

The effect of internship programmes on soft skills and work motivation on students' work readiness

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh program magang, soft skill, dan motivasi kerja terhadap kesiapan kerja mahasiswa, dengan efikasi diri sebagai variabel mediasi. Penelitian dilakukan pada mahasiswa Universitas Pertiba dengan pendekatan kuantitatif menggunakan metode Partial Least Squares (PLS). Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner dengan jumlah responden sebanyak 178 mahasiswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa soft skill dan motivasi kerja berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap kesiapan kerja mahasiswa. Sebaliknya, program magang tidak menunjukkan pengaruh yang signifikan terhadap kesiapan kerja, baik secara langsung maupun tidak langsung. Selain itu, efikasi diri terbukti memediasi secara signifikan hubungan antara soft skill dan kesiapan kerja, namun tidak memediasi hubungan antara program magang maupun motivasi kerja terhadap kesiapan kerja mahasiswa. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa kesiapan kerja mahasiswa lebih banyak ditentukan oleh faktor internal, khususnya kemampuan interpersonal dan tingkat kepercayaan diri, dibandingkan dengan pengalaman magang semata. Oleh karena itu, perguruan tinggi disarankan untuk lebih menekankan pengembangan soft skill dan efikasi diri mahasiswa melalui pembelajaran kolaboratif, aktivitas pengembangan diri, serta pengalaman praktis yang bermakna guna meningkatkan kesiapan mahasiswa dalam menghadapi dunia kerja yang semakin kompetitif.

Kata Kunci: program magang; softskill; motivasi kerja; efikasi diri; kesiapan kerja

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the influence of internship programs, soft skills, and work motivation on students' work readiness, with self-efficacy as a mediating variable. The study was conducted on Pertiba University students using a quantitative approach using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method. Data were collected through questionnaires with 178 students as respondents. The results showed that soft skills and work motivation had a positive and significant effect on students' work readiness. Conversely, internship programs did not show a significant effect on work readiness, either directly or indirectly. In addition, self-efficacy was shown to significantly mediate the relationship between soft skills and work readiness, but did not mediate the relationship between internship programs and work motivation on students' work readiness. These findings confirm that students' work readiness is more determined by internal factors, particularly interpersonal skills and self-confidence, than by internship experience alone. Therefore, universities are advised to place more emphasis on the development of students' soft skills and self-efficacy through collaborative learning, self-development activities, and meaningful practical experiences to improve students' readiness to face the increasingly competitive world of work.

Keyword: internship program; soft skills; work motivation; self-efficacy; work readiness

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1. INTRODUCTION

Competition in the workplace in the era of globalisation has become increasingly intense, requiring students to possess adequate readiness before entering the professional world. Work readiness is not solely

determined by academic knowledge, but also encompasses non-technical skills, work attitudes, and self-confidence in responding to workplace demands. In this context, higher education institutions bear responsibility not only for delivering theoretical knowledge, but also for facilitating practical learning experiences that foster students' comprehensive work competencies (Candrawati, 2025).

One widely implemented strategy to enhance student employability is the internship programme, which provides opportunities for students to engage directly in real workplace environments. Through internships, students are able to observe professional practices, understand organisational culture, and develop adaptability to everyday work situations. Internship experiences also play a crucial role in strengthening soft skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and self-management, which are increasingly essential in today's dynamic and collaborative labour market (Redjeki & Warsito, 2016; Agustian et al., 2020).

In addition to soft skills, work motivation is a key factor influencing students' readiness for employment. Work motivation encourages individuals to strive for achievement, demonstrate persistence, and continuously develop their capabilities in facing professional challenges. A well-designed internship programme can enhance students' work motivation, particularly when they are assigned meaningful tasks, receive constructive feedback, and obtain adequate mentoring support. Kahn et al. (2021) argue that student involvement in solving real-world problems during internships strengthens motivation and builds self-confidence. Furthermore, mentoring plays a significant role in shaping professional attitudes and sustaining work motivation. Lee and Smith (2022) explain that effective mentor–intern relationships help students understand workplace expectations, improve self-efficacy, and enhance interpersonal competencies. From an institutional perspective, internship partnerships also benefit higher education institutions by strengthening industry linkages and improving curriculum relevance (Thompson et al., 2023).

