Job Preparedness Indicator Study

CAREER ADVISORY BOARD
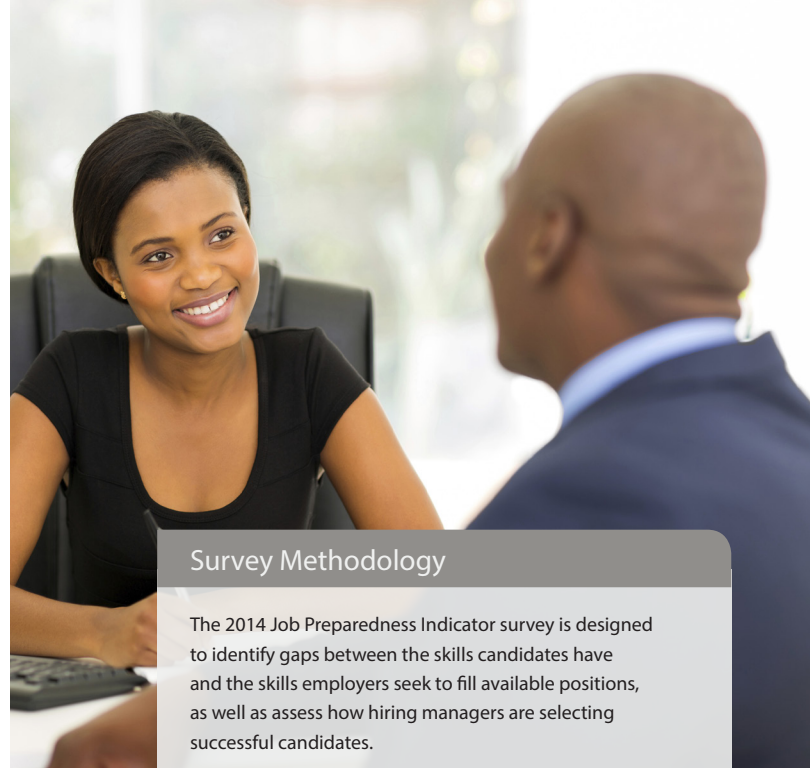EST. 2010
Presented by DeVry University

Job Seekers Unprepared to Take Advantage of Employment Market Opportunities

The 2014 Job Preparedness Indicator confirmed previous reports that while a skills gap exists at all levels of U.S. employment, hiring managers may be unrealistic in their search for the "total package."

Only 7 percent of hiring managers said that "nearly all" or "most" job seekers have the right combination of skills and traits that their companies need to fill open positions, yet they also reported that they commonly see essential, individual skills among candidates at the entry-level, mid-level, and senior-level.

This year's results also indicate that hiring managers aren't evolving their sourcing or selection processes to keep pace with the changing job market.

The following report summarizes the highlights of the fourth-annual Job Preparedness Indicator and offers recommendations for job seekers to prepare for gainful employment and make the best possible impression on hiring managers.

Survey Methodology

The 2014 Job Preparedness Indicator survey is designed to identify gaps between the skills candidates have and the skills employers seek to fill available positions, as well as assess how hiring managers are selecting successful candidates.

The research was conducted online within the United States by DeVry University on behalf of the Career Advisory Board in October 2014. Survey respondents included 524 U.S. individuals who are responsible for screening post-college level applicants and making hiring decisions in organizations with more than 10 employees. These hiring managers have been in their positions an average of 6-10 years.

Career Advisory Board

Established in 2010 by DeVry University, the Career Advisory Board is comprised of leading representatives from business and academia, and recognized career experts who deliver valuable insights on today's most important career trends and provide actionable advice for job seekers. The Career Advisory Board generates original research and commentary, and creates tools, insights and resources to prepare job seekers for success. Its members include executives from DeVry University, Google, HP, IBM, and LinkedIn, as well as nationally recognized career experts. For more information, visit http://careeradvisoryboard.org/members
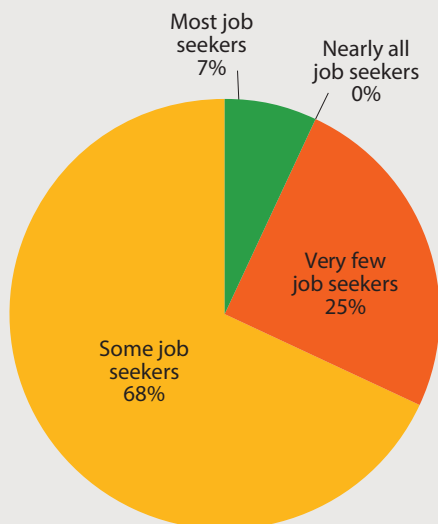
More Gaps Are Reported at the Senior-Level

