

Starting your career during a pandemic: The experience of remote and hybrid working

Authors: Dr Helen Hughes and Dr Matthew Davis
Leeds University Business School

October 2021



Contents

1. Starting out during the pandemic
2. The research
3. Key findings
 - a. Workplace learning is affected by remote working
 - b. The built environment is valuable
 - c. Remote communication brings new challenges for interns
 - d. The importance of being proactive
4. Is a remote internship worth it?
5. What can employers do to help their interns?
6. How can universities better prepare interns?
7. What can interns do to help themselves?

Starting out during a pandemic

During the pandemic swathes of us had to suddenly work from home. From the bustle of the office, many of us found ourselves suddenly working alone in hastily created home offices, and being required to learn and navigate new technological systems overnight. Imagine though, that this is your first and only experience of the workplace. Not only are you learning a new job, and navigating the organization's politics, culture and norms, you also have little to no prior work experience to benchmark your experiences against.

In 2021, graduates, school leavers, and interns have entered a new world of work that is devoid of cues that we can too easily take for granted. Work environments and the way they are used set expectations for office etiquette. The size and organization of space can provide insights into hierarchy, culture, and politics, and navigating these aspects can be crucial for employees as they seek to thrive in their work. While much has been written about the challenges of remote working, little research has focused on the distinct challenges faced by early-career, new employees.



The research

Since June 2020 we have been researching students undertaking paid 9-12 month internships, to understand the specific barriers and opportunities they have experienced while remote and hybrid working. There were three core aspects to the data collection:

- 22 interns were interviewed to gather detailed experiences of remote and hybrid working. Interns were working across sectors, with different kinds of roles and living arrangements, and with different working arrangements.
- 175 intern essays were analysed. Interns were asked to write 2500 words reflecting on the development of their competencies, workplace values, goals, and consider their key achievements. Interns reflected in-depth on their experiences of remote work and how it had shaped the internship.
- 175 interns completed questionnaires at three-time points during the internship which tracked the development of their competencies, the prevalence of remote and hybrid working, and patterns in work experiences.



Key findings

Remote and hybrid working have been widespread, and look set to continue

On average, interns spent less than 15% of their overall placement co-located with work colleagues. The majority of communication was through scheduled video meetings (47%) and 'quick online chats' e.g., via Microsoft Teams, Google, WhatsApp or email (31%).

The experience of remote and hybrid working varied. Some interns had strong, polarised views on remote working - several detesting everything about it, others reporting favourable experiences - while others reported a balanced view of the upsides and downsides.

Many of the pros and cons of remote working have been reported elsewhere in research and industry reports, with the benefits of travel time reduction and home comforts traded against the isolation and associated strains to mental health, feelings of 'technostress', and the challenges to work-life balance.

However, interns also reported challenges specific to those entering the workforce for the first time. These can be clustered around four themes:

- Workplace learning is affected by remote working
- The built environment is valuable
- Remote communication brings new challenges for interns
- The importance of being proactive.

1. Workplace learning is affected by remote working.

Interns referred to different types of learning. Generally, they reported being well prepared to complete their key work tasks, and were well trained in this regard by their employers. However, they often felt that it took much longer to learn the culture of the organization – with some remote workers reporting that they still had little understanding of workplace norms and etiquette nearly a year after starting their jobs.

Technical activities and core work tasks were learned easily through remote working

Interns generally reported positive induction experiences. Those with particularly good experiences reported being onboarded through a variety of activities and approaches. Remote technologies were found to be particularly beneficial for learning core work tasks (e.g., how to run or write particular reports, or undertake technical activities). Interns reported learning such activities through recorded briefings, live virtual team introductions, and 1:1 handover training from a colleague. Often this was led by an outgoing intern, and often it involved virtual ‘screen sharing’.

Specific advantages of remote onboarding included:

- Interns could rehearse tasks through ‘live’ screen sharing, and could ask questions in real time, so becoming technically proficient very quickly.
- Interns could record, replay, and slow down instructions, reducing the

number of follow-up questions they needed to ask.

- Interns could refer to recordings later in the placement, helping them to make fewer errors when performing technical tasks.
- Interns also noted limitations to remote onboarding, describing the process as “tedious”, “dry”, and “demotivating”.

