

# IMPROVING EMPLOYEE SELECTION WITH A REVISED RESUME FORMAT

Edward W. Wright

Theresa A. Domagalski

*Western Carolina University*

Ronald Collins

*Mars Hill College*

*This study investigates the acceptance of a prototype resume that includes candidate personality assessment information. Data were obtained from hiring managers and human resource professionals in regional chapters of the Society for Human Resource Management. Respondents found the new content useful and that the new information added value when compared with a traditional resume. This study suggests the possibility of improving the effectiveness of candidate screening and selection with the inclusion of such data in a standard resume and may be useful for instructing new business school graduates in the preparation of their professional resumes.*

**Keywords:** *resumes; personality assessment; hiring practices; candidate selection; emotional intelligence*

THE EMPLOYEE SELECTION process has become a sophisticated endeavor for many organizations. Numerous screening tools are available and include job applications and resumes, interviews, background and reference checks, personality testing, drug screening, honesty and integrity tests, and a host of other procedures. Fundamental to this process is the professional resume. Its use is ubiquitous with hiring and plays a major role in determining which applicants are invited by employers for additional screening and interviews (Pannone, 1994). Recruiters' perceptions of a candidate's qualifications are an important predictor of employability. It has been suggested that recruiters use resume information to draw conclusions regarding candidates' abilities, motivation, personality, and job fit and to evaluate the

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Address correspondence to Theresa A. Domagalski, College of Business, Western Carolina University, 323 Forsyth, Cullowhee, NC 28723, USA; email: tdomagalski@email.wcu.edu.

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alignment between an applicant's qualifications and the requirements of the position in question (Cole, Rubin, Field, & Giles, 2007; Smart, 2004). However, recruiter inferences in doing so are not altogether reliable (Cole, Field, Giles, & Harris, 2009). Increasingly, recruiters are utilizing personality testing as a component of the recruitment and hiring process (Rothstein & Goffin, 2006).

Based on the importance of the resume in the hiring process and its identified shortcomings by researchers and practitioners, we wondered if the inclusion of personality assessments could add value to its use as a recruitment tool. If so, this information would be of interest to those who teach business communication courses, since they could train students to include the results of valid personality assessments on their resumes. We sought out those most familiar with resume use (i.e., human resource professionals) and explored their opinions and potential acceptance of a revised resume in terms of content and format for recent business school graduates. A pilot study with a convenience sample of 48 human resources and hiring managers provided promising results that led to a resume with revised content. This revised resume then became the focus of a quantitative study of human resource specialists and hiring managers. We reasoned that a revised resume format could facilitate the candidate screening process for hiring managers by providing valuable information related to the personal characteristics of the prospect and the fit with the position and an organization's culture. Furthermore, if the new format is accepted by human resource professionals, it could be taught in business communications courses and used by recent college graduates to distinguish their resumes from those of other job applicants (Varma, Soo Min, & Pichler, 2006) by furnishing information related to the fit between an organization's culture, requirements of the job, and the personal characteristics of a prospective new hire.

We begin with a brief background of the resume, summarize relevant literature regarding its use, discuss the role of personality characteristics in candidate selection, and provide a conceptual model for a modified resume document. This is followed by an analysis of survey data of regional Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) chapters and other hiring managers along with discussions concerning methodology, results, and conclusions.

## Background

Norms regarding resume content, form, format, and etiquette have changed over the past 50 or 60 years (Hutchinson & Brefka, 1997). Studies addressing the relevance of resumes appeared in the early 1970s but generally focused on the importance of the interviewing process. Hakel, Dobmeyer, and Dunnette (1970) provide a resume example and mention the relative importance of three content dimensions of resumes: the order of content presentation, its favorability, and alignment with stereotypes. Similarly, Hutchinson and Brefka (1997) report that a job objective, academic background, and work experience are most desired by personnel specialists from *Fortune* 500 companies but that personal and social information are not perceived as important. Schullery, Ickes, and Schullery (2009) discuss the migration of resumes from the scanable formats of the early 1990s, to the faxed versions in the late 1990s, and to the online versions common today using keywords and stylistic formatting. While the modern resume has evolved from the 1970 model, one aspect remains: the insistence from recruiters that resumes remain brief. A review of contemporary information regarding resume guidelines suggests that resumes should be limited to one or two pages (Kenkel, 2005).

