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The Meaningfulness of Internships: A Sensemaking Approach

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THE MEANINGFULNESS OF INTERNSHIPS: A SENSEMAKING APPROACH

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

of

Purdue University

By

Kaley S. Campbell

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ABSTRACT

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Internships are an important part of undergraduate education, with more than 61% of students completing an internship, yet there is not much academic literature surrounding this topic (NACE, 2015). Using Weick's (1995) sensemaking theory, report data were analyzed thematically looking for how interns made sense of their experiences and what they found to be meaningful. This study found four distinct themes that interns used to navigate unique tensions and power dynamics within their organizational setting: "Just an intern," "It's up to me," "For my future," and "I was allowed." Future research could explore framing internships more as a career choice rather than a precursor or stepping stone into a future career.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Summer internships for undergraduate students are often talked about as a necessity for competitive résumés and as a stepping stone into a future career. For example, some parents compare having their children selected for an internship to acceptance at Harvard University (Greenburg, 2015). Internships have also been auctioned at charity events, with a *Vogue* internship selling for $42,500 (Stout, 2010). The number of students completing internships evidences their prevalence and importance for students. In 2015, almost two-thirds or 61 percent of undergraduate students in the United States completed internships before graduating according the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2015). Internships are found in nearly every field including medicine, law, performing arts, government, and communication. Universities offer academic credit for internships, legitimizing their importance as a learning experience.

Yet, what criteria and experience constitute an internship? While there is rarely just one definition for any word, the type of experience and even the title of what constitutes an internship is especially vague and changes from field to field and between each organization. In the medical field, nursing students complete internships called "preceptorships" while they shadow licensed nurses for a set number of hours. "An Internet search of 'internship definition' yields more than fourteen million responseswith

many from campus websites (O'Neill, 2010, para. 15). Law students complete

internships titled "clerkships" during summers between law school. In the broadest sense,

internships are considered to be work and to consist of career developmental activities.

Even if unpaid, like household labor and volunteer activities, internships are considered

part of the broad conceptualization of "work," with work typically associated with some

form of employment in which one receives compensation in some form. As students get

internships to help prepare themselves for their career, it should be noted that a career has

"no limits" as to the direction or speed one moves or for how achievements are defined

regarding employment experiences, yet internships are talked about as one way to start

one's career (Lucas, Liu, & Buzzanell, 2006).

Therefore, the way interns make sense of their experiences varies widely and can

be diverse based upon their unique internship experiences. The nature, depth, and

conditions of the "opportunity" can be somewhat vague, offering space for both

organizations and interns to create different kinds of experiences and/or negotiate the

terms. As a result, internships are socially created discursively and materially through

intern-organization relations and the needs and interests of both parties. This social

construction is partially created through the framing of internships in general as well as in

particular contexts and this framing can direct attention to certain aspects and indicate

appropriate action. The experience of internships is vague and thus offers a site for

sensemaking to be articulated as interns navigate their understanding. Weick (1995)

explained that strategic ambiguity is important in sensemaking because it "allows people

to maintain the perception that there is agreement, when in fact, there is not" (p. 120; see

Eisenberg, 1984). Given the ambiguity of internships, they are consistently redefined

within organizations to accommodate organizational needs. They also differ for all interns, creating unique needs for sensemaking because expectations likely differ from the internship experience. These mismatched expectations also may prompt sensemaking because interns who interned at a previous organization might need to make sense of their new organizational environment, because there likely are many differences given the diversity of internship opportunities.

In this chapter, I first provide an overview of internships, specifically, the historical construction of internships as well as academic literature and empirical research on internships. Second, I provide the rationale for this study including the theoretical and methodological approaches to be used. Finally, I conclude with a summary and overview of the thesis chapters.

Historical Construction of Internships

Originally, internships began as an apprenticeship-like model for medical students to gain first-hand experience in the field under direct supervision (Perlin, 2011). Before World War II, internships only existed in the form of medical residencies for aspiring doctors. Around the 1930s, internship programs were developed for political campaigns and governmental organizations at the local, state, and national levels. Around 1975 the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education no longer used the term "internship" and replaced it with "residency" to differentiate medical internships from those in other fields. In the 1960s, universities began integrating internships into undergraduate curriculums as a way to provide students with real-world experience

outside of the classroom (Spradlin, 2009). But it was not until the 1980s and 1990s that the internship boom began and has grown rapidly ever since.

Today, universities across the country offer internships in multiple departments on campus for university credit. The Association of American Colleges and Universities list internships among first year seminars and learning communities as "high impact experiences," and the criteria that make an experience high-impact are:

(1) "they are effortful," (2) "they help students build substantive relationships," (3) "they help students engage across differences," (4) "they provide students with rich feedback," (5) "they help students apply and test what they are learning in new situations," (6) "they provide opportunities for students to reflect on the people they are becoming" (O'Neill, 2010, paras. 9-14).

Internships provide students with hands-on learning opportunities outside of the classroom and feedback on their work. Also, with university credit, an internship can be listed on an academic transcript to increase authenticity when applying for future jobs.

Academic Literature Related to Internships

While internships are an important staple of undergraduate curriculums among all fields, academic literature on the subject is scarce. As of 2010, there were only 22 published studies on internships (Narayanan, Olk, & Fukami, 2010). Of these studies, socialization theory was the common framework with five studies using this theory. Although common to many disciplines and studied in various ways, internships have not been analyzed from a communicative perspective. Narayanan et al. (2010) found two overall themes for categorizing internship literature: internship design and internship

outcomes. Internship design was defined as investigating "what makes the experience valuable for the student, supervisor, or faculty member" including the presence of mentoring relationships and levels of satisfaction (p. 62; see also Tovey, 2001). Research on internship design shows that mentors are impactful even when time between the supervisor and intern is sparse (Anson & Forsberg, 1990). Internship outcomes have mainly revolved around the accumulation of knowledge and skills. Internships can help students gain skills that are useful to their jobs and also help them with their writing (Freedman & Adam, 2001; Garavan & Murphy, 2001).

Rationale and Theoretical and Methodological Approaches

The rationale for this study stems from discussions about internships and personal experience as an intern regarding the diversity of internship experiences. Some experiences were great, while others were negative and lacked meaningful work. Universities list internships as a high-impact experience and organizations advertise internship programs each summer and semester. Yet, according to research conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2014), unpaid interns were no more successful in getting a job offer after graduation than college students who did not intern at all. After graduation, only 37 percent of unpaid interns received a job offer in 2014, which does not show a significant advantage in comparison to the 35 percent of students who received a job offer and did not complete an internship at all. While getting a job is not the only determinant of whether or not an experience is meaningful, it is assumed to be one motivation. This research study also evidenced that those completing an unpaid internship received an average starting salary of $35,721 while those with no internship

experience were offered $37,087. There could be several factors that go into why unpaid internships were not beneficial in helping students obtain a job. These include: the field of the internships, the current economy, and additional work-related experiences each student had. Although not investigated in this research study, it is quite possible that unpaid interns feel less attached or experience less identification with the organizations for which they intern because of perceived lack of investment and commitment to their career development. Regardless, this study raised the question of whether internships are always meaningful and whether students are learning enough for these experiences to be considered high-impact.

Therefore, this thesis seeks to understand themes of how interns make sense of their diverse internship experiences given the wide scope of intern experiences. Sensemaking provides the most suitable theoretical groundwork for understanding how interns comprehend, talk and feel about, and give meaning to their summer or semester-long internships because sensemaking enables researchers to analyze communicative processes in detail with the goal of understanding participants' ("interns") lived experiences. Ultimately, sensemaking is "about authoring as well as interpretation, creation as well as discovery" and is a fluid and ever changing process (Weick, 1995, p. 8). These processes construct meaning and value in any unique environment (Weick, 1995). Through all stages of their experience, interns engage in sensemaking and reflection, that they continue throughout their careers and particularly at junctures or transitions in which there ae changes. Most importantly, interns engage in sensemaking once they enter into their new organizational environment in order to manage uncertainty (Louis, 1980). While there are different focal points between theorists of sensemaking,

they all agree that sensemaking is ultimately about articulating a sense of meaning in an effort to understand an environment.

This study departs from current internship literature because it analyzes overall themes of internship experiences to determine how interns make sense of and find meaningfulness from their internship experiences. I sought to understand how interns made sense of their experiences through their written internship reports. Stories and details that interns share in internship reports pull together different cues and details in a coherent narrative structure that can be analyzed through a thematic analysis. Scott et al. (1998) explain that "the story we tell of ourselves… is the essence of identification" (p. 305). Thus, reflective internship reports are a collection of narratives and responses to questions in which notions of identity are present and extractable. Identity is tied to meaningfulness because the more closely one identifies with the organization, the more positive their association with that experience should be (Scott et al., 1998). Internship reports are useful to analyze because while students are responding to specific questions, the details of the experience they include and chose not to include articulate their experiences. I assumed that interns would likely write about problems they encountered and explain how they overcame those obstacles, and what they found to be important about their experiences.

To achieve these research goals, I conducted a thematic analysis of internship reflection papers written by interns at the conclusion of their experience. Qualitative methodology was used because much of the literature simply surveys the prevalence of and fields in which internships take place (Narayanan et al., 2010) as well as the purported benefits of internships (Peterson, Wardwell, Will, & Campana, 2014).

However, the type of information this project seeks is more nuanced and complex, given that the meaningfulness of internships is situated within interns' perceived experiences. Analyzing how interns make sense of their internship experiences enables scholars and practitioners to learn about and design effective and truly high-impact internships by listening to interns' stories in their own words.

Summary and Overview of Chapters

In chapter one, I have introduced my topic, provided a brief history of internships, an overview of academic literature, and given an introduction to my theoretical framework and methodological approach. I have explained how prevalent internships are for undergraduate students and explained that there are a lot of different types of internships. I also identified that there is a lack of literature surrounding how interns make sense of their experiences.

In chapter two, I explain why it is important to understand how interns make sense of their experiences through the theoretical framework of sensemaking. I explain what sensemaking is and explain the relationship between identity and sensemaking to further develop in my results section. In this chapter I also discuss what academic literature has written about internships to evidence how this thesis can fill a current gap in the literature. The legality of unpaid internships is also an important issue and the definition of what the requirements are for an unpaid internship are outlined in chapter two. I conclude with a summary of my research questions.

