Student competency in the workplace: the remuneration bias of industry supervisors

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WIL programs are embedded in an ever-growing proportion of the tertiary courses offered in contemporary Australian universities. Often workplace supervisors are charged with the responsibility of assessing student competency in discipline-specific contexts. Whilst assessment practices in WIL have been well documented, there is a paucity of research regarding the biases held by workplace supervisors and the resultant impact in the assessment process. This initial stage of an action research project examined the supervisor evaluations of tourism and hospitality management students who were undertaking their mandatory capstone internship to identify bias related to remuneration of the placement. Data used in the analysis was derived from workplace supervisor evaluation forms which assessed students on fifteen competencies in terms of skill level and importance of skill. Minimal supervisor bias was evident in the ratings between students undertaking paid placements or those on unpaid placements. The results indicate that the use of the selected supervisor evaluation assessment item enhances the capacity of the WIL program to gain authentic feedback from industry partners on students’ developing capabilities, irrespective of placement remuneration. The study highlighted the benefits of assessment strategy review in fostering a continuous improvement culture in WIL curriculum design and program development.

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