
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND MANAGERIAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT: A CASE OF IBS BUSINESS SCHOOL, PUNE

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³Email: aishwariyak100@gmail.com aishwariya@amohasskinnovation.com**ABSTRACT**

In the current fast-changing business world, where skills, knowledge, and understanding are increasingly required, MBA graduates must not be only well-versed with the theoretical concepts but also equipped with managerial skills and competencies. Bridging the gap between what is taught in the classroom and what is done in actual practice, industry internships have become a part and parcel of management education. This study focuses on the effect of internship experiences on the growth of technical, human and conceptual managerial skills of the MBA students. The study examines the relationship among important internship quality factors (such as the quality of internship work assignments, managerial support, length of internship, and alignment of the internship experience with the student's career objective) and managerial competency development, as drawn from Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and Katz's Managerial Skills Framework.

The study adopts quantitative research design which uses data collected from 200 students of MBA in the various fields of specialization that have done industry internships. Descriptive Statistics, Chi-Square Analysis, Exploratory Factor Analysis, Logistic Regression and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) were used for analysis of the data. They suggest that meaningful work assignments, effective management mentoring, longer lengths of internship, and high career orientation are important factors for improving managerial competencies during internship. Human skills, and teamwork and networking in particular, experienced the greatest growth in the three dimensions of management skills. The findings highlight the importance of having a structured internship program to enhance the managerial skills and prepare students for their professional careers.

The study offers empirical findings on the internship quality and managerial skill development to the literature of experiential learning. It also provides practical suggestions to the business schools and industry practitioners to develop employability and managerial skills of the MBA students through internship programmes.

Keywords: Industry Internship, MBA Education, Experiential Learning, Managerial Skills, Technical Skills, Human Skills, Conceptual Skills, Employability.

INTRODUCTION

Global business environments are undergoing significant change, with the world becoming digital, global and more complex, resulting in the significant change in managerial competency requirements. Employers seek graduates from the outset who have leadership, communication, strategic thinking and problem solving abilities, and who are adaptable. Classroom education is essential for conceptual and theoretical learning but it has been observed that students are unable to get opportunities to implement the concept and theory in real organisational contexts.

Internship programs are thus now an integral part of the MBA curriculum all over the world. Internships provide students with planned experiences to work in an organization and under professional guidance and to experience running business activities. These experiences help students obtain technical knowledge, interpersonal skills, and conceptual understanding that will help them become effective managers.

While it is well known that internships are important experiences to learn, very little empirical work has been done on the specific skills that interns develop. Most of the studies focus on employability outcomes without numerous studies looking at the impact of internships on technical, human and conceptual skills. So, there is a need for there to be a systematic study of how internship experiences are developed into managerial skills.

Thus, this study is aimed to close this gap by investigating the impact of internship programs, on the managerial skills development of the MBA students. The present study specifically investigates the aspects of the quality of internship (mentoring, meaningful assignment, length of time interned, and correspondence of internship to

career) on managerial skill acquisition. This study builds on the extant literature, which has tended to emphasize the employability and career readiness dimension, and develops and empirically tests a framework of managerial competencies that examines the relationship of internship quality dimensions to technical, human, and conceptual skills development. Accordingly, the study helps the body of management education literature in the sense that it provides an explanation of how internships are related to managerial skills.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Experiential Learning by Industry Internships

An industry internship is a practice-oriented and hands-on learning experience in management education for students to put the theory into practice in real organizational contexts. What defines internship-based learning is the concept of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) of learning, which describes learning as a cyclical process: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. The MBA students are given an educational experience in this cycle through internships, where they have the opportunity to use what they have learned in the classroom to solve problems in the workplace, review their experiences, and further develop managerial skills.

Experiential learning is vital to management education as it brings together learning with real-life business issues, as emphasized by Eckhaus, Klein and Kantor (2017). Their research showed that an internship/experiential project would benefit students in terms of their problem-solving skills, strategic thinking and decision-making skills as they would be presented with real-life managerial experiences, rather than mock experiences in the classroom.