In chapter three, I explain my methods for this project and rationale for choosing to conduct a thematic analysis to answer my research questions.

My results of this thematic analysis are listed and explained in depth in chapter four. The four themes that interns used to talk about their experiences were: "It's up to me," "For my future," "Just an intern," and "I was allowed." These themes help explain how interns made sense of their positive and negative experiences, their identity as an intern, and what they found to be meaningful about their experiences.

Chapter five discusses these results in more depth and connects them to other findings. It also discusses my theoretical contributions of this study: that interns used a tension-based framework to talk about their experiences, that internships should be talked about and regarded more as career choices rather than a barrier to entry for a professional job, and that there were many connections on power dynamics that future research should explore. The practical contributions from this study include the recommendation that workshops be held for future interns to help them adjust more quickly to their internship and reduce uncertainty.

CHAPTER TWO. LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

In this chapter, I first explain why sensemaking is the most suitable theoretical

framework to understanding the meaningfulness of internships. Second, I connect

sensemaking to identity to explain the connection in application to meaningfulness. From

there, I explain benefits of internships that have been listed by academic literature along

with noting the coverage of internships within certain fields like psychology and details

regarding the legality of unpaid internships. I also discuss the meaningfulness of work

and then conclude with my summary and restatement of research questions.

The Need for a Sensemaking Approach

While there are many different aspects of sensemaking, generally, sensemaking

presumes that we are actively and constantly working to make sense of our experiences in

an effort to reduce equivocality, or uncertainty, so we can achieve a sense of normality. It

combines both action and interpretation and is a communicative process (Weick,

Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Alternatively, Jablin and Kramer (1998) explained that

sensemaking processes occur when expectations are unmet or there is a "shock" to the

system, particularly in employment processes. Entering into an internship causes a shock

to one's system until the interns are adjusted to their new environment because they are inundated with so many new experiences at once. Meryl Louis (1980) explained sensemaking as a cycle beginning when newcomers to an organization rely on assumptions that they may or may not be aware of, how these expectations contrast with specific events they experience, and continually apply previously successful frameworks until sense is made.

For instance, each student likely has particular expectations about their internships. When these expectations are not met, it causes a shock, and interns will make sense of the reality of their actual environment. The role of an intern within an organization may not be clearly established depending upon how established and structured an internship program is. Katz and Kahn (1978) explained that roles "describe specific forms of behavior associated with given positions; they develop originally from task requirements" and are "standardized patterns of behavior" (p. 43). They further explained that formal organizations allow for "constancy under conditions of persistent turnover of personnel" (p. 187), which means that even as individual students come and go, the role of an intern may stay relatively constant. This role process ensures consistency for the organization as interns are only temporary. As a result, a clearly demarcated role can facilitate the orientation process for each new student filling that role. Yet the role requirements for each intern are contingent upon the structure and needs of the organization at that time and a demarcated role may not yet be established at some organizations. The purpose of clearly designed roles are to increase overall organizational effectiveness and decrease role ambiguity, which can cause stress.

Interns have expectations of what their experience will be like based on their previous internship experiences, conversations with other interns, or what they have read about. Their expectations are important in guiding sensemaking processes (Weick, 1995). These fulfilled expectations occur when a cue is linked to an expectation which, in turn, creates meaning. Self-fulfilling prophecies are "a fundamental act of sensemaking" because they serve as starting point to build around in the sensemaking cycle (p.148). Thus, interns may have preconceived ideas of what will be meaningful for them, or expectations regarding the type of work they will be doing. What is presumed to create value may or may not be an actual source of value, but at the beginning their expectation may be shaped by what information is selected to be processed (Snyder & Swann, 1978). When expectations are not fulfilled, interns must work to make sense of their internship experience in a different way. Weick writes that "a socially constructed world is a stable world, made stable by behaviorally confirmed expectations" (p. 154). The fulfillment of expectations is desired to create stability.

Meryl Louis (1980) focuses on how new employees use sensemaking processes when becoming acquainted and oriented to an organization. Whenever interns enter into organizations and their expectations are not met, they can encounter a type of shock to the system. Interns may be surprised, which is defined by Louis as representing "a difference between an individual's anticipations and subsequent experiences in the new setting," or when expectations are not met (p. 237). Given interns' general inexperience with an organizational setting outside of their school and different experiences with prior

internships or no internship experience at all, it is important to look at how they make sense of their new organizational environment.

Research also shows that students do not find satisfaction with their internship experiences, and a mismatch between expectations is a cause for undergoing sensemaking processes (Jablin & Kramer, 1998). One study conducted in South Korea found that expectations regarding internships in the hotel management industry were not met (Cho, 2006). In this study, 285 surveys were collected from students who completed internships at two-year universities in South Korea. This study found that students' expectations of task orientation, communicating and orienting new interns to particular assignments or tasks, was especially low. These students' overall perceptions of the quality of the internship program did not meet their expectations. This was also affirmed in an earlier study that looked at how co-ops in the UK may negatively influence students' perceptions of a career in hospitality by evidencing discrepancies between what was expected from the internship and what the internship experience provided (Leslie & Richardson, 2000). Similar findings between unfulfilled expectations and disappointment in hospitality internships was also found in Australia as half of the students began considering other careers (Richardson, 2008).

Previous literature shows that interns have unfulfilled expectations, causing interns to make sense of their surprising new environment. In applying sensemaking theory, interns who expected to learn and receive feedback from their supervisors would look for other cues and implicit, even nonverbal feedback, in an attempt to manage expectations that supervisors are invested in their work. As a doctoral student at Oxford

University, Natalie Lundsteen (2011) completed her dissertation on how students learn. She defined an internship as a temporary position in which learning and education is most important. She interviewed students for a longitudinal study over the course of three summers at an investment bank internship. Her study found that there was little support for students before and during their internship, hindering the process of feedback. Oftentimes, supervisors were not able to provide feedback on intern performance due to other obligations. Lundsteen wrote, "An internship may be viewed by the intern as a learning experience, but not necessarily seen that way by the internship employer" (p. 309). Alternatively, interns may cite lack of feedback as a cue for dissatisfaction with their experiences. This disparity also creates a unique tension when interns are not paid because having direct, close supervision is a legal requirement for unpaid internships (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010).

In contrast to the focus on how "shock" creates a need for sensemaking, Weick (1995) focuses on how cues work within frameworks to create meaning. Cues are a central element in creating the substance of sensemaking because they determine which frameworks can be applied to the experience. Weick (1995) uses the metaphor of cues as seeds to explain how cues work—"extracted cues are simple, familiar structures that are the seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring" (p. 50). These cues are critical in determining where attention is directed for individuals. An important determinant of how cues are used to make sense is the context of the organization. An intern may have a different context for interpreting an event or a behavior than a supervisor might and this creates a conflicting interpretation.

Cues signal particular frameworks and when connected they help to create meaning and sense of whatever event is causing shock or confusion. For example, when employees were upset about events at work they used extracted cues of wasting time, unfair business practices, poor or subpar work, among others (Dougherty & Drumheller, 2006). These cues ''are simple, familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring'' (Weick, 1995, p. 50). Thus, they are smaller pieces of a larger puzzle that help one to make sense and rationalize their surroundings or emotions. Cues can be selected or avoided and "deselection is a highly active process in which certain cues are carefully avoided, such as through denial, leaving them unavailable for extraction and the subsequent related sensemaking" (Dougherty & Drumheller, 2006, p. 235). Therefore, through a thematic analysis, cues can be extracted in determining a larger framework of what constitutes meaningfulness for interns.

The Connection Between Sensemaking and Identity

One key element of sensemaking is that it is grounded in identity construction (Weick, 1995). Identity has multiple meanings and definitions. For the purpose of this study, it is defined as "a set of rules and resources that function as an anchor for who we are" (Scott et al., 1998, p. 303). Organizational identity is constructed once an intern perceives themselves to be a part of that organization, creating a sense of attachment. Identity is communicated socially and thus part of the identification between themselves and their organization. Thus, identity becomes "both a product of interaction and a resource for interaction" (p. 308). It is equally influenced by a person's individual self

along with the structure of the environment which can be both constraining or enabling, impacting the meaningfulness of the identification.

From whatever decision is made or irrevocable action that occurs, there is a threat to one's identity if sense is not created because value is inferred from our choices and decisions (Brickman, 1987). This means that we try to reframe bad decisions so that they are not a reflection of our own negative choices. Instead, we work to create alternative explanations that we can communicate to other people that rationalize our actions. How much an organization influences identity can indicate one's commitment level. In an analysis of internship reports from a variety of different undergraduate students from various majors spent 40 days at an organization, a number of students shifted from talking about "the organization" to using the first person, "we" (Peterson & Ober, 2006). It is not unlikely that interns might identify more strongly with their organization as the internship progresses as a way to make sense of their new identity and build associations that affirm this identity.

Weick (1995) explained that justification for commitment may stem from "ego-defensive reasons" (p. 158). Commitment is defined as an action-driven process factoring into sensemaking that occurs once an individual's beliefs become "irrevocable" actions (p. 156). Interns who are unpaid may need to justify their commitment for themselves and for others in order to create meaning from their choices and action to accept particular internships. Perlin (2011) explained the volunteerism language used when interns talk about their experiences as unpaid interns. By justifying their commitment as an altruistic action, the interns created meaning and a rationale for why they were working without compensation. Weick (1995) explained that these justifications "may seem like fantasy

constructions to outsiders, but that impression occurs because outsiders see different things" (p. 158). Certain cues thus become more salient than others in an effort to gather supporting evidence for the intern's choice of commitment. When interns commit to an action, it "involves interpretation focused on explaining behaviors for which people are responsible" and manipulation which "involves stabilizing an otherwise unstable set of events so that it is easier to explain them" (p. 135). When an intern behaves in a way that evidences a particular belief, the intern commits his or her beliefs to those actions to not experience cognitive dissonance between actions and thoughts. Thus, once an intern agrees to work for an organization this irrevocable action has committed them to that organization. Other kinds of irrevocable actions occur when others are watching, when there is evidence, and the actions cannot be taken back (p. 157).

