【研究論文】

Creativity and Innovation Management Case Study on T-Automobile's Innovation Management Program: Creativity Development and Methodology

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Abstract

大学生の企業でのインターンシップに関する研究は、学生への教育目的を中心としている。企業の立場からにすると、一般に、「採用手段の一つとして」「優秀な人材とのネットワーク作り」「学生に向けての企業 PR」等が言われるが、インターンシップに限らず大学と企業の間には互恵的関係がなければ続かないにもかかわらず、学生を受け入れる側の企業の効果については議論されることがない。
本論文では、T 社における外国の大学生を対象したインターンシッププログラムをケーススタディーとして取り上げる。学生は多くの部署を体験し、専門性からやや離れ企業全体のマネジメントを学び、学生の行き来や報告をまめに行うことでT社はセクショナリズムが起きがちな部署間のコミュニケーションを円滑にすることができた。インターンシップを受け入れていない企業や今後受け入れ先を開拓していく大学が交渉の材料として、この報告は有用であると考える。

1. Introduction

From Johannesburg to New York, the world round, major corporate enterprises reap the benefits of various internship programs, encouraging the young to be creative and explore new business opportunities, while bringing new and innovative ideas into stagnating projects and working environments going stale. *The World Bank*, *Coca Cola*, *Saatchi & Saatchi*, *BMW*, *Philipe Stark*, *The Zaha Hadid Associates*, *Cirque de Soleil*, *Virgin Galactic* and the *Guggenheim Museum* are just a few examples of prominent global organizations employing intern students worldwide and making the most of their constructive input.

How about the world' third largest economy, Japan? Although the internship program is not a new idea to this country, successful practices are still few and far between. Major manufacturers and global brands of Japanese origin, such as SONY, Panasonic, Fuji Xerox, Seiko, etc. have all tried various versions of internship, project often encouraged by the government and commercial promoters (JETRO, etc.), but they all seem to be short of tangible results and Japanese associates often point out to the challenges of creating an "international" working environment in order to accommodate intern students coming from overseas. This is an example of how T-Automobile, one of Japan's leading car manufacturers, has taken one of the most adventurous approaches to

on-boarding international students on a six-month internship program within its advanced product development projects, and further on to cutting-edge marketing and global HR practices.

There is little discussion about whether corporate enterprises need or not to take student interns on board – be it an undergraduate or graduate program, academic organizations are coming closer to the real business life by bridging connections between various business organizations and the students enrolled in their programs. Research on student internship programs within corporate enterprises around the world has mainly centered on the students' training benefit (e.g. Kusoku, 2006).

In general, internship programs have been regarded as an "employment strategy", opportunities for "constructing human networks", "student-geared PR", while enterprises often seek "reciprocal benefit". With a new and different approach to understanding how well-managed internship programs can be of considerable advantage to both the enterprise and the students on board, this paper will provide the reader with valuable insight from various perspectives and will mainly benefit organizations which have not yet started an internship program. This study focuses on the case of T-Automobile, a world famous automotive manufacturer from Japan.

The multinational creativity internship program is a breakthrough initiative for a Japanese enterprise to introduce and utilize a fully-fledged internship system and to implement all relevant results in its corporate strategy, advanced product planning programs, corporate communications and HR actions.

2. Internship Programs in Japan

As a result of extensive face-to-face interviews and discussions with various university educators from both private and state institutions in Japan, it has been found that many educators consider the internship programs to be hard to link directly to academic activities. That is to say, universities have traditionally considered themselves as places for conducting academic research and not for performing job-specific training. MITI(Ministry of International Trade and Industry) and MCS(Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) started encouraging and promoting internship programs as an interim environment for students to get on-the-job experience prior to graduation, as a result of the "bubble economics" from 1990-2000[1].

Then, universities found themselves confronted with serious problems. There are two main reasons: at first, universities in Japan had to come to terms with their perception of their own mission (they do not consider themselves as environments for job training); second, Japanese enterprises have taken an ambiguous approach to task management. Therefore, the incumbent problem is twofold: both on the universities' side and on the side of the enterprise.