As a consequence of this business norm for brevity, candidates are typically quite careful to create as favorable an impression as possible in a resume (Varma et al., 2006). In fact, Amare and Manning (2009) recap recommendations in a number of popular business communication textbooks where students are advised to use resumes as a personal selling tool. It is nevertheless important that the resume convey information that permits recruiters to assess whether applicants possess desired characteristics beyond just the educational and experience qualifications for the job. Providing information related to personal characteristics may be valued by hiring managers if it is useful in distinguishing between applicants and leads to better screening and selection decisions.

One reason that resumes are routinely used by organizations is their perceived effectiveness and low cost in evaluating the alignment between the requirements of the job and the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics of job applicants (Dipboye & Jackson, 1999). Employment recruiters who screen resumes typically possess the authority to determine which applicants will be given additional consideration to

participate in subsequent steps of the screening process (Cole et al., 2009). However, research suggests that employment recruiters often look beyond the objective data presented in resumes. They also make inferences about subjective information such as dispositional characteristics and person-job fit. This is problematic, since the reliability and validity of assessing personality characteristics from resume content are generally low. Cole and his colleagues found that recruiters' inferences about job candidates' extraversion from resume content was moderately reliable and valid but that other personality characteristics were not reliably discernable and did not demonstrate validity when compared with actual personality scores for a sample of graduating college students.

These findings are further substantiated when employment interviews are used for employee selection (Barrick, Patton, & Haugland, 2000). Although some of the Big Five personality traits (i.e., extraversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability, agreeableness, and openness to experience) may be accurately assessed during employment interviews, research suggests it is difficult to assess conscientiousness and emotional stability (Barrick et al., 2000). This is true for several types of interviews including structured and unstructured interviews as well as interviews that utilize behavioral questions, situational questions, and job-related questions. Barrick et al. (2000) indicate that the visibility of different characteristics may influence accuracy of assessment. A more visible trait such as extraversion may be more accurately evaluated in an employment interview than one that is less visible. Moreover, applicant self-presentation effects may skew interviewers' abilities to infer personality characteristics correctly.

Taken together, these findings suggest the need for caution when resumes and employment interviews are used to evaluate job-related personality traits. Given the importance of screening and selecting applicants who possess dispositional characteristics that are associated with required work outcomes and job performance standards, other methods of ascertaining these characteristics may be necessary.

### **The Role of Assessment Testing**

Surveys of recruiters find that 20% of American companies (Piotrowski & Armstrong, 2006) and all the top 100 companies in Great Britain

(Faulder, 2005) use personality testing to screen job applicants. Recent studies report that personality testing is increasing in frequency as a component of the recruitment and hiring process (Rothstein & Goffin, 2006). Widespread acceptance of the Big Five model of personality characteristics and meta-analytic studies have provided strong evidence of the ability of personality measures to predict job performance.

One personality characteristic that has received considerable attention is conscientiousness. Conscientiousness is characterized by behavioral attributes such as dependability, persistence, and hard work. It has been found to correlate with job proficiency across a wide variety of occupational groups including professionals, managers, and semi-skilled jobs (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Moy & Lam, 2004).

In addition to conscientiousness, managers and sales representatives who rate high on gregariousness, sociability, and assertiveness, known within the Big Five as extraversion, have been found to perform their jobs more effectively (Barrick & Mount, 1991). However, the work context also affects job performance. In managerial jobs that provide autonomy, managers who score high in conscientiousness and extraversion perform better than those who operate in less autonomous, structured work settings (Barrick & Mount, 1993). Managers who are low in extraversion, however, receive high ratings on their interpersonal performance by supervisors when they display a tendency toward high self-monitoring since this suggests an ability to adjust one's public image to conform to the requirements of particular social situations (Barrick, Parks, & Mount, 2005).