At the senior-level, most skills increased both in importance and commonality. In other words, more is expected, but candidates are also bringing more to the table. The exceptions, or where we see the widest gaps, are in the skills and attributes of high integrity, adaptability, and strategic perspective. Similarly to last year, we see more gaps at the senior-level than any other level.

Interestingly, certain skills and attributes that we commonly associate with effective 21st century leadership, such as global competence, technology skills, and innovation, were rated by respondents as not especially important or common among senior-level job seekers. This result suggests that senior-level candidates aren't evolving their skill sets to reflect the changing nature of business and work – perhaps because hiring organizations aren't yet emphasizing these skills.

Across all levels, most important skills were rated at least "somewhat common" by the hiring managers, yet only 7 percent of hiring managers said that "nearly all" or "most" job seekers have the right combination of skills and traits that their companies need to fill open positions. This finding re-affirms last year's results, which demonstrated that hiring managers are unable or unwilling to select candidates who aren't exactly what they're looking for.

How many job seekers have the right combination of skills and traits needed to fill open positions?

Most job seekers
7%

Nearly all job seekers
0%

Very few job seekers
25%

Some job seekers
68%

At the Entry-Level, Attitude Outweighs Tangible Skills

Managers hiring recent college graduates rated high integrity, a strong work ethic, accountability, self-motivation, and strong basic interpersonal ability as the most critical attributes for successful candidates. Among this population, tangible skills like technology, decision-making, presentation, and risk-taking skills are not essential.

In terms of attributes that are least common among recent college graduates applying for entry-level positions, hiring managers reported innovation, risk-taking, strategic perspective, general business acumen, and global competence – or the ability to understand how business is done in different cultures. However, even the skills and attributes that hiring managers rated as most critical are only "somewhat common" according to the survey.

At the entry-level, the greatest gap between what hiring managers are looking for and what candidates are showcasing occurs with the adaptability and written communication skills. These skills are considered most desirable but are also the least common.

Mid-Level Expectations Are Not Appreciably Higher

At the mid-level, manager respondents ranked many skills with approximately the same level of importance as at the entry-level. Most important skills were slightly more common at the mid-level than the entry-level, though the most critical skills and attributes of high integrity and accountability were still not considered "very common" among mid-level job seekers. At the mid-level, the most significant gap between what hiring managers need and what candidates are delivering is again seen in the area of written communication.

TOP 5 SKILLS

According to the survey, hiring managers place the highest value on the following attributes across all job levels:

» strategic perspective

» high integrity

» strong work ethic

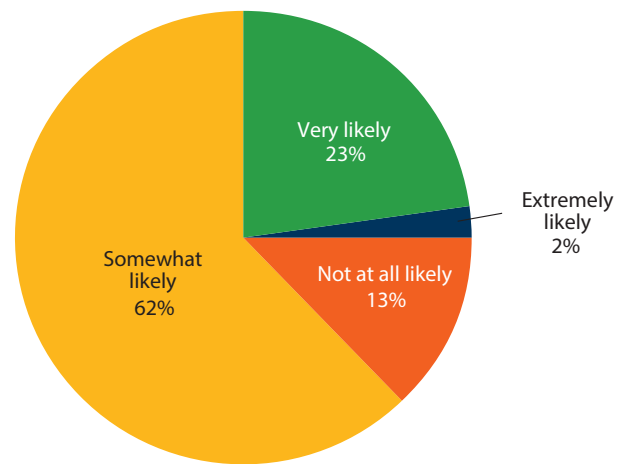» accountability

» self-motivation

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Where Hiring Managers Wish Candidates Would Focus

Besides honing the skills and attributes they reported are most critical, hiring manager respondents mentioned that candidates should gain a better understanding of the open position and the organization, and strive to improve their conversation ability and professionalism. When asked about the most important factor for success, respondents said that candidate skills (38 percent) have a slight edge over potential (35 percent) and experience (27 percent).

