CONTRIBUTIONS OF WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING PROGRAMS TO ORGANIZATIONAL TALENT PIPELINES: INSIGHTS FROM TALENT MANAGERS

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Work-integrated learning (WIL)[1] programs support the development of employers' talent pipelines in four ways. First, WIL programs prepare students for success. Second, the nature of WIL programs reduces hiring risk for the employer. Third, WIL programs allow the employer to develop long-term relationships with potential full-time candidates. Last, the support provided by WIL program staff makes hiring easier.

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

Employers participate in work-integrated learning programs by hiring students. One of the reasons employers participate in WIL programs is to attract the right people who may end up working for their organization full-time. Employers need to bring the right people with the right attributes into their organizations. Hiring students may result in finding the best candidates to support the organizations growth and goals. This is called the "talent pipeline." Employers tend to think of "talent" as individuals who have soft skills and a lifelong learning mindset. A study was conducted to determine employers' perspectives on how WIL programs contribute to their talent pipelines, or their ability to identify, attract, develop, and retain people.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

Researchers interviewed 18 talent managers from a variety of sectors who had previously hired co-op students from a Canadian university. The responses were analyzed using grounded theory. Participants were asked two questions: (1) to describe what a talented person "looks like" in their organization and (2) what role does work-integrated learning play in this picture.

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[1] **Work-integrated learning (WIL):**
an education model that combines academic studies with a workplace or practice setting. Work-integrated learning includes a partnership of an academic institution, a host organization, and a student.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

The researchers found two key findings. First, employers described talent as consistent with having a lifelong learning mindset (read more about the Lifelong Learning Mindset). This includes an aptitude for learning, ability to think critically and having capacity to be resilient towards change. Employers in the study emphasized that while hard skills and experience were important, soft skills are harder to train and therefore a desirable talent for employers.

The second finding was that the participants felt WIL was important to their development of the talent pipeline. Four themes emerged explaining why WIL is important to developing talent pipelines:

1. **WIL prepares students for success.** The combination of academic courses and work experiences position students as desirable for filling the talent pipeline.

2. **WIL reduced hiring risks.** WIL terms are shorter in duration and the financial costs of hiring are lower. The consequence of potential low performance is lower as the WIL experience has a defined end date/exit of the organization.

3. **WIL contributes to long-term relationships.** Many participants used WIL to build long-term relationships, meaning as employers they used WIL programs to socialize students into their organization to fill potential full-time positions.

4. **WIL services make hiring easier.** Academic institutions helped students articulate their skills as part of a WIL program, making hiring easier for employers. WIL program staff made employers feel supported to maximize positive outcomes before and during the students' work terms.

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

WIL practitioners can use this research to consider how to grow their programs, taking into consideration the employers' aim to attract talent. This includes helping students to develop their lifelong learning mindset, while offering training in more technical skills. This research can also help to identify and maintain important areas of support for employers and students to sustain and empower successful WIL stakeholder relationships.

KEYWORDS

COVID-19, diverse practices, remote WIL, simulations, agile curriculum, institutional WIL resilience

CITATION

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ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

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The Work-Learn Institute at the University of Waterloo is the only institute in the world dedicated to research on co-operative education and other forms of work-integrated learning.

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