

Strategic Structured Internship Programme (SSIP): The Nuts and Bolts of Bridging the Gap

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ABSTRACT

Making education relevant to the world of work is as pressing a challenge in Malaysia as it is in other regions of the world. The Strategic Structured Internship Programme, or rather popularly known as SSIP, is a collaborative initiative between Politeknik Banting Selangor (PBS) and Selangor Human Resource Development Centre (SHRDC). It is designed and developed to give students the kind of confidence needed that what they learned in class is applicable to the workplace, while on the other hand to provide the industry with the assurance that new and potential workforce entrants have the needed skills. This initiative was borne out of a deep desire to enhance the employability rate of PBS's students, which also constitutes one of the many key performance indicators (KPI) of public polytechnics in the country, while at the same time trying to bridge the gap between academia and industry. Oftentimes, skills mismatch between graduates and employers' needs is frequently cited as one of the main driver of graduate unemployment. Hence, this may constitute the so-called nuts and bolts of bridging the gap. In the implementation of SSIP, the roles of SHRDC and PBS are very well defined. SHRDC, being closer to industries, is responsible in identifying and engaging suitable industry partners to participate in the programme. PBS is responsible in the selection of suitable candidates (students) to be part of the programme. The SSIP entails a three (3) phase structured programme with its built-in monitoring mechanism. Since the SSIP is a pilot project, hence the target group comprises participating students from the 4th semester of the Mechanical Engineering Diploma programme. SHRDC and PBS work hand-in-hand in trying to enable participating students acquire the right and relevant skills that will enhance their employability.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Industries and policy makers, alike, are increasingly fascinated by a myriad of "implementation ready" schemes that improve productivity worldwide. The interest is fuelled by the desire to get work done in a timely and cost-effective manner. In this world of work, there is no room for error and work or products are expected to be delivered on time with zero

defect! Any slips will mean a reduction in profits. Hence, this means that any potential employee is expected to literally "hit the ground running" as soon as he/she is employed [5].

The dichotomy between institutions of higher learning (IHL) and the industries have never been clearer. IHLs debated that they educate students and do not mass produce work-ready graduates, while for the longest time, the

industry continues to complain about skills mismatched and that graduates are not work-ready. And it looks like.....never the twain shall meet? Or is it?

But times have changed and evolved in so many ways over the last few decades. The onset of globalisation has brought in its wake stiff competition among industries and businesses. Businesses are done on “high-speed track” and if you are slow or not innovative enough, you either get left behind or annihilated into obscurity.

Hence, in today’s world it is more about how ready one is able to WORK and be an ASSET to the company rather than just acquiring a degree or even a diploma for instance. One may go to any IHL to learn a trade but if that person is unable to function in a work situation, he/she may be a liability. It is of very little use if a person who has studied in a certain profession does not practically do what a professional of such profession is supposed to do [5]. According to the many grouses from the employers, most graduates lacked employable skills to fit into the world of work.

The National Graduate Employability Blueprint 2012-2017 [12] by the (then) Ministry of Higher Education, denotes that Malaysian industries are currently emphasizing a set of skills that graduates should have when they apply for a job. These are further divided into two separate categories comprising hard skills and soft skills. Hard skills are defined as the mastery and practice of a body of knowledge whereas soft skills are the development of largely inter- and intra-personal skills. There are several hard skills and soft skills that have been highlighted, which should be incorporated into the IHLs’ curriculum. Some hard skills include provision of temporary/vacation work, literacy, time management, research skills, computer skills, help to secure work placement and internship, contacts with employers, preparing resume, providing assistance in job search and its techniques, and career fairs. Correspondingly, some of the soft skills include team work, presentation skills, decision-making, communication skills, understanding of career area, interview practice and planning.

It is an understood fact that as the number of IHL graduates increases, so does the need for these graduates to remain competitive and able to meet the demands set by industry, especially since the industry has the luxury of selecting the best from a sizeable pool of job seekers. The plus

point is that companies in for the long haul are prepared to invest reasonable time and money to train fresh graduates provided they can be convinced that those they hire have the required attributes. It is the industry’s responsibility to provide further training and develop graduates’ potential so as to make them experts in their profession, thereby increasing their employability. On the other hand, it is also the IHL’s responsibility to inculcate the right attributes which should be instilled and nurtured before these graduates join the workforce [12].