Although internships provide many benefits, they may not guarantee a job, which may create a need for interns to justify their commitment if they do not receive a job from their internship. One study showed that the likelihood that interns, specifically at accounting firms, will be offered a job upon graduation is based upon individual circumstances of both the intern and company (Rigsby, Addy, Herring, & Polledo, 2013). In public relations internships, one online survey of 290 students found that students were more satisfied with internship experiences when paid than they were when they were unpaid (Beebe, Blaylock, & Sweetser, 2009). These respondents were students at a large university on the East coast and they also ranked learning and having opportunities to be promoted in the future as more important than salary.

Academic Literature Surrounding Internships

Scholarly literature has detailed multiple benefits for interns across a variety of fields, from teaching to healthcare to business. One theme that was seen across different studies is the benefit of expanding one's worldview and learning. Within international teaching internships, research found that internships helped students to expand their worldview by entering and navigating cultures different from their own (Letourneau, 2010). Internships for doctoral students training to become principals in schools are also talked about as great learning experiences and training (Gray, 2001). Recent public health graduates who participated in internships explained that there are multiple benefits to having an internship. For example, one intern stated that, "Communicating with other health professionals enhances our ability to connect with diverse stakeholders, and in turn provides us with new perspectives that inform our own career development" (Hernandez et al., 2014, p. 96).

Expanding worldview was a similar theme in Peterson, Wardwell, Will, and Campana's (2014) study which analyzed the knowledge, skills, and abilities students gained from a service-learning internship for undergraduate psychology students by analyzing the text of students' internship reports. Interns reported gaining knowledge about working with diverse populations, applying knowledge learned from courses, and also learning about their individual fit with the work environment. Additionally, interns reported that their communication and interpersonal skills improved and their abilities to be flexible and patient were enhanced. Similarly, internships provide a broader perspective to what is being taught in the class (Wisch, 1988). One hospitality professor explained "While textbook knowledge is of the utmost importance it must be coupled

with on-the-job training to provide the student with a suitable entre to a career in hospitality, one which will hopefully be both stimulating and rewarding" (Wisch, 1988, p. 483).

Performing arts interns cited specific employability skills as being a major source of value for their internship experience (Daniel & Daniel, 2013). Additionally, they mentioned learning about a work environment, networking, gaining broader understanding of their field, and having hands-on work experience as other additional benefits. These internships in this field were also beneficial to the organization based on this study because 78 percent of performing arts organizations found having an intern to be a positive experience and 68 percent found the internship to be beneficial to their organization in some way. There were some noted challenges that interns faced during their internship which included being given boring assignments, financial costs, feeling "inadequate," and dealing with difficult clients.

Tse (2010) conducted a quantitative study by doing a content analysis of 279 internship reports in an effort to parse out what was most important to students' internship experience. Key findings included that students were influenced by working with and learning from adult colleagues and also experienced personal growth during the experience. Other important themes that emerged were: practical skills, what the interns gave or contributed to their organization, how the internship aligned with their own career goals, the students' experiences with leadership during the course of their internship, how the students had to overcome problems, and problems that interns faced during the course of their internship.

Through critical reflection processes interns can benefit from learning less

obvious yet more powerful lessons from internships. Beyond learning specific skills,

research shows interns who engage in critical reflection often gain a deeper insight to

their experiences can teach interns greater knowledge about organizations (Carson &

Fisher, 2006). This study had an undisclosed number of participants from a senior

internship program for undergraduate business majors at the University of Sydney. They

wrote internship papers at the conclusion of their 40 day internships. Through critical

reflection, such as journaling, interns reflected on values and assumptions they held

before beginning their internships. More than three-quarters, or 76 percent, of students

experienced change through a critical reflection process. For example, one intern noted

she had experienced a loss of innocence or former naiveté when she realized all situations

could not be divided into good or bad. This study analyzed language from interns and

noted that overall themes students learned included "Connections with sociopolitical

concerns included a sense of coming from a privileged background that conferred

power… hierarchies and power issues in the workplace… the impact of culture and

socialization" (Carson & Fisher, 2006, p. 710).

Literature also explains the benefits of interns for organizations, thus creating a

win-win framework for both the intern and organization. Research shows organizations

can economically benefit from hiring unpaid interns. Conklin and Simko (1994) found

that there were direct economic benefits for one dietetic organization employing interns

because of their interns' high productivity levels which relieved staff members of work

responsibilities. This study collected data from 45 hospital dietetic departments across the

United States and found that 100 percent of those completing the survey found relief in

staffing with the help of student interns. Full-time workers were able to complete other tasks while interns completed their working assignments, helping to displace the amount of work needing to be completed. Organizations benefit financially from interns by receiving labor for less cost than a full-time worker or no cost at all. Due to the temporary nature of internships, companies can offer short-term internships to displace the work of full-time employees.

By making sense of how to get along in a workplace during an internship, the intern positively benefits in understanding how political skills can be applied for future success, which is another benefit of internships. Knowledge gain from an internship of organization policies and politics can be applied to future work within organizations to help one make sense of a new job. It is argued that organizations are largely political institutions that one must navigate by gaining resources and influencing others (Mintzberg, 1983; Pfeffer, 1981). Therefore, internships are also political in that interns are competing for a positive recommendation and expanding their social networks. Lui, Ferris, Xu, Weitz, and Peerewe (2014) analyzed the results of how students completing internships for academic credit used political skills like networking and conscious awareness of others' nonverbal behaviors and its effect on supervisor ratings. There was a clear result that ingratiation, or likeability, and positive affect led to higher internship performance ratings and how much they were liked by their supervisors.

Field-Specific Studies

Research on medical residency internships shows that internships can also create a loss of idealism, providing a more realistic and/or jaded mindset when entering into one's first job post-graduation. Medical residencies are classified as three-year long

internships. Griffith and Wilson (2003) measured interns' attitudes toward certain types of patients at three different points over the three-year period. Their study noted that interns were more pessimistic in their attitudes, with the most significant shift occurring after the first five months of the program. At the first sample, 19 percent of medical students believed that patients requesting narcotics were "drug-seekers" and this increased to 33 percent at the time of the final survey.

There is also academic literature that is field specific. Doctoral internships for psychology students are a commonly researched area in academic internship literature. In order to become a psychologist, all doctoral students must complete an internship, which has created a large demand for organizations offering internships (Peterson & Ober, 2006). Internships accredited by the American Psychological Association are much more competitive and pay more than unaccredited internships. Peterson and Ober (2006) analyzed the history of the psychology internship requirement, particularly in relation to the recent increase in demand for internship providers. Students are required to apply to the APA internship program and await acceptance. Students who are not accepted must either postpone their graduation until they receive a placement or complete an unaccredited internship. There are many more doctoral students who need internship experience in order to graduate than the APA internship program can provide spots for as, "the more the economics of internships are examined, the more complex and entangled they seem" (p. 639). Another article discussed a lack of accreditation of internships needed for doctoral students by the American Psychological Association and called for more variety in developmental programs aside from the internship (Cornish, Smith-Acuna, & Nadkarni, 2005). Guinee (1998) analyzed how the internship year

required for psychology doctoral students is talked about in terms of a life span. Language describes how interns go through periods of "transition" and have "crises." Other articles about interns have referred to interns as "infants" and "adolescents." By talking about internships as a life cycle, they are thought to "have a life of their own." Thus, using Erikson's model of psychosocial development, interns and internships are discussed as a development process.

Legality of Internships

In 2015, 39.2 percent of internships were unpaid (NACE, 2015). According to the NACE, unpaid internships can be legitimized via academic credit, and the internship must meet the criteria discussing legality, as mentioned below. Yet there is no regulation on internships as even if a student enters into an unsatisfactory internship for academic credit, there is not much the university can control on behalf of the placement organization. One book, *Intern Nation* (2011) by Ross Perlin, discusses the controversy surrounding the legality of unpaid internships. Citing the Disney internship program in which undergraduate students intern for Disney by working at various locations within the amusement park, Perlin criticizes internships as taking advantage of undergraduate students. Perlin explains that "Disney has figured out how to rebrand ordinary jobs in the internship mold, framing them as part of a structured program—comprehensible to educators and parents, and tapping into student reserves of careerism and altruism" (p. 3). Perlin also finds that unpaid internships are a brewing set of lawsuits waiting to happen and argues that unpaid internships are largely illegal. In the United States, per the ruling from the 1947 *Walling v. Portland Terminal Co.*, an unpaid internship is considered legal if all of the following criterion are met:

1. The internship, even though it includes actual operation of the facilities of the employer, is similar to training which would be given in an educational environment.

2. The internship experience is for the benefit of the intern.

3. The intern does not displace regular employees, but works under close supervision of existing staff.

4. The employer that provides the training derives no immediate advantage from the activities of the intern; and on occasion its operations may actually be impeded.

5. The intern is not necessarily entitled to a job at the conclusion of the internship.

6. The employer and the intern understand that the intern is not entitled to wages for the time spent in the internship. (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010, para. 4)

Perlin also explains that unpaid interns often talk using a language of volunteerism when working at unpaid internships. This language may create a blurry area especially in the field of non-profits, where internships are largely unpaid because there is not a distinction made between altruistic volunteering and unpaid labor. Overall, the argument of legality continues to be brought up in the media as former interns are filing class action lawsuits against former employers. For example, a former intern, Justin Henry, worked for Atlantic Records and said that he "was required to work full-time for eight months, sometimes up to 10 hours a day, without pay" (Zara, 2013). Thus, the legality of internships is an important issue.

The legality of internships can play a role in how interns make sense of their experiences. Even though interns may have benefitted the organization more at the time

of the internship, many interns felt that their internships would be more beneficial later in their careers.

Meaningfulness of Work

Buzzanell and D'Enbeau (2014) defined work as meaningful when one relies on "their own determinations as well as those in popular culture or broader societal discourses of what is a worthy expenditure of their time and energy" (p. 56). Thus, meaningfulness is constructed in part by what is individually meaningful but ultimately shaped by what is celebrated within a larger organizational and/ or societal discourse. For example, in the show *Mad Men*, one's creativity at work is more meaningful and celebrated than their ability to research or have a strong work ethic. It was meaningful when one character, Donald Draper, created a great advertisement slogan while he was in a meeting "out of thin" air because it evidenced unteachable, inherent creativity—a skill idealized within that specific firm and industry.