As for how candidates should develop their skills, respondents continue to value formal education, but alternative paths to skill acquisition are making their way into the mainstream. For instance, 87 percent said they are at least "somewhat likely" to consider micro-credentials, or specialized certificates awarded by reputable educational or business institutions, as proof of skill mastery.

In order to close the deal, job seekers should showcase their results in a similar position (#1 most important activity, mentioned by 74 percent of hiring manager respondents), as well as their willingness to learn and grow in a position (#2 most important activity, mentioned by 70 percent of respondents). Being able to produce strong references was only cited by 27 percent of respondents, and contrary to last year's results, only 23 percent cited having an industry mentor as an important step in securing an offer.

Provided a micro-credential is provided by a respected educational or business institution, how likely are you to consider it for employment above and beyond a traditional degree?

Very likely
23%

Extremely
likely
2%

Somewhat
likely
62%

Not at all likely
13%

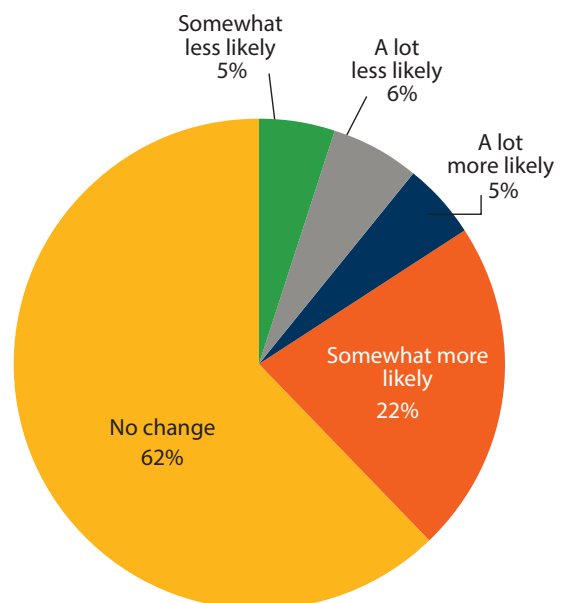## Hiring Managers Prefer to Stay Close to Home

Despite sophisticated sourcing technology and globalization, which open up an organization's talent pool considerably, surveyed hiring managers still stick with what they know. Only 25 percent of respondents hire and relocate candidates from other geographic areas regularly, and nearly a quarter said they are more likely to hire from within than they were last year. Increasingly, internal candidates are given priority consideration over external ones, and successful junior-level employees are purposefully trained and groomed for internal promotions.

When the right talent isn't available to fill open positions, several hiring managers cited "growing their own" as a frequently employed solution. Among our respondents, outsourcing to external contractors has taken a back seat, with more than a third saying they don't hire contractors at all.

Online sourcing, especially via sites like LinkedIn, continues to increase in prevalence, though evaluation of candidates is "going virtual" at a slower rate. Twenty-seven percent of respondents said they are "more likely" to hire in part based on a digital interview, while 62 percent admitted there is no change from last year. Employees who will work remotely on a permanent basis seem to be the best candidates for digital interviewing, but overall, digital interviewing is mostly used as a weed-out gesture. In

most cases, candidates under serious consideration must eventually meet potential employers face-to-face.

Is your organization more or less likely than it was a year ago to hire based in part on a digital or online interview?

