

In Your Shoes: Role Reversal and Job Applicant Success

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Abstract

Research shows students often do not understand the expectations of employers and, as a result, how to prepare recruiter-relevant career communication. To help our students, we conducted a role reversal exercise where we asked students to put themselves in the shoes of recruiters and to make decisions as if they were actual recruiters hiring candidates who best met the job criteria listed in a job description. The exercise was designed to help students develop effective resumes and to prepare for job interviews. Students reported that the exercise changed the way they usually prepared resumes and approached job interviews. The exercise made them aware of the importance of including specific and relevant information on resumes and gave them insight as to the types of questions they should anticipate in job interviews.

Keywords: Recruiter, job ad; applicant, role reversal, human resources, first-generation students

Introduction

One major outcome for college students is employment. Employment not only helps them to establish a new career, but it also provides students an opportunity to apply the knowledge acquired from their educational experience. Students who adequately prepare in school tend to gain employment. Given the central role of job interviews and well-crafted resumes in successful job applications, it is a key responsibility of management teachers to improve the career readiness of students by preparing them to succeed in their job applications and interviews (Chang, Lee, Chen, & Yu, 2012). Many students, particularly those from first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented backgrounds lack the knowledge and skills critical for career preparation. As a result, they have limited career readiness (Hooker, & Brand, 2010; Tate, Caperton, Kaiser, Pruitt, White, & Hall, 2015). One way to prepare students is to help them assume the role of human resources professionals who make hiring decisions (i.e., role reversal).

Role reversal is a form of simulation of the expectations of recruiters (i.e., role play). Role-play simulations have commonly been used in the human resources (James & Harvey, 2015), health (Guntzviller, Jensen, & Carreno, 2017), and business communication (Apter, 2003) domains. It enables students to see the implications of their behavior in terms of their immediate career goals, rather than from the perspective of those who have achieved career success (Barr & McNeilly, 2002). In other words, it provides an opportunity for students to understand the mindset of employers when they assume the latter's role (Chang et al., 2012). Students are likely to internalize the cognitive, affective, and behavioral tendencies that orient recruiters during the recruitment and selection process. Assuming the role of "evaluator" of the oral and written communication of the applicant, students in a role reversal are likely to appreciate the perspective of the message receiver. That perspective may enable them to develop an understanding of employers' expectations and prepare their resumes and interview behaviors accordingly.

Additionally, students are likely to comprehend the specific knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) demanded by employers and to acquire such competencies through internships (Barr & McNeilly, 2002). Lastly, students are likely to discern potential questions that might be asked in real interviews and to better prepare for job interviews accordingly. In short, we expected the knowledge acquired from the exercise to enhance their career readiness.

Consequently, we prepared the exercise reported in these two studies to facilitate career readiness. We simulated the actual job application process by combining resume preparation and behavioral interviews. We asked students to imagine themselves as recruiters or representatives of employers. Research shows that organizations desire transferable and specific KSAOs (Collins, 2014; Mathew, 2015). Transferable KSAOs such as communication, critical thinking, teamwork, and information searching are not limited to a particular organization (Hughes & Jones, 2011). Typically, organizations identify competent employees through KSAOs that match the tasks, duties, and responsibilities (TDRs) of the job. As a result, recruiters search for KSAOs in job applications. Next, we briefly review the theoretical basis of our exercise.

Theoretical Background

Decades of research in role reversal spans several domains in psychology (Apter, 2003; James & Harvey, 2015), theater (Craig, 2003), critical incident management (Corrine, Adams & Cook, 2003), leadership (Crozier, 2003), stress at work (Doyle & Carter, 2003) and learning disability (Walsh, 2003). In the area of learning and development, Apter (2003) argues that reversal is an empirically supported, third component of change. Generally, a role reversal involves a change in the behavioral roles of an entity. In this study it refers to the change in the pattern of expectations and norms of behavior that are associated with a recruiter.

A recruiter expects a job applicant to demonstrate KSAOs that correspond with the TDRs in the job description. To the extent that the job candidate can identify the KSAOs (i.e., list them) and address them in a resume and subsequently anticipate likely questions and prepare for them in a job interview, the recruiter is likely to deduce job fit (Stumpf, Austin, & Hartman, 1984). Recruiters determine the job fit of applicants by reviewing the latter's resume. The traditional approach where recruiters manually review resumes is being replaced with modern techniques

introduced by internet technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) which are used to screen applications for competent employees (Tambe, Cappelli, & Yakubovich, 2019). Such modern technologies highlight the importance of helping students learn how to use key words in their application materials to correspond to those in the job description.

Supplementing recruiters' knowledge of KSAOs are interviews of job candidates. A job interview is a major tool of recruiters. In addition to exploring unknown areas – knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors – not discernible from the candidate's resume, a job interview enables a recruiter to simulate expected behaviors. By presenting job candidates with scenarios the recruiter is likely to determine from the responses future behaviors that might be enacted. Otherwise termed behavioral interviewing (Motowidlo et al., 1992), the technique has been used extensively in the human resources management literature to hire private security personnel (Moscoso & Salgado, 2001) and to evaluate the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) competencies in resident selection (Easdown, Castro, Shinkle, Small, & Algren, 2005). It has also been used in the educational context. Clark, Easter, and Clark (2007) describe an in-class exercise that elevated students' awareness of the importance of planning verbal and nonverbal behavior as key to successful career communication and its implication in job interviews.

