



Evidence Summary

Information Professional Job Advertisements in the U.K. Indicate Professional Experience is the Most Required Skill

A Review of:

Orme, Verity. "You will be...: A Study of Job Advertisements to Determine Employers' Requirements for LIS Professionals in the UK in 2007." *Library Review* 57.8 (2008): 619-33.

Reviewed by:

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Objective – To determine what skills employers in the United Kingdom (U.K.) want from information professionals as revealed through their job advertisements.

Design – Content analysis, combining elements of both quantitative and qualitative content analysis. Orme describes it as "a descriptive non-experimental approach of content analysis" (62).

Setting – Data for this study were obtained from job advertisements in the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professional's (CILIP) Library and Information Gazette published from June 2006 through May 2007.

Subjects – A total of 180 job advertisements.

Methods – Job advertisements were selected using a random number generator, purposely selecting only 15 advertisements per first issue of each month of the Library and Information Gazette (published every two weeks). The author used several sources to create an initial list of skills required by information professionals, using such sources as prior studies that examined this topic, the Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA) database thesaurus, and personal knowledge. Synonyms for the skills were then added to the framework for coding. Skills that were coded had to be noted in such a way that the employer plainly stated the employee would be a certain skill or attribute or they were seeking a skill or a particular skill was essential or desirable. Skills

that were stated in synonymous ways within the same advertisement were counted as two incidences of that skill. Duties for the position were not counted unless they were listed as a specific skill. Data were all coded by hand and then tallied. The author claims to have triangulated the results of this study with the literature review, the synonym ring used to prepare the coding framework, and a few notable studies.

Main Results – A wide variety of job titles was observed, including “Copyright Clearance Officer,” “Electronic Resources and Training Librarian,” and “Assistant Information Advisor.” Employers represented private, school, and university libraries, as well as legal firms and prisons. Fifty-nine skills were found a total of 1,021 times across all of the advertisements. Each advertisement averaged 5.67 requirements. These skills were classified in four categories: professional, generic, personal, and experience. The most highly noted requirement was professional experience, noted 129 times, followed by interpersonal/communication skills (94), general computing skills (63), enthusiasm (48), and team-working skills (39). Professional skills were noted just slightly more than generic and personal skills in the top twenty skills found. Other professional skills that were highly noted were customer service skills (34), chartership (30), cataloguing/classification/metadata skills (25), and information retrieval skills (20). Some notable skills that occurred rarely included Web design and development skills (6), application of information technology in the library (5), and knowledge management skills (3).

Conclusion – Professional, generic, and personal qualities were all important to employers in the U.K.; however, without experience, possessing these qualities may not be enough for new professionals in the field.

Commentary

This study used a content analysis method that appeared to combine both quantitative and qualitative characteristics. According to White and Marsh (36), qualitative content analysis requires a strong grounding in the data itself. Orme took the necessary steps to prepare for coding and accurate assessment of the data by thoroughly reviewing the literature surrounding content analysis of job advertisements, looking for patterns of skills that became apparent from their results, and including the coding framework in the paper. However, closer examination of the framework seems to confound the findings of the study slightly. One could argue that the categories where certain skills were placed changed the outcome of the study, except with regard to experience, which is clearly the most frequently requested quality. For example, customer service skill is coded as a professional skill. Many might consider this skill to fall in the generic category rather than professional skill. Another potential coding problem is that some categories are not mutually exclusive. This can be seen in the professional skill “knowledge of the sector/subject area” and in the generic skill “subject knowledge.” We do not have the full context in which these skills were derived or classified, so it is difficult to determine if this is truly an overlap area or not. Mutually exclusive categories are important in quantitative content analysis (White and Marsh 32), therefore, the validity of these results could be somewhat questioned. These issues raise questions about whether the study could be replicated by another researcher using the same parameters and result in the same conclusions. This study had a lengthy literature review that adds a lot of value to the article. Orme claims to use the literature review as one way to substantiate the findings of the study. However, what discussion there is about the results appears to simply be a comparison of the results rather than a true triangulation, where a researcher would use other research perspectives to re-interpret the results.

Additionally, the dominance of skills classified as generic and personal was not discussed by the author in relation to the debate surrounding the obsolescence of the master's degree for information professionals, though mentioned in the literature review. On a practical note, this article is not divided into the typical sections of a research article (i.e., methods, results, discussion), making it a bit difficult to read.

Orme does acknowledge the two biggest limitations of this study: limiting data collection to only one source (the *Library and Information Gazette*), and assuming that job advertisements sufficiently and correctly described the skills and qualities desired from information professionals. This study focused on the U.K., therefore, its generalizability is somewhat limited. The emphasis on experience found in this study was unexpected and had not been seen as the dominant factor in previous similar studies. But, this finding confirms the anecdotal experiences of many newer North American graduates who are unable to obtain professional positions partly because of their lack of prior experience (Orbanus 46; Holt and Strock 44). Findings such as this are significant and should grab the attention of both library students and

library schools everywhere, reemphasizing the importance of practical and service learning while earning the professional master's degree and also calling attention the need to produce current research to evaluate the impact of such experiential learning experiences (Ball 77).

Works Cited

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- White, Marilyn Domas, and Emily E. Marsh. "Content Analysis: A Flexible Methodology." *Library Trends* 55.1 (2006): 22-45.