

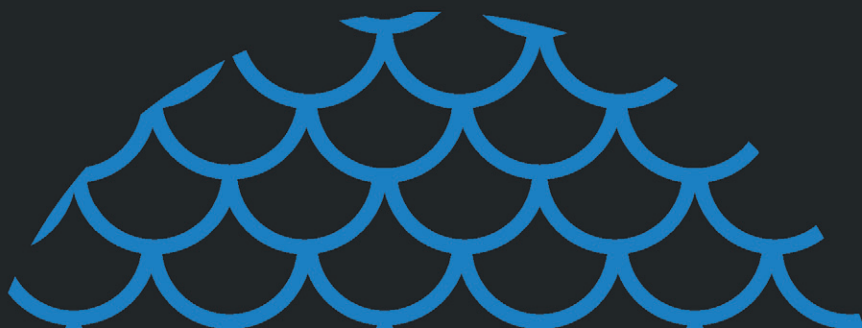


EMERALD POINTS

# CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERGRADUATE INTERNSHIPS

A Toolkit for Empowering the  
Next Generation

**DAVIDE DE GENNARO**  
**MARCO MARINO**



CROSS-CULTURAL  
UNDERGRADUATE INTERNSHIPS

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A Toolkit for Empowering the Next  
Generation

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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## EDITORS' NOTE

The editors would like to specify that this book is organized into three sections, all of which consist of chapters and boxes. Concerning the sections, the first one is merely theoretical, the second deals with a case study, and the third offers a toolkit based on the presented theory and case study. Concerning the chapters, each one offers a final, in-depth box on the topic, written by an author who is (in almost all cases) different from the author of the chapter. The box, therefore, complements and integrates the discussion of the chapter.

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# PREFACE: A LOOK FORWARD TO THE FUTURE OF INTERNATIONALIZATION

As is well-documented in many international business texts, the expansion of global business in the last two decades was unprecedented. Trillions of dollars were exchanged every day; more than half a million people were in the air at any given moment; and the globe was covered with millions of miles of fiber optic cable that gave businesses to access new markets, new talent pools, and new partnerships. However, in recent years, much of that progress came to a halt with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. In essence, the world ground to a halt. Even prior to the pandemic, the geopolitical forces associated with nationalism had taken root, and the world community seemed to shy away into their respective corners.

Because I travel around the world so much on business with the institute, I have been asked the same questions many times over: “Given the receding tide of globalism, is it worthwhile to send students abroad to gain practical experience? Are international experiences worth the effort?” Without hesitation, my answer is always “yes.” There are many reasons for this positive answer, but I will elaborate on a few key elements that shape my attitude.

First, professional life is difficult due to the influence of VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) environments. These VUCA environments require high levels of self-regulation and grit for successful mission completion. Students who gain experience abroad must continuously adapt to local cultural norms and expectations. While students can prepare for these experiences, culture cannot be learned from a book. They must jump into the deep end of the pool and swim. This real-world experience requires a tremendous amount of self-regulation in terms of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral control necessary to navigate a new culture. Self-regulation is often described metaphorically as a muscle. The more self-regulation is used, the stronger the muscle becomes. Thus, students who learn from overseas experiences come back home stronger and better able to contribute in VUCA environments.

Second, experiential learning is far superior to formal learning in the acquisition of complex skills. In executive development, coaches have long

relied on McCall's 10-20-70 model of learning: 10% of learning should occur in formal settings, 20% through relationship-based learning such as mentoring, and 70% through experiential learning. Of all the executive development methods commonly employed, perhaps the most demanding and most impactful is the international "stretch" assignment. Both long-term and short-term overseas assignments are viewed as a way to expose high potentials to different business units and give them a chance to lead an organization far away from the friendly confines of home. Important skills linked to international job assignments include building a professional team, practicing influence skills across cultures, and managing competing agendas from local and global stakeholders. This sounds like the perfect internship to me.

Third, cross-cultural skills are simply good people skills, and, as such, they will broadly generalize to domestic settings. When working abroad, one of the first skills one must develop is listening. This skill may be necessary due to differing accents or a differing pace of speech. However, I find my focus is greatly increased in international settings, as I am listening not just to what is said but to *how* it is said, while observing who is (and is not) in the room and the nonverbal behavior of the speaker (and audience). In these settings, listening is conducted at a whole different level, and the skills developed as a result will continue to benefit the listener no matter where they are working. The same is true for other cross-cultural skills such as perspective taking and withholding judgment. While they help abroad, they help at home too.