An investigation of personality characteristics in a sample of Hong Kong employees found that openness to experience, another Big Five personality trait, influenced performance evaluations of employees by their supervisors. Specifically, low openness was preferred to curiosity and inquisitiveness (Moy & Lam, 2004). This study highlights the importance of contextual variables such as occupational type and country differences in determining desired dispositional characteristics. Moy and Lam (2004) found that conventional and traditional behaviors were preferred in the manufacturing industry they studied, as were high levels of agreeableness and a solid command of verbal English language skills. These results suggest that both specific occupations and national culture may influence the personality characteristics perceived to influence job performance.

Based on the importance of the resume in the hiring process, its identified shortcomings by researchers and practitioners, and the increasing recognition of a relationship between personality characteristics and job success, we examined whether the inclusion of personality assessment data would be perceived to add value to the screening process for new hires. This investigation complements research by Moody, Stewart, and Bolt-Lee (2002) who examined the potential benefits of supplementing resumes and job interviews with portfolios of academic work demonstrating the types of skills sought by employers. Although their investigation suggested that the portfolios of business students were somewhat favorably received by recruiters, resumes and interviews remained the more popular selection tools. Similarly, we sought to determine if personal profiles that included business students' personality characteristics and related biographical information would be considered relevant to recruiters and hiring managers who screen initial applicant material for job openings in their organizations.

### **Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted to gain insight into recruiters' reactions to the addition of personality assessment and related biodata to the traditional resume. A candidate profile document (Profile) was created to reflect a recent business school graduate's self-assessment scores for personality characteristics, emotional intelligence, diversity tolerance, and preferred organizational structure. This profile also contained biographical information about the candidate (hometown, high school, awards, activities, etc.) as well as evaluative statements relative to the candidate's credentials (see Appendix A).

A convenience sample of 48 human resources and hiring managers was surveyed and asked about the uniqueness, usefulness, value, and desired frequency of use of the Profile document as a supplement to the traditional resume. Results were positive, with 81% finding the document "fairly" or "very" original. Fifty-five percent of the respondents reported that the document added value to the resume, with 52% indicating the probable or definite use of the information in candidate selection.

We also asked for qualitative responses concerning likes and dislikes about the Profile document. Using coding and a grounded, iterative

approach (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), we categorized the responses for guidance in judging how resumes should be modified and what content would be most valued and useful to hiring managers.

Based on our analysis of the qualitative responses, we concluded that psychological assessment data would be valued by human resources and hiring managers as providing a more complete view of the applicant. However, respondents were clear that these data needed to be relevant, brief, and related to job fit. We concluded that a separate Profile document was unnecessary and that appropriate information could be included in a reformatted resume.

## **METHOD**

### **Procedure and Sample**

Subsequent to the results of the pilot study, members of the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) were electronically surveyed. SHRM is a global organization with 575 affiliate chapters in the United States and abroad, including China and India. Presidents of eight regional chapters of SHRM in the Southeastern and Pacific Coast regions of the United States were contacted and asked for permission to have their membership complete the survey. These chapters as well as additional respondents were obtained through the assistance of industry contacts.

Two similar resumes were developed—one with and one without Profile data included. An online survey instrument was developed to test the resume content preferences of the respondents. The survey first presented a resume without Profile data for an entry-level candidate and asked respondents how it compared with those from candidates of similar age, experience, and background. Those who responded that the resume was “about the same as a typical resume” were then shown a similar resume modified to include Profile data (see Appendix B). Respondents were asked to assess the resume regarding (a) its usefulness in screening job applicants, (b) its value compared with that of a typical resume, and (c) how often the respondent would want to use such a resume in the hiring process.