However, post-pandemic workplace dynamics have introduced significant changes in internship implementation, particularly through the emergence of remote and virtual internship models. Garcia and Patel (2023) emphasise that although virtual internships offer flexibility, effective mentoring systems and digital collaboration strategies are essential to ensure optimal development of students' soft skills. This shift highlights the importance of designing adaptive internship programmes that remain competency-oriented. Recent studies indicate that internships not only enhance soft skills and motivation but also provide valuable networking opportunities that facilitate smoother transitions into the workforce. For instance, Thompson et al. (2023) and Gomes Jr. et al. (2024) report that students who actively participate in internships tend to experience higher job satisfaction and improved career advancement prospects. Moreover, professional networks established during internships serve as bridges between academia and industry, reinforcing the relevance of experiential learning in preparing graduates for employment (Anugra et al., 2023; Heizer et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2024).

Understanding the interrelationship between internship experience, soft skill development, and work motivation is therefore crucial in improving student employability. This is particularly relevant for universities, including Pertiba University, in designing learning strategies and self-development programmes that are responsive to the increasingly competitive and complex labour market (Prisnayanti & Widowati, 2024). Accordingly, this study aims to analyse the impact of internship programmes on the development of soft skills and work motivation among students, as well as how these factors contribute to work readiness. By examining the interaction among these variables, the study seeks to identify effective strategies for strengthening student competencies and preparing graduates to meet professional challenges.

The originality of this study lies in its comprehensive approach to examining work readiness through the integration of three key dimensions: internship experience, soft skill development, and work motivation, with particular attention to mentoring dynamics during internships. Unlike previous studies that tend to examine internships or soft skills in isolation, this research highlights the interaction among these factors within the context of a rapidly evolving and post-pandemic labour market. Furthermore, this study incorporates the changing nature of internships, including remote internship models and the role of digital technology in creating meaningful learning experiences. By offering a holistic and contemporary perspective, this research provides empirical evidence that can support universities and industry partners in designing more effective internship programmes oriented towards strengthening students' work competencies and employability.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a quantitative approach with a causal research design aimed at analysing the influence of independent variables on a dependent variable while considering the role of a mediating variable. The quantitative approach was selected because it provides an objective, measurable, and statistically testable framework for examining relationships among variables. Specifically, this study investigates the effects of internship programmes, soft skills, and work motivation on students' work readiness, with self-efficacy serving as a mediating variable. This approach enables hypothesis testing through structured data collection and inferential statistical analysis.

The population of this study consists of all active students at Pertiba University who have participated in or are currently participating in an internship programme. This population was chosen because internship participants possess direct exposure to workplace environments and are therefore able to provide relevant insights into their level of work readiness. The sample was determined using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) active students in their final academic stage (semester 6 and above), (2) students who have completed or are undertaking an internship for a minimum duration of one month, and (3) students who are willing to complete the research questionnaire. The number of respondents ranged between 100 and 150 students, in accordance with the recommendation of Hair et al. (2019), who suggest a minimum sample size of five to ten times the number of indicators used in a Partial Least Squares (PLS) model.

The data used in this study comprise primary data obtained through the distribution of closed-ended questionnaires to respondents. The questionnaire was developed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Each item was constructed based on established theoretical frameworks, including Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1997) for self-efficacy, Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (1985) for work motivation, and the soft skills framework proposed by Spencer and Spencer (1993). Data collection was conducted both online via Google Forms and offline on the Pertiba University campus. In addition, secondary data in the form of academic literature, scientific journals, and institutional reports were used to support the theoretical foundation of the study.

