

A COMPARISON OF COMPETENCIES NECESSARY FOR EMPLOYMENT OF FIRST-TIME COLLEGE, BUSINESS MAJOR, UNDERGRADUATES

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ABSTRACT

This study was developed and designed to assess the relative importance of employment acquisition characteristics for first-time business, college graduates. Nine job acquisition dimensions were identified. Those dimensions included: (a) Communication Skills, (b) Personal Appearance, (c) Recommendations, (d) Scholastic Record, (e) Co-curricular activities, (f) Related Work Experience, (g) Non-related Work Experience, (h) Knowledge of the Company and/or Industry, and (i) Career Goals. Employers of first-time college graduates in the fields of marketing, management and accounting relied upon the dimensions of communication skills, scholastic record, personal appearance, and recommendations to the greatest extent.

INTRODUCTION

There is a wide array of information that deals with the "tools" a student needs in order to secure that first job out of college. These data are important to both the student and college (or university) for purposes of increased placement. The study objective of this research is to assimilate and rank this information in order to assist the marketing student with job acquisition.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In order to secure a job, the student needs basic tools. In a recent research project, these tools were categorized into nine dimensions: communication skills, co-curricular activities, non-related work experience, related work experience, career goals, knowledge of the company and/or industry, personal appearance, recommendations, and scholastic record (Ogden 1987). Within each of these dimensions large amounts of research have been published emphasizing particular operational skills. Wyant and Vice (1979) discuss the importance of a well written resume. Other authors echo the importance of a well written resume (McDaniel 1978; Figler 1979; Coxford 1982; Eure and Halatin 1981). Additional research emphasizing communication

skills include areas such as cover letters, personal interviews, thank-you notes, phone calls and social settings (Shart 1982); Beaumont 1980; Porter 1981; and Tucker and Rowe 1979). The importance of personal appearance has been well documented through various studies (Carlson 1979; Douglas and Soloman 1983; Malloy 1977; Lydon 1981 and Holman 1980). Tinsley (1978) and others have studied the impact of nonverbal communication. Overall, there have been hundreds of articles written (in the past twenty years) dealing with the "problem" of securing post-undergraduate employment (Manning and Reece 1984; Hafer and Hoth 1981; Downs and Tanner 1982; The College Placement Annual 1982; 1983, Ogden 1987, etc.).

METHODOLOGY

Based upon an earlier work (Ogden 1987), the nine major employment dimensions of communication skills, co-curricular activities, non-related work experience, work experience, career goals, knowledge of the company and/or industry, personal appearance, recommendations and scholastic record, were utilized as a basis for comparison purposes.

For this research, twenty-two personnel recruiters representing twenty-two randomly selected Fortune 500 companies, and eight personnel recruiters representing each of the "Big Eight" accounting firms were utilized. "The N that forms the basis for (this) research has traditionally been the number of decisions that must be judged" rather than the total number of "judges" utilized (Thornton, 1974, p. 20; Postmand and Tolman, 1959).

The representatives were selected based upon the generation of a random number table. This table was then applied to the Fortune 500 companies and 22 representative companies were selected. The remaining eight judges were representatives of the top eight accounting firms.

For this study, forty-five bar graphs were developed. Each of the graphs depicts a hypothetical job applicant. On each graph there are nine bars. The nine bars represent the nine defined employment dimensions. Each bar depicts the relative strengths or weaknesses of that particular job applicant for the given dimension(s). A random number table was used to generate the ratings for each dimension (depicted in bar lengths). Thus, the hypothetical applicant depicted in Figure 2 would be generated by the random numbers of 6, 9, 3, 9, 3, 2, 9, 9, 1. The ratings are based on a nine-point continuum ranging from "among the lowest" to "among the highest". No attempt was made to develop any particular set of combinations for each profile. Each bar graph, thus, represented a particular hypothetical profile for a job applicant. The forty-five bar graphs (or job applicant profiles) were placed in plastic page covers. The plastic pages were put in a looseleaf binder. All profiles were randomly assigned using a random number table.

Thirty participants were used in this study. Eight participants were from accounting firms and twenty-two participants were from a random sample of Fortune 500 firms. These subjects were asked to respond to 45 profiles. For each of these subjects, a separate response was used as a method of acquiring the needed judgements. Of those thirty participants, ten were from each of the disciplines under study (marketing, management, and accounting) and were used for comparison purposes.

