

CASE STUDY IN GHANA: STUDENT PROJECT WITH A NIGERIAN COMPANY

Student's Internship Experience in Ghana: Marketing Research Project

LIOBA VISSER

Background

From September 2016 to February 2017, I did an internship at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana (UCC) as part of my studies in Business Administration at Hochschule Bonn-Rhein-Sieg, University of Applied Sciences, Germany (H-BRS). At H-BRS, an internship of five or six months (or, alternatively, one exchange semester) is an obligatory part of the curriculum so students get hands-on experience even before they enter the job market. My internship was also part of the intercontinental partnership between UCC and H-BRS, which has resulted in many different projects.

During my internship in Ghana, I worked at the Center of Entrepreneurship and Small Enterprise Development (CESED), which is part of the UCC School of Business. One of my main tasks was conducting marketing research. The research was part of an initiative where H-BRS sponsors their students to do marketing research in African countries for a company with respective interest. The research results should be part of the student's bachelor's thesis.

I was matched with a Nigerian company which wants to introduce a brand of clothing starch to the Ghanaian market. This is one of their key products and widely popular in Nigeria. My assignment was to find out about the use of clothing starch in Ghana, the consumers' interest for this product, and to write a report and a recommendation.

Before flying to Ghana and starting the internship, I had to prepare for my travels, my time abroad, and for the given assignment. Since I was traveling to a non-EU country, I had to apply for a visa. Several employees at UCC School of Business, with whom I was in contact mainly via email and sometimes via Skype, assisted me by getting the necessary documents and information for obtaining the visa. At H-BRS, I was supported with getting the obligatory vaccination, sending the visa application to the embassy in Berlin and other visa-related questions. To get familiar with Ghana and its culture, I spoke with several H-BRS employees who had been on business trips to Ghana. UCC helped me find accommodation in Cape Coast, which would have been difficult to do by myself since I was not on site and not familiar with the housing market in Ghana.

Preparing the marketing research was done mainly at H-BRS. The project coordinator helped me establish contact with the company that I would do the research for. I had several Skype

meetings with a representative of the company during which I learned about their business, their product, and about Ghana. Lastly, I informed myself about clothing starch and about the basic principles of conducting marketing research.

Activities in Ghana

For conducting the marketing research, I had to design a survey, administer it, analyse the results, and write a report including a recommendation. It took several weeks to design the questionnaire. I conferred regularly about the questionnaire with colleagues at CESED and a representative of the contracting company. They helped me by fixing general beginner mistakes like turning open questions into closed questions and finding adequate categories for responses. They also helped me with more specific questions like wording the questions so that a Ghanaian respondent would understand them. Language is used differently among countries, which was a fundamental insight.

After getting the green light from the contracting company, I pre-tested the survey twice with students to make sure the questions were unambiguous. Several student assistants helped select eligible courses. Finally, the Nigerian company did the final proofreading before I finalized the questionnaire.

Since the Internet connection in Ghana is usually unreliable and many people do not have an Internet connection at home, we needed to administer the questionnaire manually. At CESED, we decided that it would save the most time and costs to send out the questionnaire to the different distant education centers of UCC. The centers would administer the surveys among their students and send them back to Cape Coast. The surveys were sent back bit by bit and some follow-ups were required. Since I did not know the responsible people, I again got help from student assistants with sending out surveys and getting them back. Since the questionnaires were on paper, the data had to be manually entered into SPSS and Stata. Entering the significant amount of data all by myself would have cost a great deal of time, so once again I got help from the student assistants.

Conclusion

The internship required much preparation in Germany and work in Ghana. I performed many tasks that I had never done before, like organizing a journey to a non-EU country, doing marketing research, and working together with a company abroad. Without any support, I would have not been able to do any of this.

During my internship, I acquired a couple of skills and competencies. The hard skills included setting up a questionnaire, administering it and analysing data, in short, doing empirical research. The soft skills I developed were managing and organizing a research project, self-discipline, problem-solving abilities, working in a non-German environment, and intercultural competences.

I acquired these skills and competencies by doing a long-term, real, job-related task and by getting support and tips from professionals, correcting my own mistakes, encountering on-the-field problems, like receiving blank questionnaires or dealing with miscommunication. These skills and competencies can find a theoretical ground in the classroom, but through the learning-by-doing approach, they get internalized by experience and practice.

Recommendation

In my opinion, the working experience students get from an internship are an advantage for them on the job market but also benefit companies since they can hire more experienced students. If possible, students should get the possibility to do internships. Completing them requires sufficient support. I found it most important to have contact persons who were experienced in doing marketing research, who could answer my questions and help me proceed when I was stuck, and who could help me with getting in contact with people responsible for specific tasks. Internships abroad required more support for preparing the journey and for answering intercultural questions. I found it very helpful to have contact persons in Ghana who had been to Germany and understood that I did not know certain things, like how to word the questionnaire in the way the Ghanaian responders could understand it.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Ms. Regina Brautlacht and Prof. Daniel Agyapong for helping me organize my internship, supporting me all the way through, and always being prepared to help and answer any questions. Furthermore, I would like to thank Ms. Christine Freitag, Prof. Jürgen Bode, Prof. Rosemond Boohene, and Mr. Phaniel Wunu for coordinating the partnerships between H-BRS and UCC and making my internship possible, and Dr. Mavis Mensah for being an incredibly supportive boss at CESED. Also, many thanks to Christina Appiah-Nimo and Ester Sarpong for being my hosts. Furthermore, I would like to thank the entire UCC School of Business for all the support and for including me as part of the staff. Finally, I would like to thank Ms. Bettina Schlass for always supporting me in everything I do.

Appendix



Figure 15: Internship in Ghana