Additionally, some interns felt that although they understood the tasks they were being asked to do and processes they needed to follow, they had often missed the bigger picture because they lacked understanding about how their role fitted into the wider team or organization.

Learning through 'osmosis'

These interns felt that this kind of learning would have been achieved more quickly in the physical workspace, and that they were missing the opportunity to “learn through osmosis” that is afforded in a physical workspace. Several noted that they had only realised how much they benefitted from the office environment since they had moved to a hybrid or office-based arrangement:

“When I’m in the office I’m ‘hearing’... I can then go, ‘what do you mean by that?’ Or, ‘is that the strategy you’re talking about?’ I’m not going to hear those conversations when they’re going on in meetings at home. I’m not going to hear the office lingo and stuff like that.”

It can be slower to access development opportunities

While interns reported becoming quickly proficient at their directed tasks, others found it difficult to get involved in new activities that would widen their portfolio, because they struggled to showcase their work and network while working remotely. Some gave examples of projects that had arisen through face-to-face office conversations, while others felt that they had been slower to gain new experiences, and gave several explanations for this:

- 1.They were more easily overlooked, because others did not know of them or their role remit. Sometimes this was because their team was small and self-contained, so they had few opportunities to engage with the wider business. In an office they felt they would have been "noticed".
- 2.They believed others assumed (incorrectly) they would be too busy to take on anything new, and because they were less visible than they would be if physically in the workplace, they could not correct or challenge this assumption.
- 3.There were few opportunities for ad hoc office conversations (discussed later), which might have led to fewer opportunities to meet more people, or hear about new things to get involved with.

“I feel that my mentoring was not as strong as it would have been had I been sitting in an office. There was no scope for the serendipitous knowledge transfer that a ‘normal’ workplace produces, and that would have been so crucial to my further development.”

The learning process is hidden

Several interns noted an upside to the 'invisibility' of remote working was that colleagues only saw the outputs of their work and not the process - none of the confusion, internet searching, or phone calls to friends and family! Some noted that they had received excellent appraisals for work that they had actually found very challenging.

One explained that he would have sometimes appreciated it if a colleague had 'offered' to help though, as it can be difficult to reach out. They felt that this invisibility was difficult.



“I have been able to somewhat hide my [in]ability with this (with work being online) by preparing for things before having to do them, rather than being put on the spot.”

Managing learning

Interns found it hard to take ownership of their learning, particularly earlier on in their placements. They felt uncertainties could be slow to resolve, and would limit the speed of progression.

“It is sometimes difficult to learn new things remotely... It's also a lot harder to ask small questions. In an office environment its simply the case you ask them as they're next to you, whereas online there's the whole hassle of finding out if they are free, then calling them.”

Interns also found it hard to:

- Identify appropriate times to ask questions. They felt uncertain about what they 'should' already know, and did not know how to ask questions, for instance about processes or acronyms. Several admitted waiting too long to ask questions, because they were worried about appearing incompetent.
- Find the confidence to ask for new tasks and to access new opportunities during remote working. They often remarked that such conversations were easier where they had met colleagues in person first, as this helped build trust.
- Approach workload challenges (both too high and too low). They reported worrying that people would not be able to see what they had been working on “behind the scenes”. Several said they had felt uncomfortable saying they had finished work early, as they assumed

they had misunderstood the brief or made a mistake. Some interns described working very long hours to keep on top of work tasks, because they were keen to impress, or worried that failure to do so would be badly received. They felt such challenges would have been more obvious in a physical workplace.

“I have on some occasions, found myself struggling to complete a task but instead decided to move on to a different task rather than ask for help in fear of looking stupid. These tasks can then be left too long, until someone is chasing me up about that piece of work and asking why I did not approach them for help.”

Learning cultural norms can be harder than learning core tasks

Some interns were shown 'welcome' videos that articulated the company's mission statement and values during their induction. Few recalled further prescriptive training on organizational culture, but were slowly gaining insights into values and norms through dealings with clients and colleagues.

Some felt they had a good understanding of communication practices, dress codes, hierarchy, and expectations, within their immediate team, but limited insight into whether those were shared across the wider organization.