1「大学等におけるインターンシップ実施状況調査」Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology　(2013/5/22 Access)
http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/toukei/chousa01/intern/1260927.htm

3. Case Study: T-Automobile Internship Program

T-Automobile is in competition for the leading position in the automotive industry globally. The enterprise has never had a real internship program. The main reasons for that are related to task management, as well as to the high level of confidentiality of most of its projects. The most important reason of all, though, is that T-Automobile could not find a practical business reason for doing so. Therefore, the only similar program available was a CSR-based factory visit program. Over this past decade, T-Automobile has been doing well in the North American region and the Middle East; however, car manufacturers from developing countries, which have recently joined the industry, have been growing fast, leaving little room for expansion for T-Automobile on the European market. From this perspective, managing directors at T-Automobile came to the conclusion that the planning, designing and development of future mobility and technology can no longer be accomplished only by Japanese associates working in Japan.

4. Research Method

This study was carried out using a first-hand case study approach, complemented by participant observations carried out within the CDD - Concept Development Department project. One of the authors of this study is an ex-employee of T-Automotive, contributing with information on the operations and management structure of the program. This method leads to a full 360° view on the managerial circumstances and a deep understanding of the inside situation (Yin 2008). This study focuses on the time period from January 2008 to December 2012. Within this time span of two years, we studied the planning, implementation and results of the internship program. We conducted focus group interviews in order to edit the findings of this program. We could not conduct research by statistical research methodology – that is because the number of interns and employees involved is relatively low. We are convinced that this case study is a pilot test in this field and that the evaluation process best fits the circumstances given.

5. The T-Automobile Intership Program

5.1. CDD

Concept Development Department focuses on the development of future mobility and advanced technologies to be employed in next generation vehicles.

5.2. Aims of internship program in CDD

1) Stimulating creativity and innovation in thought and action

The enterprise values creative activities needed for assuring competitive advantage within the industry in the future.

2) Connecting the best creative centers in the world

T-Automobile developed a series of initiatives to connect not only participants from

the automotive industry, but also participants from industries where high creativity and diversity are needed.

3) Creating and participating in the development of a better future through partnerships with local creators, corporations and universities – especially with European organizations

As the most important objective, the building of a sustainable creative network with artists, fashion designers, calligraphers, architects, etc.), combined with a strong and stable academic network (universities - not only engineering and polytechnic programs, but also Sociology, Architecture, Art and Japanese Studies, etc.). The construction of such a cross-industrial and cross-functional "global network", operating on multiple disciplines, was given utmost priority (Berliant and Fujita, 2011).

5.2. Internship theme

In most cases, the internship theme is usually restricted to a certain measurable topic; the reason for this is that the internship program is generally considered to be "on-the-job training" and performance evaluation is based on the correct acquisition of the skills specific to a certain job or task. In this case, T-Automobile aim is reaching out for high-end creativity – therefore, their management considered that state-of-the creativity could be reached and introduced to the core structure of the business by having direct access to the diversity of the incoming interns. CDD decided to collaborate with incoming interns on 7 main themes:1) Concept cars, 2) Fashion and accessories, 3) City development, 4) Architecture and civil engineering, 5) Academic network, 6) Art and culture (especially subculture), 7) Nature and Agriculture. These themes, apparently unrelated to the automobile industry, were intentionally selected by CDD.

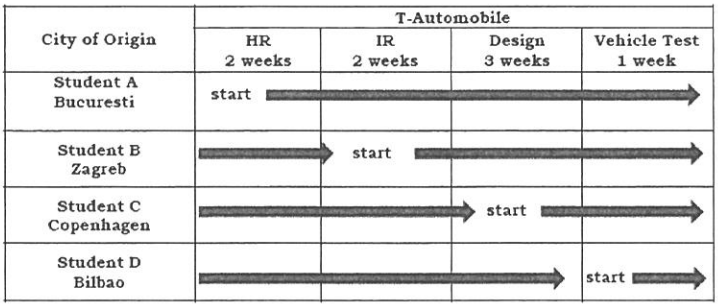
Of course, the main theme remains the "development of concept cars". In order to achieve that, is was mandatory to know the trends and specific needs of the industry and the environments closely related to cars and next-generation mobility, such as fashion, future infrastructures, cities, and so on. T-Automobile paid special attention to agriculture, industry often considered to be at the opposite side of the automotive industry. In order to increase the participation of students with high creativity, T-Automobile signed contracts with various prominent academic institutions from around the world.

