

Internship programs are hitherto underutilized source of talent pool. Organizations can explore the potential of internship program as a strategic tool for acquiring future talent, source of diverse and global expertise for business projects, and medium for organizational branding as preferred employer in premier campuses. With increasing globalization of businesses and tighter market for quality talent, internship programs could become an effective tool for acquiring expertise and managing organizational brand. This could be one of the effective tools for examining organization-employee fit. The diverse expertise that is brought through internship program also helps in bringing innovative ideas into the organizations.

For a candidate an internship program may help to explore an area of interest or a prospective employer. For the students, internship helps to get an understanding the employment market and students expect the internship programs to provide good exposure and value-adding experience.

Internships at RPG Group

RPG Group, a USD 3 billion enterprise has interest in six sectors including power, transmission, retail, entertainment, technology, and tyres. The diversity of talent required here becomes a big opportunity to prospective employees to have an area to work that suits their interests. However, from an HR perspective it creates an opportunity and challenge to manage the diverse needs of the businesses and create a unified platform to connect with the premium campuses.

The internship process challenges can thus be summarized in terms of managing relations and branding in premium campuses, and internally creating demand for interns and creating systems and processes that are best in class to manage the internship. RPG started in a major way in recruiting interns from campuses in the year 2006 for the year 2007. There were 76 interns who were recruited from these campuses. While in the cycle of 2007-2008, we have recruited 100 summer interns. By all means this would make RPG the largest recruiter of summer interns from premium Indian management campuses. This is also in parallel with the policy of hiring permanent hires from premium campuses.

Management summer internships

It is mandatory for students of premium management campuses to undergo summer internships during the summer months of the two year program.

As far a student is concerned, the objectives would be as follows.

- To work with a good organization aligned that offers an opportunity aligned to his/her interests
- To have a reasonable expectation of a career with the organization
- To have a two months experience with a brand that will help in future career
- To learn on the job and have a reasonable stint in a good project

Internship process THE RPG way

PRE JOINING

- Assign single point of contact in respective companies for resolving all queries of the interns (project related, logistics & accommodation based queries).
- Provide list of suggested readings: books, journals etc. related to the respective project or industry, so that the intern can focus more on areas related to the project.

ON JOINING

- Welcome meeting (preferably with project guide).
- Proper seating arrangement and computer access (within a day of joining).
- E-mail id for each intern (within 2-3 days of joining).

DURING INTERNSHIP

- Informal interactions with senior management.
- Fortnightly review of progress on the project with milestones.
- Informal interactions and general checking of intern's comfort.
- Appointment of buddy in case the project guide is in a different location from where the intern is posted.

ON COMPLETION

- Presentation by each intern upon completion of the project to senior management team (including the CEO, HR head and project guide).
- Project evaluation and feedback to intern.
- RPG mementos to the interns (t-shirts, caps, cups, music CD etc.).
- Consolidated report submission to Group HR.

FEEDBACK

- Questionnaire to be filled by the intern, i.e., feedback on all the above points for future improvement.
- Consolidated report submission to Group HR.

summers @RPG

By Dr. Sandeep K. Krishnan



Being one of the highest recruiters from premium management campuses, RPG has put in place a world class process to manage its interns.

However, its important that some intangible objectives are always kept in the mind of individuals when they make a choice. The brand of the organization, the peer group that would be joining, and the relative importance feel of the project is a major deciding factor as far the student is concerned. The ball game in a premier campus is of branding, showing the big picture, and ensuring that internship is part of a long term association with the organization.

A summer internship program for the premium campus students is a difficult and even an expensive proposition. The stipends that are given for the interns are on the higher side. The projects are to fine tuned and there should be commitment from the management team to be project guides and mentors. There should be an effort to make sure that in a short period of close to 8 weeks that the intern is engaged with the team and the organization as a whole. While the organizational objectives are to have important projects done with talented individuals, the crux is in ensuring that enough management time is invested in guiding the interns and getting reasonable outcomes.

RPG way

RPG with its diversified nature offers wide variety of projects in different group companies and associated functions. With diverse opportunities and growth in the various sectors, in premier campuses RPG being represented as a group gave the opportunity for students to pick and choose the variety of projects available. The multiple opportunities offered as well as the well managed process in the past helped to have considerable selling points on the campus. As Arvind Agrawal, President HR and Corporate Development, RPG Group explains, "The scope of the internships and how the programme is run clearly reflects the growth and forward looking nature of the group. Our efforts are to make these talents ready for future leadership positions."

The following are the processes that were followed to have the best in class experience for the interns

- The interns are hired against ear marked number projects
- The projects area and the number of interns needed are agreed and buy in is there from managers
- The projects are of important yet not urgent in nature. Hence, the interns work less on transactional work
- The selection team is made very clear that who ever is hired as interns are to be looked as possible final recruits
- The points of contact on administration both in terms

RPG BRAND PROPOSITION: GO FOR GROWTH

DIVERSE STRENGTHS
DIVERSE OPPORTUNITIES

EMPOWERING
PERFORMANCE

VALUING PEOPLE

FORWARD LOOKING

Reasons to believe: examples

Opportunity to in six sectors - movements across sectors and functions

Higher responsibilities in the beginning of the career (testimonials from previous batch)

Group's investment in the people, vision to be an exciting work place, processes in talent management, learning and development, and testimonials of caring for people

Adoption of new age work practices - balanced business scorecard

The well laid out growth plan to be USD 10 bn in market cap from the current US 3 bn by 2010

of logistics and project related matters with the organization are informed well in advance.