“So culture, I think I have sort of picked up and I think I have a decent grasp of it now, but that's just work culture. I have no grasp of office culture or anything like that. They did make a conscious effort to go over culture, values, things like that [during induction]. But it was just one of a few presentations that we were run through. I feel like it's really tough - you can't possibly teach you it... I think we all acknowledge that you only really get a feel for that when you're in that day-to-day working environment.”



2. The built work environment is valuable to interns.

The built work environment is valuable to interns for several reasons:

Nurturing commitment

For some, the value of the built environment was immediate, and helped them to feel part of the organization. One intern described attending the company's head office for their assessment centre as "almost like a customer journey", helping them develop a loyalty and commitment to the organization before the internship even started. Others described picking up signals as they walked through the building during assessment centres and interviews, that made them feel that working there would be a good fit with

their personal values:

"You've got street clinic boards with upcoming modules, upcoming launches, you know straight away as you walk in that this company is [names company]... It's very reflective of the people in the company, and I knew it was for me."

Some described the site visit as the 'decider' in helping them to choose between multiple job offers, and talked of the "excitement" and "pride" they felt at being able to work in that building.

"Under normal circumstances, I would have been working in Westminster... Part of the attraction of the civil service is working in and around that historic postcode of the United Kingdom, so I was disappointed to miss out on that."



Other interns reported feeling a closer connection to the organization since working in the office. This was not necessarily always simply due to the configuration of the office space, but because simply being in the building facilitated face-to-face interaction

“I attended the office and met my team for the first time in my final week of placement. It was this experience that made me increase the importance I placed on social contact with co-workers. Although only in the office for two days, I realized how much this boosted my mood, productivity and feeling of belonging in the team. Having social contact with my team is now a very important value to me and would have a large part of my decision-making process when selecting a graduate job.”



Workspace can facilitate social comparison... and this can be motivating!

Some interns gave examples of remote working negatively affecting their focus and motivation to work, and believed that they would have thrived on the face-to-face environment because they would have learned standards through role models and better social comparison with their peers. For instance, some described how the social learning of being in an office would help them improve their focus:

“Maintaining productivity when in a home environment surrounded by distractions and not surrounded by colleagues or others working hard, can have negative effects on productivity.”

Some remote interns said they felt detached from the organization, which affected their motivation for work. This was not universally experienced, and organizational commitment was particularly salient amongst interns living in house-shares with other company interns (e.g., where their living arrangements had been facilitated by their employer).

Although they rarely worked together directly, several spoke about benchmarking their workloads and opportunities against those of their housemates, often creating friendly competition and pushing them to “up their game”.

Being in the workplace improved mood

Some interns noted that a move to hybrid work had made them realise how much they valued face-to-face interactions. Being in the workplace was credited with improving their mood, because it helped create a sense of comradery:

“Having spent a couple of weeks working in the office now, I can see the way that I interact with people being stronger than before. I am more quick to introduce myself and build a cheerful rapport with people working in the shared office”

Making sense of organizational politics and cultural norms

Interns who had been working in their employer’s workspace also described how the built environment had helped them better understand their employer's politic

and company culture.

For example, they described how aspects of the workspace had provided them with cues about the hierarchy (e.g., through office sizes, décor, or restricted spaces), and how to communicate with others (e.g., the degree of formality, and the approachability of colleagues). The office provided insights into their employer’s values (e.g., through flexibility and citizenship behaviours) and had made colleagues’ working patterns more transparent.

All of these aspects were useful to interns, helping them quickly make sense of their employer and adapt accordingly.

Those working in the physical workspaces from the outset, described this sense-making process as being "quick" and "obvious", whereas several remote interns referenced the challenges of navigating such aspects remotely, without access to the clues in the physical infrastructure.