Following the comparison of resumes with and without Candidate Profile Data, respondents were asked to review two sample resume layouts with profile data presented in random order. One presented the

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics**

<i>Age (Years)</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Company Size: No. of Employees</i>		<i>Industry</i>		
<24	6% Male	32%	1-49	25%	Manufacturing	16%
25-34	21% Female	68%	50-99	14%	Health care	19%
35-44	23%		100-499	34%	Financial services	11%
45-54	31%		500-999	9%	Retail/wholesale	6%
55-64	18%		1,000-4,999	11%	Technology	5%
>64	1%		>5,000	6%	Other <sup>a</sup>	47%

a. Responses included Hospitality, Consulting, Tourism, Utility, Recruiting, Country club, Construction Material Handling, Sales & Marketing, Real Estate, Nonprofit, Energy, Heating & Air Services.

data at the beginning of the resume. The second did so at the end of the resume. Respondents were then asked to complete a five-item survey that assessed their preferences for the location of the Profile information and attitudes about the Profile resume format. Likert-type scales were used for responses to the survey questions, and demographic information was also requested.

## RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

One hundred and seven human resources professionals and hiring managers completed the electronic survey. Respondents were typically 34 years and older (73%), female (68%), and employed by a midsized company of less than 500 employees (73%). Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. Overall, respondents found the new resume “very” (27%) or “somewhat” (57%) useful for screening applicants for an interview and indicated that the new content added “considerable” (19%) or “some” (47%) value to the candidates job application versus that of a typical resume (see Table 2).

We attempted to identify whether resume usefulness and perceived value were related to the respondents’ demographic characteristics. A statistical analysis was conducted using a multiple factor design procedure consisting of two-way ANOVAs for the main effects versus the variables of age, broken into four age groups; size of the company, broken into five size groups; and type of industry involved as well as

**Table 2. Survey Results**

<i>Survey Item</i>	<i>Respondent Rating</i>	<i>Total (N = 107)</i>	<i>95% CI</i>
Useful	1 = <i>Very useful</i>	27%	±4.3%
	2 = <i>Somewhat useful</i>	57%	±4.8%
	3 = <i>Not useful</i>	16%	±3.5%
Added value	1 = <i>Considerable value</i>	19%	±3.8%
	2 = <i>Some value</i>	47%	±4.8%
	3 = <i>No change</i>	17%	±3.6%
	4 = <i>Less valuable</i>	18%	±4.3%
Desired frequency of use	1 = <i>With every new hire</i>	13%	±3.3%
	2 = <i>With most</i>	19%	±3.8%
	3 = <i>With some</i>	24%	±4.1%
	4 = <i>With a few</i>	18%	±3.7%
	5 = <i>Never</i>	26%	±4.2%

NOTE: CI = confidence interval.

respondent gender. None of these factors was found to be significant. Levene's test confirmed the homogeneity of variances across all respondent groups, and post hoc tests (both Scheffe and Bonferroni) substantiated that there were no significant group differences.

## DISCUSSION

This investigation sought to determine the perceived value and usefulness of incorporating personality and biographical information into the standard resume. While the study was exploratory, we reasoned that this information would provide employment recruiters relevant job-related data that are generally obtained during later stages of the employee selection process. We found that 84% of the respondents perceived the profile data as useful and 66% of the respondents believed the information was a valuable addition to the standard resume. Moreover, there were no differences in perceived value and utility regardless of the respondent's age, gender, organization size, or industry type.

This study has practical implications for organizational recruiters, job seekers, and business communications instructors. Resumes are an important and necessary part of the employee selection process. With estimates of the resume screenings in the billions annually

(Levine & Flory, 1976) and the cost of hiring mistakes an increasing concern for businesses (Hillmer, Hillmer, & McRoberts, 2004), improvements to the employee selection process are likely to be welcomed by organizations and candidates alike.

Resumes also provide a means for job applicants to self-market and make themselves attractive to potential employers (Udechukwu & Manyak, 2009). While job seekers cannot rewrite their career histories (Brown & Campion, 1994), they can build better resumes that match their specific biodata credentials to those positions with the highest potential for employment success.