According to Brandon S. Fick [2], students and practitioners believed that internships are a vital part of academic programmes; they should develop job skills, as well as play an important role in the transition of students from the college to the work force. Both recruiters and educational leaders believe that internship is the number one factor in undergraduate programmes. Because of this, all students should be strongly encouraged to engage in an internship experience as they not only provide academically trained individuals to help supplement the work force, but they are also a breeding ground for the future leaders of the profession. Students not only get a jump-start to a job as they graduate, but they learn something beyond the traditional classrooms. The goal of internships is to integrate classroom teachings and field-based application opportunities to prepare them for the entry into today’s workforce.

2.0 GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Quality human resource is a crucial consideration in every productive venture and it is in fact, the most important of all the factors of production. The quality of human resource base of any country is critical if that country is expected to experience accelerated development and achieve competitive advantage, and thus far, there is little or no argument about this maxim.

However, for the longest time, there have been a lot of complaints from employers and industries that the caliber of graduates being churned out from the universities and polytechnics are not really up to scratch. Much debate has been going on and most times the unfortunate impression was created that these two – academia and industry, must necessarily be mutually exclusive of each other.

Initially, nobody could tell specifically what was not right about the so-called products of the

universities/polytechnics. And so, it started off with whinging such as “Why must she be constantly told what to do, she needs to be more proactive”; “He cannot express himself well – he doesn’t have a good command of the English language”; “He got first class but he doesn’t know the first thing about attention to detail”; “This person is not a team player – he seems to have trouble getting along with everybody, including his supervisor” ...and the list goes on and on.

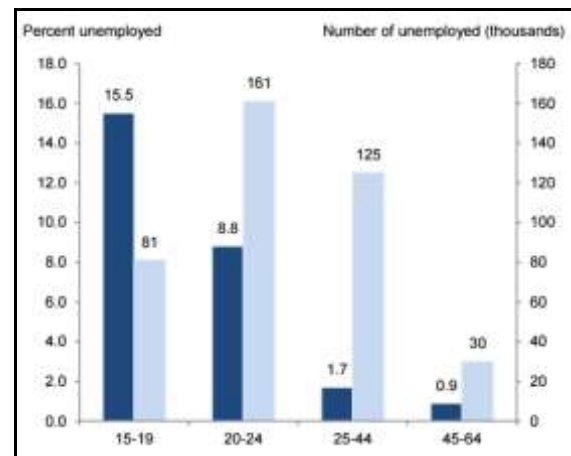
According to the Economic Transformation Programme or popularly known as ETP [8] with its goal to elevate the country to a developed-nation status by 2020 (we are only a few years away) will create 3.3 million new jobs by attracting US\$444 billion in investment into the country.

Statistics from the Ministry of Education Quick Facts 2014 [9] (data as of 21 May 2014) reported that a total of 531,522 local students (or 94.85% of total enrolment) enrolled at public IHLs for tertiary education. And this conservative figure does not even take into account potential workforce who will eventually graduate from private IHLs and other training institutions (under the purview of other Ministries such as the Ministry of Human Resource, Ministry of Youth and Sports, to name a few). By right, this figure should translate into a constant supply of more than half a million potential better-educated and supposedly talented pool of workforce that is able to meet the demands needed by the industries.

However, strangely enough, a rather interesting question was raised in the Malaysia Economic Monitor [7]. It puzzled that if the economy requires increasing numbers of talented workers, plus the supposedly constant supply of better-educated and talented pool of workforce by the IHLs, why then, does a relatively large share of better-educated youths have trouble finding jobs? This is really mind boggling!

In Malaysia the ratio of youth unemployment to overall unemployment appears high at 3.3 times and 60 percent of all unemployed workers in Malaysia are between 15 and 24 (Figure 2.1). Of special concern is the concentration of the unemployed among 20-24 year-olds, as this cohort of workers is relatively well-educated. If this were to persist, then high unemployment among youths will add up to very substantial non-return of investments (non-ROIs) in terms of unproductivity and loss in tax revenues to the Government.