Thus, in application to internship work, meaningfulness is constructed in part by what is important to each intern, but is also a product of what is valued within societal discourses, such as opportunities to get one step ahead of peers and gain work experience, along with more specific sources of meaningfulness unique to the field and organization themselves. Meaningfulness is largely subjective and changes over time as values and discourses shift from one generation to the next (Cheney et al., 2008). For instance, O'Connor and Raile (2015) found that most, or 63 percent, of Millennials describe a "real job" as one where they earn enough money to be independent. Yet, in a similar study

conducted earlier by Clair (1996), meaningfulness was characterized as money, application of knowledge from college or other education, and enjoyableness of the job-- all of which ranked as the most prevalent characteristics of what defined a job. Clair's (1996) study was conducted by analyzing 25 narratives written by students who explained what a "real job" meant to them. Ultimately, the way people construct meaningfulness is shaped by the type of society in which they are a part.

Meaningfulness is an important construct to measure because it provides insight as to what makes these internships beneficial and important to students. Money, however, may not necessarily define meaningfulness and there has been evidence to show that there is a distinction between what is found to be meaningful work and what is one's job. Meaningful work can also be separate from one's job as Fryer and Payne (1984) discovered that when people quit their jobs and were not employed, their happiness increased. Meaningfulness can also be co-constructed with one's identity of self. Cheney et al. (2008) explain that work can be seen an extension of self or a valuation of one's self-worth, which is grounds for constructing importance and worthiness for one's job. For example, those drawn to the healthcare industry may be drawn to achieve an idealized vision of helping others or to answer to one's calling (see Rawlins, 2005).

Due to its social construction through societal and cultural discourses and its openness to interpretation for each individual, the specific criteria that constitute meaningfulness is difficult to pinpoint (Cheney et al., 2008). However, recurring themes from various studies that constitute meaningfulness are:

(1) enables a sense of agency, (2) enhances belonging or relationships, (3) creates

opportunities for influence, (4) permits one to use and develop one's talents, (5)

offers a sense of making a contribution to a greater good, and (6) provides income

adequate for a decent living. (p. 150)

Meaningfulness can also be co-constructed by an organizational culture in which

practices like employee empowerment and autonomy are used to empower employees

(see Black, 2005). Relationships with coworkers is also influential for employees as

"meaningful work can be defined in terms of a web of interpersonal relationships"

(Cheney et al., p. 160). Overall, meaningfulness is constructed, co-constructed, and

influenced by multiple variables within any job and organizational setting.

Summary and Restatement of Research Questions

In this chapter, I have outlined an overview of academic literature regarding

internships including benefits to the intern, benefits to the organization, issues

surrounding legality, and field-specific literature. I have explained how sensemaking

connects to this study and why it is an important framework for answering my research

questions along with providing an overview of meaningfulness of work. I have also

discussed how meaningfulness is defined. Based on this literature review and the aims of

my study, my research questions are: (1) How do interns make sense of their positive and

negative internship experiences? and (2) How do internships allow interns to construct

meaningfulness?

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I first discuss the data used for this study which consists of internship reports. I then explain my procedures starting with why and how a thematic analysis was used to answer my research questions from chapter two. Lastly, I explain my procedures and data collection.

Data: Internship Reports and Survey Participants

There is one major form of data for this study. There are a total of 97 internship reports spanning from Summer 2010 through Summer 2015 that were used in this qualitative analysis. These internships could be completed in areas including, but not limited to: human relations, corporate communication, public relations, or mass communication. Ten of these internship reports were a part of a London summer internship program and the questions for these reports are listed in Appendix B. Appendix A includes questions asked for the remaining 87 reports. Of these participants, there were five freshmen, six sophomores, 21 juniors, 54 seniors, and 11 participants who did not identify their year.

Procedures

I gathered existing internship reports from the Communication internship coordinator and conducted a thematic analysis. Names and all other potential identifiers were removed before I review documents to protect confidentiality of students. All

internship reports were given pseudonyms to protect the identity of the undergraduate interns who wrote these reports. All parts of the research project received IRB approval.

Before I began reading through the internship reports, I reviewed Cheney et al.'s (2008) work that identified recurring themes of meaningfulness. As noted earlier in this thesis, these themes of meaningfulness are:

(1) enables a sense of agency, (2) enhances belonging or relationships, (3) creates opportunities for influence, (4) permits one to use and develop one's talents, (5) offers a sense of making a contribution to a greater good, and (6) provides income adequate for a decent living. (p. 150)

When I began reviewing internship reports, I looked for times when interns mentioned parts of their experiences that corresponded to the above list. Through looking for these themes, it became apparent that while they were referenced, they generally were not met. This created the need for interns to create new sources of meaningfulness and the basis of this tension is what created the four themes addressed in chapter 4. In finding parts of sensemaking, I identified where interns articulated confusion or uncertainty and how they made sense of these conflicts to reduce uncertainty (Weick, 1995). I read through all internship reports and noted certain phrases, sentences, and stories that reflected a source of meaningfulness using Owen's (1984) method of thematic analysis. Once I read through and found phrases and comments that were repetitive, recurred throughout internship reports, and were forceful in italics, capitals, or bolding certain words, I used these as the basis for the creation of my themes.

Data Collection

A total of 97 internship reports were reviewed as existing data to identify overarching trends related to the meaningfulness of internship experiences and how interns made sense of these experiences. 87 of these internship reports required all students the same series of quantitative and qualitative questions related to their experiences over the course of their internship, which students filled out at the completion of the internship experiences. The additional papers were more extended essays in response to a few standard study abroad question sets for academic credit, noted in Appendix B.

Thematic Analysis

A thematic analysis "provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data" (Braun & Clarke, p. 5). Because lived internship experiences are re-told through the lens and words of each intern, a qualitative methodology which permits flexibility is most appropriate. Flexibility is one major benefit of using thematic analysis which means that it can be applied to many different theoretical and epistemological frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There are many differences in tasks, supervisor support, organizational structure, span of time, and the environment in which each intern is situated; therefore, a thematic analysis identifies the overall themes or semantic patterns that can be gleaned from multiple experiences. This type of analysis "involves the searching across a data set–be that a number of interviews or focus groups, or a range of texts–to find repeated patterns of meaning" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.15). I conducted a thematic analysis to look for similarities within the interns lived experiences as they wrote about them in their

internship reports. The thematic analysis focused on how interns made sense of their experiences—obstacles they faced, things that confused them, conflict management, and sources of meaningfulness.

The method for thematic analysis is based upon Owen's (1984) procedure for analysis using three different criteria: recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. Although recurrence and repetition sound similar, a distinction lies in language used by each participant and meaning created. Recurrence "is an extension of criterion one in that it is an explicit repeated use of the same wording while [repetition] involves an implicit recurrence of meaning using different discourse (Owen 1984, p. 275). The final criterion used by Owen included "forcefulness" which looked at how different words were emphasized, either using vocal inflection or underlined. Since this analysis looked at written documents, this last criterion was used when the documents contained passages that were underlined, bolded, italicized, or in some other way noted as different from other sections by the intern. I first read and re-read all documents until there were coherent semantic patterns or understandings that emerged within and across the reports.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

The research questions for this thesis asked: (1) How do interns make sense of their positive and negative internship experiences? and (2) How do internships allow interns to construct meaningfulness? Findings indicated that there were four themes interns talked about that answered these research questions: (a) "It's up to me", (b) "For my future", (c) "Just an intern", and (d) "I was allowed". These themes indicated that interns perceived their roles and the meaningfulness of their internships: as centering on their own proactivity; as oriented toward their futures as investments and rites of passage; as involving political understandings and unexpected pleasure at being respected despite lack of permanent and higher organizational status; and as situated within hierarchical constraints and opportunities. These themes indicated strategies for appropriate intern behaviors and demeanor.

"It's Up to Me"

Interns spoke about their internships in three major ways. The first theme, "It's up to me," highlights a unique discourse that presumes interns must take initiative for their internship to be a successful experience. This discourse is not surprising given the U.S. neoliberal political economy that situates the individual at the center of, and responsible for, their career development and meaningful work (Buzzannell & Lucas, 2013).

Buzzanell and Lucas (2013) write that meaningfulness and dignity often are intertwined. Specifically, they say that "the realization of dignity aligns with material ability to make choices and exercise autonomy, perceptions that one's actions reasonably result from choices made, and the ability to discursively construct a sense of choice about one's work situation" (p. 4). In my data, interns often talked about how they conformed to the organization and took initiative as reasons for their positive experience. In other words, they are the ones who made the internship meaningful and they took the credit for their work in this regard. The "It's up to me" theme presumes internships are not inherently meaningful, but rather, the intern must create his or her own opportunities. Thus, they create meaningfulness and, in doing so, they articulate the worth of their experiences, the agency they constructed, and presumably the dignity that they derived and projected.

There were two ways this theme of "It's up to me" was expressed by the participants in this study: directly and indirectly. First, interns, when asked for what advice they would give to other interns who would be completing their same internship in the future, said that the success of the internship is up to the interns themselves. If interns want to make connections, learn from the field, and have meaningful learning experiences, then the interns need to take that initiative. Even when interns arrive and they are placed at a desk and not communicated with, it is up to the interns to voice that discomfort and make the best of what is provided.

Second, this theme was expressed indirectly when interns were explaining how they handled conflict, particularly unmet expectations, insofar as they discussed that their conflicts were resolved after interns conformed to the organization. In other words, many

interns said that they arrived at their internship site only to find that their internship was not what they expected. But after they aligned their behaviors, attitudes, and values to the organization, they had a moment when things "clicked," and then their experiences were positive from that point forward. This sensemaking of a common internship experience indirectly fits into the theme of "It's up to me" because the process provides evidence that interns needed to learn how they fit within the organizational scheme of things including their responsibilities for molding to the organization—if interns never conformed, then their experiences were not positive and the fault was presumed to be their own.

