

ZUYD UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

UNIVERSIDAD DEL ROSARIO



**INCLUSION OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AND MOTIVATION OF WORK-FROM-
HOME STUDENT INTERNS FOR RETENTION**

Thesis Project – Trabajo de Grado

Laura Marcela Vergara Rodríguez

Maastricht, Netherlands

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HOME STUDENT INTERNS FOR RETENTION**

Thesis Project

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Resumen

El propósito de esta tesis fue diseñar y ejecutar un estudio para resolver un problema interno organizacional, tal como la retención de estudiantes pasantes en una unidad en la empresa IBM. Esto fue hecho centrado en cómo incentivar su sentido de pertenencia en el lugar de trabajo, basándose en la inclusión de diferencias culturales que existen en un equipo compuesto de miembros de distintos países. IBM es una organización internacional, líder en el sector de TIC, que opera por medio de unidades de trabajo compuestas de empleados con distintos trasfondos culturales, así que es común que los equipos tengan colaboradores provenientes de varias partes del mundo.

Para 2020, la unidad Technical Support Services para Latinoamérica y México estaba enfrentando una serie de desafíos. Los trabajadores se encontraban realizando sus funciones de manera remota vía herramientas tecnológicas tales como Webex y Slack, donde había una necesidad de incluir a los nuevos miembros del equipo como los estudiantes pasantes, una necesidad de crear un sentido de pertenencia, y de mantener a los trabajadores motivados. Los líderes de la unidad expresaron el deseo de retener a los estudiantes practicantes y transformarlos en empleados regulares al final de sus prácticas profesionales. Por lo tanto, la brecha entre la situación actual y la situación deseada consiste en incentivar la inclusión cultural y el sentido de pertenencia al equipo de los estudiantes pasantes, para conseguir retenerlos y convertirlos en empleados regulares. El objetivo de la compañía es incrementar la cantidad de estudiantes que son regularizados en la unidad a 2 por año.

Una revisión de literatura en diferencias culturales, trabajadores remotos, y retención (y retención de pasantes) fue realizada para recopilar ideas e historias de éxito, y los factores que podrían motivar a los estudiantes pasantes a permanecer en la organización. Adicionalmente, se realizó una encuesta para obtener datos y percepciones de los pasantes actuales.

La revisión señaló que los trabajadores de la Generación Z, que es la generación actual que se encuentra ingresando a la fuerza de trabajo, tiene nuevas y diferentes necesidades que generaciones pasadas, enfocándose en salud, estructura, aprendizaje democratizado, posibilidades para crecimiento personal, y soporte emocional. Los administradores deben ajustar sus operaciones para convertir estas prioridades en factores clave que harán que los pasantes quieran mantenerse en la organización.

Tras concluir las entrevistas con el gerente de la unidad y con el líder del programa de estudiantes practicantes, y compararlo con los hallazgos de la encuesta a los estudiantes actuales, se encontró que existen tres problemas a abordar. Se encontró que el problema que debía priorizarse fue el de “Integrar e incluir a los nuevos miembros a la unidad para retenerlos”, el cual se propone que sea resuelto a través de la opción “Reuniones virtuales”. Se hizo un análisis financiero de lo que implicaría tomar las acciones sugeridas para implementar soluciones para este problema, resultando en unas políticas recomendadas ideales para poner el plan en acción.

Palabras clave

IBM, diferencias culturales, retención, motivación, trabajo remoto, trabajo en equipo, estudiantes, pasantes, practicantes

Management Summary

The purpose of this thesis was to design and execute a study to solve an internal organizational problem such as the retention of student interns in a unit of IBM. This was done focusing on how to incentivize their sense of belonging in the workplace, rooted in the inclusion of cultural differences that exist in a team made up of members from different countries. IBM is an international organization, a leader in the IT sector that operates by business units composed of employees from different cultural backgrounds, and therefore it is common that teams have collaborators from several parts of the world.

As of 2020, the Technical Support Services (a branch of the organization) for Spanish South America and Mexico region was facing a set of challenges. Workers were performing their jobs remotely via technological tools such as Webex and Slack, and there was a need for inclusion of new teammembers like the student interns and a need for creating a sense of belonging and maintaining workers motivated. The leaders of the unit expressed a desire to retain student interns and transform them into regular employees at the end of their internship. Therefore, the gap between the current situation and the desired situation is to incentivize student intern cultural inclusion and sense of belonging to the team in order to retain them and convert them into regular workers. The company objective is to increase the amount of interns that are regularized within the unit by 2 per year.

A literature review on cultural differences, remote workers, and retention (and intern retention) was done to gather insights on success stories and the factors that might motivate

student interns to remain within the organization. Along with this, a survey was done to obtain the perceptions and data of current interns.

The review pointed out that Generation-Z workers (the current generation entering the workforce) has new and different needs than those of past generations, focusing on health, structure, democratized learning, possibilities for personal growth and emotional support. Managers need to adjust their ways to turn these priorities into key factors that will make interns want to remain within the organization.

After conducting interviews with the unit manager and the leader of the student program, and comparing it with the findings of the student intern survey it was found that there were three main issues to tackle. The one that was found that should be tackled first was *Integrating and including new team members to the unit to retain them*, which is proposed to be solved by *Virtual meetings*. A financial underpinning of what this would entail was done, resulting in the policy recommendation that it is ideal to put the plan into action.

Keywords

IBM, cultural differences, retention, motivation, remote work, team, teamwork, student interns.

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List of abbreviations

IBM: International Business Machines, hereafter referred to as IBM, the company.

TSS: Technical Support Services, a branch of the organization.

SSA & Mex: Spanish South America & Mexico, this geographical division.

IBMers: company workers.

DS: Digital Sales Group.

1. Preface

As a part of the culmination of the studies, I will be working on the thesis project for International Business Machines (IBM) in Bogotá, Colombia. The person appointed to assist all questions was Roland Tirana, the manager for the Digital Sales Spanish South America & Mexico region. The company has over 100 years of history, spread across the globe with the main purpose of focusing on the success of their clients and making an impact with innovations that matter to the world. This is relevant nowadays more than ever, in the IT industry, which has grown exponentially in the past decade. The project will engage in research conducted on cultural differences, adaptability, sense of belonging, and motivation in relation to the workers in the SSA & Mex branch of IBM.

2. Introduction

This project is based on the internship conducted in the second semester of 2020, with the outcome of recommendations of the issue identified within the Digital Sales, Technical Support Services (TSS) for Spanish South America & Mexico (SSA & Mex) branch of IBM.

The company's top priority is the success of their clients, and Digital Sales TSS SSA & Mex being a commercial branch this also is expressed in meeting their goals and providing accurate, quality services to their customers. This is made as a collective team effort, since more than three people work in quoting single contracts for every client. For the team to do this, it is important that the employees feel motivated and included in the group, and that their cultural differences are taken into account, since the team is composed of members from all over South America and Mexico.

However, due to the shift in paradigm that brought the global pandemic in 2020, the entire unit has moved their operations to remote working or home offices. This presents an issue for the team culture and sense of belonging since there is no longer an active physical workspace and a physical group dynamic.

To achieve their goals of teamwork and showing results, multiple campaigns and efforts need to be made to bring the intents of inclusivity and motivation to practice.

Finally, the main aim of this project is to recommend a course of action to solve the issue found within the company. The recommendations will be supported by a literature research, options analysis, and financial underpinning.

3. Chapter 1 Research Setup

3.1. Introduction to chapter

In this chapter the company IBM will be introduced. This is composed of their organizational profile, their mission, vision, their objectives, and problem statement. From these, the research questions and objective will be drawn and serve as the base for the development of the project. Finally, a justification for the methodology of research will be given.

3.2. Company Profile

IBM is an international company that is best known for adapting and shifting focus when needed. Established on June 16th, 1911, in Armonk, New York, it started as a computing, tabulating, and recording company, as a merger of three manufacturing businesses (IBM, n.d.). This will mark an important trait that will be carried on throughout its history: adapting while taking big risks.

The company believes in the place they represent in the world, and it is exactly what has kept IBM as a top player in the Information Technology (IT) industry. Its core values have served as an anchor through the years in the ever-changing sector and shift in economies, and even though they have evolved with the times, they remain coherent with the original ones (IBM, n.d.).

