

# The Flip Side of Recruitment: Allowing Job Candidates to View Current Employees' Resumes

Dr. James G. Pesek, Management, Clarion University  
Mr. William E. Fulmer, Management, Clarion University

## Abstract

*Providing job candidates the opportunity to view the resumes of potential supervisors, subordinates, and co-workers is discussed in this paper. Data collected from a sample of members of the Society for Human Resource Management are also analyzed. Of particular note is the finding that the respondents are more interested in viewing the resumes of potential subordinates than viewing the resumes of potential co-workers.*

## Introduction

Over 15 years ago John Wanous turned the focus of recruiting 90 degrees (Wanous, 1973). Instead of examining recruitment of new employees from the perspective of presenting the organization in the most favorable light, Wanous recommended providing recruits with realistic job previews (RJPs). This change in focus away from the organization itself to the expectations of those being recruited has received little further modification. In tight labor markets the trend has seemed to forego RJPs and return to exaggerating the benefits of joining the organization. If the redirection initiated by Wanous was continued another 90 degrees, recruiters would then be focusing on applicants rather than on their own organizations. Providing realistic job previews may well be insufficient. Other glimpses into the organization might provide possible recruits with better decision making information and enhance the likelihood of their choosing the correct jobs.

While there may be several instrumental means of providing job applicants with organizational insights, such as through examples of career paths and historical promotions and progression tables, this paper has selected only one--the providing of applicants with the opportunity to view the resumes of potential supervisors, co-workers, and subordinates. The logical basis for such a process is that the job applicant who understands the backgrounds of potential colleagues, superiors and subordinates will make a better decision in assessing the match between himself/ herself and the organization.

Would job seekers want to examine the resumes of potential co-workers, superiors and subordinates? Would organizations be willing to provide such information? How important do employers feel that such information would be to job applicants? In this study a group of human resource managers were surveyed to answer these and other questions. The managers were asked to consider the value of such job-related information first as job-seekers, and then as employers.

## Literature Review

For the most part, the literature appears to be nonexistent on the issue of viewing potential co-workers, supervisors, and subordinates resumes. Albeit a number of job search studies recognize the importance of providing job candidates as much information as possible about the job and the organization. In an article dealing with college recruiting, Kolenko (1988) advises that job applicants should engage in a careful and systematic assessment of each potential employer to make a realistic job choice. Yet, this may be difficult if organizations are less than willing to provide job applicants access to important pieces of information (Greenhaus, 1987). Wanous (1980) also cites the importance of information noting that job searchers need good and accurate information, both negative and positive, to make effective job decisions.

Some organizations go to great lengths to obtain as

much information about the candidate as is feasible through a series of interviews, reference checks, tests, and visits to the organization (Gilmore & Ferris, 1986). As other researchers have noted, considerable research has been directed toward understanding the decision-making of the interviewers (Schmidt, 1976; Avery & Campion, 1982; Hakel, 1982; Gilmore & Ferris, 1986; Harris, 1987), but less is known about the decision-making of the applicant (Gilmore et al, 1988). One study of recruitment methods suggests that job seekers should take a more active role in seeking information about prospective companies (Mangum, 1982).

Since applicants appear to find job incumbents as more credible sources of job information than full-time recruiters (Fisher et al, 1979), it may behoove an organization to provide the resumes of its employees to job seekers. Some researchers have concluded that realism of job information received by applicants contributes to recruiting effectiveness (Taylor and Schmidt, 1983). Knowing the backgrounds and experiences of members of the organization with whom the job seeker would be working could enhance that realism. Job choice decisions are typically based on a multitude of factors, the most important of which appear to be pay, type of work performed, and benefits (Dyer et al, 1978; Feldman and Arnold, 1978; Jurgensen, 1978). Additionally, job candidates may also be influenced by other factors, such as job security, location, promotion policies, and working conditions (Soelberg, 1967; Scarpello and Campbell, 1983). Certainly, the attractiveness of the organization to a job candidate may be enhanced if its current employees are of high quality.

Faculty in a university setting probably provide more information about their backgrounds than other occupations. For example, college catalogs typically list faculty by department, degree, rank, and year of appointment. Others go even further and provide journal publication lists of their faculty members to the candidate and "slick" brochures that they use to market their programs and organization.

Based on their review of a number of recruitment studies, Rynes et al (1980) suggest that the applicant views treatment received during the recruitment process as indicative of the degree of organizational interest in ultimately extending an offer of employment. Given that job searching is costly, job candidates are more likely to direct their search efforts toward those organizations where they perceive the highest probabilities of success (Alderfer & McCord, 1970; Schmitt & Coyle, 1976). Allowing job candidates to view the resumes of current employees may impress upon the candidates that this organization is very serious about them and perhaps

even quite proud of its current group of employees. Hence, the organization is able to create a positive, human resources-oriented image.