This research involves five main variables. The independent variables include internship programmes (X_1), soft skills (X_2), and work motivation (X_3). Self-efficacy (Z) acts as the mediating variable, while student work readiness (Y) is the dependent variable. Internship programmes are measured using indicators such as duration, task relevance, mentoring quality, and real work experience. Soft skills are assessed through communication ability, teamwork, adaptability, and self-management. Work motivation is measured based on intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and achievement orientation. Self-efficacy is evaluated through belief in personal abilities, confidence in task completion, and optimism in facing challenges. Meanwhile, work readiness is measured through knowledge, skills, work attitude, and mental readiness to enter the workforce.

Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with a Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach, processed using SmartPLS version 4.0 software. The PLS-SEM method was chosen because it is suitable for complex research models with latent variables, relatively small sample sizes, and does not require strict assumptions of data normality. The analysis was carried out in two stages. First, the measurement model (outer model) was evaluated to assess construct validity and reliability through factor loading values, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Composite Reliability (CR), and Cronbach's Alpha. Second, the structural model (inner model) was evaluated to examine the relationships between variables using path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values.

Mediation analysis was performed using the bootstrapping method to determine the indirect effect of self-efficacy. Convergent validity is considered satisfactory if indicator loadings exceed 0.70 and AVE values are greater than 0.50. Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and cross-loading values. Construct reliability is deemed acceptable when Composite Reliability values exceed 0.70. To ensure the absence of multicollinearity, collinearity diagnostics were conducted using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), with acceptable values below 5. Furthermore, the model's explanatory power was evaluated using the coefficient of determination (R^2) and Goodness of Fit (GoF) indices. All statistical tests were conducted at a significance level of 5% ($\alpha = 0.05$). Through this analytical procedure, the proposed research model is expected to provide robust and reliable empirical evidence regarding the relationships among internship programmes, soft skills, work motivation, self-efficacy, and students' work readiness.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the structural model testing reveal varying relationships among the independent, mediating, and dependent variables examined in this study. Path coefficient values, t-statistics, and p-values were employed to evaluate the strength and statistical significance of these relationships. Overall, the findings provide empirical evidence regarding how internship programmes, soft skills, and work motivation influence the work readiness of Pertiba University students, both directly and indirectly through self-efficacy as a mediating variable. This analysis is crucial for identifying the key determinants of students' preparedness to enter the workforce.

Table 1. Path-Coefficients – Mean, STDEV, T Values, p values

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Self-efficacy -> readiness for work	0.402	0.355	0.149	2.703	0.007

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Work motivation -> self-efficacy	0.413	0.339	0.241	1.714	0.087
Work motivation -> readiness for work	0.301	0.263	0.110	2.744	0.006
Internship programme -> self-efficacy	0.031	0.079	0.145	0.212	0.832
Internship programme -> work readiness	0.020	0.051	0.104	0.194	0.846
Soft skills -> self-efficacy	0.508	0.546	0.133	3.813	0.000
Soft skills -> work readiness	0.184	0.234	0.140	1.310	0.190
Work motivation -> self-efficacy -> work readiness	0.166	0.144	0.119	1.399	0.162
Internship programme -> self-efficacy -> work readiness	0.012	0.017	0.049	0.250	0.803
Soft skills -> self-efficacy -> work readiness	0.204	0.182	0.072	2.853	0.004
Work motivation -> self-efficacy -> work readiness	0.166	0.144	0.119	1.399	0.162
Internship programme -> self-efficacy -> work readiness	0.012	0.017	0.049	0.250	0.803
Soft skills -> self-efficacy -> work readiness	0.204	0.182	0.072	2.853	0.004

The relationship between self-efficacy and work readiness shows a path coefficient of 0.402, with a t-statistic of 2.703 and a p-value of 0.007. Since the p-value is below the 0.05 significance level, this relationship is statistically significant. These results indicate that higher levels of self-efficacy are associated with greater work readiness among students. This finding is consistent with Bandura's (1997) theory, which posits that self-efficacy shapes how individuals think, behave, and adapt to environmental demands. In the student context, confidence in one's own abilities serves as a critical psychological resource for coping with professional challenges and transitioning into the workplace.