It is important to highlight the fact that they have historically shifted focus by splitting part of its operations and leaving aside entire business units to progress into a different stage, always betting on the future and the impact they can make in the world (IBM, n.d.). An example of this is the fact that IBM is best known for selling computers, but this has not been true since 2005, when they sold that part of their operations and created an alliance with Lenovo. Even so, at the time of framing the current project, the company announced it would be splitting into two companies by the end of 2021 in a publication done by its CEO Arvind Krishna. He stated that, to grow, the company's strategy needs to be based in the reality of the world and in the future that its clients want to build. For this reason, and since its clients are demanding further development in the area, they will be focusing on hybrid cloud and artificial intelligence (AI) and leaving behind the application and infrastructure business (Krishna, 2021).

So not only does the company embrace change and take risks, it sheds its own skin to make room for growth. IBM has done this by sharing knowledge and constantly monitoring its client's needs to focus on the added value that the company can provide. Consequently, the company does not have an official mission and vision statement, instead they believe in living their values as a way guiding the efforts toward meeting their objectives. The culture is expressed as a 1-3-9 scheme, explained as having one purpose, three values and nine actions. IBM's main purpose is to "*be essential*", this is, to its customers and partners in a way which is valuable to them (IBM, n.d.).

Their three values are then divided into three actions that help the IBMers (its workers) to express them, respectively. The first value is “*Dedication to every client’s success*”, which is expressed by putting the client first, listening for need, envisioning the future; and finally, by sharing expertise. Here is where feedback is key, and sharing knowledge helps (IBM, n.d.).

The second value is “*Innovation that matters - for our company and for the world*”. The actions taken for this one are: to “relentlessly reinvent — our company and ourselves.”, dare to create original ideas, and treasure wild ducks. This is based on the belief that wild ideas can be tamed, but once done they can’t return to the wild state. IBM uses this because it understands that its business needs creative and disruptive ideas to continue innovating, solving problems, and building the future (IBM, n.d.).

And finally, the third value is to “*Trust and personal responsibility in all relationships*”. The actions are more person-oriented since they rely on the workers judgement and teamwork: “*Think. Prepare. Rehearse*”, “*Unite to get it done now*”, “*Show personal interest*” (IBM, n.d.).

3.3. Problem statement

To identify the problem statement that this project will be built upon, the current situation, desired situation, and the gap that IBM faces between the two will be drawn to identify the room for work.

3.3.1. Current Situation

As of the second semester of 2020, IBM Colombia has adapted a remote workspace for its collaborators, with the intent of complying with health and safety regulations. The Digital Sales TSS business unit of IBM uses digital tools to carry out its operations, operating entirely virtually, due to the nature of its offerings. All the tools, communication channels, and information are stored and managed via remote access.

It is relevant to highlight that the Digital Sales SSA & Mex is a team of workers from all over the region, therefore, their communications are often via chat, calls, or video conferences with customers and business partners from different countries in the region.

The unit operates as a team, meaning multiple members work on the same client account to provide services. Depending on demand and level of operations, there is a seller assigned per country. Each seller or Opportunity Owner (OO) is supported by a Proposal Team Leader (PTL) or intern. Usually there are six to seven interns per semester, and currently the amount of regular IBM workers that started as student interns is 50%, and there are a total of 14 collaborators in the area. The PTL interns assume high responsibilities since they are held accountable for accurately providing service quotations and presenting final versions of contracts before signatures. Once

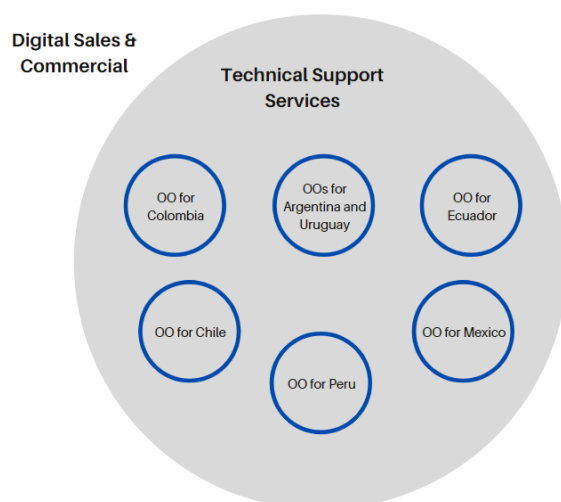
the process is done, the OO proceeds to ask other business units (often in Brazil) for necessary approvals for registering the transaction and billing the customer. (Fig.1)

Thus, the work is rooted in multicultural teamwork and cooperation, and having a collaborative dynamic brings up a need for team inclusion. Sellers are the more constant part of the team, since the interns are students aiming to obtain their university degree and can only stay in the role from six months to a year.

Therefore, the challenge is to include the interns into the work environment, which is especially intricate considering that this generation of students enters a workforce they will not be able to meet, because the environment takes place on a remote space.

Finally, it is important to note that the company believes that by measuring retention it is possible to know to which extent the employees and interns are feeling included and at ease in the workplace.

Figure 1. *Digital Sales & Commercial territory distribution and role division*



3.3.2. Desired Situation

The main goal of the unit is to work as a collaborative team rooted in cultural inclusion, so that people can combine their efforts to succeed. IBM wants to incentivize the cultural inclusion and development of each team member, and by doing this, they hope it translates into more group solidification and a conversion of interns into regular workers in a larger percentage, and thus, minimize the challenge of insertion.

The unit wants to increase the number of interns that turn into regular workers, since it takes time to train the interns and it is rather challenging solidifying teamwork when there are new members who are constantly seeking to adapt and belong. Additionally, they believe that by measuring the intern regularization is a way to identify the likeliness of them feeling comfortable and included in the team.

The new bet for this year is to include all remote working staff and boost the motivation and sense of belonging in the group. The aim is to focus on cultural aspects in teamwork initiatives, so that they can have a bigger diversity and incorporate people that bring different perspectives to the unit.

3.3.3. Gap

The company needs to boost intern cultural inclusion and sense of belonging on the team to retain them, whilst considering their cultural differences within the international teams, and thus solidify team dynamics. Therefore, the gap is in how to retain interns and convert them into regular workers.

3.4. Company Objective

IBM wants to increase the number of TSS SSA & Mex student interns that turn into regular employees by 2 per year, for 2021. The overall objective can be formulated as:

“To increase the inclusion translated into regularization of interns by 14% in the TSS SSA & Mex branch by July 2021”

3.5. Research objective and research questions

3.5.1. Research objective

The main objective for this project is to identify actions the company can take towards including interns and converting them into regular employees. This will be done by conducting desk research and a literature review.

3.5.2. Research questions

3.5.2.1 Current situation

- What are the initiatives to include the student interns in the TSS SSA & Mex unit and how is the sense of belonging created?
- How do cultural differences of employees impact teamwork within the unit, and in which ways is interculturality evident?
- What are the current challenges that both the TSS SSA & Mex team and the Student Program have regarding motivating and including interns to retain them at IBM?

3.5.2.2. Desired situation

- What is the projected and desirable future of teamwork and inclusion within the TSS SSA & Mex unit and the role of student interns in it?
- What are the goals and the impact that the team is striving to accomplish in terms of intern retention?

3.6. Justification of methodology

To develop this thesis research, both qualitative and quantitative methods were established to further specify the goals.

3.6.1. Virtual interviews

An interview was conducted on the manager of the unit, and for the Talent Acquisition Partner for the Student Program in Colombia, to narrow down the priorities of the unit, the impact of past initiatives and gather insight on their goals.

The interviews were conducted with the manager of the unit, Roland Triana, and with the director of the student program for the country, Nicolás Sánchez. They were selected based on the knowledge associated with these positions, since they are monitoring and directly involved in acquiring the talent, educating, and forming the interns, evaluating workers, and monitoring aspects related to cultural differences and ways to handle them. Therefore, as they have a clear understanding of the procedures and a clear vision of the expected, they are deemed as a reliable source.

It was considered the best way to obtain accurate results since they are in position...to provide insights in specific company policies and regular operations, which is qualitative information

that cannot be found publicly online. The reason behind selecting virtual interviews is that due to Covid-19 health regulations and social distancing policies, it was safer for them not to be held in person.

These interviews were semi structured, meaning they held a protocol and contained a previously researched series of questions to guide the conversation with the participants, but allowed asking for additional details or subsequent questions that arose from interviewee's answers.

