

# Interpersonal Communication in LEAP Industrial Experience, to Manifest The Link and Match between Industry and University

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**ABSTRACT.** The true and agile learners are ability that needed when students finish their studies and enter the industrial world. Unfortunately, many college graduates are then unemployed, due to the inequality between the profile of university graduates and the labor qualifications needed by the company. For this reason, the MBKM policy was made, so that through existing programs, and link and match was created, not only between students and the world of industry. In line with this policy, Petra Christian University, launched the *Leadership Enhancement Program (LEAP)* in 2020. There are four forms of LEAP, one of which is *industrial experience*. This research tries to figure how interpersonal communication takes part in communicating the credibility and quality of intern students as future leaders to the industry, through the LEAP Industrial Experience program. The author uses field research, with phenomenography methods in an interpretive-qualitative paradigm. The data collection was taken through interviews with four industrial representations, who are supervisors of intern students in the Communication Department's LEAP Industrial Experience. These four people are from emerging and digital-based industries. Several patterns were evident in the participants' responses. In line with the stated purpose of the study, that related with how intern communicate their credibility and ability through their internship, it found that pre-internship period, becomes the capital for students to finally be accepted as interns. In this period, students 'sold themselves' and managed to meet the needs of the industry. Second, the forms of interpersonal communication that occur within the company, be the basis for the supervisor's assessment of student professional work skills. Finally, the effectiveness of interpersonal communication they carried out throughout LEAP Industrial Experience, made students of Communication Sciences, Petra Christian University, succeeded in establishing a link and match between industry and university.

**KEYWORDS:** interpersonal communication, internship, link and match

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Policy of *Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM)* or Freedom to Learn in Free Campus, launched by Nadiem Anwar Makarim, B.A., M.B.A, Minister of Education and Culture since 2020, has provided many changes in the world of higher education. Curriculum changes are unavoidable, to prepare students as true learners who are skilled, flexible, and diligent (*agile learners*) (Kemdikbud, 2021). This ability is needed when students finish their studies and enter the industrial world.

Unfortunately, many college graduates are then unemployed, due to the inequality between the profile of university graduates and the labor qualifications needed by the company. The results of Willis Towers Watson's study on Talent Management and Rewards since 2014 revealed that 8 out of 10 companies in Indonesia have difficulty getting ready-to-use university graduates (Gewati, Kompas.com, 2016). It is difficult to absorb Indonesian university graduates because they do not have the skills needed by the company, such as critical, digital, and global skills. On the other hand, agile thinking ability, adaptability skills, as well as interpersonal and communication skills, are also other skills that need to be continuously honed (Gewati, 2018). Antara said, in 2018, the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education recorded that of the total 7 million unemployed people in Indonesia, as many as 8.8 percent or around 630,000 people were undergraduate graduates (S-1). Putri Tanjung,

CEO of Creativepreneur, said that graduates need to apply an '*agile mindset*' or a series of agile attitudes and mindsets to support an agile work environment. This mindset encourages a person willing to continue learning, and easily adapt to the times (CNN, 2019).

For this reason, universities are required to be the pioneers of the birth of qualified human resources (HR), which are also ready to challenge the industrial revolution 4.0. According to Prof. Ir. Nizam, M.Sc., DIC, Ph.D, Director General of Higher Education, in order to prepare qualified human resources, Indonesia already has 4,593 universities. This is important, considering that Indonesia is currently entering a period of demographic bonus, where the number of productive age groups is greater than the number of non-productive age groups. In 2019, data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) showed that the population of productive age (15-64 years) still dominated by around 67.6%. Meanwhile, the population of unproductive age is only about 26-27% (Aeni, 2022).



Figure 1. *Mismatch* between Labor Demand and Supply  
Source: (Rahardian, 2019)

Meanwhile, as seen in Figure 1, there is still a conflict (e.g., mismatch) between labor demand and supply. For this reason, the MBKM policy was made, so that through existing programs, link and match was created, not only between students and the industry, but also between students with a future that is changing very quickly. In line with this policy, Petra Christian University, launched the *Leadership Enhancement Program (LEAP)* in 2020. There are four forms of LEAP, one of which is *industrial experience*, an internship program that creates opportunities for students to experience professional work in the industry.