In contrast, the relationship between work motivation and self-efficacy yields a positive coefficient of 0.413 but is not statistically significant, as indicated by a t-statistic of 1.714 and a p-value of 0.087. This suggests that increased work motivation does not necessarily translate into higher self-efficacy. One possible explanation is that students' work motivation may predominantly stem from extrinsic factors, such as obtaining academic grades or fulfilling internship requirements, rather than from intrinsic motivation that fosters stronger confidence in personal capabilities.

Nevertheless, the absence of a significant direct effect does not preclude the possibility of indirect influences through other mechanisms. According to Herzberg's motivation theory, motivating factors such as achievement and recognition can contribute to the development of self-efficacy. Students who engage in meaningful academic or professional experiences are more likely to develop stronger self-confidence than those whose motivation is limited to meeting formal academic obligations. This finding highlights opportunities for future research to examine more nuanced dimensions of motivation and their role in shaping self-efficacy.

Furthermore, work motivation demonstrates a significant and positive direct effect on work readiness, with a coefficient of 0.301, a t-statistic of 2.744, and a p-value of 0.006. This result indicates that students with stronger motivation to work or develop their careers tend to be better prepared to enter the workforce. Theoretically, this finding supports Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory, which emphasizes that individuals with higher intrinsic motivation exhibit greater readiness to face work-related challenges.

Meanwhile, the relationship between internship programmes and self-efficacy shows a very low coefficient of 0.031, with a t-statistic of 0.212 and a p-value of 0.832, indicating a non-significant effect. This finding is noteworthy, given that internships are often assumed to enhance students' confidence. One plausible explanation is that the quality of internship implementation may not yet be optimal, such as limited student involvement or insufficient guidance from field supervisors, thereby reducing the potential impact on self-efficacy.

Similarly, the relationship between internship programmes and work readiness is also insignificant, with a coefficient of 0.020, a t-statistic of 0.194, and a p-value of 0.846. This result suggests that internship experiences alone do not directly enhance students' readiness for work. It is possible that the internships undertaken were largely administrative or observational in nature, rather than providing challenging, field-relevant tasks. Therefore, these findings indicate the need for a critical evaluation of internship programmes to

ensure they offer meaningful learning experiences that effectively contribute to the development of students' work readiness.

In contrast to the relationships involving internship programmes and work motivation, the effect of soft skills on self-efficacy demonstrates a strong and statistically significant influence, with a path coefficient of 0.508, a t-statistic of 3.813, and a p-value of 0.000. This finding indicates that soft skills play a crucial role in shaping students' self-efficacy. Students who possess strong communication abilities, teamwork skills, and effective self-management tend to exhibit higher levels of confidence when facing workplace challenges. This result is consistent with the competency-based framework proposed by Spencer and Spencer (1993), which emphasizes that behavioural and social competencies are fundamental determinants of individual success in professional environments.

However, the direct relationship between soft skills and work readiness is not statistically significant, as reflected by a coefficient of 0.184, a t-statistic of 1.310, and a p-value of 0.190. These results suggest that the possession of soft skills alone does not automatically enhance students' readiness for work in the absence of mediating mechanisms. Instead, soft skills appear to influence work readiness indirectly through psychological factors, particularly self-efficacy. In this context, students with well-developed soft skills tend to develop greater confidence in their abilities, and it is this confidence that ultimately contributes to higher levels of work readiness.

Overall, the findings indicate that self-efficacy functions as a partial mediating variable in the relationship between soft skills and work readiness. Soft skills significantly enhance self-efficacy, and self-efficacy, in turn, exerts a significant influence on work readiness. Consequently, initiatives aimed at strengthening students' soft skills are likely to increase self-efficacy, which subsequently improves their preparedness to enter the workforce. These results reinforce the principles of social cognitive theory, which position self-efficacy as a key psychological mechanism through which personal competencies are translated into behavioural outcomes.

In contrast, the non-significant relationships between internship programmes and work motivation with self-efficacy suggest that students' psychological engagement in interpreting work experiences remains relatively weak. This finding highlights the need for educational institutions to critically evaluate their internship implementation strategies and motivation development programmes to ensure they are oriented toward meaningful, reflective learning experiences rather than merely fulfilling administrative requirements. Approaches such as experiential learning models, structured reflection, and intensive field mentoring may serve as effective alternatives to strengthen students' psychological development.

