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This study investigated the résumé factors that predict candidate selection for job interviews. To determine the key factors, 200 qualified résumés for a position from a pool of more than 1,000 résumés were randomly selected and analyzed. Regression analyses determined the factors that led to actual candidate interviews. In order of importance, findings indicate that candidates with (1) relevant, current, and continual work experience; (2) a college degree or enrollment in college; and (3) achievements listed on their résumés were more likely to be selected by hiring managers for employment interviews.

Key words: cover letter, hiring decisions, job applicant, personnel selection, résumé

Employers have high expectations when it comes to filling their vacant positions. Meanwhile, many confident jobseekers say, “if I could just get the interview, I could get the job.” At the early stages of the selection process, the résumé is an important factor for both the employer and the job applicant (Breugh, 2009). For example, Chen, Huang, and Lee (2011) found that employers make inferences about job-related knowledge, interpersonal skills, general mental ability, and conscientiousness of the applicant after viewing a résumé.

Despite this, the research relating to factors that determine which candidate will be selected for a job interview is limited (Risavy, 2017). There was no research found that was based on actual hiring decisions. Instead, the research identified is based on evaluations of hypothetical résumés and job openings.

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Literature Review

Thoms, McMasters, Roberts, and Dombkowski (1999) found that employers prefer specific objective statements over general ones, one-page résumés over two-page résumés, listing grade point averages above 3.0, relevant coursework, and accomplishment statements. Knouse (1994) found that job-relevant education and related experience were positively correlated to résumé evaluations. Nemanick and Clark (2002) found that extracurricular activities enhanced résumé evaluations, particularly if there were a significant number of activities, there was evidence of leadership, and the activities were related to the job for the applicant is seeking.

However, Cole, Rubin, Field, and Giles (2007) found that the résumé factors interact with each other in ways that are complex and often difficult to predict. They found that academic qualifications, work experience, and extracurricular activities are all valued by hiring managers but being above average in one factor is better than being above average in all three. For example, an applicant with higher levels of extracurricular involvement but less work experience and academic achievement would be evaluated higher than a candidate who has high levels of all three.

Knouse (1994) looked at the role that impression management by the applicant had on résumé evaluations. In the résumé context, Knouse defines *impression management* as self-descriptions on a résumé that portray the applicant in a positive light. He found that impression management enhanced perceptions if they were specifically related to the job. In an earlier study, Knouse, Giacalone, and Pollard (1988) found that impression management statements that were unrelated to the job negatively affected résumé evaluations.

Method

Rather than speculate about what might drive interview decisions, this study based its conclusions on actual interview decisions made by hiring managers. In the present study, 200 qualified résumés were randomly selected and analyzed for positions from a pool of more than 1,000 résumés. Candidates in the sample had

an average of 9.2 years of work experience. These candidates were under consideration for positions that required either a college degree or equivalent work experience. All résumés selected met the basic qualifications for the jobs as described in employers' job advertisements, and all candidates were called to verify their qualifications. These résumés were then presented to hiring managers.

The purpose of this research was to predict which candidates would be selected for employment interviews based on 15 résumé characteristics. Résumés were evaluated and coded for each of these 15 characteristics by two trained coders. Table 1 presents the résumé characteristics that were investigated. Multiple regression was used to determine which résumé characteristics were most predictive of interview decisions. A significant regression equation was found: $F(4, 95) = 7.014$ ($p < .000$), with an R^2 of .228.

Table 1: Résumé Characteristics Studied

Total Months in the Workforce	
Total Months in Current Jobs	
Total Number of Regular Positions	
Gaps in Employment Greater Than One Month	
Total Months Unemployed	
Total Months Unemployed from Last Job	
Gender	
Currently Enrolled in a Degree Program	
Highest Degree Completed	
Degree Relevant to Applied Position	
Number of Years Out of School Since Last Degree Earned	
Grade Point Average (GPA)	
Experiential Index	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Military experience • Volunteer/charitable work • Non-relevant certifications
Leadership Index	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership position in a volunteer, charitable or professional association
Achievement Index	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job-relevant certifications • Number of languages fluent in other than English • Professional organization membership • Honors society membership • Peer-reviewed publications and patents • Professional presentations

Key Findings

Table 2 shows the résumé characteristics that best predicted the candidates who were selected for employment interviews. In order of importance, candidates with (1) relevant, current, and continual work experience; (2) a college degree or enrollment in college; and (3) achievements listed on their résumés were more likely to be selected by hiring managers for an employment interview.

Table 2: Résumé Characteristics That Best Predict Selection for Interviews

Predictor	Significance
Relevant Work Experience	$p < 0.025$
College Degree	$p < 0.010$
Currently Enrolled in College	$p < 0.042$
Achievements	$p < 0.000$

Moderating Factors

Several statistically significant correlations between predictors and other characteristics help us understand how hiring managers evaluate résumés.