Figure 2.1: Concentration of Unemployment Among Youths in Malaysia

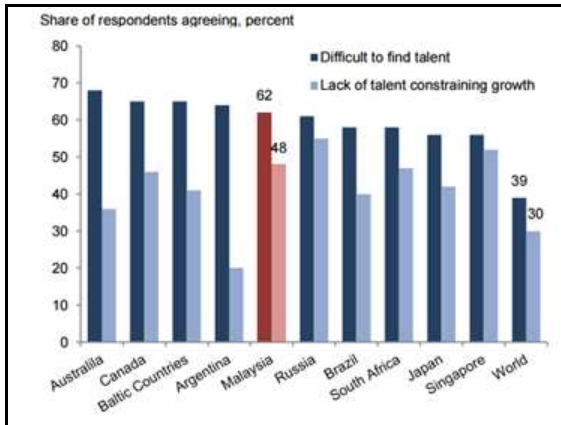


Source: DOSM (Labour Force Statistics Time Series), 2012 and World Bank staff Calculations extracted from MEM, June 2012

The Malaysia Economic Monitor [7] also reported that a survey conducted by global consultancy Grant Thornton (2013) found that 62 percent of Malaysian firms have difficulty finding skilled workers, and 48 percent identify lack of talent as a constraint for future growth (Figure 2.2). One of the main drivers of graduate unemployment according to the report [7] is skills mismatches between graduates and employers’ demands. Most firms and companies surveyed quoted the overall lack of skills as the main difficulty in recruiting local graduates. Hence, mismatch between the supply of graduates in terms of their credentials and competences and the demand of the employment system in terms of available jobs and qualification requirements has been a major area of concern for several decades [4].

This is where industrial training, or commonly known as internships, play a vital role to students, companies and academic programmes. Internships not only augment academic programmes with valuable learning experiences that are of great importance and relevance to the field of study, it also narrows the gap and addresses skills mismatches between graduates and employers’ demands. With proper understanding, communication and alignment of the needs and expectations of all stakeholders – when properly managed, the eco-system will provide the right medium for all stakeholders to flourish together.

Figure 2.2: Firms say they cannot find fresh graduates with the necessary skills



Source: Grant-Thornton International Business Report 2013 extracted from MEM, June 2012

3.0 STRUCTURED INTERNSHIPS

Two types of internships currently exist, that is, structured and unstructured. Both internships are currently practiced at universities across the nation and the world. Both types of internships are a step in developing students into professionals; they can also solve problems in today's businesses [2].

Brandon S. Fick [2] defined structured internship as any internship with a defined curriculum and required hours of field related experience in related and relevant industry.

According to TalentCorp Malaysia [11], structured internship programme (SIP) is an internship programme that provides practical experience which emphasizes development of specific knowledge or skills for students of higher educational institution. The programme offered must be relevant or similar to the students' field of study and should emphasize on the following skills and attributes as shown in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1 Structured Internship Programme Skills and Attributes

Technical	Personal	Business
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Competence	Competence	Competence
Technical/functional knowledge and skills required substantially in the area of responsibility of the position.	Personal attributes and skills that enhances individual's interactions and increase personal effectiveness.	Professional attributes and skills required to enhance professional and business performance.
Example: • Specific technical knowledge/skills	Example: • Communication skills • Presentation skills • Personal effectiveness	Example: • Business acumen • Conflict resolution and negotiation • Teamwork/teambuilding

Source: TalentCorp Malaysia (2015)

The programme also defined the monitoring and assessment mechanisms so as to keep track of the interns' progress as they follow the programme until the end. The objectives of the SIP are to:

- Provide practical perspectives on the academic concepts and theories the interns have studied at the University;
- Prepare local graduates from public and private institutions of higher learning to become relevant to industries and ready to enter employment;
- Encourage companies and/or industries to make internship programmes more structured in terms of their competency development; and
- Introduce students as early as possible to the working world.