Rynes et al (1980) further state that a second reason why recruiting activities are likely to influence job applicants is the difficulty of obtaining accurate information about certain types of attributes prior to actual employment. Insufficient information may cause the applicant to use recruitment experiences to make references regarding important, but unknowable variables (Thronson & Thomas, 1968; Glueck, 1973). As a result, recruiter preparation and pleasantness may become proxies for ascertaining the competency level of the typical employee (Rynes et al, 1980).

It is difficult to find any article or study that has explicitly dealt with the provision of resume information to job seekers. Providing such information to employees for the purpose of effective career development and charting of career paths has been often recommended (McRae, 1985). To apply the career development approach to job applicants is clearly breaking new ground. This survey presents some interesting data concerning the perceived acceptance and valuation of resume-viewing by applicants.

## Methodology

Data were collected through the use of a three page questionnaire. The questionnaire enabled the researchers to gather general background information about each respondent and his/her current employing organization, including the following: the organization's major line of business, number of employees, geographic location, job title, years of experience in present occupation, age, educational background, and sex. In addition, respondents were asked to assume that they were job candidates and to indicate how important it is to have an opportunity to view potential co-workers' resumes and potential supervisors' resumes in making a decision on whether or not to accept a job offer from a particular organization. A 7-point Likert-type scale was used ranging from unimportant to very important. Respondents were also asked how important it is to them to have an opportunity to view their potential subordinates' resumes if they were applying for a managerial/supervisory position.

Other questions requested the respondents to indicate if they had personally been interviewed for a new job during the past two years and if any organization had permitted them to view the resumes of its current employees. Moreover, they were asked if their current organizations allowed job candidates to view the re-

sumes of any employees currently working for their organization. Finally, the respondents were asked if they had any objections to job candidates viewing their own resumes. A cover letter was included with the questionnaire identifying the purpose of the study and requesting the reader's participation.

A random sample of 470 members of the Society for Human Resource Management was used for this study. The sample was not stratified by industry nor location nor any other factor. A self-addressed, stamped envelope, which was included in the mailing, contributed to an overall response rate of 28.5%. Of the 134 questionnaires that were returned, only 3 were deemed unusable and, therefore, discarded.

### Analysis of Results

A selected profile of the respondent sample and their current organizations is depicted in Table 1. As depicted in Table 1, the respondent sample was primarily from three major types of businesses: manufacturing, services, and finance, insurance, and real estate. In terms of size, the total number of employees working for each of these organizations was fairly well distributed, with 49.6% of the organizations having 1,000 or more employees. The majority of the organizations were found in the Northeast and the Midwest (63.1%). Over 32% of the sample had earned masters degrees or doctorates. The sample included 75 females or 57.7% of the total. Slightly more than 50% of the sample had 10 years or less experience in their current occupations, although the sample was rather evenly distributed in terms of age.

Utilizing a 7-point scale, with 1 indicating unimportant, 4 indicating moderately important and 7 indicating very important, the respondent's mean rating of the importance of viewing their potential co-workers' resumes was 2.29. Their mean rating of the importance of viewing their potential supervisors' resumes was 2.59. And their mean importance rating of having an opportunity to view their potential subordinates' resumes when applying for supervisory or managerial positions was 3.56. (See Table 2.

Using two-tailed t-tests, the differences between the respondents importance ratings for viewing co-workers', supervisors' and subordinates' resumes were tested. The results, found in Table 3, indicated that there was a statistically significant difference ( $p \leq .01$ ) between the respondents importance ratings for viewing co-workers' resumes and subordinates' resumes. In brief, this means that respondents' are more interested in viewing the resumes of potential subordinates (when applying for managerial/supervisory positions) than viewing the

resumes of potential co-workers. Additionally, a statistically significant difference ( $p \leq .01$ ) was found between the respondents' importance ratings for viewing the resumes of supervisors' and subordinates' resumes. The mean difference in importance ratings for viewing co-workers' and supervisors' resumes was statistically significant at the .05 level.

Although the respondent sample was currently employed, 51.9% of the respondents indicated that they had personally interviewed for a new job during the past two years. As expected, none of the organizations that they interviewed with gave them the opportunity to view the resumes of its current employees. Furthermore, only 7 respondents (5.6%) indicated that their current organizations permitted job candidates to view the resumes of current workers.