However, it is understood that interviews can easily be done irregularly and that it is hard to target and get relevant answers, because it depends mostly on the subject's interpretation. To avoid this, participants were informed on the topics and guided through the semi structured nature previously mentioned, so that if their answers strayed away or they interpreted something different than intended, it would be possible to course-correct and obtain pertinent information.

3.6.2. Digital survey

A quantitative and qualitative survey was conducted on TSS SSA & Mex unit student interns to observe how they resonate with virtual initiatives and how these have impacted their perception of inclusivity and interculturality in the workplace. The survey was conducted to this population virtually since the workspace was entirely remote due to Covid-19 health and safety regulations.

The idea behind the survey applied to student interns is to gather answers directly from them about the topics in question, this is, because only interns can identify and express how comfortable and included they feel in the team, what they find is attractive to stay in the role and the key factors that will influence their seeking a long term position within IBM. This chosen population is the one that holds valid and reliable information in these topics.

Thus, surveying was the method chosen for obtaining quantitative and qualitative data, with the objective of obtaining comparable and measurable data. Close-ended questions that made it possible to extract quantitative data via rating and Likert scales, and open-ended questions to delve on participants opinions and perceptions of inclusivity within the workplace as qualitative data. The population of interns is relatively small, being only of 5 in the moment of application of the survey including the author of the thesis, therefore the validity of the survey depends on gathering 75% responses.

To counteract the natural bias and the fact that they could easily be wrongfully applied due to the subject's interpretation, the surveys were structured in sections that carefully explained the intent of the questions.

3.6.3. Desk research and literature review

Desk research was made to gain insights on initiatives, programs and current inclusion practices that have already taken place inside IBM. Publications made by IBM and files available on their platforms was consulted, as well as public access websites containing current and

relevant information. It also included online courses that are available to all IBM workers, since they explained current initiatives and programs that are already adapted.

Literature review was done on topics such as remote workers, motivation, cultural differences, and inclusion. Book chapters and journal articles were used as a way of acquiring knowledge based on research previously published, that provide sustained information on what other researchers have done regarding the issue at hand. This means, success cases and publications on said topics were consulted.

Journal articles and publications are written from the author's point of view and therefore were only used as research on what researchers have done regarding the issues, understanding the limit on the scope of their papers.

Combining these research insights, it is possible to draw the current situation in the following chapter. The methodologies described are all sourced from desk research. The main advantages and disadvantages for the methods used are described in *Table 1. Advantages and Disadvantages of Methodologies* below.

Table 1. *Advantages and Disadvantages of Methodologies*

Methodologies	Advantages	Disadvantages
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Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Gather experiences and knowledge from the interviewee.- Provide information on specific topics that is not publicly available online.- Information comes from reliable or trusted sources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Can easily be poorly executed, resulting in non-accurate information.- It depends on the subject's interpretation and cooperation to elaborate on answers.
Surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Collect quantitative and qualitative data- Provide information on particular topics firsthand from directly implicated participants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Can be limited by the subject's interpretation, resulting in inaccurate information.- Do not provide a flow of conversation and elaboration on response justification.
Journal articles and books	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Provide results from past research on relevant topics.- Verified and accepted by academia.- Easy access.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Personal perspective can influence the research.- Can be outdated or not entirely applicable to the current world paradigm.

IBM online courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide intelligence on the company's particular practices and frameworks. - Interactive and easy to understand. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not for public access. - Can be time consuming. - Not easy to reference. - Overly attached to the company's values and instructions.
Public access websites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easily accessible. - Updated to current events and latest publications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - May not provide accurate information

Source: Author's own work

3.6.4. Justification research questions

From the research methods previously established and justified, the set of research questions was drawn on the relevant topics.

Current situation questions examine initiatives and present practices on inclusion and sense of belonging, which is the main issue found in the problem statement. The unit is looking for ways to grow and translate interns into regular workers based on cultural differences inclusion and creating an Agile team from remote workers. The questions also seek to understand group dynamics, strengths, and weaknesses present.

Questions for pinpointing the desired situation ask about goals and the future of the unit, to determine why they want to increase inclusion and why they strive to convert more student interns into regular workers. They were drawn to indagate on needs and priorities, which will serve as a guide on finding appropriate recommendations.

The following *Table 2. Research questions* also explains what type of research will be used for each research question and the type of data it is.

Table 2. *Research questions*

Research Question	Desk or Field research	Sources used	Qualitative or Quantitative
What are the initiatives to include the student interns in the TSS SSA & Mex unit and how is the sense of belonging created?	Field and desk research	Roland Triana, manager of TSS SSA & Mex, and Nicolás Sánchez, Talent Acquisition Partner for the Student Program in Colombia	Qualitative
How do employee's cultural differences impact teamwork within the unit, and in which ways is interculturality evident?	Field and desk research	Roland Triana, manager of TSS SSA & Mex, and Nicolás Sánchez, Talent Acquisition Partner for the Student Program in	Qualitative and quantitative

		Colombia. Also, surveys done to the student interns.	
What are the current challenges that both the TSS SSA & Mex team and the Student Program have regarding motivating and including interns to retain them at IBM?	Field and desk research	Roland Triana, manager of TSS SSA & Mex, and Nicolás Sánchez, Talent Acquisition Partner for the Student Program in Colombia. Also, surveys done to the student interns.	Qualitative and quantitative
What is the projected and desirable future of teamwork and inclusion within the TSS SSA & Mex unit and the role of student interns in it?	Field and desk research	Roland Triana, manager of TSS SSA & Mex, and Nicolás Sánchez, Talent Acquisition Partner for the Student Program in Colombia	Qualitative
What are the goals and the impact that the team is striving to accomplish in terms of intern retention?	Field and desk research	Roland Triana, manager of TSS SSA & Mex, and Nicolás Sánchez, Talent Acquisition Partner for	Qualitative

the Student Program in
Colombia

Source: Author's own work

3.6.5. Limitations

This research was done entirely in a non-presence, virtual workspace, meaning, it was not possible to meet any of the research subjects in person. This limited interaction with subjects, allowed little to no reading of nonverbal communication, and lacked in flow of conversation. Social distancing meant not meeting the team about which this project is based on, so it is hard to grasp its unique characteristics and intrinsic group dynamic, when it was not possible to experience them firsthand. Field research was not possible, so all research had to be done in the form of desk research.

Regarding investigation methods, the findings in this research need to be seen in light of possible limitations. The implementation of data collection was potentially limited by my experience in primary data collection. Furthermore, there is a lack of previous studies in multicultural inclusion of remote workers, and unprecedented Covid-19 restrictions presented an obligated remote workplace that is yet to be researched in depth by authorities in the matter. And finally, there were no studies found that took into consideration the dimension of remote working in student intern retention, and a survey was conducted to identify relevant factors, but they may be biased to participant's opinions.

Additionally, in conversations with the team manager and leaders, they have expressed the company's approach to interpreting cultural inclusion. The assumption is that a good way to measure inclusion and sense of belonging is by the number of interns who become regular employees, or by the number of former employees who choose to return to work at IBM because of their shared values and the healthy workplace environment that they have experienced. They announce that nowadays over half of the actual employees had started as interns. This is mentioned as a limitation since it is an assumption that limited the scope of the research, served as a guide of how cultural inclusion would be measured and restricted research topics.

Finally, throughout the process of this research the company experienced a period of restructuring since IBM announced a split into two companies in 2021. This created instability in teams and units because some employees left the organization, some changed roles, and new collaborators were recruited. Meaning, there were no established teamwork dynamics as the groups were continuously adjusting, roles and workload shifted, processes were modified and there were constantly new instructions on how to do the work.

4. Chapter 2 Literature Review

4.1. Introduction and purpose of literature study

In this chapter, research done in academic sources will be presented and discussed. The main topics are cultural differences and interculturality, and remote workers during Covid-19 lockdowns. These have been selected based on the main concerns and objectives of the company, and they are tied to IBM's company objective. The literature review is done and applied to the organization's concerns and attempts to help solve the research questions.