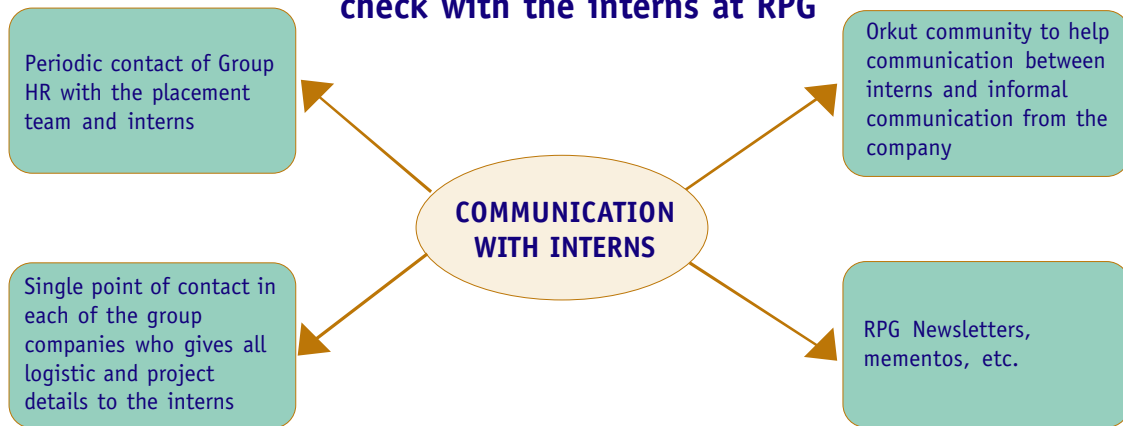
- Evaluation and feedback criteria are well laid out

The process flow

The first step is to have the requirements from different group companies. At this stage we get the commitment on the number of projects and the mentors. In the second stage we set the stage in the select campuses. RPG hires only from the top 15 campuses in the country. This includes IIMs, XLRI, MDI, SP Jain, etc. The key is to have the best talent come in place and with that have the best in class processes. In certain campuses, we already have an established identity and the slotting of RPG is high in the order. RPG branding is on the following key areas. With the underlying theme of going for growth, the following are the brand propositions are diverse strengths and diverse opportunities, empowering performance, valuing people, and forward looking.

The consistency in this has ensured that we get preferred slots in many of the campuses. Also for the presentations and associated selection process, there is always participation of the senior management team. According to Nihar Ghosh, senior vice president, retail sector: "Internships are a targeted branding tool for us in the campuses. There is a great value in saying that apart from what we portray in campuses, come and experience the brand proposition before planning to join us. We believe that all our interns are our future brand ambassadors or employees." This ensures that hiring of the interns is of strategic importance for both brand building and sends a message across the campus and

Communication and process check with the interns at RPG



organization on how seriously we are taking this intervention for building future talent pipeline.

Key challenges

Although we can have best in class processes, the key challenge is to have it executed in the best possible way. One key issue is that the time period for internship is only 8 weeks and there is no room for much error. The other key aspect is that there should be consistency of experience while doing the internship. These calls for great in terms of reaching to all levels on what are the expectations from both the interns and the project mentors. At RPG this is done by two means; advance communication of process from Group HR to all the interns, HR heads of different companies in the group, and using means of continuous communication. We used orkut community as a means of communication of all the interns. This helps the interns to communicate between themselves and also give any communication from RPG to them. Since there is huge time gap between the selection of the interns and their actual joining, we send regular communication like RPG newsletters to update the students on what is happening at RPG.

Once on board, periodic feedback is also taken from the interns on different aspects as shown above. Here, we are looking at pure administrative arrangements at one end to feedback on learning and execution on the project at other end. The final stage of the project period is also critical. As one of the major outcome of the project is that the student is evaluated for fit for future roles in the organization, the project guide and the senior team evaluates the student for a possible pre placement offer. Pre-placement offer is a common term in the placement parlance where the student is offered an opportunity to join the organization before she/he opts for the regular placement season. It is also quite possible in an organization like RPG that the individual may be really good at a project but there is no suitable permanent position available. In such a case the group human resource also takes the responsibility to evaluate the

candidate across the various group companies for suitable positions. It is interesting to note that at RPG while we had close to 80 summer interns last year, 32 were given PPOs (Pre placement offer) and 4 were given PPIs (pre-placement interview offer to be considered for positions across group companies). States N.Dharmarajan, vice president HR, KEC International (part of transmission sector of RPG), "Internship really gives the best opportunity for the student and the organization to evaluate each other best. Hence, apart from the value add in terms of the project, we get a really good bandwidth for assessing the student on the attitude and competencies".

Other interesting aspect here is that the communication with the project mentor in the company and the intern starts well in advance before the internship. Hence, from the day one in the company there is enough rapport built between the intern and the project mentor. At RPG, to have the best of internship apart from the stipend, and the evaluation for pre placement offers, we give the Chairman's best intern of the year award and five RPG interns of the year award. This award is based on the presentation to the leadership team on the project, the conduct of the intern on behavior and competencies.

The stretched stage in the internship process that we are perfecting is the continuous contact of the intern with the project mentor even after the completion of the project. Hence, the intern completely sees through the recommendations of his/her project being implemented in the organization.

As a whole if we sum up the challenges of running a successful internship are in consistency of processes across, communication and buy-in with various stake holders, effective branding in the campuses, and getting tangible results to fulfill the objectives of both the students and the organization. ○

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