### Problem/Research Focus

This is a big challenge for Petra Christian University, which was founded with the aim of being a place where leaders of the digital age are formed and forged based on Christian values. Prof. Dr. Djwantoro Hardjito (Petra Christian University, n.d.), Rector, said that with the new vision of 'to be a world-leading Christian University that transforms society for the glory of God', this university will accompany and prepare students as future leaders in their respective fields, not only at the national level, but also internationally. In addition, students will be developed all their potential using whole person education, as well as in the passion of their vocation and the meaning of their lives.

As future leaders, students are expected to master various skills and characters (future knowledge, skills & characters) needed in that era, and continue to be able to develop themselves as life-long learners. The changes in the times are finally not a scary thing, because as future leaders, students are ready to anticipate it. This is realized through periodic curriculum improvements, such as the embodiment of

the LEAP Industrial Experience above. LEAP Industrial Experience can answer not only questions about the link and match between industry and universities, but also Petra Christian University's main goal to create students as future leaders.

This challenge then also becomes a common challenge for all study programs at Petra Christian University, including the Communication Science Department. This department has gained national recognition, by always getting an A rating on accreditation issued by BAN-PT (National Accreditation Board for Higher Education). This ranking is certainly a reflection of the excellent quality of education to produce graduates who have more value when competing in the world of work, as well as when creating jobs (Communication Science Department, n.d.).

This goes to be an interesting thing because it has a primary focus of learning on communication, as the fundamental thing of interaction between people. So, students of the Communication Science study program should be able to manage and design the right communication patterns when interacting with industry, especially at the LEAP Industrial Experience. Thus, the industry will be able to capture the credibility and quality of Communication Science study program students as future leaders.

### **Literature Review and Research Objective**

By this means, there have been no studies analyzing the extent of *Leadership Enhancement Program (Industrial Experience)* as a medium to communicate the quality of students in realizing a link and match between the academic world and industry. Previous research by Marcelle Scott and Sarah Richardson (Scott, 2014), titled "Preparing for Practice: How Internships and Other Practice-Based Learning Exchanges Benefit Students, Industry Hosts and Universities", shows that most hosts value the opportunity to engage with the university, and many seek greater involvement in course design and, in some cases, guest teaching. Criticisms and weaknesses of the internship program relate to hosts' uncertainty about the university's expectations; a lack of information provided in advance about the student, their skills and interests; and a lack of feedback after the placement.

Another finding about internship appeared in a study entitled "Internship and employability prospects: assessing student's work readiness" (Kapareliotis, 2019). In this paper, Ilias Kapareliotis, Katerina Voutsina and Athanasios Patsiotis concluded that academic institutions that incorporate internship within their curricula may smoothen out the transition of their students from academia to the business world, and thus increase their reputation. Curricula designers who decide to include the internship component in the curriculum's structure should consider the type of skills that the internship will foster and how the latter are aligned to the skills that the students have already built in the classroom environment. Similarly, in a study conducted by Gatut Priyowidodo, et al (Priyowidodo, 2021), which showed two factors that influence leadership communication strategies in the digital media industry. First, a digital-based information business requires two main strengths: professionals with information technology skills and professionals with management skills. Second, companies must build good external relationships with at least three important stakeholders: advertisers, suppliers, and consumers.

So, it is cleared that relationship between intern and industry plays a very important role. This relationship can be seen through the concept of interpersonal communication. Morreale and Pearson said that ability to communicate interpersonally is widely recognized as crucial to professional success (DeVito, 2016). From the initial interview at a college job fair to interning, to participating in and then leading meetings, your skills at interpersonal communication will largely determine your success. This ability is even considered more important than job-specific skills, which employers felt could be learned on the job. For example, one study found that among the 23 attributes ranked as "very important" in hiring decisions, "communication and interpersonal skills," noted by 89 percent of the recruiters, was at the top of the list. This was a far higher percentage of recruiters than the percentage who noted "content of the core curriculum" (34 percent) or "overall value for the money invested in the recruiting effort" (33 percent) (Alsop, 2004).

In Hart Research Associates' survey of employers who were asked what colleges should place more emphasis on, 89 percent identified "the ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing" as the highest of any skill listed (DeVito, 2016). And in that same survey, the largest number of employers (84 percent), when asked what would prepare college students for success, identified "communication skills." In still another survey of women and leadership, the ability to communicate and to build relationships—the essential of interpersonal communication—were noted among the competencies exemplified by top leaders (Harvard Business Review, 2013). The importance of interpersonal communication skills extends over the entire spectrum of professions.