Taken together, the results of this study demonstrate that internal factors—particularly soft skills and self-efficacy—play a more decisive role in enhancing students' work readiness than external factors such as internship programmes alone. Therefore, higher education institutions should prioritize the systematic development of soft skills through both academic and non-academic activities that foster self-confidence and adaptive readiness for the world of work. These findings contribute theoretically to the literature on human resource management and higher education, while also offering practical implications for universities in designing curricula that emphasize competency development grounded in self-efficacy.

The mediation effect analysis in this study aims to examine the extent to which self-efficacy mediates the relationships between the independent variables—work motivation, internship programmes, and soft skills—and the dependent variable, namely students' work readiness. Using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach, mediation effects were evaluated based on the original sample estimates, t-statistics, and p-values to determine the statistical significance of indirect relationships. This analysis is essential for understanding the psychological mechanisms through which learning experiences and personal competencies influence students' readiness to enter the world of work.

The first mediation result indicates that the indirect relationship between work motivation and work readiness through self-efficacy has a coefficient value of 0.166, with a t-statistic of 1.399 and a p-value of 0.162. Since the p-value exceeds the 0.05 significance threshold, this mediating effect is not statistically significant. This finding suggests that self-efficacy does not effectively mediate the influence of work motivation on students' work readiness. In other words, an increase in students' work motivation does not automatically translate into higher work readiness through enhanced self-confidence. This result implies that although students may be motivated to work, their self-efficacy does not necessarily develop in parallel with that motivation.

This finding can be explained by Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1997), which posits that self-efficacy is primarily developed through mastery experiences, vicarious learning, and social persuasion, rather than solely through motivational drives. In many cases, students' work motivation tends to be externally oriented, such as the desire to achieve good grades, fulfil academic requirements, or participate in institutional

programmes. Such forms of motivation may not be sufficiently strong to foster deep confidence in personal abilities, thereby weakening the mediating role of self-efficacy.

The insignificant mediation effect may also reflect a gap between motivation and actual competence. Students may possess enthusiasm and aspirations to enter the workforce but lack sufficient hands-on experience or skill mastery to feel confident in professional settings. Experiences of success in real work contexts play a critical role in strengthening self-efficacy. Therefore, enhancing work motivation should be accompanied by meaningful opportunities for students to apply their skills in authentic work environments so that its impact on work readiness becomes more tangible.

Furthermore, the mediation pathway between internship programmes and work readiness through self-efficacy also shows an insignificant result, with an indirect coefficient value of 0.012, a t-statistic of 0.250, and a p-value of 0.803. This indicates that internship programmes do not exert a significant indirect influence on work readiness through self-efficacy. This finding is noteworthy, given that internships are often theoretically regarded as one of the most effective experiential learning mechanisms for improving work readiness. However, the results suggest that the internship experiences of students at Pertiba University have not yet been sufficiently effective in fostering professional confidence.

Overall, these findings imply that internship experiences may not automatically contribute to the development of self-efficacy unless they provide meaningful responsibilities, opportunities for problem-solving, and constructive feedback. Without such elements, internships may function merely as formal requirements rather than as transformative learning experiences that enhance students' psychological readiness for work.

One possible explanation for the weak mediating effect observed in the internship programme lies in the quality of its implementation. When internships are conducted without adequate supervision, involve tasks that are not aligned with students' fields of study, or position students merely as passive observers, such experiences are unlikely to contribute meaningfully to the development of self-efficacy. Internships should therefore be designed as active learning processes that provide students with opportunities to face real challenges, engage in problem-solving activities, and receive constructive feedback from the professional environment.

