The Impact of Taking a Psychology Internship on Future Career Goals and Perceived Strengths and Weakness

Kenan M. White

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The Impact of Taking a Psychology Internship on Future Career Goals and Perceived Strengths and Weakness

Kenan M. White

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PY 488

The University of Alabama in Huntsville

The Riley Behavioral and Educational Center, Behavioral Technician
Abstract

Internships are a useful tool for students to gain practical experience within their chosen fields. Because they involve several different factors, such as supervision and various learning tools, they can be significantly effective as a part of a school’s curriculum. It also gives necessary insight for the student, either through experiences at the site or through supervisor comments, their strengths and weaknesses within that field. The psychology internship class is used to give psychology students in the psychological services track that experience in order to assist them in their future career goals. However, although we know that the internship itself is effective, it has not yet been analyzed how effective it is in impacting interns' future career goals and their perception of their strengths and weaknesses. Based on my experiences at my internship site, The Riley Behavioral and Educational Center, and through an analysis of previous semesters pilot study data, it was discovered that an interns’ internship experience has a statistically significant effect on future career goals and their self-perception.

Introduction

Personality traits have an exponential effect on various aspects of life, and they have an impact on one's perceived strengths and weaknesses. An internship is often used to help facilitate learning in a clinical setting and understanding those aspects of oneself can have an impact on how one performs or perceives how they perform. In an article by Roye et al., they discuss the relationship between both normative and maladaptive personality traits regarding multiple domains of executive functioning. Executive functioning is defined through this study as the “collection of higher order processes that are used to facilitate goal oriented performances” (p. 1) (Roye et al., 2022). They included 389 undergraduate students in their self-report study and discovered, through correlation and multiple regression analyses, that maladaptive traits assessed
by The Personality Inventory for DSM-5 Short-Form (negative affectivity, detachment, antagonism, disinhibition, and psychoticism) predicted all domains except for self-management to time. These domains are self-organization, self-restraint, self-motivation, self-regulation, and total executive functioning, with the highest being in self-organization (Roye et al., 2022). Because this study used self-reported data, it also examines the perception of one's own traits. This is a very necessary trait in a professional setting because of its impact on the above traits. An awareness of one's major personality traits, both normative and maladaptive, can give an intern more insight into how they perform within their internship setting. By obtaining that information, an intern can become better overall as they make any necessary changes to increase their performance.

As previously discussed, personality traits can influence perceptions regarding strengths and weaknesses. However, it also influences a mentee/mentor relationship and its impact on future goals and expectations. It can give the mentee the tools needed to be able to analyze their own traits and how to best utilize them in a more professional setting. In an article by Goldner, they analyze how proteges personality traits and expectations can impact the quality of the mentor relationship, perceived contribution, and level of adjustment after completion of the mentorship, using the Big Five Model. A longitudinal study was conducted on 167 proteges, 166 parents, and 99 teachers over the course of eight months. It showed how more positive aspects of the protege’s personality traits (i.e., higher levels of extraversion vs. higher levels of neuroticism) can have a significant impact on their expectations and adjustment. It was also discovered that higher levels of positive personality traits promoted coping strategies such as self-regulation and adaptation (Goldner, 2016). Therefore, if the protege or mentee exhibits more positive personality traits, they will get more out of the mentor relationship. In a professional
setting such as an internship, this relationship is pivotal for growth and development. It relies on the perception of the mentor and the mentee of the positive and negative traits of the mentee that can either help or hinder them in the future.

Internships are an important aspect of clinical practice that allows for the interns to develop and realize their strengths and weaknesses within their field of interest, in a professional setting. This setting allows them to make mistakes under supervision and helps them become more successful due to a better understanding of their limitations. In an article by Deketelaere et al., an exploratory study was conducted on medical internships in order to analyze how students learn during an internship and the impact of supervision and the level of support provided. The data was collected from four interns in phase one and four interns in phase two during a four-month internship in the department of internal medicine and a two-month internship in the departments of pediatrics and obstetrics using a case study format. Five internship components were analyzed: attitude of supervisor, culture of the training setting, intern’s learning attitude, nature of the learning process, and the agenda of the internship. It was discovered that an overload of work or lack of workload has a negative impact of the interns learning, a clear and non-conflicting supervisor role is the most impactful, different interns react to different workplace culture settings, more extroverted and assertive interns fare better overall, and informal learning is the most effective in an internship setting (Deketelaere et al., 2006).

Through this article, it is increasingly apparent how important a good internship experience is on student learning. By taking an internship course, the students will become more effective practitioners within their field. It gives them a chance to redefine their future roles through their successes and limitations. It also emphasized the supervisor and intern relationship as being a
pivotal aspect of this success, which was previously discussed as a necessity when analyzing personal strengths and weaknesses.