Given the significance of KSAOs in determining a candidate's fitness for a job and, behavioral interviews as an exploratory simulation tool, we expected that students who developed knowledge of these mechanisms would enhance their career readiness.¹ By learning how to identify KSAOs that match a particular job through role reversal, students may improve their career readiness (Clark, 2010). Further, knowledge of predicted screening and behavioral interviews improves the likelihood that students will comprehend the behaviors expected of them if presented with scenarios in real job search situations.

Therefore, we expected students to be able to (1) identify KSAOs that correspond with a job, (2) generate screening and behavioral interview questions that would be asked in an interview, and (3) connect the exercise with applicant success. These three expectations are important because they correspond with employer expectations of job candidates. The KSAOs of applicants in the resume are expected to match the tasks, duties, and responsibilities (TDRs) specified in the job description. Those who make it to the interview stage are also expected to answer questions related to their potential behaviors in the workplace.

Method

We conducted two studies to explore our expectations. Study 2 replicated the findings of Study 1. To the extent that students in Study 2 do as well as those in Study 1, we would have evidence of validation. Both studies had the same goals and instrument - a real job ad. Importantly, the organizations specified in the ads were different. Further, Study 2 focused on individuals and did not have options for participants to choose a job description from a limited list. Study 1 focused on teams and provided options. We made the changes to Study 2 because we wanted to compare decisions made in a group setting with those made individually.

¹ A major mechanism that transforms knowledge into action is internalization of the acquired knowledge, given that job search and interviewing are skills. We recommend future studies test internalization. Anecdotal evidence from the debriefings with students, as well as insight from students' evaluative essays, suggest internalization as a potential mechanism.

The Exercise

We informed students of the rationale, expectations, and structure of the role reversal exercise, using both individual and team-based interactions (see Appendix A). The description explained the rationale and benefit of the exercise.

Procedure

First, we conducted a pre-study exercise where we surveyed students about their exposure to creating resumes and taking job interviews. This was important to determine learning, if any, that had occurred. To the extent that students had no prior exposure, it could reasonably be inferred that the learning after the exercise was valid. Even though some students had participated in mock interviews (Study 1: $n = 4$; Study 2: $n = 6$) none had experience with role reversal exercises either individually or in a team context.

Second, we provided each participant with a real job ad adopted from O*Net (<https://www.onetonline.org/>). We then instructed participants on the conduct, expectations, deliverables of the exercise. Where necessary, we provided clarification. The job ad used in Study 2 had technological skill and communication competency demands in addition to those required in the job ad of Study 1. The exercise in both studies involved three parts. In Part A, students listed the information they would specify in a resume to fit the actual job description given to them to indicate that they are *the best fit* for the job. In Part B, we asked them to assume that they had been selected for a job interview based on the resume they submitted. They were then to generate likely screening and behavioral questions they, in their role as recruiters, would ask potential applicants (i.e., those who had submitted the selected resumes). In Part C, students described the value of the exercise to themselves with regard to affect, learning, and interaction in the job context.

Third, we explained the two goals of the exercise: 1) to help students develop effective resumes and prepare effectively for job interviews by putting themselves in the place of recruiters by creating lists of what information they would look for in a resume in response to an actual job description (Stumpf, Austin, & Hartman, K., 1984), and 2) to determine what interview questions recruiters would ask in an actual job interview and what content they would find most effective in answering these questions (Camara, 2013). We also provided background knowledge as assigned readings to help students comprehend the behavioral interviewing technique.

Lastly, we had students work in teams of 3-4 members in Study 1 to complete the three parts. In Study 2, however, they worked individually. The instructions in Study 2 required students to categorize the KSAOs into ‘paid work-related; unpaid work-related, and school-specific’ to enable students to distinguish among the KSAOs. They were also asked to separate work-specific skills from work experience, education, and personal qualities. In both studies, work skills were defined to comprise “knowledge,” “skills,” “attitudes,” and “other characteristics.” We considered the categorization important in enabling students to generate the behavioral questions required in the second part. We did not find any significant differences in the responses of students in the Managerial Communication (MC) course which was taught online over an eight-week period, and International Human Resources Management (HRM) and Strategic Human Resources

Management (SHRM) courses which were taught in the traditional classroom setting over a sixteen-week period.