Fourth, cultural diversity is not the only kind of diversity students will face. The modern workplace is incredibly diverse. We are constantly surrounded by people who are different from ourselves. These differences may fall into the realm of surface diversity (e.g., age, sex, race, etc.), but we also must work across professional lines. Engineers must talk to marketing people, and executives must talk to managers. In some cases, such conversations may be more difficult than those between people in Shanghai and Sao Paulo. Students who can only speak to like-minded peers will see their careers stymied, dooming them to individual contributor roles. Conversely, students who can speak to people who are different from them will become future leaders.

Finally, the problems of the world are getting bigger, and a single company or country cannot solve them alone. Challenges such as future pandemics lie on the horizon. We are one subvariant away from reliving the isolation of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the last pandemic, a vaccine was mobilized (a process normally taking a decade) within a year. This rapid advancement of medicine required talented minds from across the world collaborating to advance science. Other problems, like global climate change, will need the same kind of

collaborative response. Powerful professional networks of the best talent will be needed, and such networks are established through personal relationships.

I have taught at winter and summer schools overseas for almost 20 years, and I have observed that the development of students who spend time abroad is accelerated, with those students reaching skill levels exceeding those of students who only train in their home countries. International professional experiences are a critical part of this development.

Yes, international experiences are receding now. However, our contact with other countries and other cultures is very much like a pendulum. Now, we are retreating toward our own countries, but that means we need to get the limited number of interactions we have right, because we might only have one chance. The pendulum is still swinging, and before too long globalization will return to prominence. Just like in the days of the Silk Road, we will exchange goods and services, art, ideas, and more. When we do, we will want that generation to be ready for the days ahead.

Good experiential learning opportunities, especially international ones, do not “just happen”; they are carefully and purposefully designed. This book provides a roadmap for the development of the next generation and provides the tools necessary to craft effective learning experiences to develop the future cohort of scientists, business people, and leaders. We cannot sit back and merely hope learning will occur. We must design these overseas experiences or risk facing global challenges unprepared. This book is an important step in that design thinking.

*Richard Griffith*  
*Florida Institute of Technology*

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It is our pleasure to thank those who believed in this project, as much and perhaps even more than ourselves. Starting from the authors of the individual contributions, who are scattered across the four corners of the globe and have shared our enthusiasm and passion since day one when we started chatting about it: “Do you know what could be useful? A text on internships abroad and their evaluation. . . .”

A special thanks to our families, who have been extremely understanding and supportive despite the time we took away from them; to our colleagues at Sant’Anna Institute, who have acknowledged the reasons for our commitment and our motivation; to the companies that partner with our Institute by welcoming our interns, for having provided us with fertile ground for the growth of our project. And, of course, to our students, with their achievements, energies, complaints, cultural discomforts, and some setbacks during their internships, who have paved the way by convincing us that, perhaps, our time was well invested, or at least we hope so.

This text is to summarize our long-standing commitment in the field of international education, as well as our modest contribution to this sector, in a moment of such quick and deep evolution. If it can be of support to any colleague in making an internship abroad program more meaningful or to any student in living their international experience in a more conscious and less frustrating way, our goal will be considered achieved.

*Davide de Gennaro and Marco Marino*

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## Section 1

# UNDERGRADUATE INTERNATIONAL INTERNSHIPS

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# 1.1

## INTRODUCTION: THE NEW PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL SKILLS IN THE WORLD OF WORK

Carol Del Vitto

*There are two main mindsets we can navigate life with: growth and fixed. Having a growth mindset is essential for success.*

*Dweck (2006)*

### 1.1.1 INTRODUCTION

A seismic shift in the workplace has occurred due to the evolution into Industry 4.0, also referred to as the Fourth Industrial Revolution. In fact, there has recently been a “double disruption” due to the development of Industry 4.0 combined with the unprecedented economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is exponentially transforming jobs and society ([World Economic Forum, 2020](#)). Because of this “double disruption,” it is imperative that employees in business and citizens in society around the world be adaptable, agile, resilient, and, importantly, have a “growth mindset” ([Dweck, 2006](#)). That means that in an Industry 4.0 world, the nature of work and the skills needed by employees and citizens must be a combination of “hard” and “soft, uniquely human skills,” developed within a growth mindset to meet the changing conditions and future requirements ([Mercer, 2022](#)).