Initially, the programme initiated by Talentcorp Malaysia was more focused to undergraduates from local universities with first degree programme, however the SIP has now been SIP extended to diploma holders (or its equivalent) effective January 2015. The Department of Polytechnic Education (DPE) initiated its first meeting with Mr. Johan Merican, CEO of Talentcorp Malaysia, on the 15th May 2015 to explore a seamless integration that allows the alignment between the mechanics of the polytechnic system with the proposed SIP. Internships are nothing new to the Malaysian polytechnic system. It is already embedded into the curriculum of all Diploma Programmes

offered in the polytechnics. Students will have to undergo 5 months of internships at an organization or company related to their field of study. By the end of the training, the students are expected to have put into practice the theoretical part of their knowledge, thereby further sharpening their skills that will greatly enhance future employment opportunities. In other words, internships implemented in the polytechnic education system are structured with its defined set of mechanisms that was already put into place and well established over the years.

4.0 STRATEGIC STRUCTURED INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME (SSIP)

For internships to be more effective in order to yield more significant results, it needs to be further improved in order for students to keep up with our ever-changing industry such as that related to: providing a pre-internship workshop, reviewing and revising the on-going internship programme, designing intervention programmes or courses based on the reviews, creating a mentoring system, facilitating communication with all parties involved, and regular meetings and discussions with all parties involved.

According to an internet radio company, Pandora, it was found that a successful internship programme requires structure, accountability and a commitment to substantive projects for each participant [13]. Hence, this is where Strategic Structured Internship Programme (SSIP) comes into place.

Selangor Human Resource Development Centre is a learning centre established in February 1992 through a smart partnership between the Government and the private sector with an aim of improving the human resource pool in Malaysia. The primary objective of the SHRDC is to develop world class talent through change and innovation leading to positive impact on performance improvement and companies' bottom line and be benchmarked as Malaysia's premier centre for competency-based learning. One of SHRDC's strong points is its closely knit relationships with strategic partners such as blue chip organisations in the manufacturing and technological fields, amongst others.

Hence, it is through this understanding that Politeknik Banting Selangor (PBS) and Selangor Human Resource Development Centre (SHRDC) forged a strategic alliance via its Strategic Structured Internship Programme or better

known as SSIP on the 26th June 2014. The partnership centred on the diversity of each other's strength thereby complementing each other. SSIP is a pilot project for both parties.

The main purpose of this SSIP is to develop a systematic alternate "learn-apply-review-intervention" mechanism to help learners (participating students) to be more work-ready through acquiring industry-relevant knowledge, skills and competencies. The objectives of this SSIP are:

- a. To address the gaps between the curriculum taught and the competencies needed by the relevant industries.
- b. To enhance students' learning so that they have a solid education and skills foundation to advance in their chosen careers.
- c. To increase employment of participating graduates in high growth and high impact sectors of the industry.
- d. To develop a systematic alternate "learn-apply-review-intervention" mechanism to help learners be work ready through acquiring industry-relevant knowledge, skills and competencies.

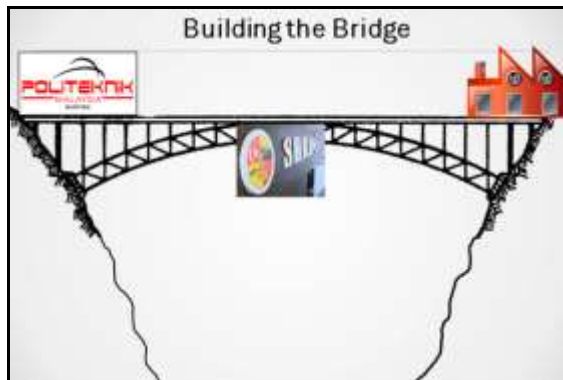
Even though, at first glance, there seems to be a fine line between the general structured internship that was already embedded in the polytechnic curriculum and SSIP, however, in SSIP there is the added component of review and intervention during the implementation of SSIP itself.