Sample

The sample comprised of students taking courses in IHRM, SHRM, and MC. They participated in the exercise in Spring 2019 (Study 1) and Spring 2020 (Study 2). In Study 1, fifty-four students from MC (N = 40) and IHRM (n = 14) courses at a private Midwestern college participated in the exercise. In Study 2, sixty-six students (MC = 40; SHRM = 26) participated in the exercise. The demographics of the students are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Demographics of Samples from Two Studies

	Study 1		Study 2	
	IHRM	MC1	SHRM	MC2
Gender				
Men	0.45	0.58	0.75	0.55
Women	0.55	0.43	0.25	0.45
Level				
Freshmen	0.10	0.03	0.35	0.03
Sophomores	0.20	0.23	0.35	0.18
Juniors	0.25	0.48	0.20	0.53
Seniors	0.45	0.28	0.10	0.28
Major				
Marketing	0.01	0.33	0.15	0.30
BAIS	0.01	0.18	0.02	0.30
Accounting	0.00	0.28	0.10	0.18
Management	0.15	0.10	0.20	0.13
HRM	0.75	0.03	0.30	0.03
Hosp Adm	0.00	0.08	0.00	0.05
Psychology	0.08	0.03	0.22	0.03

IHRM = International Human Resources Management; SHRM = Strategic Human Resources Management; MC1 = Managerial Communication 1; MC2 = Managerial Communication 2

Concerning gender, the majority in the IHRM course were female (55%) while the majority in the SHRM class were male (75%). There were more seniors in the IHRM course than the SHRM course. There were also fewer students (n=4) outside of the Management and Entrepreneurship Department. We had the same number of MC students in both studies (n = 40). The distribution, however, was different. About the same proportion of women and men were in both studies. There was also the same proportion of seniors and juniors in the two studies.

Results

Study 1

With regard to the first task (Part A), most students matched information to be included in the resume (i.e., KSAOs) with the information listed on the job descriptions (TDRs). For the IHRM course (n = 4), three teams identified KSAOs and TDRs and accurately matched the KSAOs to TDRs while one team identified the KSAOs and TDRs but partially matched them. Overall, 75% of the students were able to complete Part A accurately (see Table 2). In the MC course, a similar pattern emerged. Of the twelve teams, approximately seventy-five percent were able to identify KSAOs and TDRs and accurately matched them while about seventy percent of the teams identified the KSAOs and TDRs but partially matched them. About ten percent of the teams could only identify either the KSAOs or TDRs but not match them. In sum, about eighty-five percent of the students were able to complete Part 1 accurately (see Table 2).

A student’s questions are shown in Table 4. The second column shows verbatim reports of student groups. The questions are shown in the first column and likely responses are in column 2. Another team’s submission (Table 5) shows their KSAOs. Functional skills expected by the job ad are shown in column 1 and the specific KSAOs of the students are summarized in columns 2 and 3.

With regard to the second task (Part B), all teams in the IHRM and MC courses were able to generate behavioral questions. As shown in Table 2, about 97% of the questions were consistent with the technique while 3% were not. In the MC course, about 91% of the questions were consistent with the technique while 9% were not consistent. Table 6 shows samples of behavioral interview questions submitted by teams.

TABLE 2
Proportions of Parts A and B

Group	Study 1		Study 2	
	KSAO	Behavioral Interviews	KSAO	Behavioral Interviews
IHRM (N = 14)	75%	97%		
SHRM (N = 26)			87%	88%
MC1 (N = 40)	85%	91%		
MC2 (N = 40)			89%	95%

IHRM = International Human Resources Management; SHRM = Strategic Human Resources Management; MC1 = Managerial Communication 1; MC2 = Managerial Communication 2.

Content analysis of the evaluative essays (Part C)² showed that 89% and 91% of the comments indicated positive valuation of the exercise in the IHRM and MC courses respectively (see Table 3). A high percentage of the statements (92% and 93%) indicate that students from the IHRM and MC courses respectively had “learned” from the exercise. Recommendations for continuation of the exercise were also high: 79% and 81% respectively.

² We used Wordstat for STATA v.8

TABLE 3
Results of Content Analysis of Evaluative Essays

	Study 1		Study 2	
	IHRM	MC1	SHRM	MC2
Value of Exercise	0.89	0.91	0.96	0.97
Learning from exercise	0.92	0.93	0.88	0.93
Recommendation for future	0.79	0.81	0.93	0.95
Technology-centered KSAOs	–	–	0.86	0.94
Satisfaction with Exercise	0.87	0.9	0.95	0.85
Perceived influence on employment prospects	0.92	0.85	0.89	0.88

IHRM = International Human Resources Management; SHRM = Strategic Human Resources Management; MC1 = Managerial Communication 1; MC2 = Managerial Communication 2

Table 4 (Study 1)
A Student’s Interview Questions and Justifications

Interview questions and justification: Recruitment involves asking questions that help you determine how someone will do at the job. The best way to do that is by asking about real situations, and these interview questions will help you make that determination.	
<i>Which accounting platforms have you worked with?</i>	Accountants often have worked with multiple accounting applications or enterprise resource planning systems. This question allows the applicant to show their familiarity with prominent accounting and business software packages. Look for answers that include the name and version of the software, as well as the features the applicant is most familiar with.
<i>What do you do when you have a tight deadline and multiple accounting projects to finish?</i>	Many accounting projects have a strict deadline, and accountants may be working on more than one at a time. This important question gives you insight into how the job seeker prioritizes tasks and responds to high-pressure situations.
<i>How do you answer questions from clients who don't have any background in accounting?</i>	Accountants may need to explain processes or concepts to other people in your organization who don't know anything about accounting. Look for a response that conveys a willingness to simplify complex information.
<i>What strategies do you use to detect fraudulent entries in a journal or ledger?</i>	Accountants need to remain vigilant in fraud detection to protect the company's finances and values. The applicant should have familiarity in using a combination of software features and their own judgment to identify unusual or fraudulent patterns.
<i>How have you helped companies or clients save money or better use their available financial resources?</i>	Accountants can identify areas of wasteful spending and put together strategies to reduce unnecessary expenses. Look for answers that display logical and analytical thinking, with critical problem-solving skills.