[McAfee and Brynjolfsson \(2016\)](#) describe this revolution as one of “brain power versus muscle power,” as was the case with the previous industrial revolutions. The Fourth Industrial Revolution has already had an impact on

“every aspect of society” and its citizens, not only in workplaces, but also in the way society functions and organizes itself (Autio et al., 2021). This revolution has caused a shift in the way talent is valued, viewed, and developed. The continuous development of “soft, uniquely human” skills for workplace 4.0 is essential as they act as enablers to effectively communicate technical concepts, while also enhancing global collaboration.

*Technical skills have been the holy grail of hiring in years past, but these skills have rapidly declining shelf lives. The rise of A.I. and automation means employees are increasingly tasked with jobs that only humans can do: thinking creatively, using judgment, employing empathy, etc. Adaptability will be the most durable skill in the years to come, as the ability to learn and adjust becomes more important than any one skill. Companies, as well as education systems, will need to shift how they assess and train people accordingly.*

*Hirji (2018)*

### 1.1.2 HARD, SOFT, AND UNIQUELY HUMAN SKILLS

Developing and maintaining a growth mindset are essential to the continuous development and updating of “hard” and “soft, uniquely human” skills. Of course, the development and identification of these skills will need to align with the needs of companies and societies. According to Forbes (2020), “While Technical proficiency is an obvious and evolving need, it is critical that people also cultivate so-called ‘uniquely human skills,’ which will have even greater value in a more-automated workplace. Not only will developing these uniquely human skills create a more adaptable workforce as jobs are restructured, but it will also help workers specialize in areas where machines are less likely to excel.” This increased adaptability will be needed for both younger and older workers as experts predict that 50% of workers will be displaced by technological automation in the next five years, and 40% of skills will no longer be relevant (Mercer, 2022). In essence, “soft, uniquely human” skills will be the enablers for technology and future transformation, thereby serving an essential function and becoming even more valuable. According to LinkedIn’s (2022) Learning Report, 46% of L&D leaders confirm that upskilling and reskilling employees constitute a key focus area. On the one hand, employees who do not develop a growth mindset will not be considered adaptable, agile, and open to learning these required skills, and as a result they will not be competitive in the job market. On the other hand, employers who do not encourage and invest

both time and money in developing “soft” and “hard” skills for their employees will lose the war for talent, as the employees will leave.

### 1.1.3 NEW TRENDS IN THE WORLD OF WORK

Another significant trend that has occurred because of these technological shifts and economic disruption over the last few years is the phenomenon of the Great Resignation, which has become a challenge as organizations everywhere struggle to recruit and retain the talent they need; therefore, it is more critical than ever that companies understand the skills that deliver the greatest value to the business today and tomorrow (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2017; PWC, 2018). Globalization over the last two decades and the recent COVID-19 epidemic have had a significant impact on the skills that are necessary to work in a hybrid or remote workplace. Traditional teams have evolved into global virtual teams, creating new opportunities, as well as challenges, due to their often diverse cultures and communication over a variety of technological mediums. When online meetings expanded across the globe during the COVID-19 epidemic, English also became even more essential as the *lingua franca* of business (Neeley, 2012).

Effective communication skill development is essential in online interaction, as “conflict occurs more frequently and is harder to manage and interpret given the ambiguity caused by most computer-mediated communication tools” (Wildman & Griffith, 2015). Communication skills, such as the development of intercultural sensitivity and empathy, are the “soft, uniquely human skills” that help to enable teams to work more collaboratively (Del Vitto, 2008).

Understanding the “mental programming” and different cultural dimensions of national cultures that influence how different cultures perceive risk, power structures, long-term versus short-term orientation, and individualism versus collectivism, for example, can greatly reduce intercultural and social misunderstandings and conflicts teams can experience (Hofstede, 2009). For example, the increased global mobility of engineers in the workplace has scaled up dramatically. Engineers are often required to collaborate with colleagues who have been trained in other countries (Downey & Lucena, 2005). This can frequently lead to frustration due to varied technical education and cultural values, as evidenced by an internal survey conducted before an intercultural training workshop for a team at a German-based engineering company (Del Vitto, 2021). In the survey, 20% of respondents agreed with the statements “Technical expertise can be inconsistent due to diverse multicultural educational backgrounds” and “Conflicts can occur due to multi-cultural differences” (Del Vitto, 2021). Such intercultural conflicts and miscommunications can cause

“process loss,” or a slowing down of project progress, lack of trust and additional challenges to leaders. However, when people develop intercultural “soft, uniquely human” skills to create greater awareness of other cultures, cultural diversity can instead have a positive effect, leading to greater innovation by leveraging the strengths of each culture. Goldman (2005) highlights this “heightened collective creativity and entrepreneurial energy” that results from greater diversity.