Employment vs. Unemployment. Results show that hiring managers considered both the amount of work experience in relationship to the number of months unemployed as well as the number of unemployment gaps displayed on the résumé. Candidates with more work experience and continual employment were more likely to receive a job interview. In fact, 80% of candidates with relevant work experience and no employment gaps on their résumés were selected to be interviewed. For candidates with qualified résumés who were unemployed for 20% or more over the past 10 years, only 50% were selected for employment interviews (see Table 3).

Table 3: Correlation of Unemployment to Interview Selection

Unemployment History	# Invited to Interview
20% or more of their career unemployed (past 10 years)	1 out of 2
Have no unemployment history (past 10 years)	4 out of 5

A statistically significant inverse relationship also exists between the number of gaps in employment and hiring managers' decisions to interview. As the number of gaps in unemployment increased, a candidate's chance of being offered an

interview decreased. Even a gap of 30 days or more decreased a candidate's chance of receiving an interview from 76% to 63% (see Table 4).

Table 4: Correlation of Unemployment Gaps Longer Than 30 Days to Interview Selection

Unemployment Gaps Longer Than 30 Days	Percentage Invited to Interview
None	76%
1 to 2	63%
3 to 5	43%

College Degree vs. High School Diploma and the Role of Achievement Indicators. Table 5 shows the breakdown of interviewed and rejected candidates by high school diploma and college degree.

Table 5: Interviewed vs. Rejected Candidates

College Degree		High School Diploma		Total	
Interview	Reject	Interview	Reject	Interview	Reject
65 (60%)	43 (40%)	48 (52%)	44 (48%)	113 (57%)	87 (43%)

There is a greater preference for degreed candidates. Sixty percent of college graduates are interviewed compared to 52% of candidates with only high school diplomas. Table 6 shows that those selected for employment interviews have, on average, greater work experience, are enrolled in school, and/or have more achievement characteristics than those rejected.

Table 6: Résumé Characteristics Most Influencing Hiring Managers' Interview Decisions

All Candidates							
Work Experience (Mean # Months)		Unemployed (Mean # Months)		# of Gaps Longer Than One Month		Achievement Indicators/Enrolled in Degree Program	
Interview	Reject	Interview	Reject	Interview	Reject	Interview	Reject
114	106	10	16	< 2	> 2	1 or more	0–1
High School Diploma							
104	85	10	10	< 2	< 2	2 or more	0–1
College Degree (Associate/Bachelor's/Master's)							
121	128	9	22	< 2	> 2	1 or more	0–1

Note: Numbers in table are rounded to nearest whole numbers.

For candidates with high school diplomas, résumé gaps longer than 30 days as well as months unemployed were equally distributed among those interviewed and rejected. On average, candidates with high school diplomas chosen for employment interviews had 104 months of work experience and two or more achievement indicators or enrollment in a degree program. In contrast, high school graduates who were rejected on the basis of their résumé had, on average, 85 months of work experience and either were not enrolled in a degree program or lacked one or more achievement indicators.

Candidates with college degrees who were selected for employment interviews tended to have two or less gaps of 30 days or more on their résumés and an average of nine months of unemployment. College degree holders who were rejected had three or more gaps of 30 days or more and an average of 22 months of unemployment. Candidates with college degrees who were selected for employment interviews also tended to have one or more achievement factors or were enrolled in a higher degree program (for example, a candidate with an associate degree enrolled in a bachelor's degree program). Unlike candidates with high school diplomas, work experience beyond the minimum required on the job requisition did not make up for increased number of résumé gaps longer than 30 days or excess time unemployed for those with college degrees.

Discussion

It is worth noting that there were no gender preferences in this study. Approximately the same number of men and women received interviews. Grade point average (GPA) also did not serve as a strong determinant in predicting who was invited to an interview, nor did it override or serve in the place of the factors that did. This is likely because GPA is far more important to employers when evaluating candidates who will or have recently graduated than those who have several years of work experience post-graduation.

Although most employers emphasize the importance of leadership qualities, résumé characteristics comprising our leadership index did not seem to

significantly influence interview decisions. This may be due to the nature of the jobs in our sample or the fact that the characteristics making up our leadership factor are secondary to more dominant factors such as work experience. It is equally feasible that corporate recruiters and hiring managers rely on other selection methods, like an in-person interview, to infer leadership characteristics.

Finally, candidates with high school diplomas had, on average, fewer résumé gaps and shorter unemployment durations than those with college degrees. This may be explained by the fact that those with high school diplomas had 29 fewer average months of work experience at 95 months than the college degree candidates, who averaged 124 months of work experience.

Who Do Employers Interview?