The first article by Roye et al. discussed the importance of personality traits in executive functioning, which has a direct impact on performance (Roye et al., 2022). The second article by Golder discusses the impact of a good mentor relationship and positive personality traits on its outcome and potential for future growth (Goldner, 2016). The third article by Deketelaere et al. discussed the importance of a good internship on intern learning based on five interrelated factors (Deketelaere et al., 2006). Overall, the articles showed the potential factors involved when perceiving one’s strengths and weaknesses within their field of interest. An internship allows for all of those factors to become set in motion for the intern to become more successful and self-aware. Because of this, an important question needs to be asked. What is the impact of taking a psychology internship class on future career plans for undergraduate level psychology students?

**Procedure**

**Participants**

I am a young adult, Caucasian female working towards a bachelor’s degree in psychology, with a concentration in psychological services, from the State of Alabama. I participated as an intern at The Riley Behavioral Center from February 18th to March 18, 2022, as an undergraduate intern and. My position was a Behavioral Technician. I completed ten days on site for a total of forty-two hours. Throughout the semester, I worked on various projects related to my honors thesis with my supervisor, Dr. Eric Seemann. The total hours I worked on my thesis was sixty-eight hours with an additional ten hours added from class attendance. The total hours worked was one hundred and twenty hours. For this research, all APA and State of
Alabama ethical guidelines were observed. The qualitative research for the internship is based on field observation only and does not require the use of a specific experimental design. The research regarding the honors thesis did not involve any participants and was approved by the IRB. Pilot study data from previous semesters was obtained from my faculty advisor, Dr. Eric Seemann.

**Approach**

The theme for the chi squared approaches was the identification of personal strengths and weaknesses from the internship. Two 2x2 chi square analyses were conducted. For the first chi square, the content units shown in Figure 1 were decided using experiences within the internship site and the resulting behaviors that followed. Figure 2 shows how the hours were organized for the first chi square and how the coding units were labeled. The experiences were defined as positive or negative. Positive experiences involved a successful interaction with the client that abided by their general behavior plan. Negative experiences involved an unsuccessful interaction with the client that did not abide by their general behavior plan. The consequences were defined through my perception of my abilities as an intern and how successful/unsuccessful I was during that experience. Constructive behavior was defined as a lack of anxiety and general feeling of success. Maladaptive behavior was defined through anxiety and a general lack of a feeling of success. Those units were based off the hour divisions for my overall internship hours. The second chi square was based on my perception of the days themselves. Figure 3 show how the hours were organized for the first chi square and how the coding units were labeled. It was categorized based on the overall perceived stressfulness of the day (stressful/not stressful) and how present I was emotionally (present/not present) to handle those days. The hypotheses for both chi squares are shown below.
H1: There is a significant relationship between experience and behavior.

H0: There is not a significant relationship between experience and behavior.

H1: There is a significant relationship between perceived day dress and presentness.

H0: There is not a significant relationship between perceived day dress and presentness.

**Figure 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Units</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive/negative experiences with clients</td>
<td>Positive/negative self-perception</td>
<td>1. experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(successful/unsuccessful</td>
<td>based on how the situation was handled</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interactions)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived (own) behavior that does or does not</td>
<td>Resulting</td>
<td>1. behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have negative effects on self</td>
<td>successful/unsuccessful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(anxiety, stress, exhaustion)</td>
<td>behavior that is fulfilling or hurtful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days that can be generally categorized</td>
<td>General overview of the day and its resulting perception</td>
<td>1. stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as stressful due to experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How mentally “there” I am to handle</td>
<td>Perceived capableness of being able to handle</td>
<td>1. presentness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Hour(s)</th>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2/18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2:2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Coding Scheme**

- Theme: Identify personal areas of strengths and weaknesses you discover
• Qualitative Description of traits: 1 = positive/constructive; 2 = negative/maladaptive
• Description of behaviors: 1 = not stressful/present; 2 = stressful/not present
• Examples: The most commonly observed characteristics are listed below
  o Client is going through behavior (1); (2)
  o Conducting supervised programs (1); (2)
  o No responses to questions (2); (2)
  o Verbalization of needs (1); (1)

The pilot study is data obtained from previous psychology internship classes. There is no coding scheme for the pilot study data for the honors thesis portion of this analysis. SPSS was used as an analytical tool in order to discover if my experiences with the psychology internship class and my internship was an outlier. A paired samples T-Test was conducted to analyze relevant factors. The factors were measured using a five-point Likert scale. The pilot study data was received from Dr. Eric Seemann, who is my faculty advisor for my honors thesis and assisted me with the assessment and analysis of the data. The pilot study data is from the Fall 2020 and Spring 2022 semesters. The participants were psychology students who took the psychology internship class and took an internship as part of the class requirements. Because it was retrieved during the Covid-19 pandemic, it is relevant to my personal experiences because of the impact it has had on my Spring 2022 semester.