This research tries to figure how interpersonal communication takes part in communicating the credibility and quality of intern students as future leaders to the industry, through the LEAP Industrial Experience program. The author uses field research, with phenomenography methods in an interpretive-qualitative paradigm. The qualitative approaches examine meaning production as a process which is contextualized and inextricably integrated with wider social and cultural practices. The data collection was taken through interviews with four industrial representations, who are supervisors of internship students in the Communication Department's LEAP Industrial Experience. These four people are from emerging and digital-based industries.

## 2 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Several patterns were evident in the participants' responses. In line with the stated purpose of the study, this section contains the findings that related with how intern communicate their credibility and ability through their internship. The first section is anything in the pre-internship period, which becomes the capital for students to finally be accepted as interns. Next, it will be explained the forms of interpersonal communication that occur within the company, which are the basis for the supervisor's assessment of student skills. The final section more generally explores how LEAP Industrial Experience shows there is a link and match between industry and university.

### 2.1 Pre-Internship as The Main Gateway to 'Selling Yourself'

Bersin in De Vito (DeVito, 2016) tells that both forms of communication, face-to-face communication and online/social media communication are important for intern to achieve their goal. Their employability will depend, in great part, on how effectively they communicate in their e-mails, in their phone conferences, in their Skype interviews, and in their in-person interviews. Social networking recruiting is perhaps the major means used to hire new employees. This was admitted by one of the informants who is internship supervisor from Multimedia Agency:

*The first time I met her online, I asked first about remapping the courses there (in university). Specifically, she is more directed to the pre-production and production section (OC, interview, May 25, 2022).*

The same thing is also said by informants from online media, as in the interview excerpt below:

*So, before she started the internship, I communicated to make a deal with her. At that time, I asked "where do you prefer to go, to social media or make articles or make videos or what?". Then she said that she wanted to make social media content. In this institution, I prefer intern who explore by themselves, and do what they want to do. (WG, interview, May 18, 2022).*

This is in accordance with the concept that interviewers tend to rate more highly and be more satisfied with applicants who talk more of the time in their interviews (though this talk is not necessarily in response to interviewers' questions), who elaborate on answers, and whose discussion of topics more

nearly matches interviewee expectations (Jablin, 2001). Through this interview, students who will run an internship, can convey their mastered abilities to the agency. At this pre-internship stage, prospective interns can 'sell themselves'. In other words, they make the industry aware of their capability and strong intentions, through an interview process. At this stage, there is also a match expectation from both sides.

## 2.2 Communication during Internship for Showing The Capability

The capability offered by the intern at the initial interview, will then be confirmed during the internship. Good capability is assessed when the interns can keep the deadline. From there, it will be seen the extent of intern commitments in the company. As a result, the company is satisfied because of their good performance. Not stopping there, the client also liked and appreciated it. All informant described this aspect like the example below:

*In each project there will be a deadline. There are several projects that are really remitted to her to explore. She made start from pre-production, until it's ready to be produced (OC, interview, May 25, 2022).*

*So, his output is always exceeding my expectations. I means, if I give him some responsibilities to be completed in, for example, one week, he can complete within 4 or 5 days (RA, interview, May 25, 2022).*

Deadline setting is a widely used project management tool, and for good reason: deadlines help employees overcome procrastination, prioritize important tasks, also increasing productivity and team coordination (Jablin, 2001). Therefore, it is important for the industry, to get an intern who can work according to deadlines.

Students should recognize that employers are judging interns to determine whether they can be future employees. Making a good impression is important, most obviously with technical skills, but sometimes it made with simple things, such as being on time and complying with the company's dress norms. Some universities ask employers for a review of their students, and some companies and local managers are more apt to give positive references for interns who leave a good impression on all counts.