To begin with, the first topic is **cultural differences and interculturality**, which will be discussed as to gather insight about the intrinsic characteristics of multicultural groups and find literature recommendations for managers regarding how to best consider differences and to support their culturally diverse teams. The book "Cultural Differences and Improving Performance: How Values and Beliefs Influence Organizational Performance" (2009) by author Bryan Hopkins presents a theoretical framework and a step-by-step program that is intended to help global managers to best handle cultural differences present in the interactions between their collaborators, and between the collaborators and their work. Additionally, the article "Cross-Border Diversity Initiatives for Recruiting and Retention" (2014) by Dowling was selected as it

explains what managers and companies can do when hiring people from different backgrounds to best promote diversity, and the importance of tailoring their strategies to the local demographics.

Secondly, research on **remote workers** has been made to consider current characteristics of work environment. The Harvard Business Review article “A guide to managing your (newly) remote workers” (2020) by Larson, Vroman, and Makarius has been selected as it is a recent and relevant piece that additionally investigates the newfound situation of remote workers that have had to adapt to new circumstances due to Covid-19 lockdowns. The report “Workers and Learners during a Global Pandemic and Social Uprising” (2020) was considered for its specific investigation regarding the conjuncture brought by the pandemic, given that it is mainly focused on the social, economic, psychological and health aspects that impacted student-workers and student-interns in their final years of studies, which is relevant for the student team that concerns IBM. Additionally, the article by HB Review “OUT OF SIGHT: 10 Tips for effectively managing remote workers” was examined for its cohesive list of suggestions for managing teams and workers who relied on digital tools to communicate and collaborate in the 2020 lockdowns. Finally, the article “Remote Workers During the COVID-19 Lockdown. What Are We Missing and Why Is Important” (2020) was explored since it compiles results from different health research produced about remote workers in Covid-19 times and linking it with work productivity and motivation.

Finally, the third topic of **retention** (and intern retention) has been considered to identify the factors that motivate student interns to wish to continue working at a company, which is the objective of the TSS SSA & Mex unit. The article “Recruiting and selecting graduate employees via internships” by Philip S Rose was consulted as it comprises the findings of multiple research papers and studies on factors that benefit interns, organizations and universities from an

internship program and what exactly increases the chances of a student accepting job offers from the same organization where they did their internship. Then, the article “Employee development and retention of Generation-Z employees in the post-COVID-19 workplace: a conceptual framework” published on *Benchmarking: An International Journal* was considered as it proportioned insights on intrinsic generational characteristics of the new generation of student interns and the specific motivators that apply to them when considering remaining at a workplace.

4.2. Cultural differences and interculturality

Comparison of literature: the main aim of the book was to help managers identify how to handle intercultural groups, by taking into account the deeply rooted cultural differences that are present in people, and how that relates to the work they do, the attitudes they may take, their emergency response and their relationships with other team members. It draws a guideline for managers to implement in their teams to close the gap of discomfort and uncertainty, and to ease communication resulting in more productivity and better results.

On the other hand, the article’s author explains how American companies tend to view diversity just as it applies to them, meaning according to the antique EEO-1 model that based diversity only on gender, ethnicity and race; by presenting that pursuing to bring this perspective

to other regions where demographics and history are completely different ends up not working, because other countries tackle diversity on much broader terms, and so American companies should operate differently when approaching diversity in overseas locations.

Both writings attempt to provide either tips or guides for better smoothing differences in the workplace as to have a better and more productive working environment.

Learning impacts and added value for the thesis: in the book a research-based analysis is made on different aspects of culture and how it impacts the way people act, interact and present themselves at work, by breaking down into elements such as belief systems and values external representations such as physically expressed attitudes that are prevalent in each culture, and by examining how different characteristics affect people's behavior at work and how they can be effectively managed. It breaks down culture into surface behavior, values and perception of both individuals and groups, which are expressions that can then be used as indicators for managers, and to best deal with said expressions. Additionally, the author explores anthropologist Kluckhohn's dimensions of everyday life that are impacted by culture and Hofstede's classification for countries about attitudes to life and values, and explains that while they are a good approach, it cannot be expected that every individual belonging to a culture or a country will behave according to the dimensions nor the values of their people, as each person has a unique background.

Specifically for the Latin American context, most countries share views on dimensions and behave in similar ways as they are of collectivistic nature: several things happen without explicit communication, as people have shared understandings or processes and things and therefore feel

as though there is no need to disclose them, and so information is usually expressed through non-verbal cues in a "restricted code". This is relevant to international managers because it highlights the fact that different cultures express indicators directly and others do it indirectly, and it is the manager's responsibility to identify indicators such as power distance, long-term orientation in the workplace, affectivism, etc; and to train their team accordingly.

This impacts people's attitudes towards work, technological developments, change and emergencies. Individualistic cultures are keen to accept changes if these are similar to those they have personally endured, whereas collectivistic cultures look within their in-group and see if the knowledge is lacking in order to accept it. Regarding trainings, scheduling and day to day activities, it is suggested that Managers need to make information and tools accessible to each worker in almost a tailored way, both in the macro and micro level, because conventions and symbols are interpreted differently culture to culture and societal rites vary on every location which in turn affects worker's daily operations.

In contrast, the article on "Cross-Border Diversity Initiatives for Recruiting an Retention" highlights the importance of understanding inclusion does not only mean culture, it means understanding the groups that are inserted in said culture, which are mostly gender, ethnicity and race; and also that countries put special emphasis on what is relevant and what diversity means to them based on their own demographics and history of inclusion. In professional groups, diversity includes age, disabled and non-disabled, sexual orientation, legally protected, and so on. Therefore, managers must acknowledge the local initiatives and programs that are already established in a location whenever considering hiring and training personnel and tailoring their efforts to the people there.

Both writings highlight that misunderstandings can always occur due to deeply set cultural differences in work styles, assumptions and attitudes towards work, so companies must address these in trainings and bring awareness in local campaigns.

4.3. Remote working

Comparison of literature: all articles and reports agree on the fact that remote work has had negative impacts on motivation for workers who were used to physical settings, given that factors such as social isolation, stress, external conditions, pressure to perform well and miscommunication are frequent and take a toll on everyday activities, which ends up affecting the health and overall wellbeing of collaborators.

Learning impacts and added value for the thesis: The HBR article for managing remote workers explains that working remotely translates into a lack of face-to-face supervision, access to information and an increment of social isolation and home distractions. All this impacts negatively motivation and productivity in workers who rely on communication to work in teams. Nonverbal communication elements such as tone cannot be translated or communicated in a remote work environment, since oftentimes it is not relevant for professional exchanges or email communication to explain feelings and moods. The author proposes the implementation of different technology-based communication options for collaborators to interact and better

understand each other, which is relevant for this thesis project as it poses an insight on ways in which inclusion and collaboration can be incentivized. Additionally, to schedule regular check-ins, spaces for remote social interaction and to establish rules of engagement so that teams of remote workers can feel connected and supported by their managers.

In contrast, the report was found to be especially relevant since the investigation provided both quantitative and qualitative data about perceptions and situations that student-workers and student-interns have experienced since the beginning of the pandemic, and how the shift to isolation has impacted their relationship with their work, their studies and plans for the future. They reported that before the pandemic, only half of the students were able to manage studying and working, and after the outbreak, only a quarter were able to do so. About half of the population interviewed had to change their educational plans, and more than 65% were concerned about the lack of jobs after graduation. This highlights the importance of providing student interns in IBM with future career projections and to help them navigate their needs. The report recommends for colleges and employers to increase student's access to modern basic needs, including internet access and an appropriate working space; to help workers and learners by providing monitored academic and professional training, since they are encountering new challenges both with entering the workforce and with navigating pandemic lockdowns; and to expand opportunities of growth, both personally and professionally within their jobs. Students would like for both colleges and employers must understand and accommodate for student workers who are pursuing academical and professional goals at the same time, since they report to have had negative mental and physical health impacts in adjusting to Covid-19 and have been relying on coping mechanisms and support systems, but it would make it easier for them if they felt more supported by these institutions.

The article by HBReview presents ten tips for managers to handle remote workers, which consist mostly about setting clear expectations, tracking progress, and celebrating success, being flexible, putting an emphasis on communication, on listening and building close connections. Acknowledging that workers need structure (time, schedules, meetings) and communication to reinforce what they already know, complimenting what is done well and listening for worker's concerns to build rapport and trust that they are performing well from afar are practices that managers must maintain to best support their workers.