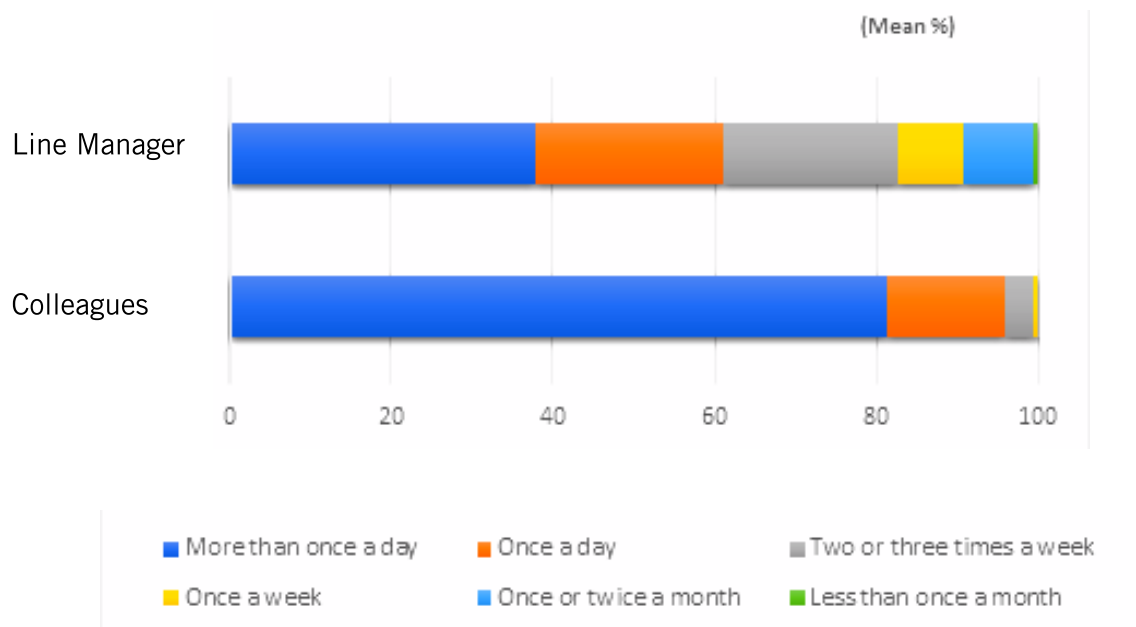


3. Remote communication brings new challenges

Most students have spent the majority of their placement working remotely, with little face-to-face interaction with their peers and managers. This has changed with the course of the pandemic, but for a large proportion of interns the entire placement has been remote. This pattern seems likely to continue into the medium term at least, with many interns reporting that they had begun the process of remotely onboarding their replacement intern (for 2021/22).

On average, interns communicated with colleagues more frequently than they did with their line manager. In just under 10% of cases, they only communicated with their line manager once or twice a month. The most common type of hybrid internship arrangement was to work from home 3-4 days a week. Some came to the office on pre-agreed rotas. Others were given choices about where to work. Some had been asked to alter their working pattern to spend fewer, longer days in the office.

How often do you communicate with your...?



There are advantages and disadvantages to remote communication:

PROS

Invisibility:

They can hide behind notes and prepare answers to questions in advance.

Planning:

Interns can plan for conversations and so are being put 'on the spot' less frequently than they imagined they would be in an office.

Attending meetings:

They can attend meetings that might previously have been restricted due to room size or travel costs.

Levelling the field:

Other colleagues do not realise you are 'the intern' or have any idea about your seniority when you attend online meetings. Everyone is given equal voice in meetings.

CONS

Fewer social cues:

Online meetings can feel unnatural and miss the richness of face-to-face interactions (e.g. body language, facial expression, pauses).

Impromptu conversation:

Fewer opportunities for impromptu discussion that might lead to a development opportunity. Most conversations occur through meetings and so interactions are generally both planned and purposeful. There are fewer serendipitous conversations ('water cooler moments').

Small close network:

Most communications were within a very small network from the immediate team. Access to more senior colleagues and other teams occurred less frequently and often through intermediaries. Conversations with more senior colleagues would be formal. Less formal modes were only for peers or the immediate team.

Conversation is task-related:

Interns felt that chatting would be seen as 'wasting time' so they would not generally just 'call' a work colleague or a senior. Most interns described their workplace relationships as 'strong but transactional'. Only a few considered their work colleagues to be 'friends' or people they would stay in touch with.

Miscommunication:

Miscommunications can happen more easily. Implicit instructions previously learned through watching others might need to be more explicitly stated e.g. to ensure colleagues are clear about what you are working on.

Online versus face-to-face presentations

Several interns said they were comfortable presenting online to a live audience. However, interns frequently referenced there being a difference between online and face-to-face presenting skills.