SSIP is more to addressing the gaps and to build a bridge between what are being taught in polytechnics and what are the competencies needed by the relevant industries in a more systematic manner. For example, prior to the actual implementation, analysis was done on the Diploma programme structure to gauge the level of competency of a potential participating semester 3 students. The end result of the analysis will culminate with a competency matrix that will be shared with SSIP participating companies so that the right candidate (participating student) is sent to the right company (participating company).

However, we have to bear in mind that these students have not yet completed their full spectrum of the Diploma programme. Hence, the description of the competences in relation to core work tasks is an attempt to bridge the terminological and ideological gap between the world of education and the world of work. It also served as an attempt to form a clearer picture of

how they can be applied in the work context based on the level of the students at the point of study (which is at Semester 3).

Diagram 4.1: Strategic Alliance



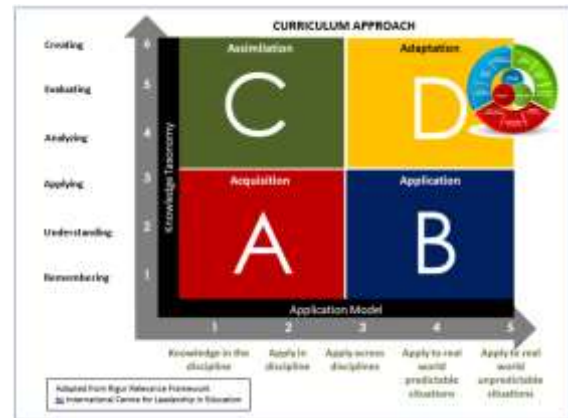
Source: SHRDC presentation on 9 January 2014

Building bridges is easy, but to build the right bridge takes a lot of commitment, time and patience on all parties.

4.1 SSIP Framework

SHRDC adapted the Rigor/Relevance Framework which was a tool developed by the International Centre for Leadership in Education [14] to examine curriculum, instruction, and assessment for the SSIP. The Framework was based on two dimensions of higher standards and student achievement.

Diagram 4.2 showed that the Knowledge Taxonomy is based on the six levels of Bloom's Taxonomy while the Application Model describes putting knowledge to use.



Source: Adaptation from SHRDC presentation slide on 9 January 2014

The four quadrants according to Rigor/Relevance Framework are as follows:

Quadrant A: Acquisition – simple recall and basic understanding of knowledge for its own sake. Here, students gather and store bits of knowledge and information.

Quadrant B: Application – students use acquired knowledge to solve problems, design solutions, and complete work.

Quadrant C: Assimilation – embraces higher levels of knowledge and more complex thinking, but still knowledge for its own sake. Students extend and refine their acquired knowledge to automatically and routinely analyze and solve problems as well as create unique solutions.

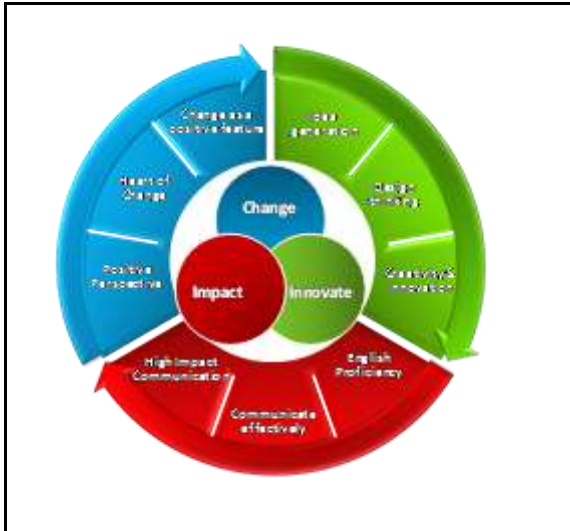
Quadrant D: Adaptation – represent action or high degrees of application. Students have the competence to think in complex ways and apply knowledge and skills they have acquired.

Hence, each of these four quadrants which can also be labeled with a term that characterizes the learning or student performance is incorporated into the desired SSIP framework.