Likewise, Awaysheh and Bonfiglio (2017) investigated the experiential learning in MBA programmes based on social entrepreneurship projects, and revealed that the practical learning experience highly enhances students' confidence, workplace readiness, ethical decision making and leadership skills. From their results, they conclude that experiential pedagogy is a method that helps learners acquire professional competence which they cannot acquire in a traditional classroom.

Chitrao et al. (2025) further contended that internships can effectively act as a link between the academic context and the industry requirements in more recent times. Their research revealed that structured internship programs provide students with insights into an organization's culture, business processes, professional responsibilities, and lessen the disconnect between students and their employers' expectations of what they can perform. The authors highlighted the importance of embedding internship as an essential part of the MBA program to make it more relevant.

Similarly, Jackson, O'Brien and Richards (2023) conducted a study amongst MBA students from the Indian subcontinent studying in the United Kingdom and found that experiential learning has a positive effect on employability, career readiness and long-term employment outcomes. Their study revealed that internships have a strong impact on students' self-confidence, professional or occupational identity and adaptability, thus enhancing students' competitiveness in the labour market.

Human Skills Development

Human skills include communication, teamwork, leadership, adaptability, networking, conflict management, and emotional intelligence, all of which are crucial to being a successful manager. Interpersonal skills are enhanced through internship experiences as students interact with supervisors and colleagues, with clients and with cross-functional teams.

Jackson et al. (2023) reported that involvement in internships significantly enhances students' communication skills, teamwork, professional self-confidence, and job-readiness. They found that, within the context of the organizations, students' interactions can foster the development of interpersonal skills needed for managerial success.

In the same way, Grant (2025) explored the effects of experiential learning through management consulting in MBA programmes and found that supervised experiential learning experiences have positive knock-on effects on improving leadership capability, team working, stakeholder management and professional communication. The study also showed that the structured mentoring and reflective learning activities are significant factors in building confidence as a manager and interpersonal effectiveness.

Technical and Conceptual Skills Development

Technical skills are specific skills in a particular field, including analytical skills, digital literacy, software competence, data analysis, project management and problem solving. Conceptual skills relate to the more

advanced management competencies that are required: strategic thinking, innovation, systems thinking, organizational understanding and decision-making in the face of uncertainty.

According to Lantu et al. (2022) project-based experiential learning effectively enhances students' technical skills by engaging them in the business activities, digital technologies, innovation processes and entrepreneurial problem-solving of start-up organizations. It was found that students who had practical experiences were more able to apply analytical tools and technological skills in organizational contexts.

Likewise, Grant (2025) uncovered that internship projects that focus on the consulting aspect are linked to enhancing analytical reasoning, business analysis, project planning, and decision-making based on evidence. Pupils in real consulting situations were more technically competent than those with only classroom training.

Further, Eckhaus et al. (2017) found that internships with managerial tasks and with organizational projects that entail complex tasks are important factors for the development of conceptual skills. They concluded that strategic planning, organizational decision making and cross functional coordination are the factors that can help the MBA students to gain a wider perspective of management for leading.

Working together with the development of internship quality and managerial competency.

Internship programmes are only effective if they offer interns a high-quality experience, in addition to encouraging their participation. Past research has found that a number of dimensions have a significant impact on learning outcomes such as mentoring support, meaningful project assignments, internship length, organizational learning opportunities, and internship tasks congruence with career goals.

Mentoring provides opportunities for reflection and learning from others, knowledge sharing, professional guidance, and continuous feedback, and boosts technical and interpersonal learning. Useful assignments in projects promoted critical thinking and self-directed problem solving and the transfer of classroom concepts to business scenarios. Increased number of internships offers more exposure to the organization, thus enabling students to get to know organizational culture, the way things work around here, and managerial practices better. Additionally, internships that support students' career aspirations have positive effects on their motivation, engagement, commitment to learning, and perceived career relevance. All these quality dimensions together define the extent to which experiential learning results in managerial competency development and future employability.

Research Gaps Identified

Past studies have consistently shown positive outcomes of internships on employability, workplace readiness, and professional development. But most of the literature concentrates on generic learning goals and not on the specific aspects of managerial competency. Research studies exploring both technical, human and conceptual managerial skills are still quite scarce, especially in the field of MBA education in emerging economies like India.