These findings further reinforce the perspective that internship programmes are not solely about exposure to the workplace, but rather about the quality of learning experiences and opportunities for reflection. Self-efficacy develops primarily through meaningful mastery experiences, where individuals perceive successful task completion as evidence of their competence. When students are not given opportunities to experience achievement during their internships, their confidence in their abilities remains underdeveloped. Consequently, this study highlights the importance for universities to strengthen supervision, mentoring, and guidance systems within internship programmes so that their psychological benefits for students can be maximised.

In contrast to the previous mediation results, the relationship between soft skills, self-efficacy, and work readiness demonstrates a significant mediating effect. The indirect effect of soft skills on work readiness through self-efficacy shows a coefficient value of 0.204, a t-statistic of 2.853, and a p-value of 0.004. This finding indicates that self-efficacy successfully mediates the influence of soft skills on students' work readiness. In other words, higher levels of soft skills lead to stronger self-efficacy, which in turn enhances students' readiness to enter the workforce. This result underscores the importance of interpersonal skills, communication abilities, teamwork, and self-management as foundational elements in building professional confidence.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings support the framework proposed by Spencer and Spencer (1993), which emphasises that behavioural competencies—such as communication, adaptability, and cooperation—are critical determinants of individual success in the modern workplace. Soft skills not only enhance students' social and interpersonal capabilities but also foster confidence in their ability to handle workplace challenges and collaborate effectively with others. As self-efficacy increases, students become better prepared to navigate recruitment processes, perform in job interviews, and adapt to new work environments.

Self-efficacy thus functions as a psychological bridge linking interpersonal competencies to work readiness. Students who possess strong soft skills tend to develop more positive perceptions of their own abilities, which are subsequently reflected in their preparedness to face professional demands. For instance, students with strong communication skills are more confident when interacting with supervisors or colleagues, while those with effective problem-solving abilities are better equipped to handle workplace challenges. This mechanism explains how soft skills contribute to work readiness through the enhancement of self-confidence.

Among the three mediation pathways examined in this study, only the relationship involving soft skills and self-efficacy demonstrated a significant effect on work readiness. This finding indicates that self-efficacy plays a selective mediating role, functioning more effectively when associated with internal personal

factors such as soft skills rather than external factors such as internship programmes or work motivation. Consequently, the development of students' work readiness appears to depend more heavily on strengthening internal psychological and personality-related attributes than on external experiences or motivational factors alone.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of data analysis using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method, this study concludes that not all external factors significantly influence students' work readiness. The findings indicate that soft skills and work motivation have a positive effect on work readiness, whereas internship programmes do not show a significant effect, either directly or indirectly through self-efficacy. These results suggest that students' readiness for work is shaped more by internal and psychological factors than by practical experience alone. Students who possess strong soft skills—such as communication, teamwork, and adaptability—tend to demonstrate higher confidence and greater readiness for employment compared to those whose development relies primarily on internship experience without sufficient personal competency enhancement.

Furthermore, this study reveals that self-efficacy plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between soft skills and work readiness. This finding implies that mastery of soft skills strengthens students' self-efficacy, which subsequently enhances their readiness to enter the workforce. In contrast, self-efficacy does not significantly mediate the relationship between work motivation or internship programmes and work readiness. This indicates that self-efficacy does not automatically emerge from motivational drives or practical exposure alone, but rather develops through interpersonal learning processes and meaningful mastery experiences that build confidence. These findings strongly support Bandura's self-efficacy theory, which emphasizes the central role of personal beliefs and successful experiences in preparing individuals to face work-related challenges.

Overall, the results confirm that internal factors—particularly soft skills and self-efficacy—make a dominant contribution to the work readiness of Pertiba University students. Therefore, higher education institutions are encouraged to strengthen soft skill-oriented curricula through collaborative learning, communication training, and team-based projects that foster confidence and self-belief. In addition, internship programmes should be critically evaluated and redesigned to provide more challenging, relevant, and engaging real-world experiences. Theoretically, this study contributes to the enrichment of the literature on the interplay between soft skills, self-efficacy, and work readiness in higher education, particularly within the Indonesian context. Practically, the findings offer valuable insights for universities and industry stakeholders in developing strategies to prepare young human resources who are adaptive, confident, and competitive in the evolving world of work.

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