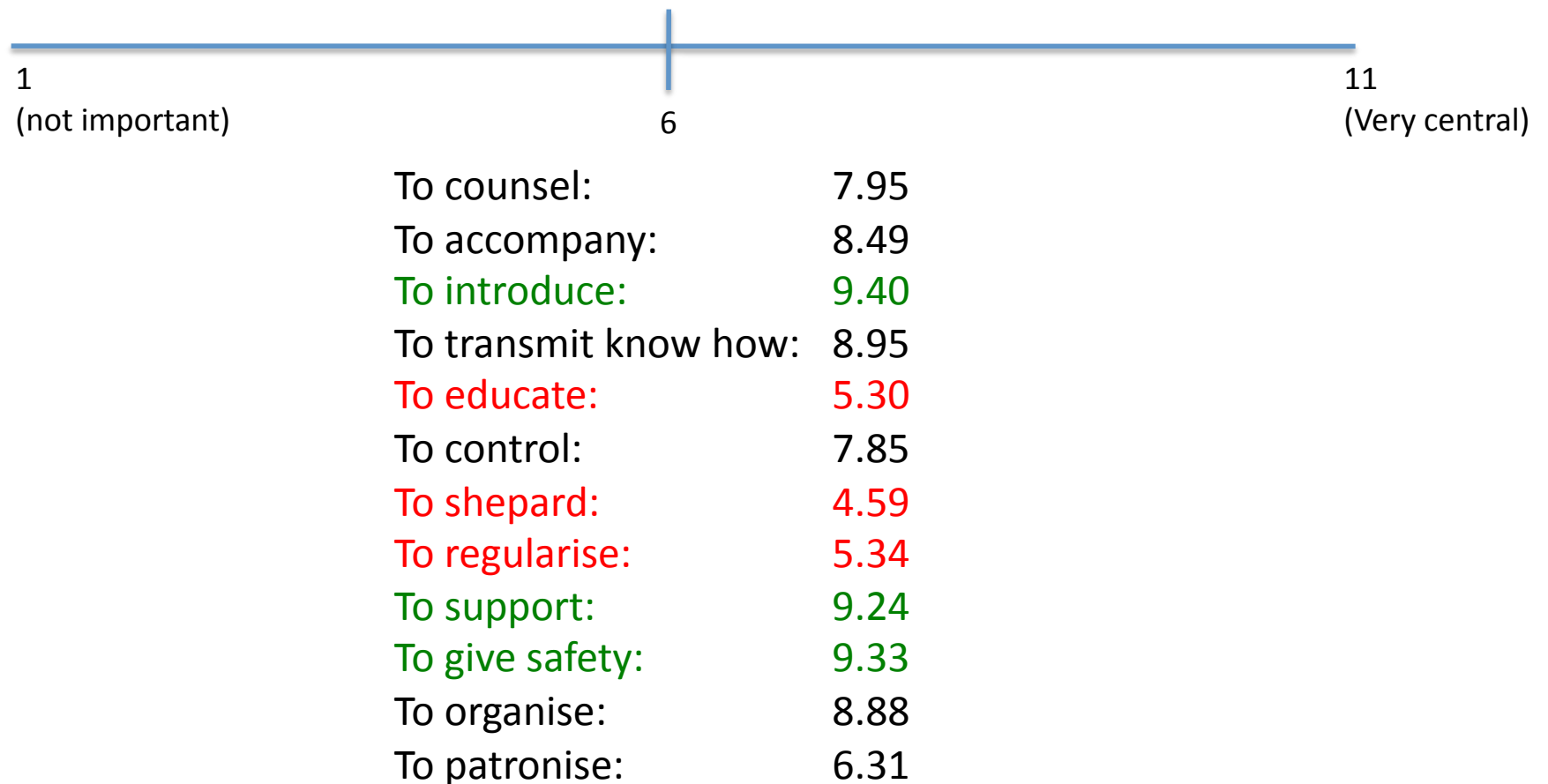
Overview on the company as a whole (90 %)

An appreciating attitude towards the intern (93 %)

Ability to integrate the intern in the social community (84 %)



The most important tasks of IA (average):





Selected findings: role interpretation

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77 % of the IA see themselves as an agent/bridge head between school and company.

95% found it important to be a good role model for the interns.

For 88 % counselling tasks are integral part of the task profile of an IA.

They have fun to cooperate with teenagers/young adults (90 %).

About 50 % see the internship advisory as an additional work load for themselves,
32 % do not so.

47 % agreed with the item „Interns credit myself from my daily work, because they take over tasks.“

Internship advisory is no matter of prestige within the company.



Concerning the expectations of IA on the interns' knowledge:

79 % think that interns should bring in their in school-based knowledge.

The IA have been asked to mark up to three of the following characteristics of interns central for a successful internship:

absolute frequency numbers (selected as central)

Accuracy	40
Manners	46
Precision	42
Specialized Knowledge	3
Concentrativeness	38



Item: Interns get prepared in school to the tasks which have to be fulfilled during the internship.

Do not agree: 43.48

Agree: 26.09

Undecided: 30.43

Item: Specialized knowledge learned at school is central for the integration of the intern into the company's procedures.

Do not agree: 36.20

Agree: 27.60

Undecided: 36.20



Discussion

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IA seem to be central for a peripheral legitimate participation in a community of practice.

They interpret their tasks intensified towards 'introduction', 'support' and 'giving safety' for the newcomer.

Knowledge transfer between the world of school and the world of work has not much importance for IA. That underlines theoretical conceptualizations which are very sceptical concerning the transfer phenomenon (like Lave & Wenger or Eraut).

Explanatory skills seem to be a critical point of internship advisors and may also be so for other (also informal) workplace educators.

Internship advisory seems to be mainly a task for higher qualified employees.

Internship advisory in the focussed case is influenced by the 'vocational training system'. An indicator is that 42 % of the IA hold a certificate to be a vocational trainer in Germany (Ausbildereignungsprüfung). So internship advisory has to be interpreted against the specific cultural background.



Literature

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Thank you for your attention !