The inclusion of personality assessment results and related biographical information may be especially pertinent for recent college graduates. This group often has limited work experience and generally no professional experience. The assessment of personality traits in business schools is fairly common. With the unique opportunity to influence how students engage in resume writing (Conn, 2008), business communication instructors can facilitate the inclusion of personality assessment information in a resume and, in doing so, may provide new college graduates an advantage with those recruiters who value such information.

Overall, the use of personality and related attribute assessments within a resume could be a worthwhile addition to a business communications curriculum and result in a more effective and efficient employee selection process.

## **Limitations**

Respondents were obtained by contacting regional chapters of the SHRM and a convenience sample of the researchers' industry contacts. This solicitation method precludes the calculation of a precise response rate for the survey. However, a 13% response rate was calculated based on industry contact solicitations and regional SHRM membership averages.

Moreover, the industry scope of our survey sample represented only five of the recognized industries in the United States. The U.S. Department of Labor (2010), in its NAICS database, recognizes 10 divisions and 83 major groupings of industries. Findings in this study may not be applicable to other or all industry groups.

Additionally, the use of personality assessments in hiring is not a widely accepted practice in the United States despite research maintaining its value (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Barrick, et al., 2000). As such, results of this study may be biased by the respondent's prior experience with and acceptance of personality assessment testing. Attempts were made to minimize this problem by asking respondents about prior use of psychological assessments. However, it was not possible to filter results specifically for familiarity with and acceptance of personality assessments.

### **Conclusions**

Barrick et al. (2000) commented that "as the evidence on personality's relationship to job performance and organizational match continues to grow, the opportunity to re-evaluate and revamp the interview into a more effective candidate selection tool should be investigated" (p. 949). We contend likewise with the professional resume and suggest that the earlier such consideration enters into the employee selection process, the better the opportunity to recruit those candidates most suited for enduring employment success. This study provides an initial step in that process.

Employee selection currently depends on the use of the traditional resume—a document long acknowledged as being problematic with highly manipulated content and terse to the point that it may not well represent the candidate. Yet it is on this document that recruiters typically rely in selecting candidates for interviews.

Studies also find that personality attributes are often assigned to the candidate by the recruiter on the basis of the resume and that recruiters generally attempt to ascertain personality attributes as a result of the interview process. Notwithstanding, additional research points to the errors made by recruiters in these endeavors.

If accurate, verifiable personality assessments can be made available to candidates for inclusion in their resumes, a number of benefits result. One, candidates provide a more unique, differentiated, and personal document for the recruiter to consider. Two, recruiters gain useful and valuable data for evaluation of candidates prior to the interview process. As a result, better qualified candidates will be selected for interviews.

## APPENDIX A

### Candidate Profile Document

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#### Personal Profile for:

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#### *John Smithfield*

Born in Buncombe County, North Carolina, John Smithfield attended TC Roberson High School where he majored in Pre-College studies, played sports (football, basketball, and track), and participated in the Odyssey of the Mind program. John now attends Western Carolina University and is on track to graduate in May 2010 with a BS Degree in Business Management. His grade point average in his major is currently 3.4 on a 4.0 scale.

John scores moderately high in Extroversion in his <sup>1</sup>Big Five Personality Profile with additional high scores in Conscientiousness and Agreeableness – the two attributes most highly correlated to long term career success. His outgoing personality and moderately high scores in <sup>2</sup>Emotional Intelligence (79 out of 100) indicate that John can work well with clients, peers, and management personnel. His <sup>3</sup>Valuing Diversity assessment (46 out of 50) is remarkably high for someone of his age and experience. It predicts his successful collaboration with all types and socio-economic categories of people.