A large number of interns referred to these perceived differences when considering the development of their skills through the internship. Several said that they would look for a summer internship, other employment experience, or time in their final year at university to develop face-to-face presentation skills.



Building relationships or building networks?

Interns often perceived remote networking to be harder than face-to-face networking, and often considered building relationships in the workplace and building their network to be two different things. 'Networking' was perceived to be something that one does only to harness career opportunities, whereas the same people talked about how they had readily built relationships with their peers for social support and comradery. Interns generally used the term 'networking' to describe formal practices, where the purpose of reaching out was to help them build their social capital, leverage a development opportunity, or gain visibility for their work or career.

Some interns referred to building strong connections with people "like me" - other interns or colleagues their age or grade. One intern explained the name of their peer-level WhatsApp group was "The Kids". Many interns viewed peer-level relationships as easier to build, and facilitated through various channels – e.g., social media messaging platforms, meeting up for drinks or lunch (even when working from home), or through joining virtual social clubs, groups, or networks within the company. Despite the potential these relationships might have in yielding future career opportunities, few interns referred to peer relationships as 'networks'.

"I think my notion of networking was not the same as my managers. I was thinking more of my experiences at university and in general social situations, but I presume my manager was considering it in the professional sense of finding new work contacts and broadening the range of people you know across businesses and industries. The latter is an area I need to improve on as I am still inexperienced in the professional world and need to learn how to distinguish between social and work connections. I need to practice adding people who I meet in the workplace on LinkedIn and then getting in touch with them to explore further opportunities and meet more people."

The value of building relationships and networking was not clear to every intern, and was seen as time-wasteful to some.

"I'm here to work on what's expected of me, and I want to achieve that as best I can. And I won't go about achieving that, having willy-nilly conversations here and there."

Getting the right level of visibility and exposure

“I often felt that with remote working it was more difficult to make an impact and shape conversations.”

Interns described their struggles "reading the room" when working remotely. One intern reported their frustration at being perceived as "shirking" because they had not contacted their manager about a project, when they were trying to demonstrate independence and courtesy, and so deliberately not interrupting them.

Another referred to the challenge of demonstrating emotional awareness, empathy and support, when working remotely, and described an example in which they had been accused of being unsupportive, when in fact they had been deeply concerned about a colleague, but had felt it would be inappropriate to raise their concerns as they had never met the colleague in person.

Joining other social groups was an important way that some interns increased their visibility and exposure within the organization. Some interns recognised the multiplicity of the benefits that these social groups offered them – they helped them to feel part of the organization, and would enable them to meet with people from across the organization, even if they did not necessarily yield obvious development opportunities.

Some interns felt that remote working had affected the size of their networks, as they were typically working in small teams with reduced exposure to others in the wider business. For many interns networking and social structures were not put in place by the organization, so interns either created them for themselves (and plenty gave examples of them initiating such activities), or they found themselves operating in much smaller teams, where networking initiatives seemed more challenging.



4. The importance of being proactive

A dominant theme within the data was proactive behaviours. Interns frequently gave examples of proactive initiatives and actions that had helped them to manage a difficult or uncomfortable situation, or to get more from the placement. Where they reported such proactivity, they also reported positive outcomes for their wellbeing, work task variety, and professional development.

Conversely, some interns appeared more passive in their acceptance of instructions and working conditions, often describing feelings of frustration and low work satisfaction.

“I need to be more active in sharing my projects with the team so they can see the work that I have done.”

In more than one case, they appeared resigned to nothing changing in their placement and so were focusing on “getting through the year”, and were making more of their home life, to compensate.

Some interns reported finding it hard to be proactive due to the remote work environment. For example, a number reported having too little or too much work to do, early in their placement, but often found it difficult to know who to approach and how to do so. Some had therefore accepted a low workload and taken advantage of the free time by using it to

develop hobbies. Some reported continuing with their work tasks, but feeling miserable in doing so.

However, some gave examples about how they had confidently approached such matters within the organization in order to proactively seek to improve the placement experience.

They often credited the organization for encouraging aspects such as working autonomously and independently, and asking questions; so it is possible that some organizational cultures are more welcoming of proactive behaviours than others.

Some interns noted that their proactivity had developed as they had become more confident in the placement over time.