During a personal interview, each of the employers were given the forty-five (45) profiles of potential (hypothetical) candidates for employment. After looking through the profiles, the employers were asked to record their judgements of the forty-five hypothetical applicants on a response sheet containing a nine-point continuum ranging from "worst possible candidate" to "best possible candidate".

Correlations were calculated for each of the subjects' judgements utilizing Pearson's Product-moment Correlation (r), to show the extent the employers relied upon each of the nine dimensions. The results are reported immediately following this section. After the correlations were computed, and the output ranked, the rankings were shown to ten different Fortune 500 executives to further establish the importance of these rankings. The employers concurred with the rankings.

RESULTS

The correlations showed both positive and inverse relationships of varying strengths. Of the 270 correlations (9 dimensions multiplied by 30 participants) 190 were positive 79 were inverse and 1 showed no correlation (0.00). Tables one and two graphically depict the overall correlation means and rankings for marketing and the overall correlation. Most of the correlations range for $\pm .000$ to $.360$ (83 percent), showing only a slight relationship; ten percent range from $\pm .361$ to $.550$, indicating a moderate but significant relationship; six percent range from $\pm .550$ to $.775$, indicating a dependable and significant relationship. Less than one percent range from $\pm .775$ to 1.00 , which indicates an extremely dependable relationship. These results indicate the heaviest reliance on the dimensions of communication skills, scholastic record, recommendations and personal appearance.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The employers (utilized in this body of research) do rely on some employment dimensions, or characteristics, more than others. The dimensions or characteristics, more than others. The dimension of communication skills is extremely important for the marketing student, as is personal appearance.

Perhaps seminars could be utilized to educate marketing faculty on the importance of these dimensions. The faculty could then give this information to their marketing students. Faculty should emphasize, in class, the importance of each of these dimensions for students who want to secure employment upon graduation.

The results of this research should be made available to the students, as well as faculty and staff, earlier in the students' collegiate career to help them prepare for their job search challenge. Perhaps workshops or seminars could be established that utilize these findings. Emphasis in course selection and placement should reflect the importance of communication skills. Additional research to replicate these findings should be undertaken. Perhaps comparisons of large versus medium versus small employers could be undertaken to further segment important dimensions for types of employers.

FIGURE 1
JOB APPLICANT'S PROFILE

When comparing this job applicant with other job applicants, this job applicant is:

| Employment Dimension | Among the Lowest | About Average | Among the Highest |
|---|--|---------------|-------------------|
| Communication Skills | xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx | | |
| Personal Appearance | xx | | |
| Recommendations | xxxxx | | |
| Scholastic Record | xx | | |
| Co-Curricular Activities | xxxxx | | |
| Related Work Experience | xxx | | |
| Non-Related Work Experience | xx | | |
| Knowledge of the Company and the Industry | xx | | |
| Career Goals | x | | |

TABLE 1

RANKING OF OVERALL EMPLOYMENT ACQUISITION DIMENSIONS FROM THE PEARSON PRODUCT MOMENT CORRELATION (r)

| Rank* | Dimension Name | Overall Correlation Mean |
|-------|--|--------------------------|
| 1. | Communication Skills | .410 |
| 2. | Scholastic Record | .311 |
| 3. | Personal Appearance | .301 |
| 4. | Recommendations | .192 |
| 5. | Career Goals | .169 |
| 6. | Non-related Work Experience | .039 |
| 7. | Knowledge of the Company and/or Industry | -.019 |
| 8. | Co-curricular Activities | -.056 |
| 9. | Related Work Experience | -.072 |

*Arranged from most important (1) to least important (9).

TABLE 2

RANKINGS OF EMPLOYMENT ACQUISITION DIMENSIONS FOR MARKETING EMPLOYERS* FROM THE PEARSON (r)

| Rank | Dimension Name | Overall Correlation Mean |
|------|--|--------------------------|
| 1. | Communication Skills (1) | .574 |
| 2. | Personal Appearance (3) | .359 |
| 3. | Recommendations (4) | .217 |
| 4. | Career Goals (5) | .209 |
| 5. | Scholastic Record (2) | .131 |
| 6. | Non-Related Work Experience (6) | .032 |
| 7. | Co-Curricular Activities (8) | -.022 |
| 8. | Knowledge of Company and/or Industry (7) | -.035 |
| 9. | Related Work Experience (9) | -.047 |

*Arranged from most important (1) to least important (9).

NOTE: Overall importance is indicated after the dimension within parentheses.

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