Finally, 66 respondents, or slightly more than 50% of the respondents, did not have any objections to job candidates viewing their resumes. Cross-tabulations between the respondents' importance ratings and whether or not the respondent had any objections to job candidates viewing their resumes revealed that those with objections to job candidates viewing their resumes were more likely to perceive having an opportunity to view potential co-workers' ( $X^2 = 15.394$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ), supervisors' ( $X^2 = 16.425$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ), and subordinates' ( $X^2 = 8.505$ ,  $p \leq .02$ ) resumes as being less important than those who did not have any objections.

Reasons given by respondents for wanting to view potential subordinates' resumes included the following: (1) it would be an opportunity to see the experience and knowledge base of the team I would be leading; (2) it would be nice to know as much as possible about the people I would have to supervise; (3) it would provide base information to help organize human resources in the department appropriately; (4) it is important for me to evaluate the prospective employee's job progression, breadth of experience, reporting relationships and accomplishments; (5) knowing their background would help me develop a supervisory approach; (6) since my job will be to accomplish results, the qualifications of my potential staff are important; (7) you need all the information you can get while accepting employment; (8) it would not be a comfortable situation if the majority of subordinates possessed superior backgrounds compared to my own level of experience and education; and (9) if team members do not have minimum requirements for the position, they cannot be expected to perform and the manager is doomed to failure.

In general, respondents recognize the interdependence between a supervisor's success and that of his/her

**TABLE 1**  
**SELECTED PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS AND THEIR ORGANIZATIONS**

	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
<b>Major Line of Business:</b>		
Manufacturing	47	36.4
Transportation & Utilities	6	4.7
Wholesale & Retail Trade	9	7.0
Finance, Insurance & Real Estate	22	17.1
Services	39	30.2
Government	4	3.1
Construction	2	1.6
Missing	2	---
<b>Number of Employees:</b>		
1 - 99	14	11.1
100 - 249	22	17.5
250 - 499	25	19.8
500 - 999	15	11.9
1,000 - 9,999	42	33.3
10,000 +	8	6.3
Missing	5	---
<b>Facility Location:</b>		
Northeast	32	24.6
Northwest	11	8.5
Southeast	18	13.8
Southwest	19	14.6
Midwest	50	38.5
Missing	1	----
<b>Job Title:</b>		
Personnel/Labor Relations	112	86.8
Other Professional	17	13.2
Missing	2	----
	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
<b>Education--Highest Degree:</b>		
High School Diploma	13	9.9
Associates Degree	7	5.3
Bachelors Degree	68	51.9
Masters Degree	36	27.5
Doctorate	7	5.3
<b>Sex:</b>		
Male	55	42.3
Female	75	57.7
Missing	1	----
<b>Number of Years of Experience in Present Occupation:</b>		
1 - 10 years	70	53.4
11 + years	61	46.6
<b>Age:</b>		
22 - 35 years	41	32.3
36 - 44 years	44	34.6
45 + years	42	33.1
Missing	4	----

**TABLE 2**  
**IMPORTANCE OF VIEWING RESUMES**  
**MEAN RATINGS**

Variables	Means	s.d.	n
Co-workers' Resumes	2.29	1.64	131
Supervisors' Resumes	2.59	1.87	131
Subordinates' Resumes	3.56	2.02	127

**TABLE 3**  
**RESULTS OF t-TEST FOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEAN IMPORTANCE RATINGS**

Variables	Mean	Standard Difference Score	Error of Mean	Computed T-Value
Subordinates - Co-workers	1.31	0.189	0.189	6.91 <sup>a</sup>
Subordinates - Supervisors	0.94	0.181	0.181	5.22 <sup>a</sup>
Supervisors - Co-workers	0.30	0.128	0.128	2.33 <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>  $p < .01$

<sup>b</sup>  $p < .05$

subordinates'. This was noted by Davis and Webster (1968) in the specific case of salespersons.

On the other hand, some respondents felt that viewing the resumes of potential subordinates was unimportant for one of the following reasons: (1) not appropriate; (2) prefer to let them show their stuff based on their performance; (3) can fire unproductive workers; (4) resumes are often vague; and (5) employee evaluations and personnel files would shed a better light on the quality of the workers.

Those respondents having objections to job candidates viewing their resumes expressed concern that job candidates may not be qualified to correctly assess information provided on resumes. Others objected on one of the following grounds: (1) that it was irrelevant to a candidate; (2) that the candidate should only be interested in the company's performance; (3) it was an invasion of privacy; (4) that their resumes were not recruitment tools; (5) that they were not the person being evaluated; and (6) a "short cut" to obtaining information that should be exchanged during a face-to-face interview.