**Table 5 (Study 1)
Representative Information to Include on a Resume for Various Jobs**

Digital Marketing	Skills: Google Analytics, SEO, Google certifications, Microsoft mastery Completed and relevant BA degree	Personal: Leadership in clubs; goal setting; achievements
Financial analyst	Skills: Proof of Excel talents. Financial modeling and databases Budgeting forecasting and P&L Completed and relevant BA	Personal: Goal achiever; reliable
Sales of investments	Skills: Bloomberg, Excel, CapQ Completed and relevant BA	Personal: Goal achiever, community leadership, team leadership Experience: prior sales success References from sales clients
Operations Supply Chain	Skills: All functions of MS Office, MS Project, and JIRA, or similar Completed and relevant BA	Embody teamwork – List projects and how you contributed to their success. Strong communication skills Show evidence relationship-building skills through customer service and sales experiences Time management and problem-solving skills – List projects completed effectively and in a timely manner. Innovation and self-motivation – Describe a project you took on or an idea you converted into a successful product or service/system

**Table 6 (Study 1) Management: ABC
Representative Interview Questions**

Questions for a Management/Sales Position	
1). Tell me about yourself.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Talk about past experiences that <i>connect personal strengths</i> to the job description <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. That is, if you are really good at solving issues discuss how you can see yourself <i>problem-solving</i> at ABC b. Ideal answers will include their <i>passion</i> for management and sales. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Discuss why you love management and why you took the career path you did. c. Include relevant extracurricular interests, like computer analytics, as it will demonstrate to ABC your ability to complete necessary tasks on the job.

2). Tell me about your education.	<p><u>a.</u> For this question, the ideal answer would include the fact that you have a <i>bachelor's degree</i>, or are going to obtain one in 12 months, as this is a necessity for the position.</p> <p><u>b.</u> Also, talk about any particular <i>management or sales courses</i> that are applicable and demonstrate the value you would bring to ABC.</p> <p><u>c.</u> If you have any <i>self-paced online classes</i> include them in your answer as ABC's training involves <i>self-paced modules</i>.</p> <p><u>d.</u> Conclude with how your education applies to this ABC role; stress your understanding of critical <i>management skills and sales techniques</i>.</p>
3). Elaborate on your work history	<p><u>a.</u> Ideal answers will show how their previous roles have prepared them for this position</p> <p><u>b.</u> Include all the positions the developed your communication, management, and sales skills. Provide examples of techniques and impact.</p> <p><u>c.</u> Demonstrate your <i>work ethic</i> and how that will translate to ABC</p> <p><u>d.</u> Give examples that show you to be <i>motivated, engaged, and optimistic</i></p>
4). Describe a difficult situation with a co-worker or client? How did you handle it?	<p><u>a.</u> With this question and all the rest, the ideal answer should use the <i>STAR</i> technique. Give a specific example of a situation, describe the action you took, and finish with the outcome.</p> <p><u>b.</u> This question is important for managers at ABC because they will be managing employees and negotiating with clients.</p> <p><u>c.</u> Ideally, talk about what happened, be specific, and describe how you addressed it.</p> <p><u>d.</u> For example, if you had an employee or client disagree with you, describe the situation, your actions, and the outcome.</p>
5). When you worked on multiple projects how did you prioritize?	<p><u>a.</u> Time management is a critical skill for managers, so ABC is likely to ask a question like this</p> <p><u>b.</u> The ideal answer includes a specific situation that stresses your ability to <i>multi-task and develop an action plan to achieve a goal</i>.</p>
6). Tell me about how you worked effectively under pressure.	<p><u>a.</u> Management involves <i>deadlines and meeting goals</i>, both of which can be stressful</p> <p><u>b.</u> The ideal answer should use an example to show how they positively dealt with stress and turned it into a solution that was timely and effective, with the candidate remaining calm and level-headed.</p>

With regard to satisfaction with the exercise, 87% and 90% of the statements indicated students from IHRM and MC respectively were “satisfied” with the exercise. In addition, some statements (IHRM = 92%; MC = 85%) indicated that the exercise influenced or ‘could affect’ students’ employment prospects. A sample of team evaluations is shown in Table 7.