Somewhat
less likely
5%

A lot
less likely
6%

A lot
more likely
5%

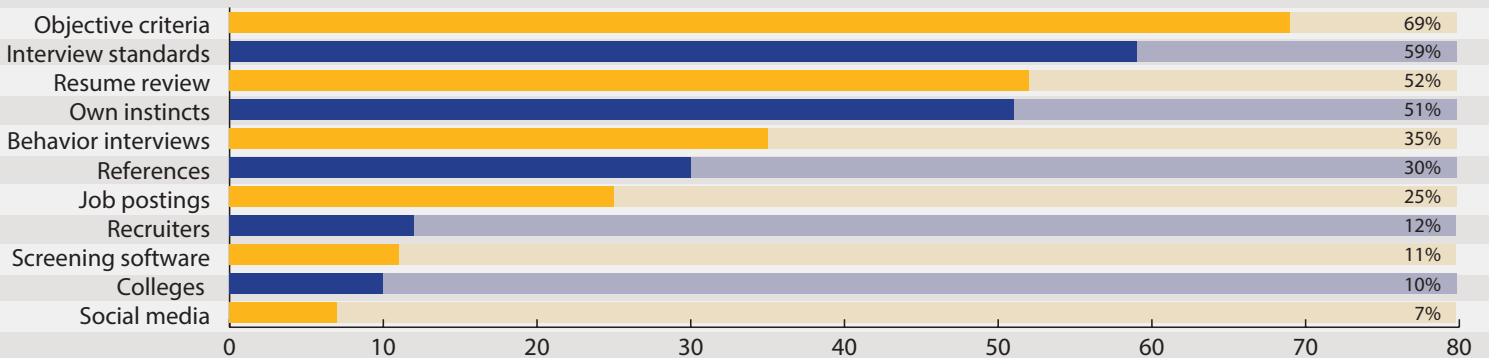Somewhat more
likely
22%

No change
62%

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Hiring Managers Are Employing More Objective Measures but Subjectivity Still Exists

In order to determine what skills are needed for a given position, hiring managers reported that they most often talk to those who directly supervise individuals in that position and that they rely on personal observation to assess what does and doesn't work for employees in that position. It's hard to imagine that these approaches, which may yield different results depending on who one speaks to, are especially reliable.

However, when it comes to tools that hiring managers use to evaluate candidates, the results were refreshing. Sixty-nine percent of respondents indicated that they establish a set of measurable criteria upon which to judge applicants, and 59 percent said they develop a set of standard questions to ask all candidates applying for a given position. Although most respondents are still not using available software to screen and assess candidates, the fact that more of them are systematizing the evaluation process is promising.

Which of the following tools are most important for you when evaluating candidates (via percentage of respondents that use them)?

Tool	Percentage
Objective criteria	69%
Interview standards	59%
Resume review	52%
Own instincts	51%
Behavior interviews	35%
References	30%
Job postings	25%
Recruiters	12%
Screening software	11%
Colleges	10%
Social media	7%

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Advice for Job Seekers

Based on the findings of the 2014 Job Preparedness Indicator, the Career Advisory Board offers the following strategies to help job seekers improve their chances of landing gainful employment:

» Consider micro-credentials: Hiring managers are becoming more open-minded with respect to how candidates acquire relevant skills, so you may want to eschew a traditional degree in favor of a more specialized, shorter-term offering. However, given that micro-credentialing isn't yet mainstream, you'll want to be careful. The last thing you need is to spend time and money earning a "junk badge" for which the job market has no use. For now, stick with certificate programs that have developed sophisticated mechanisms for testing competencies and are trusted to deliver high standards. An example of such a program is the certificate in project management offered by the Project Management Institute.

» Target local companies: Even as our world is becoming more global and more connected, employers still prefer to hire within their geographic area. Unless you live in a very rural area, chances are there at least a few local organizations that employ people with your expertise. Find these and network with people who already work there to get yourself in the door.

» Showcase your integrity: Perhaps given how badly some employers were burned during the recent financial crisis, trust is a major issue in today's organizations. Hiring managers are looking for candidates who are honest and forthcoming and will be fair in all of their dealings. During the application and interview process, don't exaggerate your credentials or try to cover up unpleasant circumstances (e.g. being fired). Instead, share examples of ethical business decisions you've made in the past.

» Beware too much informality: We suspect that the informal nature of e-communication (e.g. emoticons, acronyms) are what's partially behind hiring manager's dissatisfaction with candidates' written communication skills. When preparing application materials, use proper grammar and spelling and have a friend or family member review them to ensure that you're expressing yourself clearly, concisely, and professionally.

» Demonstrate that you'll ramp up quickly: Over four years of the Job Preparedness Indicator study, hiring managers have told us that they lack patience for developing candidates into the competent employees they need (though grooming people for internal promotions is another story). They want hires who meet 100 percent of the criteria now. For this reason, you must carefully analyze job descriptions and, in your resume, show how you can check every box. Go into the interview armed with ideas for how you can use your knowledge, skills, and experience to make an immediate contribution to the organization's bottom line – with minimal training.

Find more information on the Job Preparedness Indicator at www.careeradvisoryboard.org

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