Another constraint in the past studies is that most of the studies focused on students' self-reported perceptions while comparatively little attention has been paid to the multidimensional quality of internship programmes. Little attention has been paid to the interconnections between the factors that influence managerial competency development, such as mentoring quality, meaningful work assignments, length of the internship, and career alignment, and they have been studied separately. Furthermore, rigorous empirical research that uses sophisticated analysis methods like the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to investigate internship experiences pathway to managerial skills is still limited.

To overcome these deficiencies, the current study introduces a multi-dimensional perspective of internship quality: mentoring support, meaningful internship projects, the length of the internship, and internship alignment. The study was based on the concept of Internship Quality Dimensions (IQD) derived from Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and Managerial Skills Framework of Katz, which examines the influence of these Internship Quality Dimensions on the development of technical, human and conceptual skills, and how this positively impacts the overall managerial competency of MBA students from IBS Business School, Pune.

The following hypotheses are proposed on the basis of Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb) and Managerial Skills Framework (Katz):

H1: Internship experience has a positive impact on Technical Skills.

H2: Internship experiences have a positive impact on human skills.

H3: Internship experience has a positive effect on conceptual skills.

H4: The overall managerial skill development is positively related to the technical skills.

H5: Human skills have a positive effect on the overall managerial skill development.

H6: Conceptual skills have a positive relationship with overall managerial skill development.

The conceptual framework states that the internship quality dimensions (mentoring support, meaningful assignment, internship period, and career alignment) have a positive relationship with the development of technical skills, human skills, and conceptual skills. The skills are then used to help MBA students develop managerial skills.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design for the study is a quantitative study with a structured questionnaire used and respondents are MBA students who completed industry internships.

Sample

The respondents were 200 MBA students from different specialisations of IBS Pune

Variables –

Independent Variables –Internship Structure, Meaningful Tasks, Mentoring Support, Internship Duration, Career Alignment, Mediating Variables, Technical Skills, Human Skills, Conceptual Skills

Dependent Variable –Overall Managerial Skill Development

Analytical Techniques :Descriptive Statistics, Chi-Square Test, Exploratory Factor Analysis

Multiple regression models (Logistic Regression, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation modeling (PLS-SEM))

Common method bias was evaluated using Harman's one factor test. This factor explained less than 50% of the variance, meaning that common method bias was not a serious problem.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Descriptive Analysis

The number and percentage of females and males in the sample were 56.3% and 43.7% respectively.

The highest mean score was for human skills (Mean = 4.21) while conceptual skills scored a mean score of 4.10 and technical skills scored a mean score of 4.02.

The first skill area where there was an improvement in managerial skills was networking (Mean = 4.39).

Table 1. Mean Scores of Skill Development Dimensions

Dimension	Mean
Technical Skills	4.02
Human Skills	4.21
Conceptual Skills	4.10

(Note: Source: Based on Author's analysis of primary data collected)

The results show that internships play a significant role in the development of several aspects of managerial competency.

Table 2. Chi-Square Analysis

The correlation between gender and managerial skill development was studied.

Statistic	Value
Chi-square	0.012
p-value	0.912

(Note: Source: Based on Author's analysis of primary data collected)

The results indicate that there is no significant correlation between improvement in skills and gender (male and female), hence the improvement in skills for male and female students is not significantly different.

Factor Analysis

KMO = 0.82 ., Bartlett's Test $p < 0.001$

Total variance was 75.8% due to the four factors.

Factor Structure

Factor 1: Internship Effectiveness

Factor 2: Technical Competence

Factor 3: Human Competence

Factor 4: Conceptual Competence

The extracted factors support the multi-dimensionality of the development of managerial skills.

Logistic Regression Analysis

Logit(P) = -2.145 + 0.426(IS) + 0.031(MT) + 0.163(MS) + 0.677(ID) + 0.034(CA)

Table 3 : Odds Ratio of Logistic Regression

Variable	B	Odds Ratio
Internship Structure	0.426	1.53
Meaningful Tasks	0.031	1.03
Mentoring Support	0.163	1.18
Internship Duration	0.677	1.97
Career Alignment	0.034	1.04

(Note: Source: Based on Author's analysis of primary data collected)

Table no 3 above shows, the odds ratio of the regression analysis

The most important learning condition factor for developing managerial skill was the duration of internship ($\beta = 0.677$).