Table 7 (Study 1)
Additional Student Comments on the Value of the Exercise

Position	Team Evaluation
<i>Staff accountant</i>	<p>“This project was interesting . . . We were able to pull from our real-life jobs and implement those skills for this project. . . It allowed for us to gain more insight on what we were doing and be able to experience that for ourselves firsthand, with creating the skills and resume for the candidate for the position we chose.”</p> <p>“Throughout this project, we learned how to properly assess/screen a candidate, what to look for on a resume, how to determine what skills are best suited for positions and to determine if a candidate can do the job, especially since 80% of turnover is due to bad hiring. ”</p>
<i>Financial analyst</i>	<p>“Some challenges that arose when creating this project would include finding the criteria that a company would be looking for to correctly identify and differentiate a good Financial Analyst from a great one. This included finding what job competencies are important . . . , as well as highlighting basic knowledge of finance that needs to be obtained to perform the job well. Also, looking at the behavioral questions, it was challenging trying to come up with appropriate questions that would correctly identify if the candidate was knowledgeable in global financial analysis, but also if he or she would fit in well with the culture of the company.”</p> <p>“After conducting this project, a key takeaway was the full understanding of the various factors of the employee hiring process. Because we are graduating seniors who have participated in a variety of interviews, this project proved to us the challenges, details, and longevity of an employment process from the business side, rather than as a consumer. It is clear that the hiring process is very complex, but this project gave us a better idea of what to expect and how to prepare for our careers.”</p>
<i>Sales Representative</i>	<p>“This part was definitely challenging because we needed these questions and criteria to really let us know who the candidates were, how they would act in certain situations, how they behaved around others or certain clients, or even how their brain worked in certain situations.”</p> <p>“Our thought process behind these questions was that we looked for questions that would separate the candidate and the job application process. So, we had to come up with questions that would not be intrusive or too personal, but also would help the employer (us) gauge the person behind the resume.”</p>

Study 2

As shown in Table 2, most students matched information to be included in the resume (i.e., KSAOs) with information listed on the job descriptions (TDRs). Table 8 shows a sample submission of a student. KSAOs related to paid, unpaid, and educational work settings. For the SHRM course (n = 26), forty-four percent identified KSAOs and TDRs and accurately matched the KSAOs to TDRs while thirty-two were able to identify KSAOs and TDRs but partially match them. Fifteen percent could only identify either KSAOs or TDRs but not match them, and six percent could neither identify nor match the KSAOs and TDRs.

TABLE 8
Identification of KSAO (STUDY 2)

Specific skills (software, statistics, social media, foreign language)	Related paid work	Related unpaid work, nonprofits, clubs, etc.)	Learned or exhibited in school or training, including degree/certifications Major/minor
Knowledge	Knowledge of OpenTable Restaurant Management system, Knowledge of planning and organizing professional events	Management knowledge through role as president of AMA and VP of Scholarships and Awards of Delta Sigma Pi- ability to organize many aspects of running and managing a group of people	Marketing and Political Economy knowledge about the economic system and strategies to implement and promote products into certain markets.
Skills	Cision, Excel, PowerPoint,	Communication and email skills, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook marketing	Marketing major, Political Economy minor, President of AMA at XXXX, VP of Scholarships and Awards at Delta Sigma Pi, xxxx Scholar, Co-Founder of Charitable initiative, Junior advisor for Symphony Advisors
Attitude	Positive, enthusiastic, and determined to complete a job well	Positive, enthusiastic, and passionate about the work and leading people to success	Hard-working, dedicated, and a team player. Has a positive ability to juggle multiple responsibilities while completing each one to its fullest.

