Why education matters to employers: a vignette study in Italy, England and the Netherlands

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Appendix A. Three vacancies for three types of job

Database Administrator
Work on the design, installation, configuration and maintenance of a number of databases within internal and hosted systems, independently or in teams. Proactively monitor performance and optimize security, back-up and recovery procedures to provide high availability service and ensure that databases are secure and operational. Advise clients with regard to their database infrastructures and provide them with on-call support and troubleshooting assistance.

Software engineer
Work in a team on the design, development and maintenance of software applications and operating systems, translating clients’ problems into customized and innovative technical solutions. Solve software-related issues in accordance with the demands of clients, including further maintenance and support of the software at the client’s site. Report to the project leader on an on-going basis. Discuss functional requirements and update existing documentation for clients and suppliers.

IT Business Consultant
Work at the interface between Business and IT and show a thorough understanding of business processes. Analyse business processes together with clients, identify specific needs and translate these into feasible, innovative technical solutions. Give clients advice on complex issues including enterprise content management, business intelligence and custom systems development.
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Appendix B. Questionnaire for employers.

Selection of Personnel for ICT Jobs: an online survey

The University of Amsterdam has developed an online survey into the selection of candidates for ICT jobs, as part of a research project on labour market entry in several European countries. The survey is being administered to a sample of organizations that regularly hire candidates for ICT jobs. We kindly ask you to participate in this survey, which consists of two parts:

A) A simulation of a selection process
B) A set of questions concerning your experience in personnel selection

Your participation is completely voluntary. It will take approximately 30 minutes to complete the survey. We assure you that the information provided will be handled confidentially. The results of the survey will be sent to you upon request, when available.

Reminder: This survey is meant for those who are involved in the recruitment and selection of ICT personnel. The focus of this survey lies solely on external recruitment. Internal recruitment and promotions are not taken into consideration.

PART A - Simulation of a selection process

You will now take part in the simulation of a selection process. Please indicate the job position you are most familiar with (i.e. the position for which you have selected the highest number of candidates or the position that is available in your organization).

- Database Administrator
- Software Engineer
- IT Business Consultant

A1. The vacancy: job description

Imagine you are required to hire a ________ for your organization. Please read the following job description carefully. (The job description is shown.)
A2. Screening of résumés

In a moment you will compare résumés of candidates who have applied for a job position as___________.
In each résumé, demographic characteristics, educational background, job history, and extra-curricular activities of the candidates are listed. You can find a more detailed description by moving the cursor over the résumé.

Please indicate for each résumé the likelihood that:

a) You would hire the candidate
b) If hired, the candidate would be easy to train
c) If hired, the candidate would fit well with the corporate culture of your organization

Give your answers on a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 corresponds to the least likely option and 100 to the most likely one. You may rate the vignettes in any order and change any of your ratings at any time.

A3. Invitation to a job interview

Your screening of résumés generated the following shortlist of five candidates. Please rank these candidates in order of preference with regard to who you would invite to a job interview. Assign 1 to the candidate you would invite first, 2 to the candidate you would invite second, and so on until 5.

PART B1 – Your experience in personnel selection

How similar is this job description to the one used by your organization for a (type of vacancy chosen)?
Highly similar
Similar
Somewhat similar
Somewhat dissimilar
Very dissimilar
Not at all similar
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The following list shows pairs of personal characteristics of a candidate. Please choose the three pairs that best reflect the corporate culture of your organization.

Flexible, dynamic
Enterprising, a self-starter
Creative, innovative
Analytical, attentive to detail
Result-oriented, committed
Dependable, having a good reputation
Decisive, taking individual responsibility
Customer-oriented, obliging
Risk-taking, willing to experiment
Rule-oriented, organized
Informal, easy-going
Competitive, ambitious

(Only in England)
How difficult is to monitor the performance and output of an entry-level (type of vacancy)? Please give your answer on a scale from 1 (very easy) to 7 (very difficult).

(Only in England)
To what extent would the skills learned in your company by an entry-level (type of vacancy) be useful in another company? Please give your answer on a scale from 1 (not at all useful) to 7 (very useful).

To what extent the following characteristics of job applicants were important for your decision during the hiring simulation? Please give your answers on a scale ranging from 1 (not at all important) to 7 (extremely important).