Table 1

It's Up to Me

Pseudonym	Quote
Jocelyn	Be sure to take advantage of all of your resources, and push yourself to gain more experience than you ever thought you could.
Avery	Make the most of it. Go all out. You'll find that you learn more here than all the time you've been in college. This experience is what counts.
Stephanie	Be flexible and open minded to this internship, which you may face several unexpected challenges and urgent projects to add more workload.
Susan	It is a very valuable experience, but it does require some effort, will and sacrifice. I do also suggest asking a lot of questions and pushing yourself to do the tasks assigned without waiting for them to tell you.
Agnes	I would tell them to learn as much as they can and ask as many questions as possible. Showing interest in your company is the best way to get the most out of an experience as an intern.
Antonia	Meet as many people as you can, make yourself memorable and gain as much knowledge from the internship as possible.
Jackson	You only get out what you put in from the experience.

Interns needed to exert a large amount of effort in order for their experiences to be meaningful for themselves. For example, Marlin, a senior unpaid intern at a television station, suggests "soaking it all up and asking a lot of questions" because "You'll get out of it as much as you put in." Within this type of frame, Marlin shifted the burden of creating a successful internship experience onto himself and away from other factors, like the internship structure or the involvement of his supervisor. Marlin continues, "There could be a lot of sitting around if you don't take the initiative to ask to go places or learn new things." Marlin makes sense of his successful internship experience through his initiative to be proactive as an intern. Similarly, Gabriel, a senior unpaid intern at another television station, echoed this point in saying "Personally, I made it a goal to get as much as I could from my internship, I made sure to stay busy throughout my days, and helped with whatever I could." He reflects on his internship experience, "Go at the experience full force, and take everything it has to offer." Here, Gabriel explains that his ability to take initiative within the organization was the reason he benefitted from his experience. Hailey continues, "I believe that in order to get the most out of this internship you must be independent at doing your own work, because sometimes you will not be given something to do, but you still need to be productive and find work to do." Interns talk about the importance of the internship experience, which is conditional upon the intern taking the initiative to "make the most" out of their experience—it is up to the intern.

An intern's conformity to the organization's needs and values is an important marker of their success, and presumes it is up to the intern to make this adjustment. For example, internship listings highlight the requirements and skills needed from the intern, rather than explaining the internship in terms of what the intern will gain and how the

organization might benefit. Discenna's (2016) finding from a Critical Discourse Analysis of college internship listings found that internship listings often list what the internship organization needs rather than what the intern may learn from the experience. Discenna (2016) explained, "internship offerings feature a heavy emphasis on both the skills required for the position as well as the personality traits that define the successful candidate" (p. 445). Therefore, it is up to the intern to adjust to the needs of the organization through hard work and flexibility. Susan, a senior unpaid broadcasting intern, stated:

> I would recommend this internship, but you have to be more vocal so that they can let you execute tasks because some days, they don't really let you do anything, so you are basically going to be there sitting down for four hours and thirty minutes watching them. I was that way at first, but when I had to let them know my discomfort and asked them to let me participate, I was allowed to do it and I was able to help out more in the production process.

Susan experienced "discomfort" because she was not doing anything during her internship time and no one was providing her with things to do. This lack of consistency with her expectations and desire to work interrupted her "flow," creating opportunity for sensemaking. Susan also expressed frustration with the tasks she was given, like picking up cords, because this kind of seemingly menial task was not what she had expected from her experience. Yet, through Susan's initiative, she was able to ask for more work and the

kind of work that she wanted. Her "ah-hah" moment marked the point at which she realized that she had navigated through her inner and, perhaps, interpersonal workplace conflict by conforming to the organization and seeing where there might be opportunities in the work flow for her contributions. She also navigated the issues by letting her supervisor know that she wanted to be more involved.

Whenever interns faced conflict, it was up to the intern to conform to the organization in order for the problem to be resolved, indirectly supporting this theme. Stitts (2006) wrote about a black, female undergraduate intern called "Sara" who experienced interpersonal communication difficulties adjusting to her internship site and spoke to Stitts for advice. Stitts wrote that Sara reported being corrected by her internship supervisor because Sara needed to "tone it down" and stop "outshining" the other interns. In conclusion, Stitts wrote:

> Sara was unaware of how her nonverbal behaviors were viewed by her coworkers. And while she felt that being eager and assertive were positive traits, she was reminded that the organizations often require conformity and may frown on those who 'outshine' their colleagues. Fortunately, Sara was able to learn quickly, adjust her behaviors, and respond to the managers effectively, so that at the end of her internship, she received an excellent evaluation. (p. 449)

Stitt's concluding statements are consistent with this theme of "It's up to me" for two reasons. First, it highlights the importance of intern conformity to organizational settings in the creation of internship success. Second, it highlights how organizations

benefit from this discourse. While Sara cited her female gender and black race earlier as potential reasons for being corrected and given what she perceived to be unfair treatment when compared with her observations of her peers, Stitts only concluded with a statement about the importance of conformity to the organization for internship success. Stitts neither discussed the politics of difference that might produce differential treatment in this situation nor did Stitts note how the intern and the organization might have better negotiated expectations and created a more inclusionary climate. Thus, Stitts indirectly promoted the importance of conformity over acknowledging the potential discrimination Sara faced. Working hard and being motivated to succeed are rarely frowned upon in organizations, yet this organization found fault with it. Stitts validated the importance of the organization's needs by framing Sara's experience in a positive way—Sara conformed and achieved success through her evaluation. There was no possibility in this newcomer socialization experience for individuation or difference, much as Allen (2000) learned in her own experience as a new Black and female assistant professor at a research institution.

In conclusion, this theme shows that interns made sense of tensions and conflict through articulating inconsistencies between themselves and the organization and subsequently conforming to the organization. They did not perceive any need for the organization to adjust to them or their expectations but took matters into their own hands by observing how and where they might contribute and by having conversations with organizational members who might assist them in being able to do more and different kinds of work so that their internship experiences would be meaningful to them in terms

of the work itself and in terms of their career development. Additionally, interns who had largely positive experiences used this theme of sensemaking because they attributed their success to specific proactive actions they took and personality traits they possessed. This is consistent with previous findings that individuals find meaningfulness when they have the ability to exercise autonomy and feel in control over their results at work (Buzzannell & Lucas, 2013). Overall, this theme presumes that it is through the intern's skills, motivation, and conformity to the organization that meaningfulness of the internship is created.

"For my future"

The second theme addresses how undergraduate internships are talked about as an investment for students' future careers. This theme helps address how interns made sense of the material-discursive tension between not being paid and the discourse surrounding work which highlights salary and payment. Interns rationalized this tension through "For my future" which presumes internships are a prerequisite step for future careers and even if monetary pay is not provided at the time, there will be a future payoff. Thus, interns often made sense of their negative or unpaid experiences by viewing it as a key career developmental lesson or experience and required rite of passage to enter their careers. Their phrasing with its temporal nature indicates that they perceive the internship as a contained or bounded experience that functions as an asset or commodity useful for their future careers and associated income and other benefits. Buzzanell and Lucas (2013) highlighted how communication research tells the story of a career as "upward movement and individual choice relies on effective, efficient, and politically astute discourse and

social network positioning" (p. 5). This theme is consistent with this career story, because it highlights the interns' political savvy to get ahead of their peers in the job market while they are still students, the importance of networking, and that their careers will move upward after their internship. Interns view this as a rite of passage and focus less on the content and experiences and more as a way to be more competitive in their future career.

Whereas some interns' work was arduous and there was no pay, their experience was made sense of because it would still be "another line" on their resumés. Alternatively, students who loved their internships, paid and unpaid, often talked about how meaningful they perceived their experience to be, through a focus on future payoff—networking for future jobs, or learning skills to make them more competitive in the job market against their peers. In these cases, meaningfulness meant the building of visible credentials for job searches at present as well as the development of capital for future use.

Interns made sense of unmet expectations through the hope that the internship would help them in their future. Olivia explains that, "It can be pretty boring sometimes, but you also get some incredible experiences and get to meet some awesome alumni that make the internship completely worth it." While the internship work itself was not always meaningful in terms of deep content and new experiences, that is, interns perceived their internships as somewhat mundane, the interns expressed their conviction that was through networking for the future, that internship was "worth it." Similarly, Michael explains:

> The internship that I had this summer is probably more fitting for a student
>
> that is looking to go into Operations or Player Development, rather than
>
> Marketing like me. However, I was still able to learn a lot about the

organization as a whole and to meet a lot of important contacts, which will

help me in the future.

Here, Michael's internship was not in the field in which he was interested, but

meaningfulness was constructed through networking for future opportunities.

This theme of "For my future" allowed interns to make sense of negative

experiences because it provided space for interns to find positive benefits that might only

become useful in the future. It deals with the material-discursive tension between how

discourse surrounding work highlights the importance of payment and salary and the

sometimes lack of payment for internship work. If an intern invested time and resources

into their internship for a summer (e.g., not getting another paying summer job or

incurring expenses by moving to a new city) and then concluded that the internship was

not beneficial, this experience could potentially be a threat to their identity because would

seem as though they wasted their time and other resources and these actions are

irrevocable (Weick, 1995). Threats to identity are a cause for sensemaking, and so

justifications for actions must be created (Weick, 1995). Interns found that they could re-

frame the return on their time and financial investment from the present to the future, thus

helping them to reduce a threat to their identity through rationalizing the benefits they

receive and also providing readily available explanations to others who might view the

internship as not worth the investment for the interns.

When interns were faced with a disparity between reality and prior expectations,

they used the "For my future" theme to help navigate their experience in a positive way.