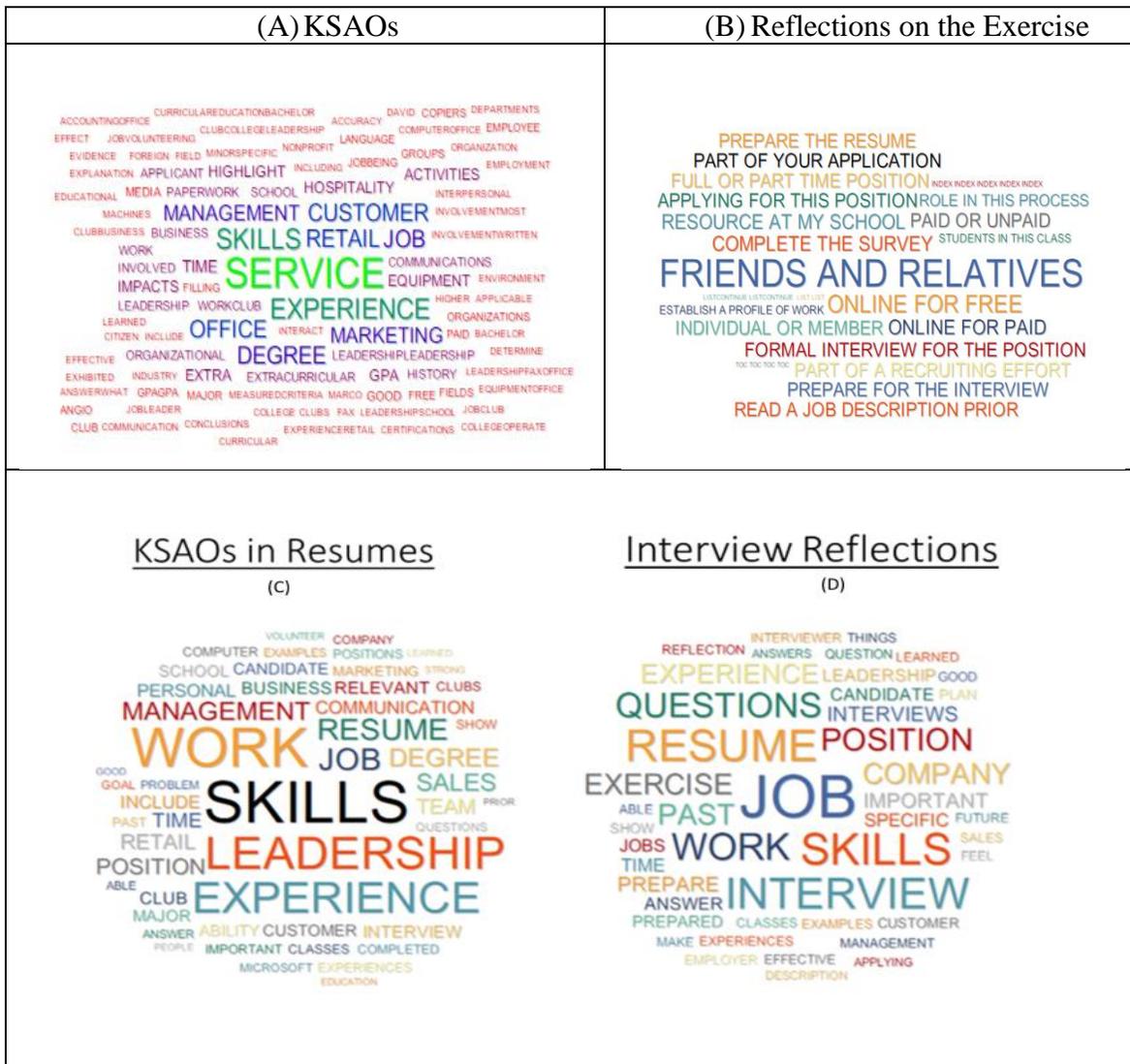
Work experience			
Knowledge	Hostess, Sales Associate, Account Intern at PR agency, Brand Ambassador	President of AMA at XXXX, VP of Scholarship and awards Delta Sigma Pi, Former VP of Social Media AMA at xx	Synfny Advisors through Office of Experiential Learning at xxxx, Dewey's Marketing contest finalist-Marketing 300
Skills	OpenTable Restaurant Management System, Cision	Public speaking, Email etiquette, research, and data collection	Excel, PowerPoint, Google Drive, Microsoft Word,
Attitude	Positive and enthusiastic	Positive and Enthusiastic	Positive and enthusiastic
Education			
Level, GPA, and degree			xxxx High School Class of 2018- GPA:4.3 xxxx - Marketing major, Political Economy minor- GPA: 3.4
Personal Qualities			
Book Smarts	High	High	Medium
Street Smarts	High	High	High

xxxx represent the identifiable confidential information that was deleted.

Overall, 87% of the students completed Part A effectively. In the MC2 course, a similar pattern emerged. Fifty percent of the students were able to identify KSAOs and TDRs and accurately matched them while thirty-nine percent identified the KSAOs and TDRs but partially matched them. The rest could only identify either the KSAOs or TDRs but not match them. In sum, about eighty-nine percent of the students were able to complete Part 1 effectively. Figure 1a shows the keywords in the resumes they prepared to match the job ad.