Others recommended taking small, proactive steps to help them get more from the placement. Crucially, several interns noted that it had taken real courage to take such action, and that they had felt anxious doing so, at least initially.

“Despite often being held back by my anxiety, overthinking social situations, I took it upon myself to arrange 1-2-1 catch ups with those I worked with closely, to engage in conversations unrelated to work I was proud of challenging myself and being proactive, as it benefitted me in the long run.”

Is a remote internship worth it?

Interns felt learning how to work remotely was a crucial skill that would be advantageous in future employment. They believed remote working had helped them develop resilience, flexibility and adaptability, and had reshaped their understanding of what it means to communicate and work with others. For others, a remote internship helped them refine work values and work out their expectations and needs for a future workplace.

"I successfully adapted to this new way of working, which I believe could be vital experience as more companies lean towards online working."

"[Remote working] was an experience that I did not think I would have the opportunity to gain prior to my placement, but I think it might be the most vital skill I developed during my time with [the company]."

"Working from home, I have adapted to communicating with my colleagues over Teams, working collaboratively online and working independently. I have had to overcome the challenges that working from home brings such as technical issues with laptops, powercuts, and struggles with internet connectivity which has resulted in me being more flexible... These are crucial skills that will benefit me in my future career as the nature of working in an office and the traditional working week continues to change going forward."

"I completed most of my placement year working from home, which taught me that a balance of both office-based and at-home working is what I would like in my work, something that I wouldn't have known prior to my year on placement."

"Working remotely most of the time pushed me to become independent and hold greater responsibilities."

What can employers do to help their interns?

Onboard employees to the intricacies of culture as well as those in the job role.

- Online tools are now a critical part of an organization's brand. Interns use these materials to help undertake work tasks. But, in the absence of a physical work environment, they also see these aspects as cues to the organization's culture and values. They might rely on these tools to help them understand how core job tasks fit within the wider organization.
- Help interns navigate the culture of the organization. Offer some additional guidance on etiquette and norms. Formal instructions might be a step too far, but it can certainly be helpful for interns to have some insight into aspects such as the norms of communication, the degree of formality in place in the company, and examples of the company's values in practice.

Networks are important for belonging as well as learning how to do the job.

- Help interns to 'learn through osmosis'. Make sure that there are channels in place to enable questions to be answered quickly. Add interns to meetings where they can observe and hear a wide range of people from across business functions, and make sure they are visible within the team they work in.
- Help interns to understand how job tasks fit within the wider business. Interns might be unclear about why particular reports are important or how they affect the work of others. Help interns see the bigger picture by introducing them to other teams that supply or receive work from them, and encouraging them to ask questions.
- Facilitate peer relationships. New employees work hard when they feel committed to their job, their colleagues, and their employer. When working remotely, commitment can be facilitated through regular informal contact with colleagues (e.g., morning briefings, informal messaging chats and emails, regular coffee catch ups, 'break out' rooms for smaller group conversations during live meetings). Interns spoke of the value they had found in 'buddy' systems, where they were paired with a peer at their level.
- If there are multiple interns working across the organization, connect them to each other. Some organizations set cross-functional business projects for their interns to work on together. Such projects broker peer relationships, and can encourage friendly competition amongst the group.

- Help interns develop their understanding of 'networking'. Interns with limited work experience can find remote networking challenging, and might have a developing understanding of what 'networking' means in practice. Help them see the value in everyday conversations, with people from across grades and departments.
- Remote interns need tools to help their networks. Tools might be technological (e.g. access to messaging platforms, online networks and communities of practice). Processes can also be useful (e.g. acronym busters, role directories or organizational charts detailing how roles and teams fit together). These systems can help nudge proactive networking behaviours, by helping interns understand who to contact, and how.



Hybrid arrangements need to be thought through.

- Interns benefit from meeting other people in person. They need opportunities to see and hear office interactions, and ask questions in real time. Hybrid arrangements should be carefully thought through, as these benefits rely on interns having impromptu conversations. Office rotas, rigid seating arrangements, and movement restrictions should be well considered, so that these benefits can be realised.
- If employees have the choice of whether to attend the office or not, then make the office a place your interns will want to be. Given the choice, interns reported varied reasons for attending the office, and surprisingly these were often unrelated to the completion of work itself. Such reasons included being able to access office 'perks' such as sample sales and office 'shows', to experience the commute, to meet with colleagues for lunch or coffee, or to access a town or shops after work.