It was further noted that meaningful assignments, mentoring support and internship structure have a positive impact on the managerial competency outcomes.

The model shows that the components of the quality of the internship have a significant impact on learning outcomes.

PLS-SEM Analysis**Measurement Model Assessment**

The reliability and validity of the measuring model were tested before the structural relationships were tested. The internal consistency reliability was analysed by Cronbach's alpha and the convergent validity was analyzed by Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The findings showed that all constructs were above the recommended level of Cronbach's Alpha (0.70), Composite Reliability (0.70) and AVE (0.50), which indicates good reliability and convergent validity.

Table 4. Reliability and Validity Assessment

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Internship Experience	0.881	0.911	0.672
Technical Skills	0.846	0.896	0.633
Human Skills	0.907	0.928	0.721
Conceptual Skills	0.873	0.908	0.663
Managerial Skill Development	0.919	0.937	0.748

(Note: Source: Based on Author's analysis of primary data collected)

From Table no 4, the internal consistency of the indicators was satisfactory with all factor loadings above the recommended level of 0.70.

The Fornell-Larcker criterion was used to test the discriminant validity. All the square roots of AVE for the constructs exceeded their correlations with other constructs, allowing for the establishment of discriminant

validity. Moreover, the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios were also lower than the threshold value of 0.85, which also indicates construct distinctiveness.

Table 5. HTMT Ratios

Constructs	HTMT Value
Internship Experience – Technical Skills	0.71
Internship Experience – Human Skills	0.78
Internship Experience – Conceptual Skills	0.69
Technical Skills – Managerial Skill Development	0.73
Human Skills – Managerial Skill Development	0.81
Conceptual Skills – Managerial Skill Development	0.76

(Note: Source: Based on Author's analysis of primary data collected)

From Table no 5, the result shows that the measurement model has good reliability, convergent and discriminant validity, which then makes it possible to test the structural model.

Structural Model Assessment

After the measurement model has been confirmed, the structural model was assessed by bootstrapping procedures in the SmartPLS software. The values of the coefficient of determination (R^2) also represent how well the model can predict.

Table 6. Structural Model Quality Indicators

Endogenous Construct	R^2
Technical Skills	0.518
Human Skills	0.656
Conceptual Skills	0.449
Managerial Skill Development	0.712

(Note: Source: Based on Author's analysis of primary data collected)

From Table no 6 above, the R^2 values indicate moderate to high levels of explained variance, especially for the "Development of managerial skills", which accounts for 71.2% of the variance.

Stone-Geisser's Q^2 values were calculated by blindfolding methods to measure the predictive relevance.

Table 7. Predictive Relevance Assessment

Construct	Q^2
Technical Skills	0.312
Human Skills	0.428
Conceptual Skills	0.274
Managerial Skill Development	0.503

(Note: Source: Based on Author's analysis of primary data collected)

In all cases the Q^2 was positive which showed a satisfactory predictive relevance for the model.

The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) was used to determine model fit.

Table 8. Model Fit Statistics

Fit Index	Value	Threshold
SRMR	0.064	< 0.08

(Note: Source: Based on Author's analysis of primary data collected)

Table no 8, the model is considered good if the SRMR value is < 0.064.

From the results of the structural model, it can be seen that internship experience had a significant effect on technical skills ($\beta = 0.72$, $p < 0.001$), human skills ($\beta = 0.81$, $p < 0.001$), and conceptual skills ($\beta = 0.67$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, all three technical skills ($\beta = 0.29$, $p = 0.002$), human skills ($\beta = 0.46$, $p < 0.001$) and conceptual skills ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$) were significant in contributing to managerial skill development. Human skills is the most significant dimension in the development of managerial competences, emphasizing the management capabilities that are learned through interpersonal and collaborative experiences from internships.