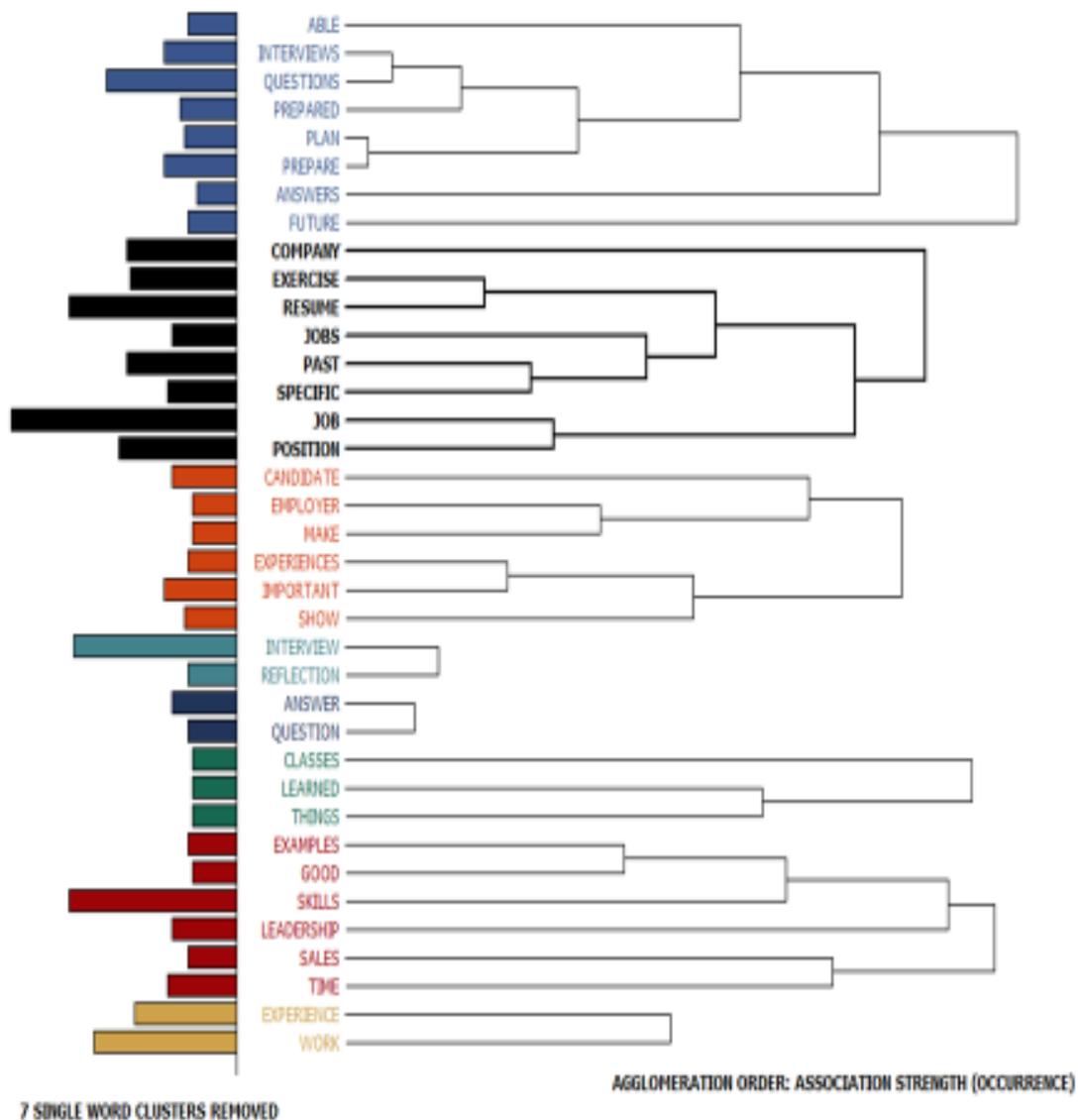
With regard to the screening and behavioral questions (Part B), seventy-one percent of the questions in the IHRM course were accurate, while seventeen were not. As shown in Table 2, about 88% of the questions were consistent with the technique while 12% were not. In the MC course, about 95% of the questions were consistent with the technique while 5% were not consistent. Further, as an alternative way of understanding this data, the dendrogram shows the keywords that were extracted (see Figure 2). The dendrogram shows the clusters of terms students used in the evaluative essays.

Figure 1
A Map of KSAOs and Value of Exercise in Reflections of Students



Content analysis of the evaluative essays (Part C) also showed that 96% and 97% of the comments indicated positive valuation of the exercise in the SHRM and MC2 courses respectively (see Table 3). A high percentage of the statements (88% and 93%) reported that students from the SHRM and MC2 courses respectively had “learned” from the exercise. Recommendations for continuing the exercise were also high: 93% and 95% respectively. With regard to satisfaction with the exercise, 95% and 85% of the statements indicated students from SHRM and MC2 respectively were “satisfied” with the exercise. Lastly, some statements (SHRM = 89%; MC2 = 88%) indicated that the exercise influenced or ‘could affect’ students employment prospects. Figure 1d is a map of terms used by students. The bigger the word, the more frequent the term. The students valued the exercises by highlighting service, experience, and other skills - most frequently mentioned KSAOs.

Figure 2
Dendrogram of Keywords Extracted



Discussion

We sought to prepare students for jobs by engaging them in an experiential exercise that required them to assume the role of recruiters who are interested in specific KSAOs elicited in a job ad and to develop questions they would ask potential candidates. The purpose of the two studies was to enable students to acquire two major competencies – KSAO determination and the ability to generate interview questions that a recruiter might ask to see if a candidate had the competencies required for the job. We found that students identified the tasks, duties, and responsibilities (TDRs) in the job description and matched them with the competency information of a resume (KSAOs). For example, one student identified “leadership skills and/or management experience; ability to

work in teams/ with other people and intrapersonal skills; retail/Sales or customer service experience, and willing to relocate and have a flexible schedule” which are consistent with the KSAOs expected in the job ad.

In addition, student groups generated lists of questions for interviews, noting the importance of experience, supporting claims with specific data, statistics, exemplars, and testimonies. For example, two students’ questions were “Tell me about a time you made a significant mistake and had to admit it to your supervisor or peers” and “How do you manage stress among your team members?” To the extent that students outline how they currently manage stress, they will likely be able to manage stress in the future, and therefore might be a good candidate for a stressful environment. They also indicated that, as recruiters, they found job experience to be weighted more heavily than academic experience, highlighting the value of reporting the management responsibilities and positive outcomes of their paid and volunteer jobs.

Another finding relates to the effectiveness of experiential learning principles. Consistent with Liu and Olsen (2011, 15) who observe that “student learning is enhanced when instructors integrate challenging organization problems into assignments that give students opportunities to see the market by being in the shoes of the executive”, students indicated that the exercise was beneficial. A team’s observation below illustrates that effect:

Overall, we thought that the project was extremely useful and could be an important experience for our future. Whether we are creating a new resume, going in for an interview, or if we encounter future problems in the workplace, we felt that this process of creating questions and analyzing candidates would be very helpful. We also researched other similar jobs, and it gave us a base for what we needed to include, so we were also able to research and learn about other tasks. With the various tasks that are included in the job description such as preparing sales analysis and reports, working with different customers, markets, and regions, preparing statistical reports, executes (sic) any special project, and assures (sic) that good communication and coordination is established at all levels, the questions above would reveal different skills, qualities, and character traits that the candidate embodies. Each of the sections helps the employer to find the best possible candidate for the sales entry-level (equipment) position.