From the article by Hernandez, that compiles research done by multiple health research it is relevant to note that the need for adaptation has brought a lack of work-life balance for workers, resulting in stress, diminished work motivation, and limited communication with teammates. The report correlates productivity directly with wellbeing and overall health, highlighting the importance eating habits, physical activity and mental health, eating habits and physical activity; and social isolation has been found to harm overall well-being. These findings should encourage companies and managers to take a compassionate approach to productivity, since workers have reported to be unhappy with expectations of performance and have experienced more symptoms of burnout as they would under normal working conditions, and they need more flexibility and room to make their own decisions without being micromanaged. It proposes that recommendations on productivity and employee wellbeing needs to be customized for each region and nation, since the needs of each population groups are different, and they experience distinct sociocultural and environmental conditions. Global research, therefore, must be adapted to specific scenarios in order to mitigate negative factors on local workers.

4.4. Retention

Comparison of literature: the first article explains that studies done on the topic of retention are only from the intern's perspective and their employability rates but are not directly linked to the retention in the same organization where their internship took place. However, it also points out that the same studies suggest that participating in an internship increases the desire of interns to remain at the same company.

The second article on Generation-Z workers considers the current population that is now entering the workforce dynamics (born from 1994-2010) and specifically details what shared values and priorities they have in relation to their work, especially in a post-pandemic paradigm. The authors explain that different environmental and economical factors have made their way of thinking and their work ethics vastly different from previous generations, which is evident in their lesser loyalty towards one company, and a particular interest in learning and developing rather than settling at a single workplace. Additionally, this article is more focused on student intern retention in IT companies and success factors, which is relevant for IBM.

Learning impacts and added value for the thesis: The article by Philip S Rose presents that the main benefits collected by interns on their internship are mainly: enhanced employability after graduating, a reduced time searching for jobs, a greater clarity in the direction of their

careers, adjusted job expectations, a higher desirability from employers, and higher starting salaries. From the organization's perspective, the motivators are obtaining highly motivated workers, reduced hiring and training costs, attract and train potential employees, and a positive image to external stakeholders from holding a training program.

Now, as to intern retention within the organization, the article explains that interns who felt they fit into the company were more likely to remain working there, that learning created the bases of the link between goal definition and intent to work at the same company, and that if the company is open to creativity, then interns were more likely to stay. Factors such as mentoring, learning opportunities, support from managers and supervisors all impacted positively intern's intentions to accept job offers in the same organization. It also points out that the transition period from intern to regular employee is preferable than that of starting at a new company, since uncertainty and discomfort is reduced because the interns know what to expect and what is expected of them.

The second article, on the other hand, explains that interns are more likely to stay at a job where they feel that they have good opportunities for their own development within the company. It mentions that a great majority of the new generation of interns is seeking positions in the IT sector as they believe it will become the dominant industry and because the salaries are higher than in traditional organizations, which is something that IBM could take as a critical factor of appeal in retention practices.

The authors explain that Generation-Z is individualistic but prefer to work in cross-cultural settings as they believe it improves. Interns prefer a democratized way of learning, meaning that the employee can either learn or teach skills on a theme that they deem important to their career,

based on collaborative technologies, meaning they prefer to have a comprehensive, on-demand access to multiple topics without having their current position as a limit to what they can learn. Generation-Z thrives in the flexibility to choose what to learn, and the article relates this to their increased performance results and more creativity. Finally, this article points that intrapreneurship within the company is an attractive factor for retaining interns because it is a way for them to weave their talents and interests into the organization, to build their career by developing new ideas and solutions for the company. This motivates Generation-Z interns to be engaged in their work and feel responsible, which in turn results in better performance and more sense of their role.

4.5. Conclusions of the review

From this review, it can be concluded the new generation of student interns have new and different needs, and they are more focused on health, structure, learning opportunities and emotional support than they were before. Managers need to take the new challenges into account and accommodate to ease employees concerns and anxieties, especially when evaluating performance and supervising teamwork. Additionally, they must create scenarios for socialization and team bonding because these are the main tools to promote a sense of belonging

and cultural inclusion. The democratization of learning and providing interns with new opportunities for self-development in their own careers are some of the key factors for retention.

The research will be used to support proposed solutions and attempt reach the company objective. Cultural differences can be hard to pinpoint given people can express them in unspoken attitudes, especially in the Latin American context. Managers must adapt their efforts to their team and its circumstances. Even when considering that the new student interns share some generational characteristics and concerns, it cannot be assumed that what generally works for one population in terms of diversity and inclusion will work for another, and the same applies to managing newly remote workers and student interns who are balancing both work and school.

Assertive communication, a combination of flexible training and structured check-ins are key elements to maintain a higher motivation and productivity among workers, since there is more understanding of one another, less misunderstandings, clear guidelines, and more support of each other's situations. This in turn creates a sense of responsibility and a better understanding of the role they are playing within the organization, which is a reason for them to continue working at the same company after graduating.

5. Chapter 3 External - Current Situation (IST analysis)

This chapter will delve on the current situation of the Digital Sales TSS SSA & Mex branch of IBM Colombia as of the second semester of 2020. To analyze the current state, two virtual interviews were made to both the manager of the unit and the representative of the Student Program, in charge of strategies concerning talent acquisition for the unit and inclusion of student interns in the Digital Sales team. The transcripts for these interviews can be found as Appendix I and II along with the methodology followed for conducting the research. Additionally, a survey about perceptions on inclusion, skill, support, work environment, and future expectations was conducted in the student intern group of Digital Sales TSS SSA & Mex, and an analysis of which can be found in Appendix II.

The main purpose of the interviews was to gather knowledge on the normal functioning of the team unit both before the development of the pandemic, and the adjustment they had to make after it began. The goal of the survey was to gather qualitative data regarding student intern's insights on their personal experiences while interning at IBM. The problems found in the interviews as expressed by the interviewees will be now listed, an issue list will be presented after each individual issue is explained, and at the end conclusions will be drawn.

Following the completion and analysis of both interviews and the survey, it was identified that IBM faces the following issues:

- *Integrating and including new team members to the unit to retain them*

- *Maintain a motivated and well communicated team.*
- *Perform an optimal onboarding of student interns to properly transfer skills to incentivize retention*

5.1. Issues

5.1.1. Integrating and including new team members to the unit to retain them

The team is made up of members whose origins are several regions of Colombia, Mexico and Argentina, and new student interns and collaborators are constantly entering the unit. Therefore, interviewees express there is a need to keep making efforts towards cultural and gender inclusion so that there is a healthy work environment. Most student interns expressed that they do not feel as a part of their team, or that remote working has made it hard for them to create bonds with other team members apart from strictly work-related relationships, because they have not met them in person. This is concerning given that the objective is to retain these student interns and convert them into regular workers.

5.1.2. Maintain a motivated and well communicated team.

Given the circumstances brought by the pandemic and the shift to remote working, the manager expresses a need for tranquility amongst the collaborators so that they can develop their tasks virtually and perform their tasks adequately. Student interns would like for the team to be closer and more united for communication to be easier among them.

5.1.3. Perform an optimal onboarding of student interns to properly transfer skills to incentivize retention

When student interns start at their positions they need to be introduced to their functions, which is done in scheduled introductory meetings, training sessions, skill-transfer activities and assessments. The unit must make sure that they are properly trained and are able to perform at a required level, and also for them to feel empowered in their roles and belonging to the organization. For this to happen, a logistics operation must also provide them with company-issued computers, which are delivered to their homes. Student interns acknowledge that they must be motivated to learn for the trainings to be effective.

5.2. Issue List

IBM's values are based on constantly working towards bettering itself, diversifying and being inclusive. Employees must have adequate tools and trainings to perform adequately at their jobs, need to feel motivated towards the company's goals and to be included in their team. Ensuring that this happens is a manager responsibility but also a team work. Thus, keeping this in mind, the findings of the interviews are reviewed, and a list of issues classified by importance can be drawn. The issues are ranked from 1 to 3, where 1 represents the least favorable option, and 3 the most favorable.