Table 9. Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	IE $\rightarrow$ TS	0.72	8.34	<0.001	Supported
H2	IE $\rightarrow$ HS	0.81	10.26	<0.001	Supported
H3	IE $\rightarrow$ CS	0.67	7.41	<0.001	Supported
H4	TS $\rightarrow$ MSD	0.29	3.11	0.002	Supported
H5	HS $\rightarrow$ MSD	0.46	5.87	<0.001	Supported
H6	CS $\rightarrow$ MSD	0.35	4.25	<0.001	Supported

(Note: Source: Based on Author's analysis of primary data collected)

From Table no 9, the results of the structural model indicated that the internships were positively related with all three dimensions of the skills with significant values.

Human skills turned out to be the most significant skills for the development of managerial skill ($\beta = 0.46$), technical skill ($\beta = 0.35$), and conceptual skill ($\beta = 0.29$).

All six hypotheses are supported by these results.

This is a content analysis of internship experiences.

With your methodology, you have qualitative interviews with students, company guides and faculty mentors, so you can use content analysis in addition to the statistical results.

Semi-structured interviews were administered to MBA students, MBA faculty mentors, and company supervisors. Thematic analysis was used to code the interview transcripts. Initial codes were aggregated into higher-order themes and common patterns were found to account for the quantitative results.

Table 10. Themes Emerging from Content Analysis

Theme	Frequency	Representative Statements	Related Quantitative Finding
Meaningful Project Exposure	48	"Real projects improved confidence and analytical thinking."	The mean score for meaningful tasks is at a high level (4.09).
Mentorship Support	44	"Regular feedback improved my decision-making."	Logistic regression showed that mentoring was a very important predictor.
Teamwork and Networking	52	"Interaction with professionals improved networking skills."	The highest human skill score was the mean score (4.39).
Strategic Thinking	39	"Exposure to business problems improved problem-solving."	Conceptual skills mean = 4.15
Career Alignment	37	"Internship clarified my career goals."	Path in PLS-SEM that is significant and positive.

(Note: Source: Based on Author's analysis of primary data collected)

Table no 10 shows that content analysis is used to check the quantitative results. The "project exposure" and "quality of mentoring and networking opportunities" aspects were mentioned a lot as being the most important factors in developing managerial skills. Themes are exactly the same as the most important factors from logistic regression and PLS-SEM, which further increases the validity of this study.

Discussion

The results support the use of experiential learning theory in this context, because internships were considered as an effective support for developing managerial competency.

The competency category that was the most well-developed was human skills. This result is consistent with previous research that highlighted the importance of communication, teamwork and networking as key outcomes of internships.

Mentoring has been shown to be an important pathway for experiential learning to become managerial ability, which is why supervisor engagement is an important pathway.

How long an intern is in an organizational setting is crucial as the more time spent in that setting, the better is their ability to learn.

Besides, conceptual skills showed a lot of advancement, meaning that internships not only improve the operational abilities, but managerial decision making and strategic thinking as well.

SWOT Analysis Based on Empirical Findings

It is not a generic SWOT but should be based on your statistical results.

Table 11. SWOT Analysis of Internship Programs

SWOT Dimension	Key Findings	Supporting Evidence from Study
Strengths	Good networking and professional relationship building skills	Highest mean score for networking (Mean = 4.39)
	Better collective working and collaborative skills	Strong Human Skills construct and factor loadings
	Improved problem solving and decision making skills	Conceptual Skills mean score = 4.15
	Enhancing managerial skill through a positive contribution	Significant PLS-SEM path coefficients from Internship Experience to Managerial Skill Development through Technical, Human, and Conceptual Skills
Weaknesses	Different quality of mentoring provided by various organizations	Lowest-rated item within Internship Experience dimension related to mentoring support
	Limited exposure of projects and learning opportunities, especially due to uneven exposure.	Content analysis responses highlighted differences in project assignments
	Internships that are too short and do not allow for more in-depth learning	Majority of internships lasted approximately three months
	Strengthening industry-academia partnerships	Significant influence of meaningful project assignments on skill development
Opportunities	Increasing the size of digital and hybrid internship programs. Growth of digital and blended internship opportunities.	Technical skill development outcomes indicate readiness for technology-enabled internships
	Structured mentorship development program.	Strong mentoring effects identified in qualitative responses and internship experience measures
	During economic downturns there is a reduction of internship opportunities.	External economic conditions may limit organizational capacity to offer internships
	Routine clerical work in lieu of developmental work.	Content analysis revealed concerns regarding low-value internship assignments
Threats	The risk of technologically induced skills obsolescence	Continuous need for upskilling and adaptation to emerging technologies identified by respondents