Leadership styles have also evolved and shifted in this new work environment. Organizational structures have begun to change as flatter organizations take hold. As organizations become flatter and more agile, with fewer layers of management, transactional leadership, with its “command and control” style, has been replaced by a coaching leadership style, for example, which strives to create a sense of accountability, ownership, and intrinsic motivation within the employees (Lee & Edmondson, 2017). The need for talent to be creative and innovative, while continuously developing new skills, is both essential and critical for the future (Cunha et al., 2022, p. 91).

The development of both “hard” and “soft, uniquely human” skills, as well as a growth mindset, must begin in early education and continue throughout one’s life. In the past, education has often focused on “hard” skills, such as the study of mathematics and science, as they offered greater job security. In an Industry 4.0 world, however, “soft, uniquely human” skills have become just as essential, as they act as “enablers” to effectively transfer and communicate complex knowledge, concepts, and ideas. Focusing on the development of “soft, uniquely human” skills and a growth mindset from a young age can also help establish “a healthy brain architecture that will create a strong foundation on which higher level skills can be built. They are also desirable for young children to learn so that they will play well with other children, and behave in socially acceptable ways in the early childhood setting” (Laureta, 2019). Dweck (2015) explains the importance of a growth mindset in young students with regard to developing both intrinsic motivation and intellectual ability:

*We found that students’ mindsets – how they perceive their abilities – played a key role in their motivation and achievement, and we found that if we changed students’ mindsets, we could boost their achievement. More precisely, students who believed their intelligence could be developed (a growth mindset) outperformed those who believed their intelligence was fixed (a fixed mindset).*

These skills learned early in life will then follow one into adulthood and are essential for successful communication and interactions with others in society and the workplace. Without them, the workforce and society will not be able to cope

with both the growing diversity of the world's population and the speed of change ahead. This means that not only educational institutions, but also industry must encourage and support continuous learning and development.

Having a growth mindset means not only viewing the workplace not as merely a means to earn one's livelihood, but also as a place of life-long development and learning, with one's individual development plan (IDP) as a roadmap. The first step in this process is to assess one's existing "hard" and "soft, uniquely human" skills and then to establish any skilling, upskilling, and re-skilling needs. [McKinsey \(2023\)](#) suggests that individuals take ownership of their IDPs and develop a personal learning journey. Employees who own their learning journey can empower themselves, which leads to greater motivation and commitment. An IDP can assist in breaking down learning goals into manageable milestones to maximize effectiveness. It is essential to plan a learning journey with clear objectives over time, to anticipate roadblocks, to schedule when and where learning will occur, and to specify opportunities to practice new approaches ([McKinsey, 2023](#)). McKinsey has developed a model with 56 foundational citizen skills that they believe are associated with "a higher likelihood of employment, higher incomes, and greater job satisfaction in the future world of work" ([Dondi et al., 2021](#)). These skills can be a good starting point from which to create an IDP.

There are further examples of programs and resources that have been created to both identify and quantify the skills needed for the future. Harvard University, for example, in an effort to quantify "soft" skills, has created a Skills Lab which attempts to measure soft skills, stating, "When surveyed, employers routinely list 'soft' skills, like teamwork, adaptability, resilience and problem solving as the most *sought after attributes* of employees. Yet society knows surprisingly little about how to teach and measure these skills, or how to facilitate their transfer from one context to another!" ([Deming, 2020](#)). Another example is [Deloitte's \(2021\)](#) "Soft Skills Training" catalog, which describes "employability skills [and] enterprise skills [that] are transferable between industries and occupations. They include topics like communication, teamwork, and problem solving, as well as emotional judgment and professional ethics" (n.d.) Alternatively, corporate on-demand, computer-based soft skills training platforms, such as Retorio, promise to "gain deeper insight into which behaviors drive success" in an organization through varied soft skills training consisting of simulated professional interactions, assessment, and targeted profiling of candidates. The focus on these essential skills is the result of the shift to Industry 4.0 and its impact on the workforce. There is a sense of urgency and greater understanding that having a growth mindset and developing *both* "hard" and "soft, uniquely human" skills is absolutely essential for society and business to both survive and thrive in the future.

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