A SPRINGBOARD TO SUCCESS

An internship abroad not only offers insights into working life in the host country. Interns also improve their language skills and establish initial contacts with foreign companies. The Heinz Nixdorf Programme is a successful model.

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The Heinz Nixdorf Scholarship Programme enables young professionals from Germany to gain experience of the Asia-Pacific region, and strengthens entrepreneurial thinking and action by young German executives, in keeping with the spirit of German businessman Heinz Nixdorf. Every year since 1994, the Programme has enabled 40 to 50 young professionals to live and work in one of eight Asian countries. The programme is centred around a six-month internship in a local or international company in China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea, Taiwan or Viet Nam. The participants — German students and graduates — gain valuable practical experience and insights into their host country’s culture and daily life.

The participants are required to attend an intensive language course before embarking on their internship, and then continue their language training in the host country. The scholarship from the Heinz Nixdorf Foundation covers the flight, language course and living costs. GIZ is responsible for organising and implementing the Programme. In order to determine whether the Programme is achieving its objectives, GIZ commissioned the University of Bonn’s Center for Evaluation and Methods to conduct a survey among former participants. Almost 60% out of a total of 750 participants since 1994 took part in the survey. The high percentage of former participants willing to give feedback is a sign of their continued strong support for the Programme. Heinz Nixdorf scholarship holders have precise notions of how their lives and careers will progress — but are also flexible, open and keen to learn about other cultures. By learning an Asian language and coping with a different cultural context, they are helping to equip the German and international economy with an expanding pool of junior executives with sound intercultural experience of Asia. Germany’s export-oriented economy relies on professionals who have acquired experience in other countries.

The car industry: a popular choice

More than 90% of respondents now work in the private sector, most of them on permanent contracts. Many are employed in the car industry. More than 93% say that their period abroad has improved their career prospects. One of them is Andreas Görres, who, with the Programme’s support, completed an internship with a South Korean automotive components supplier after graduation. He assisted the company’s head of production planning to integrate a new interlinked and automated production line into the existing serial operation. Partly due to his support, the company was able to retain its leading market position over its competitors. ‘My time in South Korea was far more demanding, instructive and formative than I had expected,’ said the graduate engineer. He benefited in every respect from his time abroad. After his re-

36% have professional links with their host country.
When asked what skills they consider to be particularly important for their profession, most former scholarship holders cite language proficiency. However, 86% say that knowledge of the country and its work culture is also very important, as are communication skills, independence and initiative (66% in each case). Tolerance towards the other culture also stands out, with 87% of participants saying that this is particularly important in their current posts.

Sensitive to other cultures

This is a frequent experience for economist Matthias Spitzer. He was an intern with professional services company KPMG in Beijing. ‘The programme certainly broadened my horizons,’ he says. Besides his language skills, he gained ‘valuable intercultural sensitivity’ from his time in China. He now owns his own management consultancy in Frankfurt, advising international banks and financial services providers in a variety of countries. The skills he has gained give him an insight into other mentalities and help him understand how other cultures conduct discussions and approach problem-solving.

Almost 90% of respondents say that they are satisfied with their current occupation. Almost half are in management posts. One of them is Nurten Erdogan, who completed an internship with Dresdner Bank in Shanghai and then went on to work for Pricewaterhouse-Coopers and Deutsche Bank. ‘The time spent in China taught me that sensitivity and openness are important management tools for motivating a team so that it works effectively and achieves the best outcomes for the company,’ she says. She is now a Managing Director at Commerzbank in Frankfurt, where she is the Head of Corporate Mergers and Acquisitions. In this role, she and her team regularly encounter very different mentalities during their project work.

About 94% of respondents consider their participation in the programme to have been a useful and valuable experience and say that it exceeded their expectations. It gave them a wealth of skills and expertise that are useful in their present employment and have enabled them to pursue a successful career and achieve a high level of professional satisfaction. Andreas Görres sums it up: ‘The Heinz Nixdorf Programme helped me to become the person I am today. It offers a wealth of unique and exciting experiences.’

The companies recognise the benefits as well. ‘Our experience with the interns has been really excellent,’ says the CEO of Puma Sports in India. ‘The Heinz Nixdorf Programme gives us access to extremely well-qualified and motivated professionals.’

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