Cameron, an intern at a social media platform start-up in London, England, used this

frame to make sense of his experiences:

However on the first day when I arrived in her home, I learned that my job

would have nothing to do with anything I had assumed…However I made

the most of what I was given...However there were a lot of days where it

seemed like we really had no direction and it was very difficult to

communicate with her...However I made do with what I had, and in the

end I feel like Linda and I made somewhat of a positive impact on the

company…. I did not necessarily have the best internship experience I

could have possibly had… However a lot of the different strategies that I

picked up in dealing with bosses, really helped me along the way. I also

found that I learned new skills in dealing with people in general. I wish I

had gotten more out of this experience but I am trying to walk away with

as much as a possibly can think of. That being said I believe I am walking

away with a somewhat better knowledge of marketing, at least more than I

knew before… All in all I had an amazing experience in London…

The "for my future" theme created opportunity for Cameron by downplaying structural

problems within the internship and re-framing the internship positively. Cameron

explained that the office environment was vastly different than he was expecting because

the office was actually in his supervisor's home. Moreover, his boss was hard to

communicate with, yet he was able to make the experience meaningful by identifying

what he learned for the future. Cameron used the word "however" throughout his report

as a way to downplay problems and conflict by immediately juxtaposing it with a positive

learning outcome to be applied in the future. Cameron also mentioned that he made

"somewhat" of a positive impact and Cheney et al. (2008) identified making a positive

contribution as being a source of meaningfulness. In terms of learning objectives, Cameron explained that "While my initial goals were not met, nor even really considered, I definitely reached majority of the ones I made along the way." Within this part of his report, he explained that the original learning objectives he created were not met, so he made new ones and through their fulfillment, his internship was meaningful. This theme of "for my future" allowed for flexibility in determining meaningfulness and presumed that the best experience is one where the intern makes it great and gets something out of it for their future.

This theme identifies that interns make sense of menial experiences by identifying how it could help them in future work. Nathan went to England hoping for an internship to help him get a better grasp on Marketing. His internship consisted of tasks like filing invoices, checking for mail, and filling out purchased orders. Thus, he did not get a great grasp on what he originally wanted—to learn more about marketing. He made sense of his investment through focusing on the benefits he did receive that could be useful in his future career—such as professionalism. He explained: "I think that this experience is invaluable because it is applicable nearly everywhere I will go in my life." This theme helped students not only to justify their experience by encouraging them to not view their internships negatively, but also to protect their identity from negative comments through its focus of framing the experience for a future in which different internship aspects might become salient.

When students wrote about their experiences, they used metaphors that helped to structure their understanding that the internship would have a future payoff (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). For example, interns spoke about their career in terms of a road or path,

which implied that a career is long and winding, so this internship is the start of their career path. The metaphor of career as a journey is one of the most widely used career metaphors (Inkson, Dries, & Arnold, 2015). Polly explained that "It is smart to connect with as many people as possible there because you could use them as contacts down the road in your career" and Melania stated, "Work your hardest so that you have an accurate idea of what your future might look like if you continue on this path." Here, interns are looking at their career in terms of a road, which highlights a career's longevity and length. Benjamin stated, "An internship helps so much and benefits you in the long run whether it be from networking, experience, resume building, etc." Benjamin's language helped to summarize how this metaphor allowed interns to make sense of their current unhappiness or difficulties by understanding that at its minimum, the internship can help to build their resumé which should aid in future job hunts.

Interns also used metaphors to help direct attention to how their experience makes them more competitive than their peers. This discourse fits within the Western capitalistic discourse, highlighting the importance of competition. Many mentioned how their internship would give them a "leg up" on their peers in the future job market. For example, Brooklyn explained "I am unable to truly relate my internship in Public Relations to my lessons about Public Relations, as I have not started the classes yet, I will begin them in the fall. I can only imagine that I will have a leg up though…" Xavier also explained that, "Internship experience is invaluable. Learning practical skills in your field will provide you with a leg up on the competition." This metaphor allows interns frame their experience as positive, regardless of the internship conditions, because they perceive and believe that it will help them be more competitive against their peers. This metaphor

also helps interns to make sense of their unpaid experiences within a capitalistic frame

because it focuses on how it will make them more competitive.

Table 2

For My Future

Pseudonym	Quote
Isaac	I do not see it as a field that I would work in long-term, but it is a new experience that I can add to my resume
Betty	Knowing exactly where I want to go after graduation is a huge advantage because there are so many different job titles out there; finding the right one is never easy.
Margo	[Organization] has given me the opportunity to make multiple connections and has referred me to other contacts to help me further myself in my career.
Roberta	I also have learned skills that will put me ahead of other people trying to find jobs in journalism
Ella	For students who are deciding on which career path they want to take, this is a great way to get your feet in the water and see what public relations is like.
Natalie	I {was} so happy that I have learned almost all the entry PR practices that will help me for my future career for the past two months.
Maureen	Then I realized that I have to have something other than classes to set me apart from my other colleagues in a job opening appeared…internship would be best option for me
Bernard	It's a great connection too if you need it in the future.

Overall, this theme highlights how interns made sense of their positive and

negative experiences through an explicit focus on how it will be beneficial for their

future. This highlights how interns addressed the material-discursive tension between

working and not being paid—through the rationale that it is a rite of passage for future

jobs. The metaphor of a career as a journey helped to make this theme identifiable, which is the most common career metaphor and implies mobility, according to Inkson, Dries, and Arnold (2015). It also implies that the future is a competition in keeping with the contemporary U.S. political economic realities (Roper, Ganesh & Inkson, 2010). Finally, as mentioned earlier, this theme connotes a rite of passage. Thus, interns need to do an internship not simply because it might prove to be a beneficial investment, but also because it marks a transition from school to the world of paid employment.

"Just an Intern"

This theme of "just an intern" addressed how students made sense of their identity as an intern and their understandings of the political organizational space in which their internships were embedded. This theme had two main aspects. First, students often explained what being an "intern" consisted of, and/or often distanced themselves from what being an "intern" did not consist of. Second, many interns talked about being "allowed" to do things and used passive language, highlighting their perceived low status within the organizational hierarchy. The next theme, "I was allowed," focuses specifically on how the language interns used reflected little autonomy and control.

First, the structure, length, consistency, among other factors of each internship depends upon the specific field and organization which makes it difficult for interns to know exactly what their experience will be like. Thus, there is no standard definition for what it means to be an intern, so interns made sense of what it means to be an intern in their internship reports by defining the term through their own experiences. For example, Connor stated, "Being an intern means you will have a lot of free time." Conversely,

Isaac acknowledged the stereotype of interns completing menial tasks and seen as less than other employees and distanced his experience from that perception. Isaac explained "The office was very open to new ideas and no one put me down because of my experience or skill level being less than theirs." Here, Isaac acknowledged that although he was only an intern, he was respected by his coworkers—an experience that seemed unexpected to Isaac. Interns talked about what it meant to be an intern in an effort to articulate and make sense of their identity as an intern.

For many interns, working hard and being flexible were important aspects of their identity as an intern. Claude stated, "It's important as an intern to stand out as a hard worker, but not for anything else." Interns felt that in order to impress the people with whom they were working, it was critical that they work extra hours and go out of their way in order to be seen as a hard worker. Harrison stated, "I do believe I learned very quickly what it takes to be a good intern. Do what you are told and do it well. Hard work pays off and that is also what makes a good intern." Harrison and Claude made sense of their role as an intern by focusing on how working hard was the most important part of interning. This theme sometimes created a unique tension when interns had other jobs outside of their internship. Michael, an intern who was paid $100 per month, had to get another job in order to make ends meet. He explained that "Luckily, my boss was very understanding…However, I still felt bad telling him I could not come in on some days when he needed me." Michael's use of "luckily" continues the discourse of the internship as a privilege, and addresses the tensions between work and internship.

Interns were expected to work as hard, or harder, than full-time employees, despite the fact that they were sometimes not paid, creating a unique tension to manage.

The language interns used when they talked about the importance of hard work as an

intern parallels to Buzzanell and Liu's (2005) study of the ways discouraged pregnant

women made sense of their maternity leave. The violation of the expectation that "good"

employees are ones who are hardworking and do not take maternity leave became

apparent in the poor treatment of the pregnant women by their supervisors during and

after their leave. In other words, the interns were supposed to be ideal workers even

though they were not permanent full-time and paid employees. As long as they aligned

with and fulfilled the organization's economic-centered focus with little to no expectation

of individualized programs or discourses and behaviors of care by others in the

organization, then they understood their place as "just an intern." Interns echoed the

importance of hard work in being able to have their coworkers view them as worthy and

for them to feel validated. Robin stated, "If you are asked to come in extra days, say yes

and be eager to show how grateful you are to be a part of the company." Here, Robin was

working for a television station but was not being paid for her work and time. Instead of

viewing extra work as being beyond her contractual internship commitment, she viewed

it as an opportunity to work hard and fulfill her perceived internship role obligations.

Otherwise, the intern-supervisor discourses and practices might be mismatched and might

lead to dissatisfaction on the parts of one or both parties, as they were in Buzzanell and

Liu's research.

Another way of managing this tension between working hard and not being paid

was by talking about themselves as volunteers for the organization, and regarding their

work contributions as "help." The language of volunteerism was one that is commonly

used with internships, especially in nonprofit organizations. Perlin (2011) cited Turner

Broadcasting System's internship listing in his book as one example of this discourse.

This internship listing clarified that its unpaid internship program is "designed to provide

the on-the-job experience to student volunteers" (p. 118). Perlin explained that "in

practice, most of us recognize a clear distinction between volunteers—contributing out of

good will, often able to dictate their own schedule, and possessing other means of

economic support—and interns, usually young people trying to get ahead" (p. 119). Thus,

interns made sense of their experiences as an act of goodwill rather than a job in some

cases. Interns sometimes wrote of their work as "help," which connotes willingness to

expend effort on behalf of others. Theresa wrote, "Most companies love extra help and

might even pay you." The language interns used is consistent with Perlin's argument that

there is a language of volunteerism within internships, particularly those without pay, and

this shifts focus away from the importance of working for pay.

Given the ambiguity of what an "intern" actually is, many interns described what

it means to be an intern through their own experiences. Many interns described their hard

work ethic and flexibility as being central to what it means to be an intern.

Table 3

Just an Intern

Pseudonym	Quote
Archie	I believe that an internship should be giving the intern an actual look as to what you would be completing everyday as a member of a similar job.
Alex	They don't treat you as if you're just an intern, but as someone that has the potential to be successful.
Ryan	This is not an internship for those who like to stay grounded or like that have every moment planned. You must be flexible.
Caleb	It's important to be humble and outgoing throughout the process and not take yourself too seriously.