On the other hand, another capability that is captured by the industry and becomes a plus point, is their perseverance, as conveyed by the following informants:

*Continue to cooperate with the team, because she is extroverted, so she can blend it in quickly. She is also energetic, so she always invited to talk and do anything. What's exciting is that she dares to wander. She was the first intern I sent to Jakarta. Because in Jakarta, you can't get tired, you can't stress. And she is still alive (OC, interview, May 25, 2022).*

*She is very adaptable, so it is very easy to adapt, plus her attitude is easy going, and can be very committed (WG, interview, May 18, 2022).*

Perseverance is being a dominant predictor of work performance and counterproductive work behaviors. Perseverance is considered a strength of courage because it reflects the person's quiet courage not to give up and continue to struggle, even in the face of difficulties and failure (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). In every occupation, job, and organization, perseverance may be as essential as talent to high performance and accomplishment. Perseverance, or grit, according to Duckworth et al. (Littman-Ovadia, 2015) is a personal quality shared by the most prominent leaders in every field. Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years regardless of failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress.

Closely related to perseverance, great capability also arises from how interns coping with stress, emotion, and communication with other teammates.

*We talk about time and emotional management. When tiredness, that must be regulated. Time is same as emotion. Arrange a time to rest. Regulate her emotions so she has not high tempering. If she should revise again, she can continue to crank. And it will affect the entire team, or even the client. This can be very dangerous (OC, interview, May 25, 2022).*

*But after chatting with me, what I think is, this kid is good, because she listens to me. And when we have a meeting to have brainstorming, she is also willing to speak up politely and firmly. That's what she did when she was finally able to socialize well with other team members (RA, interview, May 25, 2022).*

A cooperative personality and easy going, become the advantages of interns. In addition, the industry likes interns who can put themselves as part of the team. One of the communication guidelines for creating and maintaining successful workplace relationships is the willing to communicate and to hearing others' comments. Interns are expected to listen to these messages, even when they're critical, and demonstrate that willingness with appropriate eye contact, posture, and feedback cues (DeVito, 2016).

### **2.3 Link and Match between Industry and University through LEAP Industrial Experience**

Interpersonal relations between interns and supervisors are the main keys in this internship program. Supervisors as institutional representation will assess the interns work through their relationships. When the impression received is positive, then the interns will have more value in the eyes of the industry. Furthermore, this assessment will make it easier for interns to get job opportunities after graduation. The informant further explains:

*If you talk about the provisions, it's really enough. She can even get into an agency that is several times larger (than here). It's just needed a better emotional maintain because once you get into a bigger agency, it means more stressful you are (OC, interview, May 25, 2022).*

*I think they're ready. It must have been ready. But it still takes time for adjustments as well (RA, interview, May 25, 2022).*

*So, if you really want to work in online media, people can already capture the message and impression. I'm happy with her performance, as it often doesn't even need revisions. It means that she does the right thing, listens well, and finally the client likes it (WG, interview, May 18, 2022).*

*She is ready. But she needs to boost her confidence. If she is more confident, other offices will also recruit her. Especially when she won Citra Pariwara. That's what makes my office immediately take her to be our fulltime worker (WA, interview, May 24, 2022).*

That fact also in line with concept says that the effectiveness of internships is expected to be enhanced when clear expectations of tasks, responsibilities and outcomes for interns are defined (Knouse and Fontenot, 2008; Rothman, 2007), as well as clear expectations of employers' implicit and explicit obligations (Hurst et al., 2012) are met. Intern successful performance is related to the guidance, support, and feedback of their supervisors (Kapareliotis, 2019). The good interpersonal relationship between interns and supervisors is what then supports the creation of good communication between the two. Thus, the necessary link and match is created.

### 3 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and analysis of the data, there are three important conclusions. For developing companies, what needs to be maintained is the human being. Because if many workers come and go, it will make this company loose. For this reason, the industry will be very careful in recruiting employees, because the hope is that they will stay for a long time. For this reason, good cooperation between industry and universities is needed, because often the development in the industrial world is much faster than the development of concepts in books. On the other hand, the industry also needs fresh input to understand the newest trends. This is what can be given by interns who come from the younger generation. LEAP Industrial Experience provides a space for industry and universities to communicate this. Link and match started when students 'sold themselves' and managed to meet the needs of the industry. Then, during the internship, students can further strengthen this suitability through their professional work. At the end of completing the LEAP Industrial Experience, a networking has been created, which makes it easier for both the industry to find workers, as well as universities to improve their curriculum. In the end, through this LEAP Industrial Experience, students of Communication Sciences, Petra Christian University, succeeded in establishing a link and match between industry and university, because of the effectiveness of interpersonal communication they carried out throughout this program.

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