Through this exercise, students learned the knowledge and skills related to the competencies of KSAO identification and behavioral interviewing. Specifically, the exercise helped them to see career communication and competencies from the recruiter’s point of view, improving their ability to create relevant resumes and to anticipate and prepare for interviews by predicting what questions might be asked in the interview, based on their analysis of the job description. Our findings indicate it can improve job applicants’ prospects, leading to greater success in securing internships, co-ops, and full-time jobs. This point was emphasized in students’ positive evaluations of the exercise. One student noted that “*this experience was very enlightening and provided me with very useful and beneficial articles, assignments, and videos to help better prepare me for the future. In the past, I never really prepared for job interviews, asked any questions, and never tailored my resume to a specific position.*” Another observed that “*this*

experience was one of the most useful assignments I have ever had to do at this University because of how important and helpful it was.”

Recommendations

Given what we learned from this exercise we recommend that instructors who are interested in using it consider a few points. We found that this exercise works best with classes of 15-35 students, as each team or individual needs time to share its perspective in class. The value of the exercise lies in prioritizing students’ shared learning and then having the instructor relate it to issues of immediate importance such as securing internships, co-ops, and full-time work. We also recommend controlled conditions. As we discuss below, some constraints are uncontrollable.

Challenges

We encountered a few constraints in the two studies. In Study 1, it was an endogenous event that delayed submissions of KSAOs and behavioral questions. We addressed this by extending the deadlines. In Study 2, COVID-19 was the major exogenous factor that constrained the conduct of the study. The mode of instruction shifted from face-to-face to remote learning. As a result, contact with students became virtual instead of in person. The semester was also extended by two weeks. As a result, the original deadline for the submission of reports was extended. A third constraint was the course differences. While MC courses focus on audience-centered communication, IHRM and SHRM courses focus on the ability to manage the competencies of employees. We recommend future researchers highlight the goals of the particular course to ensure the effectiveness of the exercise. A pure experiment would need to control for this difference in the future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we sought to prepare students for their careers by asking them to assume the role of a recruiter. We were confident that through the role-reversal exercise students would learn KSAOs that employers look for and will prepare their resumes accordingly when they apply for jobs. We also expected students to learn behavioral questions such that they could anticipate questions employers might ask them when they apply for jobs. These competencies are important for career readiness. The students confirmed this in their reflections on the exercise. Therefore, we encourage instructors who are interested in the career readiness of their students to consider this experiential exercise.

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Appendix A

Role Description

Assignment on the logic of role reversal. You will be using the job description below as a vehicle for analyzing how to evaluate a resume, create questions for an interview, and develop criteria for effective answers. You are to individually assess 1) what information ideal candidates would provide on a resume for a specific job description and 2) what interview questions or answers would help reveal which candidates best met the criteria listed in the job description. What evidence would they use? What organizational impacts might they highlight?

Exercise Instructions

Read the job description below, modified from an actual ad, analyze it as if you were a recruiter, and create a list of the types of specific information ideal candidates would include on a resume that would prove they had met the criteria for the job. To prepare, read the information on the resume chapter in Career Strategies and the online article on how to respond to a job advertisement. After viewing the materials on job interviewing in Career Strategies, indicate how ideal candidates might, in response to your questions, prove that they meet the job criteria. What kinds of skills and behaviors would they highlight?

Read the job descriptions on O*Net (<https://www.onetonline.org/>), modified from actual ads (See link in Appendix 1): Create a list of the types of information ideal candidates would include on a resume that would prove they had met the criteria for the job.

Part A

Write down the most important qualifications in the first column of the matrix below and then fill in, as appropriate, columns, 2-4, as preparation for analyzing a resume and composing questions for an interview. Your analysis should state what should be included on a resume that would meet the specific requirements listed in the job description. Include resume information and questions that specifically reveal the relevance of an applicant's education, specific business, software, foreign language and digital media skills, work and volunteer experience, and extra-curricular activities to what ABC indicates it desires in an ideal candidate.

Part B

Formulate a set of interview questions that would allow ABC interviewers to determine which candidates best meet the stated criteria for the job. Indicate how ideal candidates might, in response to your questions, prove that they meet the job criteria. What kinds of skills and behaviors would they highlight?

Part C

Reflection, Discussion, and Debriefing:

1. In the final stage of the exercise, the activity leader and the participants discuss what they learned from the activity and work to develop a set of conclusions.
2. Individually, write a reflective essay about your experience in doing this exercise. In particular, ensure that you address the following two questions:
 - Based on your experience with this exercise, do you plan to change the way you prepare resumes for specific job applications? If so, indicate how, contrasting your planned approach to how you previously prepared resumes for jobs for which you applied.
 - Based on your experience with this exercise, do you plan to prepare differently for job interviews for specific jobs? If so, indicate how, contrasting your planned approach to previous ways you prepared for interviews for jobs for which you applied.

You will subsequently share your answers with others in the class.