How can universities better prepare interns?

If remote and hybrid working practices are here to stay (at least to some extent), then graduates may need new employability skills. Universities may need to rethink training in this area, as well as providing more detailed training that helps interns and graduates to work effectively when remote. There is a need to help interns:

- Develop strategies and techniques to improve their visibility, without being intrusive or overly demanding.
- Develop the confidence to ask the right questions, at the right time, and of the right people when working remotely.
- Help them understand how to approach uncomfortable topics with colleagues.
- Learn about different types of remote working platforms, when and how they are being used in organizations, and the likely etiquette.
- See that there is a value to informal, social interaction with colleagues, as well as purposeful communication about work projects.
- Manage their online presence – not just for building networks and approaching people, but also managing this day-to-day. They need to develop techniques that help them keep in touch with colleagues and interpret cues from the organization's culture.



- Develop techniques for effective hybrid working, so that they can think ahead to the signals and opportunities that they will lose and gain through different modes of conversation.
- Prepare for peaks and troughs in workload by normalising this, and helping interns develop strategies for seeking support when needed.
- Help interns refine techniques for focusing when there might be personal distractions.

The notion of virtual 'networking' is not new for graduates of this era – most have a LinkedIn profile and many universities help students to develop their 'online brand'. However, this research highlights a naivety in the way that some interns understand 'networking'.

Networks are multifaceted and help with different aspects of organizational life - they help provide social support, complete work tasks, learn new things, provide authority, or help interns build social capital by adding credibility to ideas. Interns may need help to see the overlaps as they often saw 'networking' and 'working with others' to be different practices.

What can interns do to help themselves?

The interns we spoke to provided lots of tips and reflective lessons for other new starters. These included:

- Develop your understanding of networking. Think about what it actually means to network. It is not just about knowing people who are higher up the chain than you. People in your network can offer you different things – e.g., social support, motivation, learning, and social capital too. All of these aspects are valuable to your performance and development. Focus on having good conversations with people, and the opportunities will follow.
- Make your projects visible. If you report to several people, make sure each one knows what you have been asked to work on, and tell someone if you are overwhelmed or do not have enough work to do.
- Do not assume that your employer will build your network for you. They might build in social activities that help you to build connections - but equally, they might not. Join clubs, groups and networks, and ask if there are projects you can get involved in to develop yourself.
- Ask questions at every opportunity - but also know the resources that are available to you. Are there FAQ boards or places where people have already answered common questions? Some organizations provide organizational charts, people directories and acronym busters. Use other people's time wisely and check your question has not already been answered elsewhere, before you ask them.
- Be proactive. Students who are proactive report improved placement experiences. If you feel that something could be done better, suggest it, and offer to lead on it. They can only say 'no'! If you identify a development need, speak to your colleagues or manager to see how you can address it.
- Act with confidence. You have got your placement because you impressed your employer during the selection process. If you are completing your work ahead of schedule, or working into every evening, speak to your manager, a trusted colleague, or a university tutor, to get some advice on how to approach this.

Further information

Visit the project webpage - www.bitly.com/valueofworkplacements - for further resources, including podcasts and blog posts.

About the authors:

Dr Helen Hughes

Dr Helen Hughes is an Associate Professor at Leeds University Business School, and a Chartered Occupational Psychologist. She has expertise in workplace collaboration, studying the social dynamics of workplace relationships and the ways that these can be harnessed by organizations to improve both their performance and efficiency, and the wellbeing and satisfaction of their employees.

h.hughes@leeds.ac.uk

Dr Matthew Davis

Dr Matthew Davis is an Associate Professor at Leeds University Business School, a Chartered Psychologist and an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society. His research centres on how people interact with their environments, the impact of different office designs and how businesses engage in CSR, particularly to address sustainability and modern slavery.

m.davis@leeds.ac.uk

Currently, they are leading an ESRC-funded project - “Adapting Offices for the Future of Work” - which is looking to support economic recovery by identifying effective office design and work practice adaptations that also support remote and hybrid working.

www.bitly.com/adaptingoffices