#### Summary of Findings and Discussion

It appears that those managers who object to having job seekers view internal resumes harbor some suspicions concerning the seekers' uses of the resumes. The prevailing attitude among such managers is that job seekers either lack the qualifications to properly assess the worth of the resumes, or that the material contained in the resumes would be of no value in deciding whether or not to accept a job offer. The work of Wanous and others suggests, however, that this Theory X attitude toward applicants is not effective in recruiting (Wanous, 1980). Instead, the Theory Y attitude should prevail, wherein it is assumed that job seekers are not only interested but competent in using resume information in making job decisions. One-half the managers surveyed appear to support this approach. Clearly, since resume-viewing by applicants is a new concept, and since only about one-half of the surveyed human resource managers concur, implementation of the concept may well receive some resistance.

A common form of resistance was evidenced when some respondents objected to the disclosure of their resumes because they view it as an invasion of their privacy and, perhaps, illegal. Sovereign (1984) believes that it is logical for job incumbents to assume that, first, information about employees is confidential,

and second, the employer has an obligation not to disclose it to third parties. However, he firmly declares that both assumptions are wrong. According to Cort v. Bristol-Myers (1982), personnel records are not confidential but are the property of the employer to be used at his/her discretion.

In fact, there is no comprehensive federal regulation for the private sector to require employers to disclose employee information to anyone. Though, federal government employees are protected by the Privacy Act of 1974. The act prohibits the disclosure of information to third persons without the written consent of the employee to whom the information pertains (Sovereign, 1984). Additionally, some states, such as Indiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota and Ohio, have enacted privacy acts for state and local government employees. And other states have passed legislation that place certain limitations on private sector employers disclosing employee information to third parties (Sovereign, 1984). Yet, most employers would be free to permit job candidates to view the resumes of current employees if they so desired. Of course, the resume should be restricted to educational background, work experience, and other job-related information. In the case of a university or college faculty position, the publications and scholarly activity record of the current faculty would be part of the standard information found on their resumes. In any event, resumes should not include non-relevant information such as race, sex, age, religion, handicap, or strictly personal performance appraisal results. Even where the employer may have a legal concern, he/she can avoid any problems by obtaining from each employee his/her permission to allow job applicants to view his/her resume.

Perhaps the hesitation in revealing resume information expressed by some respondents reflects a concern that such information might unveil unlawful selection practices. Human resource managers are particularly alert to perceived inequities in job status as a result of emphasis on equal employment opportunity and affirmative action case law. If it is feared that some individuals within the organization are structurally misplaced (e.g. a supervisor who lacks minimum educational requirements for that position, or a subordinate whose experience exceeds that of the supervisor) then court action might result. Those respondents who fear this possibility might be aware of some inequities within their own organizations. Certainly, if inequities do exist they must be expurgated prior to implementation of resume-viewing. Not only might such inequities be actionable, but they would discourage job acceptance by applicants who are sensitive to such matters (particularly women and minorities).

Should viewing resumes replace interviews with potential co-workers and subordinates? No, of course not. Interviews may be useful for obtaining other types of information that cannot be ascertained from a resume, such as type of organizational climate, attitudes, and employee morale. Nor does every applicant that is seriously considered for a job need to examine job incumbent resumes. Clearly, it would be more applicable to those seeking professional, white collar or managerial positions than those seeking entry-level sales, clerical, and service positions or traditional blue collar jobs.

Some job seekers are already requesting that organizations provide them with the resumes of current employees. During a recent search for a Dean of a College of Business for a small state university one of the finalists made a direct request to see the resumes of the faculty. Since attaining the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) accreditation was a goal that the candidate would have to work towards, he wanted to do his own analysis of the present situation at that college and make a judgment as to whether or not achieving AACSB accreditation was an attainable goal. By reviewing the resumes of the current faculty the candidate could evaluate how active the faculty were in terms of research and publications, one of a number of critical factors for achieving AACSB accreditation.

There are numerous other benefits that resume-viewing offers to job seekers. These include enabling the candidate to improve his/her negotiating position, especially if he/she views himself/herself as being more valuable (qualified) than the current group of employees. And like a realistic job preview (Wanous, 1980), viewing the resumes of potential co-workers, subordinates, or supervisors may function as a "screening device" to help candidates decide for themselves on their organizational choices. They may be better able to predict advancement opportunities, social compatibility, and potential conflicts.

Future research may entail job seekers, in particular those receiving job offers, actually viewing resumes of current job holders and subsequently responding to a series of questions on whether or not this information was viewed favorably or unfavorably. Their ratings could then be correlated against which jobs were accepted and which were rejected. Additional research might include the viewing by applicants of career path charts and historical progression tables along with resumes, again with correlations to acceptance/rejection of job offers. The hypothesis for future research should resemble that by Wanous; that realistic information

about potential colleagues, superiors and subordinates may not positively affect the number of job acceptances, but that it will effectively increase the satisfaction and employment longevity of those who do accept the jobs.

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