Gender
Years since leaving formal education
Work experience
Internship
Level of education
Degree
Duration of study
Average exam result
Membership in the board of a school committee
With regard to the most recently filled vacancy for a (type of vacancy) in your organization, please indicate:

The minimum level of education required: ……..
Any other diploma or skills required:

Amongst the characteristics of the selected candidate, which were crucial for the hiring decision? (Max. three answers possible)

Level of education
Specific field of study
General work experience
Specific work experience (e.g. internship in the organization)
Information obtained through your professional network
Outcome of intelligence tests, or attitudinal tests
Personal traits of the candidate (such as outdoor appearance, social skills, manners)
Other, please specify

What is the amount of initial training needed, on average, by an entry-level (type of vacancy) with a relevant educational background to meet the job demands? Choose one of the following answers:

The candidate:
Is already properly trained
Needs up to a month of training
Needs from one to three months of training
Needs from three to six months of training
Needs more than six months of training and up to a year
Needs more than a year of training

Over the past 12 months, has your organization paid for any training course (provided either internally or externally) for a (type of vacancy)?

Yes, internally provided
Yes, externally provided
Yes, both internally and externally provided
No
If you could get only very limited information about applying candidates for a (type of vacancy) position, what would be the 3 most useful pieces of information to have?

On-the-job conduct (absenteeism, trustworthiness)  
Educational background, additional certificates and extra-curricular activities  
Personality traits and attitudinal test scores  
Previous work experience  
Social connections and network resources

When examining the résumés of candidates who apply for a (type of vacancy) position, you interpret their educational background as an indication of:

Good job performance  
Possession of job-specific skills  
Possession of general skills, such as problem-solving skills and analytical competencies  
Technical ability, signalled by the reputation of the school  
Capacity to learn quickly  
Capacity to undergo training effectively  
Trustworthiness, signalled by the reputation of the school  
Fit with the corporate culture  
Commitment to meet deadlines, time-management skills and work ethics  
Team-player skills and capacity to handle communications situations  
Other, please specify:

In the evaluation of a job application, some of the characteristics of a candidate may be particularly negative. On the basis of such characteristics, you may conclude that the candidate is unsuitable for the job. When hiring a (type of vacancy), to what extent would you reject or hire a candidate on the basis of each of the following characteristics? Please give your answers on a scale ranging from 1 (you would reject the candidate) to 7 (you would hire the candidate).

Bad grades  
School drop-out before degree completion  
Irrelevant type of degree  
Insufficient educational level  
Intermittent or longer than expected educational trajectory  
Lack of fit with the organizational values  
Irregular job history (frequent job interruptions, job-hopping…)  
Lack of work experience  
Irrelevant work experience  
Personality traits not in line with the job demands
Part B2 – Background information

Gender
Male
Female

Age ............
Educational background (highest completed level of education) ...............
Years of tenure within the organization where you are currently employed ............
Years of experience in selecting personnel ............

Position within the organization
Owner
HR manager
Other HR function (e.g. Head of HR department, HR specialist, recruiter, HR assistant etc.)
Operational or technical manager
Commercial or marketing manager
Training manager
Director ICT department
CIO/CEO
Other, please specify

Company size, defined by number of employees
10 to 49
50 to 99
100 to 249
250 to 499
More than 500

Does your company consist of more than one establishment?
Yes
No

Is your company part of a multinational organization?
Yes, and the parent company located in (insert country)
No
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When was the last time you hired a (type of vacancy)?

In (insert year)
I never hired for this position
I don't know

Which of the following recruitment methods are used by your organization? Check any that apply.

Newspaper advertisements
Posting online ads on job boards
Online networks (LinkedIn, Facebook, etc.)
Referrals from incumbent employees
Referrals from professional contacts
Mediation from employment agencies
Graduate placement schemes, internships
Unsolicited inquiries or walk-ins
Databases and/or career services of school and universities
Open days, participation to job fairs
Other, please specify

Is there a HR Department in your organization?

Yes
No

Which of the following statements apply to the hiring policy of your organization? Check any that apply.

Your organization has set minimum educational requirements for job candidates.
Your organization administers attitudinal and/or ability tests to job candidates as part of the selection process.
Job candidates are invited for more than one interview before receiving a job offer.
Job candidates are interviewed by more than one member of the HR staff.
The hiring policy of your organization is strictly formalized.
New hires are subjected to a probationary period upon entry into your organization.
The performance of new hires is periodically monitored and assessed.
If performance criteria are not met, the contract is terminated.
To what extent do you consider the employment protection legislation currently in force as a constraint on your hiring choices? Please give your answer on a scale from 1 (not at all constraining) to 7 (very constraining).

Do you have any stable collaborations, links or partnerships with educational institutes? If yes, at which level of the educational offer?