Table 3 *IBM issue list vs. Impact of issues*

IBM issue list vs. Impact of issues	Priority (ranking)	Impact (ranking)	Absolute score	Relative Score
Integrating and including new team members to the unit to retain them	2	3	5	42%
Maintain a motivated and well communicated team.	3	1	4	33%
Perform an optimal onboarding of student interns to properly transfer skills to incentivize retention	1	2	3	25%
Total			12	100%

Source: Author's own work

5.2.1. Explanation of the Issue List

5.2.1.1. Integrating and including new team members to the unit to retain them

As the unit continues to expand, and with each semester marking the arrival of new student interns, both interviewees have expressed an intent to make them feel included in their team. Student interns have reported that they do not feel included in the unit, but that the team is somewhat united. They express that having a virtual workspace has impacted negatively union and inclusion, and some even feel alienated as they are unable to create personal bonds that go beyond work relationships (which is important in the Latin American cultural context). However, most do feel supported by their teammates and manager, and would qualify the internship as an overall positive experience.

The manager believes that gender equality is what makes the team unique but that it is based on aptitudes and capabilities, that cultural inclusion enriches the team, and highlights current student inclusion initiatives such as inviting them to career conversation sessions and checkpoint sessions so that they can see how performance is tracked and what is expected of regular employees. Additionally, he explains that students have the freedom to choose their project, and they are motivated by IBM's impact in communities and cities, make them feel included in IBM's purpose.

Student Program gives interns privileges that other employees have, such as management teams and coachings, and believes that generating an inclusive environment students can feel as a part of the team and have responsibilities are what makes them feel included in the workplace.

This issue ranks as second in priority because it weighs heavy for student interns and for the student program leaders, but for the manager it is more relevant to maintain the whole team communicated in the daily workflow to reach performance results, and inclusion and teamwork will develop with this focus. However, it is the highest ranked in impact, since for the students it is linked with motivation, sense of belonging and importance of their work. Therefore, this issue has a great impact in inclusion objectives and it creates a better working environment for all collaborators.

5.2.1.2. Maintain a motivated and well communicated team.

The manager expresses the concern of his collaborators to have tranquility to develop labor virtually and mitigate impact of non-presence. It is ranked as the team's top priority as the team depends on communication for the development of everyday tasks and for meeting the unit's performance goals. The remote work has made communication more difficult and student interns believe this could improve with more frequent virtual meetings, or even with in-person meeting following Covid-19 safety protocols. However, this issue was ranked as having the lowest impact because the team is performing well, it already has communication tools set in place and newer members are following older member's group dynamics.

5.2.1.3. Perform an optimal onboarding of student interns to properly transfer skills to incentivize retention

The goal of the unit and the student program is to have student interns get real work experience and to develop their functions accordingly. The traditional face-to-face activities, meetings and presentations that used to be key elements for soft-skill strengthening are no longer viable. Even so, elements like the logistics behind candidate selection, the assessment to match a student's skills to the vacant, the equipment procurement, and the scheduling and monitoring of trainings are all activities that do not depend only on the team, but on different departments of the company. For these reasons, the onboarding ranked the lowest in priority, because for it to change, multiple actors would need to be included.

5.3. Conclusion of the chapter

After explaining the issues and ranking them by priority and impact, it can be concluded that the one that should be addressed first is *Integrating and including new team members to the unit to retain them*, as it weighs with the highest relative score of 42% among other issues. However, this is an indication of where to begin rather than what to do, because the organization may choose to prioritize tackling a different issue, and for this reason a solution for all issues will be analyzed and proposed in the following chapter. It is important to note that all issues are relevant

and concern the parties involved in the interviews, survey and company objective, but rather the issue mentioned before should be tackled first, and at the end, resolving all of these interconnected issues could result in increasing inclusion and translating it into regularization of student interns into regular employees.

6. Chapter 4 Desired Situation

In this chapter, the viable options will be explained and drawn for the issues found in chapter three. Alternative options will be evaluated based on conditions and the limitations they face.

The criteria for classifying said options is the following:

6.1. Options on issues:

6.1.1. Integrating and including new team members to the unit to retain them

To tackle this issue the options that were found as suitable are virtual meetings, trainings and In-person meetings.

6.1.1.1. Virtual meetings

IBM has multiple collaboration and communication channels available, such as instant messaging like Slack, virtual meeting workspaces like Webex, broader virtual conferences,

learning platforms like Your Learning, mail and document sharing tools like Box. With this in mind, teams could schedule regular meetings with the purpose of team building, inclusion and creating rapport between teammembers. These sessions could follow a weekly topic presented by the meeting director, with unstructured conversation to stimulate a loose environment and putting participants at ease. Managers could schedule said meetings and appoint weekly speakers by asking team members to propose and guide topics by taking turns, that way collaborators can voice their concerns and discuss interest topics to get to know each other and build closer relationships. This in turn will serve to bring the team to the desired future of a more integrated and united entity.

The weekly sessions require:

- Scheduling a recurring meeting so that the team knows when to expect them
- Set a schedule for the weekly topic and the person who will lead the session.
- Appoint a person who will be responsible for the adequate completion of these meetings.
- Choose the communication channel that would best fit the meeting
- Inform employees in advance with a kickoff session prepared by someone who is held responsible for scheduling and completion.

6.1.1.2. Training

The company has in place several online courses that are required for all IBMers and global campaigns that go hand in hand with them. These are on topics such as Diversity and Inclusion, Business Conduct Guidelines and innovation, and there are also global campaigns put in place.

The goal behind their Be Equal campaign is to ensure equal opportunities for minorities on the workplace, based on the pillars of transparency, being influential, responsible, just and to champion diversity, driven by their expressed purpose of *“creating a culture of transparency and trust among IBMers to drive employee engagement and retention.”* [IBM, n.d.].

Therefore, IBM collaborators are aware of the values that guide the company, and that inclusion for the organization is based on gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, race, ethnicity, “DiversAbility”, and veterans. The proposed training goes beyond this and focuses on team building techniques to best manage discomfort that cultural differences may bring. Often times learning courses are available for IBMs in collaborative platforms, since some topics like Design Thinking and Agile Teams require for actual teams to complete the modules together in order to reach completion and obtain certifications.

An online course about the importance of reaching out and building relationships within the teams would fit IBM’s conditions and communication techniques, accompanied by group tasks that can be carried out in scheduled workshops to cover group-interaction modules. It would be presented in an interactive platform, and present information in an engaging way using multimedia tools.

Moreover, the managers should be highly involved with the planning and the design of the course contents, because they are who know their team, who measure their performance and who can best adapt global or general trainings to their people.

In organizing the training courser, it is required:

- To select the adequate communication method (tone, language, way of presenting information) based on the people that it is directed towards.

- Scheduling group workshop sessions for interaction and practical applications.
- Be informed about employee's concerns regarding workplace inclusion
- Promote the trainings and campaigns among the team

6.1.1.3. In-person meetings

As the lockdowns ease and the world gains some control over the pandemic's impact, a face-to-face meeting seems to be possible, following Covid-safe guidelines and restrictions. In multiple occasions and in the survey findings, team members have expressed the need to meet with their team face-to-face to improve communication, get to know each other, reacquaint themselves with the group and to explore team dynamics. It is proposed that the team schedules a get-together in person, in a well-ventilated outdoor space for those who choose to attend to the informal meeting. As it would not be a work-related reunion, and the pandemic is not over, this meeting cannot be mandatory for all members, because the manager must be aware that each individual has different living circumstances and different health priorities. This meeting could help solidify the team and bring it to the desired outcome of a stronger, more united team.

The requirements for this reunion to happen are:

- To identify which members would be willing and motivated to participate in a face-to-face reunion, as to estimate social-distancing measures that need to be taken
- To decide on a well-ventilated or outdoor space for the meeting to be held
- Prepare conversational topics and activities to guide the informal reunion if needed.
- Decide on budgetary needs for activity completion.

6.1.2. Maintain a motivated and well communicated team

This issue could be resolved by establishing communication guidelines, having regular check-in sessions and frequent informational sessions.

6.1.2.1. Communication guidelines

As proposed by the literature research on remote workers, the HBR article proposes that managers provide their teams with clear guidelines for communication so that they are aware what is expected of them, what is proper and adequate, and to reduce misunderstandings. Guidelines should cover items such as tone, frequency, level of clarity, transparency and priority. Team members are to follow them to have a better communication while working remotely.