Employers most want candidates who have current, relevant work experience with few gaps on their résumés, a college degree or enrollment in college, and indicators of success. These are the most highly desirable candidates. Work experience matters, but having more experience does not always serve as a substitute for other key influencers. For those lacking a college degree, having more job-related experience does appear to make up for not having one. After considering both educational level and work experience, hiring managers look for other positive success indicators. Achievements speak volumes and stand out to hiring managers. Being enrolled in a degree program or having multiple achievement characteristics increased the likelihood of a hiring manager selecting a candidate for an employment interview.

Theory Behind the Results

Our findings suggest a risk-averse decision-making heuristic in place. This could be explained by *zero-risk bias theory* (Baron, 2007), which states that people prefer small guaranteed benefits to larger, uncertain benefits. Candidates who have job-relevant and adequate work experience, possess a college degree, and do things to advance their job knowledge and skills appear to be safer bets than those without these characteristics or don't do these things at all. For example, two candidates with qualified résumés, one with no résumé gaps and

the other with three résumé gaps, with all other factors identical, will likely result in only one employment interview. According to our research, the candidate with three gaps of employment has a 43% chance of receiving an interview, or half the likelihood of the candidate with no employment gaps.

Hiring decisions are high-stake decisions. As such, it makes sense that employers would err on the side of caution and focus on the most desirable candidates. From an employers' perspective, selecting candidates with current, relevant work experience and achievement factors is far less risky and a better use of employers' time than interviewing every candidate. The question then becomes what are the "best" indicators to use from a résumé that predict or are indicative of subsequent job performance and tenure.

The focus of this field study was limited to how candidates with qualified résumés were selected for employment interviews. We did not measure who received job offers, began employment, job performance, or tenure post-hire. In other words, we do not know if the interview characteristics that influenced the decision to grant an employment interview are indeed predictive of performance and tenure post-hire. To the extent they do not correlate well with post-hire criteria, recruiters and hiring managers should adjust their decision-making heuristics. The research findings in this study have many implications for both employers and jobseekers.

Implications for Jobseekers

The study suggests that individuals who become unemployed should diligently work towards reemployment as quickly as possible. Taking time off before assertively beginning to look for new employment is not advisable. In fact, the longer you are unemployed, the less likely it is for you to become reemployed. This is the case even when a candidate's résumé meets the basic requirements of the position. To increase a candidate's chance of reemployment when he or she is unemployed, enrolling in a college degree program is one consideration. If a job candidate does not have an associate degree, that person should consider working toward one. If a job candidate has an associate degree, it makes good sense to enroll in a bachelor's degree program. The key word is enrolled, not

necessarily completed. Finally, candidates should consider advancing their qualifications by completing items from the Achievement Index in Table 1, such as learning a second language, earning job certifications, or joining a professional association.

Implications for Employers

This study shows that factors on the résumé beyond just prerequisite qualifications drive interview decisions. This means that an employer's candidate pool is immediately reduced to those selected to be interviewed based on the résumé itself. Well-qualified, talented individuals may be passed over because of employment gaps or the number of months they have been out of work listed on their résumés.

Employers are advised to train recruiters and hiring managers to minimize "unconscious biases" they may have regarding what gaps in employment and time spent unemployed truly convey about a candidate. Beliefs held regarding those with gaps or long-term unemployment may not reflect reality. Great employees can be victims of circumstance or simply have had a string of bad luck. While a résumé may indicate whether a candidate has the right experience for the job, it may not tell the full story. The following suggestions can aid in identifying hidden talent among the unemployed and underemployed.

- When reviewing a candidate's résumé, evaluate the employment history for the past 10+ years, rather than just the past 5 or 7 years. Candidates who had a consistent progression in their career prior to their most recent roles should be considered.
- While reviewing a candidate's résumé, pay particular attention to the candidates with educational credentials and certifications not required in the current or most recent role. These are likely to be the candidates who are currently underemployed workers or working on developing a career change. These candidates will welcome an opportunity to work for the company.

- When reviewing candidates' résumés, identify individuals who are continually developing their skill sets, such as enrolling in courses or attending certification programs.
- Speak with candidates before rejecting them for employment gaps on their résumés to ensure a thorough understanding of the circumstances related to their job transitions or employment gaps.

Future Research

The goal of the present study was to identify the factors that result in candidates receiving job interviews. In a recent literature review, Risavy (2017) noted that there is a shortage of research in this area, and much of the research that exists is based on older studies conducted in contrived settings. Research needs to be performed that updates and extends the findings of prior studies. There needs to be more research relating to the factors that determine candidate selection for interviews. With regards to the present study, future research should further investigate the effect of employment gaps, work experience, education, and job-related achievements in interview decisions. In addition, future research needs to identify the psychological mechanisms that are the basis for the decisions that hiring managers make after viewing résumés. Finally, employers should investigate the résumé characteristics associated with job performance and tenure criteria post-hire. By identifying these factors and incorporating them into talent acquisition and assessment strategy initiatives, the quality of the candidate pool can be improved, and better hires can be made.

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