**Outcome**

First, we will analyze the first 2x2 chi square regarding experiences and behaviors. As shown in Figure 4, the chi square statistic was shown to be significant with a value of 1.24. However, it was not statistically significant at a p value of 0.27 on the 0.05 scale. This means that the original hypothesis is rejected, and the null hypothesis is accepted. So, there is not a
significant relationship between positive and negative experiences and constructive and maladaptive behavior. Figure 5 shows the pie chart for the data.

**Figure 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive Experiences</th>
<th>Negative Experiences</th>
<th>Marginal Row Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constructive Behavior</strong></td>
<td>6 (4.87) [0.26]</td>
<td>1 (2.13) [0.6]</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maladaptive Behavior</strong></td>
<td>10 (11.13) [0.11]</td>
<td>6 (4.87) [0.26]</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marginal Column Totals</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23 (Grand Total)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chi-square statistic is 1.2395. The $\rho$-value is .265572. Not significant at $\rho < .05$.

The chi-square statistic with Yates correction is 0.3855. The $\rho$-value is .534673. Not significant at $\rho < .05$.

**Figure 5**

Then, we will analyze the first 2x2 chi square regarding experiences and behaviors. As shown in Figure 6, the chi square statistic was shown to be significant with a value of 0.
However, it was not statistically significant at a p value of 1 on the 0.05 scale. This means that the original hypothesis is rejected, and the null hypothesis is accepted. So, there is not a significant relationship between stressful and not stressful days and presentness. Figure 7 shows the pie chart for the data.

**Figure 6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Stressful Days</th>
<th>Not Stress Day</th>
<th>Marginal Row Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More Present</td>
<td>3 (3) [0]</td>
<td>3 (3) [0]</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Present</td>
<td>2 (2) [0]</td>
<td>2 (2) [0]</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal Column Totals</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10 (Grand Total)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chi-square statistic is 0. The p-value is 1. Not significant at p < .05.

The chi-square statistic with Yates correction is 0.4167. The p-value is .518605. Not significant at p < .05.

**Figure 7**

Perceived Stress and Presentness

- Not Stressful/ Less Present 30%
- Stressful/ Less Present 20%
- Not Stressful/ More Present 30%
- Stressful/ More Present 20%
Finally, we will analyze the pilot study data. A paired samples T-Test was conducted on three paired variables: confidence in first career choice final (confid. G1B) and confidence in first career choice initial (confid. G1A), confidence in second career choice final (confid. G2B) and confidence in second career choice initial (confid. G2A), and how much they liked their internship site final (Liking.Actual) and how much they liked their internship site initial (Liking.Expted). As shown in Figure 8, there are some notable statistics of interest. For Pair 1, the correlation between confid. G1B and confid. G1A is 0.288 with a p value of 0.030. It is statistically significant at p < 0.05. For Pair 2, the correlation between confid. G2B and confid. G2A is 0.096 with a p value of 0.477. It is not statistically significant at p > 0.05. For Pair 3, the correlation between confid. Liking.Actual and Liking.Expted is 0.631 with a p value of 0.000. It is statistically significant at p < 0.05. The t-value for pair 1 is 6.711, pair 2 is 5.812, and pair 3 is 5.347. All t-values were shown to be statistically significant. The degrees of freedom (df) for each pair are 56. Variance for each pair was calculated using the following equation: r^2 = t^2(2+df). The variance for Pair 1 is 0.44. The variance for Pair 2 is 0.38. The variance for Pair 3 is 0.34.

**Figure 8**
Both of the chi square analyses were not shown to be statistically significant. As discussed in the outcome section, this means that they have no relationship with each other. This is most likely because, regardless of my own perceived strengths and weaknesses regarding my internship experiences, I already had a baseline level of stress associated with those factors. This is because I started out on the internship site with lower expectations because it was my second choice. So, regardless of the day that the data was collected or how I organized my hours, it would already be negatively skewed. I also already have an awareness of what I am and am not capable of doing, especially within an internship setting. As discussed in the introduction, this is especially important because it not only impacts how you can perceive your own capabilities, but your internship experiences (Roye et al., 2022).
The pilot study data has some interesting interpretations for my own experiences with my internship as well as future research implications. Pair 1 was statistically significant with a correlation of 0.288. Although it is a small to moderate correlation, there is still a significant relationship between the participants' confidence in the first career choice before and after the internship. The assumption would be that there is a strong correlation between those two variables, but as shown by the analysis, this is not the case. It is most likely because participants were already confident in their first choice initially. So, when evaluated after their internship was conducted, their confidence either stayed the same or increased slightly. Any other discrepancies can potentially be caused by participants losing their confidence in their first choice due to their experiences with their internship. As previously shown by Deketelaere et al., an interns’ experience with their internship is extremely important in developing their strengths within that field, and an unsatisfactory experience can be detrimental to them (Deketelaere et al., 2006). It can make them lose their confidence in their career choice, even if it was their first choice. Pair 2 did not have a statistically significant difference, with a correlation of 0.096. The correlation is very weak, which implies that there is no relationship between participants' confidence in their second career choice before and after the internship. This correlation can be potentially explained by interns having a higher confidence in their first choice, which would lead to a decrease or stagnation in their confidence in their second choice. From my personal experience, this is shown to be true. I gained a lot of insight into my own strengths and weaknesses from my internship site, which made my confidence in my original first choice higher and my second choice lower.