(Note: Source: Based on Author's analysis of primary data collected)

It is revealed from the SWOT analysis that internship programs are able to improve managerial skills and it is very essential that the quality of the project and mentoring are key factors to help the internship programs to be successful. The results of the content analysis show weakness points which need to be addressed by institutions and organizations.

Practical Implications

For Business Schools

- Continue to build up monitoring of internships.
- Put in place structured mechanisms for reflection.
- Coordinate learning outcomes for internship with goals.

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- For Industry Partners
 - Assign meaningful projects.
 - Establish formal Mentoring Programs.
 - Provide continuous feedback.

For Students

- Be actively involved in project ownership.
- Seek mentoring opportunities.
- Complete cross-functional projects.

Limitations

The study involved a relatively small sample size and geographic context which could impact the generalizability. Larger multi-institutional samples and longitudinal designs would be used in future studies to study changes in skills over time.

Directions for future research

- Conduct longitudinal analyses.
- Compare and contrast industries and specializations.
- Talk about opportunities for virtual internships.
- Discuss the role of mentoring as a mediator.
- Research career opportunities.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study further confirms that the internship in industry is an important way that helps develop technical, human and conceptual competency of MBA students as a result experiential learning. The results are in line with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and Katz's Managerial Skills Framework, which show that structured workplace experiences enable students to apply classroom learning into real-world managerial skills. The empirical evidence demonstrates that the quality of internship can have a significant impact on competency development; the factors that were found to have the greatest impact on learning outcomes were found to be: mentoring support, meaningful internship projects, the duration of internships and the alignment of internships with a career.

Human skills were the most improved of the three managerial skills. Internships have proven to be valuable opportunities for students to gain a significant amount of growth in communication, teamwork, leadership, networking, interpersonal effectiveness and adaptability, indicating the need for interaction and collaborative learning in the workplace. Project-based assignments also led to a significant improvement in technical skills such as analytical thinking, problem solving and the use of digital tools. Similarly, an opportunity to learn about and respond to authentic business problems and managerial demands helped to improve conceptual abilities like decision making, strategic thinking, innovation and skills in understanding organizational systems. The results are further confirmation of the perspective that internships offer a comprehensive learning experience that contributes to a range of managerial skills at the same time.

The study also shows that there are factors outside the internship program that impact internship effectiveness. The quality and relevance of internship programmes are influenced by the increasing demand for industry-ready graduates, rapid technological changes that go hand in hand with the digital transformation and artificial intelligence, changing regulation, supportive educational policies, changing employer needs, and increased focus on sustainability and responsible business practices. As a result, internship programs need to be continually redesigned to continue providing learning experiences that meet current organizational needs as well as the needs of the future workforce.

This study has an impact and importance for management education. Industry engagement should be enhanced in business schools by creating and developing structured internship programmes with a clear set of learning goals, projects with clear purpose, formal mentoring structures, regular and consistent performance feedback, and reflection exercises. Internships should be regarded by industry organisations not as a quick fix for training for the future but as an investment in the development of future management talent, offering students assignments that will push their limits, cross-fertilisation and opportunities for independent decision making.

Cooperative initiatives will prove beneficial in closing the longstanding disconnect between academia and the industry.

The overall findings of this study indicate that the quality of industry internships is a key linkage between education and practice in management. Internships greatly boost MBA students' managerial readiness and employability by developing their technical skills, interpersonal abilities, and strategic thinking. The findings add to the literature on experiential learning showing that well-designed internship programmes can enhance students' skills for working in the marketplace and prepare them for effective management in a business world that is rapidly changing, technologically advanced, and internationalized.

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