The following are the requisites for this:

- Manager must be informed on team's priorities and communication styles
- Establish a protocol for communication
- Receive feedback on ways to better communication
- Use and incentivize IBM technological tools as communication channels which are best effective for the team

6.1.2.2. Regular check-in sessions

As a result of social distancing and lockdowns, literature research on remote workers points out the feeling of isolation and of not being understood that workers report. Almost all pieces propose that managers establish regular check-in sessions with their collaborators, which can be one-on-one or with the entire team, to share experiences, concerns and struggles that people may be experiencing while working remotely. This opens up communication and eases the feeling of uncertainty and loneliness. The requirements for this option are:

- Creating a schedule for check-in sessions
- Identify if it is best to have one-on-one meetings or if team conversations are more suitable
- Gather team feedback on their concerns and follow through with it
- Create solutions as a team to voiced concerns

6.1.2.3. Informational sessions

At IBM information and processes change fast, as the company is constantly striving to be more efficient and have better results for their clients. As a result to this, there is a lot of new available information on changes that is communicated unofficial through instant message channels via Slack, or in mail threads. To keep the team on the same page, it is proposed to have scheduled informational sessions, in which changes and new findings will be discussed to ensure that each member understands how to proceed, which will in turn produce better results for them and their clients.

The requirements are:

- Appoint a person responsible for tracking and compiling new information on a biweekly basis, which will then be discussed in the session.
- Schedule the meetings and inform collaborators.
- Appoint someone as responsible for feedback gathered in these sessions.

6.1.3. Perform an optimal onboarding of student interns to properly transfer skills to incentivize retention

This onboarding issue could be solved by having skill-transfer sessions, use online courses for self-learning and mentoring.

6.1.3.1. Skill-transfer sessions

It is proposed to complement regular onboarding processes with team-specific training sessions, to explain what is the goal of the team, of the unit and of IBM, and what is expected of new student interns in terms of performance and skill demonstration. An expert on processes and topics that is an experienced presenter would conduct these sessions to explain job functions and procedures in detail, answer questions and check for understanding.

It would require:

- Scheduling training sessions
- Appoint an experienced worker as responsible for carrying out the skill-transfer

- Set a mechanism to check for understanding and information assimilation
- Tailor information presenting techniques to the team to improve learning experience.

6.1.3.2. Online courses

IBM has an online platform that aligns topics that are relevant for the role and by specific category, it is known as Your Learning. In turn, this is also linked with the platform Your Career, where each collaborator can set personal goals to further develop their career. Using both platforms in the onboarding process makes learning easier for student interns. It is proposed that the trainings are structured and recorded in a learning plan, in order to create online courses for each topic that the newcomers would be concerned with. This way, information is available for them whenever they choose to access it for re-reading or for studying. Additionally, it can be improved through iterations and testings in order to align with unit's goals. Using technological tools can bring them closer to their desired future for a more capable team.

The requirement for these online courses are:

- To create a learning plan.
- Select the best communication techniques and create online courses for each relevant topic.
- Test the online course on experienced student interns and gather feedback to improve it
- Make online course available to new student interns

6.1.3.3.Mentoring

As the new group of student intern starts learning and attends job-specific trainings, a mentoring programme could be established to better ensure that each individual is getting properly acquainted with their functions. It is proposed that more experienced student interns are assigned to each newcomer to overlook their process, answer questions, give recommendations that may not be explicit in formal training sessions, and to guide them in their new role.

Requirements for this to work are:

- Appointing a person who will be responsible of overlooking the entire mentoring operation
- Creating a list of mentor-mentee to keep track of the relationship
- Make assessment sessions to check if new student interns are in fact being positively impacted by the program
- Check newcomer's work results to track their progress.

6.2. Conclusion of chapter

Suggested options are based on online tools that are already present within the organization, and the intent is to find better ways to use them and create more communication, inclusion and introduction to changes. The desired future for the unit is to have close, efficient and prevalent teamwork between the collaborators. This can be achieved by democratizing learning and creating spaces of cultural inclusion so that student interns's interests and motivations are met and they would be keen to stay if offered a job position.

7. Chapter 5 Best Option

This chapter will pinpoint the best option out of the ones found in Chapter 4. This decision will be made using a decision matrix with criteria supported by argumentation. The previous chapter proposed options to solve issues found in Chapter 3, and to determine the most feasible, cost-effective and impactful one, a decision matrix will be presented. The score was assigned by ranking each option on their respective issue, in order to calculate the highest-ranked which will be the best option for said issue.

The scores assigned followed the criteria of impact, feasibility and cost. It ponders which option has the biggest impact and feasibility, and ranks them 1-3, where 3 is the highest score and 1 the lowest. Given that each factor has the possibility to rank 3, each option was ranked as either 1, 2 or 3; and this number was then multiplied by three to obtain a score. So, for example, if an option is ranked 2, this is multiplied by 3, which results in a score of 6. The table should be read only by the results in each cell.

For the criteria of cost, both monetary and time cost were considered for its definition, given that most options are based on already available platforms and are meant as ways to take advantage of them. Therefore, for cost, the highest score was assigned to the most cost-efficient choice, at times being the most inexpensive one.

7.1. Integrating and including new team members to the unit to retain them

The following table explains the weighing of options. To solve this issue, the following options were found:

Table 4 *Integrating and including new team members to the unit to retain them*

Option	Impact	Feasibility	Costs	Total
Virtual Meetings	3 x 3 = 9	3 x 3 = 9	3 x 3 = 9	27
Trainings	1 x 3 = 3	2 x 3 = 6	2 x 3 = 6	15
In-person meetings	2 x 3 = 6	1 x 3 = 3	1 x 3 = 3	12

Source: Author's own work

7.1.1. Virtual meetings

This option was ranked with the highest impact and feasibility, since holding virtual meetings for the team to safely get reacquainted and to know each other is the most feasible way to make this happen. IBM is committed to keep its workers safe around the world, and understanding that Covid-19 regulations ensure health safety is a priority right now. These virtual meetings can also take place in perpetuity (if necessary) until the global situation improves, and even beyond that for including team members that are not based on-location. It takes some planning but other than investing time, there are no additional costs for the company nor the employees.

7.1.2. Trainings

This is ranked as the second-best option all around the criteria, because in terms of costs it would require more time from organizers and collaborators on planning and performing the trainings, and the topics of inclusion and workshops can be best approached in shorter virtual meetings. It is the lowest ranking on impact, because a single set of teambuilding workshop may boost employee inclusion and collaboration, but it needs reinforcement to be permanent. Besides, it would need repetition whenever new team members arrive and adaptations to new team dynamics.

7.1.3. In-person meetings

As the lowest-ranking option, it still is the second-best in impact. Taking into account that not all collaborators live in the same city nor the same country, the logistics aspect of bringing the team together are far too costly, both in time and money. Although they are not of mandatory attendance, it still presses the issue of safety in Covid-19 times, and whether this would require testing and space coordinating, it is not feasible to conduct.

7.2. Maintain a motivated and well communicated team.

Table 5 *Maintain a motivated and well communicated team*

Option	Impact	Feasibility	Costs	Total
Communication guidelines	1 x 3 = 3	3 x 3 = 9	3 x 3 = 9	21
Regular check-in sessions	3 x 3 = 9	2 x 3 = 6	1 x 3 = 3	18
Informational sessions	2 x 3 = 6	1 x 3 = 3	2 x 3 = 6	15

Source: Author's own work

7.2.1. Communication guidelines

This option was found to be the highest ranked overall. Writing and making communication guidelines available for all team members is the most feasible and cost-effective option (considering the time that would need to be invested). Managers could easily create a presentation, video, chart or guide to publish and distribute these game rules among their teams.

However, it is still important to note that it has the lowest impact on the issue because it would be a one-time-deal, and people oftentimes need reinforcement to remember and apply rules, along with clear examples and role models.

7.2.2. Regular check-in sessions

This is presented as the second-best option, because it would be the most impactful one while still being feasible. Employees and student interns would feel communication is better if check-in sessions are regularly scheduled, which would serve as an additional channel for voicing concerns and struggles. Giving them a space to express themselves and to obtain rapport from their teammates who relate to their issues opens up communication. Nevertheless, this option is the most time-consuming, whether the sessions are held with all of the team at the same time, or one-on-one sessions.