5.3. Related Departments

Many internal divisions and departments came in contact with this internship program. In ordinary internship programs, one student participates in the activities of one single division and learns a select number of tasks related to that specific position. The main purpose of the internship is without doubt the final embodiment of the concept, the design, and, at the same time, the development of new marketing activities, as well as advanced PR methods. The interns were active in both fields. By doing so, T-Automobile considered that the interns will have an opportunity to learn and gain skills related to both parts of the business, and also develop total management skills

(see Fig1).

Fig1. T-Automobile Internship Program (Example)



However, T-Automotive also faces serious sectionalist hurdles – the sectionalist syndrome (NIH). The corporate HR Department was initially in charge of the construction and operation of the academic network, but the task slowly shifted to CDD and other divisions related to the internship program. These actions strengthened the ties within various internal departments.

6 . Post-internship

The result of regular internship programs are usually anticipated from the initial stage: suggestions and recommendations for improving the initial administration and management of the program, suggestions for the betterment of daily operations, etc. Interns recruited and managed through traditional processes are usually highly competent and they operate in line with pre-determined criteria. They provide input easy to evaluate, matching pre-formatted schemes and matrixes. From an organizational point of view, they are also easy to manage and administer internally, as their main tasks are primarily related to the learning and utilization of pre-determined competencies and skills.

However, the results of such traditional internship programs are often shallow in content and superficial in approach, as they only operate under the strict direction, supervision and control of immediate management and do not go beyond the expectations clearly stipulated in job descriptions and project guidelines. Such programs seldom lead to remarkable innovation, both in terms of final output and process, and they often produce outdated results. The interns working on in-house projects within CDD were provided with the freedom to take various initiatives and to build hands-on a large number of creativity programs on their own, together with and for the benefit of local engineers and designers. The interns were performing continuous, timely and accurate research through the reach of the academic network, benchmarking against other manufacturers and innovators from related industries. Cross-cultural and beyond the industry on-going synergies were created through collaborations with other creators (artists, architects, designers, system and social engineers, etc.)

7. Results

The internship program was a particular trial, both from the perspective of the universities and from T-Automobile's point of view.

Strong Points

From T-Automotive point of view, the enterprise had a valuable opportunity to learn first-hand about the difference in mentality and culture between Japan and Europe, to implement new and creative ideas.

- Higher degree of creativity input
- Varied feedback – not only from an academic, but also from various related industries. Especially fashion designers and industrial designers are known to be incompatible; by working together towards a common goal though, successful collaboration could be achieved.
- Highly involved and innovative research associates
- Ideas and proposals from outside the industry, leading to unconventional advanced product development
- Constant synergies with global trends
- Indirect access to networks outside the corporate reach
- Access for internal associates to varied sources of information

Weak Points

- Time consuming process (average project 3-5 months)
- Low compatibility with existing internal networks
- Higher costs than simpler research methodology

Judging from the results mentioned above, the CDD internship program has been beneficial for both students and the enterprise. Especially for the enterprise, the internship program has proven to be a valuable opportunity to reconsider administrative structures and fundamental managerial issues. By providing intern students with the chance to move freely from one post to another, from one division and department to another, according to necessity, the program conferred the enterprise benefits which could not be achieved by standard HR procedures. As a result, frequent and meaningful communication among these departments was encouraged and tight inter-divisional collaborations were initiated. Last but not least, the walls of unnecessary organizational separatism were taken off for the common benefit of the divisions involved and the business itself.

References

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