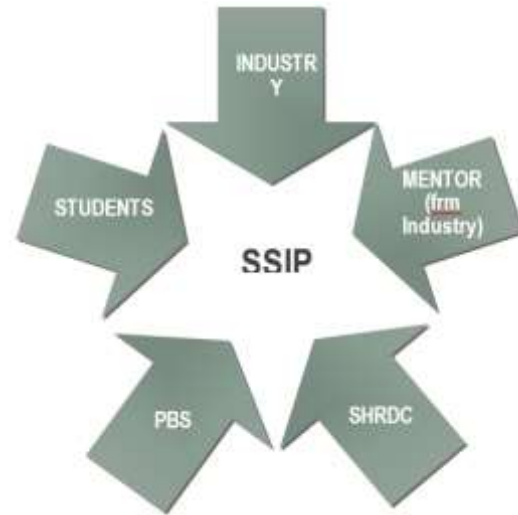
It is hoped that at the end of the spectrum, the ultimate goal is to create a holistic individual with the personal attributes that embraces Change in a positive manner with the right Impact and be Innovative as outlined in Diagram 4.3 below. A tall order indeed.

Diagram 4.2: Adaptation of Rigor/Relevance Framework

Diagram 4.3: SSIP Student's Personal Attributes



Source: SHRDC presentation slide on 9 January 2014



Source: SHRDC presentation on 9 January 2014

4.2 Key Players

The key SSIP players or stakeholders are: PBS, SHRDC, participating industry, mentor, and participating students (in this context: Semester 3 Diploma in Mechanical Engineering students).

PBS is responsible in providing a pool of highly potential students to participate in the programme. However, prior to the actual implementation, analysis was done on the Diploma programme structure to gauge the level of competency of a potential participating semester 3 student. The competency gap was jointly managed by both PBS and SHRDC. In this context, however, the focus was more on the technical competency of the students which covers both the mechanical as well as the electrical skills. This is because, the generic component or personal competence was already embedded into the curriculum of all Diploma Programmes offered in the polytechnics.

Monitoring of students' progress throughout the full duration of the programme and liaise with the coach / mentor falls under the responsibility of PBS. It is also encouraged that PBS try, on its capacity as an institution, to incorporate curriculum that requires students to demonstrate mastery and innovation to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study. And last but not least, constant monitoring in order to maintain its quality assurance, evaluation and review of the programme is another important component.

Diagram 4.4: Key Players

SHRDC is responsible in monitoring the quality of the programme by tracking and assessing the implementation and outcome of the programme to make sure that the programme is relevant to all stakeholders. One of SHRDC's strong points is its closely knit relationships and proximity with the industries. Hence, they would have a better understanding on the competencies needed by the industries. So, the responsibility of translating the industry competency into training competency is managed by SHRDC. And together with that, SHRDC will also monitor the competency application by the industries. And in addition, SHRDC will also assist PBS in monitoring the competency gaps. Since the two main players are PBS and SHRDC, SHRDC will also maintain its quality assurance, evaluation and review of the programme. Continuous reviewing of SSIP is jointly done by both SHRDC and PBS. Through these reviews, intervention programmes are designed and implemented throughout the course of the SSIP so as to address the competency gaps.

Participating industry involved in this programme were identified, proposed and finally engaged according to its relevancy to the field of study of the participating students. The participating industry must be able to provide workplace competency which is then translated into job scopes and task description. The industry involved will also provide qualified or experienced coach or mentor. This is to endure that continuous supervision and mentoring is in place.

The coach or mentor selected for the programme should be knowledgeable and experienced in

their field of work. They must not only be able to guide the students but also to motivate the students in order to realize their best potential. In addition to that, they assess the capability of the students at the workplace during internship and provide feedback on the progress and improvement of the students to the relevant stakeholders such as the industry, PBS and SHRDC. With continuous monitoring and improvement, hopefully whatever skills that the students are lacking will be improved by the end of the programme.

Lastly, the most important key players are the students. Without them, this SSIP will not happen. Commitment from all key players is one of the most important elements for the SSIP to succeed, even more so from the students. SSIP provides the platform for students to translate theory into practice and application. Hence, they should be able to apply the competencies that they have learned to the industry they are attached to. Students must be able to demonstrate the ability to think through issues that may arise while they are in the workplace and be proactive in taking actions whenever the situation calls for it. Maintaining and updating logbook throughout the whole duration of SSIP is one of the basic requirements from the students.