7.2.3. Informational session

This is the lowest-ranking option as it is the least feasible one, regardless of having an impact and still being time-consuming. It would be good for the team to have meetings where everyone has the chance to catch up to the same information and developments; but given that most information is unofficial, produced on-the-go and in all aspects of the unit's operations, it would be costly to appoint a person for the task of keeping track of changes and compiling new

information. Therefore, it is not as feasible to hold these sessions as it would be best to implement other options first.

7.3. Perform an optimal onboarding of student interns to properly transfer skills to incentivize retention

Table 6 *Perform an optimal onboarding of student interns to properly transfer skills*

Option	Impact	Feasibility	Costs	Total
Skill-transfer sessions	$3 \times 3 = 9$	$3 \times 3 = 6$	$2 \times 3 = 6$	21
Online courses	$2 \times 3 = 6$	$1 \times 3 = 3$	$1 \times 3 = 3$	12
Mentoring	$1 \times 3 = 3$	$2 \times 3 = 6$	$3 \times 3 = 9$	18

Source: Author's own work

7.3.1. Skill-transfer sessions

This is the highest-ranked option for the issue regarding onboarding, as it has the highest feasibility score due to the complexity of putting the sessions together, finding an expert to lead the meetings, and providing student interns with a space for questions and specific problem solutions. Although it also would have the second-highest impact out of the options list, it is important to mention that it is costly regarding preparation time and resources involved for its completion.

7.3.2. Online courses

This results as the lowest- ranked option as it is not the most feasible and the least cost-effective because online courses would involve not only experts on the subject but educational guidance to best adapt the trainings to the student intern group in question. It would require a higher level of resources and investment than the other options, but it is important to note that this would only be made at the beginning stages, and that once the courses are adjusted and published, they require little investment to upkeep. Research for cultural differences adaptation on micro ergonomics in the book, suggests that information should be tailored to recipients, since applying general concepts that apply to wider demographics may not apply for everyone. Nonetheless, it still would be impactful as once the information is made available for student interns, they can access it constantly, and it would be there to be modified and updated for future student intern groups, for less investment.

7.3.3. Mentoring

This option ranks as the second-best because it results in less costs, being the least time-consuming for planning and coordinating, as it consists of setting up a program to follow up with mentoring relationships between two student-interns. In terms of feasibility, it is possible as it needs a supervisor and parameters to track progress and success of the program. Where impact is concerned, it would provide new student interns with in-depth experience and coachings from more experienced interns, but they can only speak from their own experience and point of view. It may be hard to track success and impact as newcomers are not receiving information from experts on the topic.

7.4. Conclusion of the chapter

For the issue deemed as most relevant in Chapter 3, *Integrating and including new team members to the unit to retain them*, would be best tackled by the option *Virtual meetings*, as it ranks with the best scores in impact, feasibility and costs. This will help the company reach its objective in inclusion that will turn into regularization of student interns into regular employees, because by making them feel included and as a part of their team their work will be positively impacted and will be motivated. Additional best options were found for the other issues, and were analyzed if the company were to implement plans for solving them. Survey findings that

point to interns' intentions of turning their internship into a job position within IBM, which can be found in Appendix III.

8. Chapter 6 Policy recommendations

The objective of this thesis was to draw out conclusions and provide a program or plan of action that will positively impact the motivation of student interns in IBM's Digital Sales TSS SSA & Mex region, and promote inclusion rooted on the understanding of the distinctive cultural differences present in a multicultural team. This was focused on the interns that work remotely and have little to no face-to-face interaction with other members of IBM Colombia. For the topic of *Integrating and including new team members to the unit to retain them* the choice of action is *Virtual meetings* as it ranked with the highest relevance. In this chapter, policy recommendations will be made based on a detailed plan of action.

8.1. Integrating and including new team members to the unit to retain them: virtual meetings recommendations

Applying a schedule of virtual meetings to the team's weekly routine turned out to be the best selection for the matter at hand. With this, an action plan is drafted tailored to Digital Sales TSS

SSA & Mex student interns team, where costs and implementation time are considered and contrasted with benefits of adapting these recommendations.

First off, we have time constraints. With the following data obtained via Glassdoor (2020), calculations were made to best present the information. These calculations can be found in Appendix IV.

Estimated hourly salary of Operations Student Intern: \$ 8.929

Estimated hourly salary of Digital Sales Manager: \$ 73.551

The research resulted in differences between the operations student intern and the unit manager. Both were researched since it is the operations student intern who works directly under the manager and coordinates various activities related with performance tracking, statistics, contract tracking, development of opportunities; and will likely assist the manager in the logistics of coordinating virtual meetings.

Table 7 Cost calculation for each action required to carry out Virtual Meetings

Actions	Assignee(s)	Timeframe	Labour hours	Cost for Organizations intern labor hours	Costs for manager labor hours
1. Scheduling a recurring meeting so that	Team manager or Operations student intern	One day	One hour	COP \$ 8.928,57 per hour	COP \$ 73.551,91 per hour

the team

knows when to

expect them

2. Set a	Team manager	One week	Three	COP	COP
schedule for	or Operations		hours	\$73.551,91 x 3	\$73.551,91 x 3
the weekly	student intern			hours = COP	hours = COP
topic and the				\$26,785,71 per	\$220,652,74
person who				hour	per hour
will lead the					
session.					

3. Appoint a	Team manager	One day	Two	COP	COP
person who	or Operations		hours	\$73.551,91 x 2	\$73.551,91 x 2
will be	student intern			hours = COP	hours = COP
responsible for				\$17.857,15 per	\$147.101,84
the adequate				hour	per hour
completion of					
these					
meetings.					

4. Choose the	Team manager	One day	One	COP \$	COP \$
communicatio	or Operations		hour	8.928,57 per	73.551,91 per
n channel that	student intern			hour	hour

would best fit

the meeting

5. Inform	Team manager	One day	Two	COP	COP
employees in	or Operations		hours	\$73.551,91 x 2	\$73.551,91 x 2
advance with a	student intern			hours = COP	hours = COP
kickoff session				\$17.857,15 per	\$147.101,84
prepared by				hour	per hour
someone who					
is held					
responsible for					
scheduling and					
completion.					

Total	-	One week	Nine	COP	COP
		and four	hours	\$80,357,14	\$661,958,22
		days			

Source: Author's own work

8.1.1. Benefits

The costs will now be weighed against the benefits that his option will bring. Coordinating team meetings depends on how IBM values the inclusion and team activities oriented towards cultural diversity and teambuilding. As this was expressed to be a main concern to convert

student interns into regular employees, it is important to note that performing virtual meetings will positively impact in motivation and sense of belonging, which will in turn interest interns to seek more career opportunities within the company.

8.1.2. Measurement

The way in which this can be measured is by the percentage of attendance for each meeting, because it is suggested that they would not be mandatory but prioritized, and at a convenient timeframe that will ensure that everyone who is asked to attend will do so. When teammates choose to spend time with each other, exchanging experiences and concerns beyond those work-related then it indicates for manager that the efforts were beneficial. Additionally, a survey could be applied in a structured methodology, using Lickert scales and yes-no questions to convert qualitative data such as level of motivation, feelings of inclusion, cultural ease, and future plans into numbers.

8.2. Conclusion

For the matter at hand, the recommendations were found to be beneficial for the team, however it depends whether the unit believes it is preferred to spend the time in setting it up,

which is the opportunity cost of not dedicating the proposed time to other activities. The recommendation is helpful in striving to reach the company goal to increase the inclusion of student interns and in turn convert them into regular employees, by augmenting the retention of one additional intern per semester in the Digital Sales TSS SSA & Mex branch by January 2022.

9. Closing Statement

This research was done as a way to help the company solve their current issues and reach their objective. Even though the recommendation is to tackle the issue of *Integrating and including new team members to the unit to retain them*, there are recommendations for the other issues present. The option of using *virtual meetings* as a way of solving the main issue can work, but it is possible that combining it with other options would result in a better outcome in retention of student interns.

However, given that IBM has been restructured many times over the last year, that new team members have been introduced, and that processes have changed entirely, it is important to note that the policy recommendations work for the specific group of student interns analyzed under past conditions, and that these may not be the same as they are now. Thus, a sense of inclusion in a group with blurred lines and constant change can be hard to identify, and uncertainty from restructuring may harm loyalty towards the company. Since it is expected of student interns to assume great responsibility and to be able to course-correct on the go as soon as non-official information becomes available, there is no clear role definition and they may feel as if there is no guides.

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