"I was allowed"

Interns often spoke about their roles within the organization as being less important than full-time employees, highlighting their lack of autonomy within their internship role. Whereas interns were generally less experienced, younger, and only working temporarily, interns still completed skilled tasks that might otherwise be completed by full-time employees. Regardless of whether interns completed unskilled or skilled tasks, they spoke in a way that lowered their status in comparison to full-time employees or acknowledged the power imbalance that existed in organizations. This way of speaking about their internships is consistent with the discourse surrounding internships which glorify them as being a training ground or apprenticeship, namely as requirement for a future career (Perlin, 2011). As training or apprenticeship, respectful interns would do what is permitted and not pursue courses or other activities that were not appropriate for their organizational status or level. Thus, being "allowed" indicated

control of their activities but also acknowledgement of their contributions as they proved themselves worthy of additional assignments.

Weick's (1995) argument that individuals make sense of experiences to protect their identities and sense of self worked within this theme because it created opportunities for interns to view their experiences as a coveted opportunity. When internships were thought about as a coveted opportunity, it validated the need for interns to speak about their experiences in a way that highlighted luck and opportunity to complete tasks. Expectations play a large role in influencing how interns make sense of their experience, and if they have high expectations they often look for cues that fulfill their belief (Weick, 1995). These high expectations are very important because they are more influential in the process than arguments. For example, interns spoke of their work as "help" and mentioned they were "allowed" to complete tasks. In a normal working experience, employees generally view work as work itself and not as an opportunity they should be given permission to complete. Ryan, a paid senior intern at a food store, explained that his organization "let me sit in on meetings." Similarly, Lucas, a senior unpaid broadcasting intern said, "All of the reporters are super willing to have you tag along." Ryan spoke of his role in relation to his co-workers as being one of annoyance and sibling-like to full-time workers and as someone who might or might not be allowed to "tag along" with employees of the organization. Another intern, Susan, wrote that after asking her supervisors for work, she was then "allowed" to complete those tasks and "help out more."

Interns also talked about their supervisors in a way that highlighted hierarchy within the organization. Xavier, a paid intern, said, "The manager is willing to delegate

and allow the interns to truly get into the core business." The use of the word "allow"

implies that working on these tasks was something for which an intern needed

permission. Additionally, the "delegation" of tasks implies the leadership style was top-

down and that providing interns with work was something that the leader was willing or

unwilling to do. Vickie, a paid sports marketing intern, explained that her supervisor

"gave us clear orders, yet allowed enough space for us to grow on our own." Normally, if

someone was giving orders it would be in a military setting rather than an internship,

placing emphasis on the organizational hierarchy. Gabriel stated that the boss to which

she "reported" was fired, continuing language choices that evoke militaristic language,

rather than language that resembled an organization that was supportive or family-like.

Interns also spoke about their experiences in a way that referenced their "place" in

the organization, indicating low status. For example, William stated, "Don't act like you

know it all, remember your place, but if you have a good point or insight, put it out there

in a very humble way." William reflected that because he was an intern, he should know

his place and be careful not to offend his coworkers who might view him as a

subordinate. Similarly, Perlin (2011) cited an article in *Seventeen* magazine from Intern

Queen who wrote that tip #4 for "five secrets to help you get the most out of your

experience" is "know your place… as an intern, you should always keep quiet unless

someone asks your opinion… I made sure not to overstep my bounds (p. 151). Similarly,

Amelia wrote in her report that it was important to "know your boundaries… it's not like

college where you can goof off and that behavior is acceptable." The notion that interns

needed to know that they should act in a way that evidenced they know their "place"

evidences a lack of respect and reiterates that interns should be treated as lesser than fulltime employees.

Table 4

I Was Allowed

Name	Quote
Anna	We all worked in the office of her house but were allowed to move around freely as we pleased and do our work in the garden or the kitchen.
Isaac	As for the interns, we would either be in a little conference room cubicle next to the VP, or we would sit at a group of three desks that were stationed next to the couches.
Brooklyn	The work that Francesca assigned me dictated the responsibilities I would have for those hours in the office. I had a range of things to do each day and I also had set-tasks that I knew to do as soon as I got in the office.
Adrian	Be on time and keep your mouth shut during conferences with clients! Interns are not supposed to interrupt or contribute to meetings with important clients.

Summary

This final theme draws attention to how interns talk about their experiences as an intern, but focuses specifically on the lack of autonomy and low status interns had. The first theme, "It's up to me" highlights the importance of autonomy and initiative in making the internship a successful experience. The second theme, "For my future," specifically focuses on how interns view their career trajectories as a journey that they are working to get ahead in through their internship experience. This theme also helps interns manage the financial constraints and potential identity threat interns face working while they are unpaid considering the capitalistic society they are a part of where money is an important part of work (Buzzanell & Lucas, 2013). This tension is also apparent in "Just an intern," which highlights the expectations what interns are expected to do in order to be a good intern—with hard work and flexibility as two important traits that were found

in these reports. "Just an intern" focuses more on what interns found to be most important to their role as an intern, while "I was allowed" focused on the lack of autonomy and feelings of powerlessness interns felt during their time as an intern.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Contribution: Internships as tension-based frameworks

This aim of this study was to find out how students who had done internships for university credit made sense of their internship experiences. In this section, the theoretical and practical contributions of this study are presented, along with findings that support such claims.

Overall, students perceived their internships as a contradictory and ambiguous space in which they were neither student nor employee, and in which they had opportunities but not always the power or understanding of organizational dynamics to know how to act upon such opportunities. Their primary strategies for working through tensions, ambiguities, and ambivalence about their status and the internships' relationship to their current work and future career were to recall their internship as a positive experience. That internships are fraught with contradiction can be found in the words and images though which interns conveyed what they did, what they wish they had done, how they were treated, and where they situated the internship in their educational learning processes, organizational socialization, and careers.

One major finding from this study is the unique tensions, contradictions, opportunities and constraints that interns had to make sense of. Of the 97 internship

reports analyzed, 87 interns (90%) rated the organization they worked at on a scale from one to ten, with ten being most satisfied. Out of these 87 reports, 76 (87%) of respondents rated their organization at an eight or higher, indicating high satisfaction. Yet, many interns described problems with their internship site, yet still gave the organization a high rating. For instance, Glen, a senior unpaid intern for a digital marketing agency, stated "I think my experience was alright, but there was little to no direction and I felt like, though, some work really taught me a lot, some work was minimal and irrelevant to my major." Although Glen received only minimal feedback and felt his assigned work wasn't relevant to his career path, he still rated both the organization and his supervisor at an eight out of ten. Additionally, 87 of the interns were asked if they would recommend their internship to other students. Even when organization ratings were low (ratings of three and four), interns still recommended the internship to other students. This finding indicates some contradiction between what the interns said about their experiences and how they quantitatively ranked their satisfaction with their internship experiences. Throughout the findings of this study, many interns strove to make their experiences meaningful even when the experiences were not what they expected.

There were four major themes that interns used to navigate and make sense of their internship experiences. The first theme, "It's up to me," is defined as the premise that interns are responsible for conforming to the organization and making the most of their internship experience. If there are potential opportunities available during the internship, the organization does not hand these to the intern, but instead it is up to the intern to find these opportunities and look for ways to make the most of their experience. This theme helped interns to make sense of negative experiences because it highlighted

the intern's own responsibility to make the experience better and the importance of autonomy helps employees find work more meaningful (Buzzanell & Lucas, 2013). Interns often placed the blame for conflict within the internship on themselves, and after they identified and articulated the discrepancy, they modified their behaviors, they described their experiences were more positive. This is reflective of a neoliberal discourse which stresses "individual responsibility" (Roper, Ganesh & Inkson, 2010, p. 663). Interns made sense of positive experiences through this theme by highlighting the skills and attributes they possessed that helped them to conform to the organization and have productive experiences.

The second major theme, "For my future," is defined as interns' expressions of their assumption that future benefits will be derived from their current internship experiences. Interns often perceived their experiences to be meaningful by going beyond the present and delineating potential career gains that they expect their internships to provide them with in terms of networking for future jobs, adding a line to their resumé, and being more competitive for future jobs. Interns made sense of negative experiences by talking about their current dissatisfactions and juxtaposing these feelings with the future benefits that made the experience "worth" it. Interns made sense of positive experiences by focusing on the value and importance of the internship by again commenting on future benefits and reiterating the importance of internships in a future career.

The next theme "Just an intern," focused on how interns viewed their role as an intern within the world of work and organizational structures. Often they perceived that the internship and being labeled as an intern were positions and titles that marginalized

them as workers insofar as they felt as though others treated them as less valuable and worth consideration than full-time employees. The final theme, "I was allowed," focused on the power constraints interns faced as interns. Interns often used passive language, such as they were "allowed" to complete a certain task, reflecting the uneasiness they had in assimilating into the organization. Interns used this language when talking about both positive and negative experiences, and made sense of their role as being one low in the organizational hierarchy. Sometimes when interns were not satisfied they cited their perceived lack of power in not voicing their discomfort. Interns also viewed their role as being one where, because they were just an intern, hard work was the most important aspect of the job. They needed to prove themselves not only to their internship supervisor for the present, but also prove themselves for future benefits such as letters of recommendation, possible jobs at the same organization, and other career aspects. Therefore, when interns were working over their allotted time without pay, it made sense to them that they were not being taken advantage of by the organization because these actions were just the general requirements and expectations of an internship.

Much of what interns wrote about used cues from a tension-based framework with regard to how interns were treated by the organization in contrast to how interns were expected to behave and interact with the organization. These cues included interns citing feelings of stress, uncertainty, and confusion. One major tension interns felt is that they were expected to act as professional employees yet many are not being paid at all, or only a small amount, by the organization. More specifically, in this data set, only 24 of the 97 (25%) interns received any financial compensation for their time. Given that interns generally gave their internship high ratings, it is an interesting contradiction to how

Western society generally conceptualizes work as being one associated with payment as "lack of money can constrain experiences of choice and dignity in career and lifestyles" (Buzzanell & Lucas, 2013, p. 15). Yet interns never mentioned that they wished they were paid for their experiences. In fact, interns who had to get another job to help supplement their income from either a low-paying or unpaid internship felt indebted to their supervisors for allowing them to rearrange their internship schedule or not being available at certain times of the day. These interns said they felt guilty for having to work outside of the internship because they understood their supervisors expected them to have the same availability as their full-time employees. This guilt is a result of their acknowledgment of the expectation to work as a full-time employee. Ultimately, interns were expected to have the schedule and work ethic of a full-time employee but in many cases the interns were not paid, creating a contradiction for the interns to make sense of.