4.3 Benefits of SSIP

Even though the benefits of SSIP transcend all key players, however the most important beneficiaries are actually the students and also the participating industry.

The learning of technical skills is most effective when such skills are acquired and applied in a real work environment. Hence, for the students, it is hope that by the end of the programme, they would become industry ready, competent, and be skillful at hands-on work. They are also expected to build upon their existing skills and competences required to operate in a workplace including generic skills such as communication, teamwork, problem solving. By being involved with this programme, the students will be well informed on what is their future career choice. They would then have a better knowledge and understanding on what they are going to do with their future.

Diagram 4.5: Benefits of SSIP

Participating Students / Candidates	Participating Industry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become industry ready, competent and hands-on workforce • Build skills and competences required to operate in a workplace including transversal ones, such as communication, teamwork, problem solving • Informed career choice • Develop career management skills • Improved self-motivation for better performance • Facilitated entry to the job market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive impact on supply of qualified workforce • Identify talents in early stage • Address skills gap through tailor made training before OJT placement • Positive effect on recruitment and retention • Contribution to innovation and creativity through company-focused projects • Skilled manpower which responds better to the industry and company needs

Source: SHRDC presentation slide on 9 January 2014

With the SSIP, the students are also expected to learn and develop their career management skills. But this depends on how much exposures will the students gain throughout the SSIP with the industry they are involved in. If the industry is willing to give the students more exposure on management job, then the students will have a better knowledge on the management skills. Also with this SSIP, the students are expected to improve on their self-motivation. With improvement in self-motivation, then the students will be able to perform better in their work.

But the most important benefits for SSIP are for the students to gain employment. SSIP is actually a programme which emphasize on building the students' skills to better facilitate them into entering the job market. It is hoped that by the end of SSIP, the students will be able to easily gain employment in the relevant industry especially with the industry they are attached to during their SSIP.

Meanwhile for the industry, it is hoped that this SSIP will bring positive impact on the supply of qualified workforce. The qualified workforce shall be the future graduates of PBS which have gone through relevant skill training required by the industry during their SSIP. Also through this SSIP, the industry will be able to identify the talents that they wanted for their workforce at an early stage. Even if the students are not up to the standard at the early stage of SSIP, the industry will have ample time to train the students according to their needs during the whole duration of SSIP plus with the on-going intervention programmes as deemed necessary by SHRDC.

With this SSIP, the industry with the assistance of PBS and SHRDC will be able to identify and address the initial awareness and skills gaps faced by the students by offering tailor made training before the SSIP training started. By having input from all the relevant stakeholders, a proper and well planned training schedule which

focused on the skills and knowledge needed by the students in order for them to excel in their future workplace.

The SSIP also brings positive impact on the industry's recruitment practice. The industry would have a steady flow of potential skilled candidates for their workforce. On the other end of the spectrum, SSIP training will also be able to equip the candidates with relevant skills for them to gain employment with other industries also.

During the SSIP, the students will also be able to contribute on innovation and creativity ideas through industry-focused projects. By providing a platform and opportunities to the students to participate in company projects, the industry is actually letting the students to express their ideas to the benefits of the industry. Maybe some of the ideas given by the students would be very useful to improve the practice of the industry in the future.

4.4 Different Phases of SSIP Implementation

Generally, the students undergo their diploma studies for duration of 6 semesters (3 years). Hence, the SSIP is proposed for implementation during the student's fourth (4th) semester and will continue until the students finish their studies on the sixth (6th) semester. The reason why the students are introduced to SSIP starting only from their 4th semester onwards is because by then the students should have gone through sufficient modules and are expected to gain sufficient knowledge before they go for their training at their respective industry. The flow of the proposed implementation is as shown in Diagram 4.6 below.