While a student at Western Carolina University, John regularly worked summer jobs and internships. His previous supervisors confirm his high <sup>4</sup>Type A assessment (82 of 100) – indicating that he can be counted on to get a job done with little if any follow-up required. His course work included classes in Organizational Theory and Behavior, Accounting, Finance, Business Law, Strategic Planning, and related curriculum designed to provide a core competency in Business Management and Strategy. John is experienced and capable in conducting strategic analyses, writing a business or marketing plan, and launching a start-up business. He scores quite high as a <sup>5</sup>Self-Directed Learner (89 of 100) predicting a high likelihood of senior management potential for the future.

<sup>6</sup>Assessments show that John would be equally at home in a large, matrix structured organization or a small, traditionally managed firm. He looks forward to a position where he can make a strong initial contribution with growth opportunities toward the highest levels of achievement.

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<sup>1</sup> The Big Five Personality Assessment

<sup>2</sup> EI Assessment

<sup>3</sup> VAA Assessment

<sup>4</sup> Type A Assessment

<sup>5</sup> Self Directed Learner Assessment

<sup>6</sup> Preferred Organization Structure Assessment

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## APPENDIX B

### Sample Resume With Profile Data

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Resume of  
**SHANNON SMITH**  
12012 University Drive  
Western Carolina University  
Cullowhee, NC 28723  
(828) 601-XXXX

- PROFILE:** Shannon Smith attends Western Carolina University where she plays on the soccer team and participates in several honor societies. She will graduate in December 2010 with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration. Her grade point average is currently 3.5 on a 4.0 scale.
- Ms. Smith scores high in Conscientiousness in her Big Five Personality Profile with additional moderately high scores in Agreeableness and Openness-to-Experience. Two of these attributes - Conscientiousness and Agreeableness - highly correlate to long-term career success. Her moderate high scores in Emotional Intelligence (76 out of 100) indicate that Shannon will successfully collaborate with all types and socio-economic categories of people. She performs well in a team setting but is also task-oriented.
- While a student at Western Carolina University, Shannon regularly worked summer jobs and internships. Her course work included classes in Organizational Behavior, Accounting, Finance, Business Law, and Management. She is experienced and capable in conducting strategic analysis process mapping, financial auditing, and project management. Shannon looks forward to a position where she can make a strong initial contribution with growth opportunities toward higher levels of responsibility.
- OBJECTIVE:** Looking for an entry level opportunity to work for an experienced management team and to grow professionally.
- EDUCATION:** Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC  
Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, December 2010  
Major: Management and Finance GPA: 3.5
- HONORS:** Dean's list for academic excellence every semester  
Beta Gamma Sigma Honor Society  
Western Carolina University athletic scholarship
- EXPERIENCE:** Kearns & Company, Baltimore, MD  
*Intern with Accounting Department, Summer 2009*
- Completed inventory testing, payroll testing, fixed assets, and receipts
  - Completed participant testing for an employee benefit plan audit
- Bath & Body Works, Chapel Hill, NC  
*Sales Associate, Summer 2008*
- Constructed displays using a model
  - Used computer software to take payments as a cashier
- COMPUTER SKILLS:** Excel, Word, PowerPoint, Access, Visio, QuickBooks, Peachtree, Engagement
- ACTIVITIES:** Student Athletic Advisory Committee, WCU, Cullowhee, NC  
*Treasurer, August 2007 – Present*
- Organized, planned, implemented, and developed a variety of special events
- Accounting Club, WCU, Cullowhee, NC  
*Member, August 2007 – Present*

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*Edward W. Wright is an associate professor in the Global Management and Strategy Department at Western Carolina University. His research interests include business strategy and medical technology adoption. He teaches courses in leadership, marketing, strategy, and small business management.*

*Theresa A. Domagalski is an associate professor in the Global Management and Strategy Department at Western Carolina University. She teaches courses in the areas of organizational behavior and human resource management. Her research interests include emotions in organizations and employment discrimination.*

*Ronald Collins is an adjunct professor in the Business Department and Adult and Graduate Studies program at Mars Hill College. He teaches courses in statistics, organizational behavior, organizational development, and human resource management. He is a licensed clinical psychologist with areas of interest in organizational and consumer behaviors.*

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