There is another contradiction between the legal requirements of an unpaid internship and the way interns talked about their experiences in this study. The legality of unpaid internships is contingent upon a few conditions. These conditions include that students are not displacing regular workers and also that the experience should only be for the benefit of the intern (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010). Interns also are supposed to be under close supervision. Yet, interns did not talk about their experiences in a way that reflected the organization accommodating the intern. Interns instead talked about how the interns themselves needed to take initiative and conform to the organization, which defined the theme, "It's up to me." Additionally, interns talked about their experiences in ways that highlighted their feelings of having little power and autonomy in the organization, which also was reflected in the theme, "I was allowed." These two ways

of making sense of internship experiences contradict the premise that the internship is for the benefit of the intern, not for the benefit of the organization because organizations do not empower the intern to feel comfortable and they do not accommodate the intern.

Furthermore, another study found that internship listings are very similar to job listings where organizations list specific personality traits and skill set requirements that the organization is needing and talk about internships as a "marketized discourse" (Discenna, 2016). This finding also evidences the contradiction between the legal requirement that internships are for the benefit of the intern and the reality that interns conform and work hard to impress the organization. The specific requirement that an internship should be an educational experience was addressed in this Critical Discourse Analysis, where they found the term "learn" listed in 26 of the 50 internship listings. However, the way "learn" was used did not always focus on what the intern would learn 50% of these 26 times. It was used to note that the organization was interested in a future intern who was a quick "learner" (Discenna, 2016, p. 444). This contradicts the notion that internships are advertising what interns will learn from the experience in these listings because they focus on what the organization needs from an intern.

Student interns face contradictions, tensions, and privileges that are unique to their role as an intern with regard to their power, or lack of power, during their internship. One case study delved into the tensions that one intern, Dennis, who was a high school teacher interning as a principal in the school for which he worked, faced (Lochmiller, 2014). Dennis's supervisor put Dennis in a situation where he had significant power—evaluating coworkers in his own department who he knew were on the brink of being fired. When Dennis reached out to his supervisor and voiced his discomfort, he was told

that he needed to move forward with the task and accept his responsibility. Later, Dennis was asked to observe interactions in the school's front office and when he interjected himself to correct misinformation, Dennis was told his actions were inappropriate—that Dennis had overstepped his boundaries as an intern. Dennis' situation represents how the responsibility of an intern can be paradoxical and difficult to understand. Interns in this study also expressed confusion regarding understanding what their "boundaries" are as an intern because it was often unclear. Interns often referred to their status of "Just an intern," which meant interns had little control over their working situation.

Another tension that some interns faced in this study stemmed from how discourse surrounding internships can create high expectations that are left unfulfilled. Across the country, universities and employers talk about an internship experience as being one of the most important ways to set oneself apart from other students. By holding internships in high regard, and universities legitimizing their importance through academic credit, interns perceive the experience to be life changing and important (Perlin, 2011). This perception of internships being coveted is also legitimized through discourse that highlights the competitiveness to even get an internship, as interns frequently used in the theme "For my future." In "For my future," interns used metaphors, such as "Internship experience as a leg up," which talked about their experience as one way to put themselves above their peers in the job market. Additionally, at a nonprofit event for the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights, unpaid communication internships were actually auctioned to an audience for charity—the Vogue internship was sold for $42,500 (Stout, 2010). This reflects just how valuable internships, even unpaid, can be. While it is a rare occurrence, it still explains how far people may go to obtain

internships for the summer because they are seen as so useful in future careers. Yet value is not generated through being paid, which is generally a practice for those who work for an organization. Additionally, some interns' experiences were in a supervisor's home rather than an office, or at a desk where they were given little work or work they felt was irrelevant to complete. In cases like these, interns can feel tension because they expect the internship to be a coveted opportunity but this is undermined by not receiving pay, doing menial work, or not building skills. This tension was often made sense of in the theme "For my future," because interns felt even if they did not learn the skills they expected to learn, the experience would still help them in the future, which still helped interns to view the experience as meaningful and not as a waste of time.

Limitations

One limitation for this study includes that students were only responding to one list of questions, which limited the scope of what interns wrote about their experience. This method also does not allow for follow-up probing questions to get more information or to allow students to share stories. Sometimes, students did not write much information on their internship reports aside from the bare minimum, so it was difficult to understand the full scope of their experiences.

These internship reports were also submitted as part of a requirement for academic credit. This may have caused interns to report differently because the internship coordinator was reading these reports. Additionally, because many interns were only receiving academic credit, a large part of the sample only had unpaid internships. It would have been more accurate to have a more even sample of paid versus unpaid internships.

Another limitation for this study is that interns only wrote about their experiences at the conclusion of their internship. Responses would likely be different if interns wrote about their experiences throughout the internship, rather than only at the end. Interns may have been more likely to only remember events and encounters that happened toward the conclusion of the internship rather than the start, especially if their internship spanned over a few months. This limitation is especially important to understanding how interns made sense of their experiences, because the sensemaking process of applying "rules" and feelings of uncertainty and confusion were not talked about in great detail. When interns were writing their reports, it was retrospective, and so certain conflicts were only talked about minimally because they had already been solved. Completing surveys or interviews throughout the internship would have broadened the scope of the data and perhaps provided more details to analyze, especially in regards to conflicts that occurred. This study was also from the perspective of the intern, and would have provided a more complete understanding of the situation if members of the organizations were also interviewed.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

One implication of this study is that internships should be regarded more as a career choice, rather than being seen as a requirement or barrier to entry for a professional job upon graduation. Interns' navigation of difficult and tension-filled organizational conflicts and contradictions is more reflective of a first job rather than a stepping stone into a first job. Interns also used language that is reflective of how employees talk about their careers. For example, interns use the metaphor of career as

path in order to describe the start of their path, which is the most common career metaphor (Inkson, Dries, and Arnold, 2015). Interns are trying to discern a path, to develop strategies for making their path or journey easier or more directly relevant to their career goals, and determine where to take different routes. In the data, interns report that they are building their careers through social networks and knowledge gain, similar to a first job rather than being thought about as an entry into a job. Interns used language which acknowledged organizational hierarchy and interpersonal conflicts at work. Additionally, interns talked about meaningfulness from having autonomy to conform to the organization, which is one of the major themes of meaningful work (Cheney et al, 2008). Future research could explore this parallel between how people talk about their experiences as an intern in comparison to a full-time, paid employee in more detail.

Another theoretical implication is that there was a lot that was uncovered in terms of power dynamics that future research could explore. In many ways, organizations have significant power over internships because the internship is regarded so highly, organizations do not always need to provide much structure for the program. In some reports, interns were compliant and had little power, which reflects constrained autonomy and makes it easier for organizations to take advantage of the lack of power interns have. Additionally, the tension between the legal requirements for an unpaid internship and actual practice is another area to explore in more depth because organizations benefitted from having interns yet did not always frame the internship as being one where it is for the benefit of the intern. For instance, interns felt compelled to prove themselves through working hard, yet were not paid for their time, which is a routine and generally important practice for working employees.

Practical Implications

In terms of practical implications, future workshops could be created to help train internship advisors as to how to better support their student. There does not always seem to be an advocate for the student intern, and workshops where internship coordinators are empowered to be a spokesperson for the intern could help interns feel more supported.

Workshops for interns themselves would also be effective before interns enter into their first day. There should be more knowledge dissemination as to what the legal requirements are for an internship to be unpaid. Interns also often talked about being afraid to ask for tasks or help at the beginning of their internship, and once they learned how to do this their experiences were better. If workshops were held to help teach interns learn how to voice their questions in a professional setting, it could help reduce discomfort, especially at the start of the internship.

Internship workshops should frame the experience as a career choice and prepare interns for some of the tensions and power dynamics they may face as interns. Interns should have specific skills and knowledge goals outlined that they want to seek from the experience, and to not simply select the only internship they are offered, but to be selective. If the internship is unpaid, interns should understand how to communicate with their supervisors their learning objectives and expectations are. Ultimately, interns should view these as professional experiences and to acknowledge that not all internships will help them in their career.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study analyzed how interns made sense of their experiences and found three major themes: "It's up to me," "For my future," and "Just an intern," and

"I was allowed." This study analyzed themes from 97 written internship reports from interns who completed internships in the field of communication for academic credit. Interns consistently rated their organizations and internships positively, but what they wrote about experiences that evidenced tensions and contradictions embedded in their role as an intern. In conclusion, this study found that internships should be regarded more as a career choice rather than looking at internships as being a way to enter into a specific career path. Future research should also explore the power dynamics between organizations and internships in more detail.

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APPENDICIES

Appendix A: Internship Report Assignment

Complete the following evaluation.

Name:

Status at time of internship: ___ Freshman   ___ Sophomore   ___ Junior   ___ Senior

Semester internship was completed: __ Fall   ___ Spring   ___ Summer

How many internships have you done before this one?

How many internships have you applied for?

How many weeks did you work?   How many hours each week?

Organization worked for:

Supervisor worked for:

Were you paid for the internship? No _____ (if yes, what was the pay?) _____

Have you worked for or had prior contact with this organization before? If yes, in what capacity?

How did you find/locate this internship?

What were your responsibilities?

Were there any problems?

What advice would you offer other students about the internship experience?

Would you recommend that other students complete this internship with this organization? Why or why not?

On a scale of 1 (being the worst) to 10 (the best), how would you rate the organization you worked for: ____

On a scale of 1 (being the worst) to 10 (the best), how would you rate the supervisor you worked for: __

Appendix B: Internship Essay Assignment

"You must write an Internship Analysis Paper. The paper should include: a) a description of the internship work setting, the purpose and structure of the host organization, and your responsibilities; b) a description of one or more experiences which relate to your academic program: c) a review and evaluation of your learning objectives; d) a discussion of how the internship experience relates to concepts or theories learned in academic courses at Purdue and what you learned from the internship."