Pair 3 was statistically significant with a correlation of 0.631. It has a moderate to strong correlation which means that there is a relationship between how much the participants expected to like their internship and how much they actually liked it. The assumption is that, if they go
into their internships knowing that they are going to like it, they will actually like it. The potential reason why it isn’t as strong as it could be is potentially because of people who share my experiences. I went into my internship thinking that I would like the site I chose, even if it wasn’t my first choice. However, throughout the internship, I realized that I did not like it. So, if I was asked to complete this scale there would be a significant difference. Another potential factor that could explain why it isn’t as strong would be its interaction with the previous two pairs. As previously mentioned from my experience, my internship site was my second choice which had an impact on how much I initially liked the site itself. However, the supervision involved made me like it more than I did initially. If they were not as welcoming or willing to answer my questions, it would have had a substantial impact on my potential scaled answer (Goldner, 2016). More research needs to be conducted to better understand this association, but it potentially had a substantial effect on the correlation for all of the pairs analyzed.

A paired samples T-test was conducted to analyze the three pairs. All three pairs had significant t-values, with Pair 1 having the highest effect overall. This can be seen through the variance. For Pair 1, the variance is 0.44 which means that the internship accounts for 44% of the variance in the data. An internship involves several different factors that affect how an intern perceives their own strengths and weaknesses, combined into one experience (Deketelaere et al., 2006). Supervision is also included in this assessment, which was included as a part of the internship class for my experience and this pilot study as well as at the internship site itself (Goldner, 2016). Therefore, it is considered one factor, and it also gives some more insight into how it can account for 44% of the variance. Regarding Pair 1, this means that it is within reason to assume that the participants’ internship experience explains the variance between their confidence levels for their first career goal in the beginning and end of the internship. With that
in mind, it is also within reason to assume the same for Pair 2 and Pair 3. Pair 2 has a calculated variance of 0.38, which means that the participants’ internship experience explains the 38% variance between their confidence levels for their second career goal in the beginning and end of the internship. Pair 3 has a calculated variance of 0.34, which means that the participants’ internship experience explains the 34% variance between how much they actually liked their internship and how much they expected to like it.

There are several different limitations within my study and my analysis of the pilot study. First, I did not have a lot of data for my chi square analyses due to problems associated with the internship site. This made any potentially significant effect negligible, and future research should include either a higher number of hours or days involved with their internship site. Another limitation was my own initial perceptions about my internship site. I went into the site with a negative mindset because I knew early on that the internship, I chose wasn’t for me. This may have potentially skewed the results to be more negative. Although the site was effective in helping me realize where my strengths and weaknesses lie, it was more effective in highlighting the weaknesses overall. I have an anxious disposition and that had a significant impact on how I perceived my data in my analysis. Although I remained impartial when writing my internship log, they were still emotionally valent. A potential change could be to have stricter criteria for what is considered negative and positive with a scaling system used to better evaluate the data. A stricter and more categorized system for choosing an internship site could also be used in order to meet all the necessary criteria for a successful internship (Deketelaere et al., 2006). Lastly, with regards to my data and the pilot study data, they were both conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic. Because of this, there weren’t as many internship sites as possible available, and this
may have had an impact on whether the intern got their first choice with regards to their career choice.

Overall, both my experiences with my internship site and my analysis of the pilot study data gave a lot of insight into how impactful the internship class is. It allowed me the opportunity to discover my strengths and weaknesses in a controlled environment that involved factors that had a significant effect on my perception of myself and others. Supervision, in its varying forms, had a significant impact on my perception of my internship site. It also played a role in both mine and the participants’ experiences at their internship. Based on the pilot study data, this was true for other interns in different ways. More research needs to be done to find what other factors are relevant regarding internship experience and what affects future career choices.
References