The programme is scheduled to start upon the students 4th semester where the students will go to the respective participating industry. There are in total three (3) phases for SSIP. For the first 3 semesters of their studies, the students will follow their studies at PBS. But the registration for the SSIP programme will actually start during the student's third (3rd) semester. It is during this semester where the students are required to register for their Industrial Training Module which will commence on their 4th semester. For those who are not participating in SSIP, they will choose the normal industrial training where they will look for their industrial placement on their own. But for those who are opting to participate in SSIP, they will have to

undergo an interview conducted by the participating industries, thus having their first-hand experience at "job-seeking". The duration for both the normal industrial training and SSIP will commence simultaneously for five (5) months. This will make up the first (1st) phase of SSIP implementation.

Diagram 4.6: Different Phases of SSIP Implementation



Source: Adaptation from SHRDC presentation slide on 9 January 2014

Prior to Phase One of the SSIP implementation, a Workplace Planning Intervention workshop was conducted on the participating students. The programme aims to develop the knowledge and skills in applying the planning and work scheduling for various applications and approaches based on industrial practices so that students will be familiarized with the manufacturing planning and control, develop skills in operation and production management techniques and solve problems in scheduling, forecasting, and inventory control before they are even placed in the work environment.

Once when Phase One kick-starts, two more intervention programmes were conducted throughout the duration of the implementation such as: (i) SSIP Employability Skills Intervention programme where students were assessed again on their technical skills and also to sharpen on their communicative skills; and (ii) Lean Manufacturing programme where students were taught to maximize productivity through line balance optimization, and also practical experience on performance stability and standardization. All these intervention programmes were designed and developed through the expertise of SHRDC in collaboration with PBS and with the cooperation and support from participating industries.

After completing the first phase of the SSIP, the students will then continue their fifth (5th) semester at PBS. At the end of their 5th semester, the students will then return to their respective

company for their second phase in training. The duration of the training will depend on the total duration of their semester break. The semester break for each semester differs where the semester break after December Session is normally around 8 weeks while the semester break after June Session is normally around 3 weeks. So, it is suggested that if the semester break is 8 weeks, then the students will continue their SSIP for 4 weeks (1 month). While if the semester break is 3 weeks, then the students will continue their SSIP for 2 weeks. This will be known as SSIP second (2nd) phase. During this phase, students are expected to further enhance their knowledge and skills in their workplace and at the same time to identify and explore issues that can be translated into their final semester projects. Students who perform (or achieve) during this phase will then be selected by the company to join the On Job Training (OJT) for a duration of 1 year upon completion of their Diploma programme (i.e. after their sixth semester).

After successfully completing Phase Two, the students will, once again, continue with their final semester at PBS. At the end of their 6th semester, the selected students will continue their SSIP by doing OJT in the respective industry for 1 year as apprentices. This will be known as SSIP third (3rd) phase. During this phase, the students or apprentices will be paid a salary that is deemed acceptable by both parties. Only after the 1 year training at the respective industry and if the industry is offering the students full employment, then the students will become a full fledged employee at the industry complete with the relevant knowledge and skills needed by the industry.

5.0 CONCLUSION

A good internship experience is also critical as it shapes a student's perceptions of the sector, and could determine whether he or she joins the sector upon graduation. While the quality of internships at polytechnics is generally good, the quality of experience can differ significantly from student to student, depending on how the internship is carried out by the host employers.

Internships not only augment academic programmes with valuable learning experiences that are of great importance and relevance to the field of study, it also narrows the gap and addresses skills mismatches between graduates and employers' demands. For internships to be more effective in order to yield more significant

results, it needs to be further improved in order for students to keep up with our ever-changing industry such as that related to: providing a pre-internship workshop, reviewing and revising the on-going internship programme, designing intervention programmes or courses based on the reviews, creating a mentoring system, facilitating communication with all parties involved, and regular meetings and discussions with all parties involved. In other words, internships need to be structured and it needs to be strategic in its design and implementation.

Through SSIP, especially with its constant review while injected with the relevant intervention programmes, it aims to address skills gaps / mismatch and ultimately hope to achieve 100 percent employment for participating students.

On the other hand, there is also an indirect positive impact from the SSIP implementation which is about building a business relationship and network between a public institution like PBS and the business community like SHRDC and participating companies. To build trust and confidence takes time and commitment from all parties.

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