

Employability and Job Satisfaction of College of Agriculture Graduates at the University of Kentucky

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to track College of Agriculture (COA) graduates (n = 57) at the University of Kentucky to determine their employability status, identify which employability skills they perceived to be needed in the workplace, and assess their overall level of job satisfaction. Specifically, the study sought to identify the level of importance of the employability skills to graduates' work and the level of competence graduates perceived themselves to possess while performing the employability skills at work. The study revealed graduates with industry positions most often entered careers associated with management, sales, teaching, and research. Over 20% of responding graduates indicated they were enrolled in graduate school. The Borich (1980) needs assessment model was used to assess the data concerning the employability skills most in demand. It was revealed that, by combining the perceived importance construct with the perceived competence construct on the various employability skills, visioning and motivation were most in need of curriculum enhancement, while coordination, interpersonal relations, and decision making were least in need of curriculum enhancement. Specifically, graduates perceived 14 of the 16 employability skill constructs to be more important than their ability to perform them. Overall, graduates are satisfied with their career.

Introduction

According to the document, Employment Opportunities for College Graduates in the U.S. Food, Agricultural, and Natural Resources Systems (2005), the demand for graduates with degrees in agriculture remains high. The report indicated that by 2010, an estimated 52,000 new job openings will have emerged in agriculture over a five year time span with the greatest opportunities and needs in the areas of management and business, scientific and engineering, agricultural and forestry production, and education, communication, and governmental agencies (Employment Opportunities, 2005). However, only a little over 49,000 graduates will be qualified to fill the openings, thus, creating a void in the workplace.

Further contributing to the void is the fact that not all graduates will be prepared and deemed "employability ready" by the time they enter the workplace. Peddle (2000) noted entry-level graduates have not acquired the necessary skills needed for the workplace (Peddle, 2000). While there is much speculation as to what defines a "quality" graduate, a need for graduates to possess general, employability skills becomes imperative. Because it is becoming increasingly more important for graduates to be able to transfer the knowledge they learn in the college classroom and apply it to the workplace (Candy & Crebert, 1991), graduates should possess the employability skills demanded in industry (Billing, 2003).

Several studies have focused on the employability skills graduates of agriculture programs need to be successful. In a study to identify the competencies employers seek in

college of agriculture graduates from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Andelt, Barrett, and Bosshamer (1997) found that communications skills were of most importance. In addition, the ability to listen and speak clearly was determined to be two of the most important aspects of communication skills. According to Andelt, et al. (1997) employers felt as though employability skills such as problem solving and teamwork would need to continue to improve in the future of the graduate employees.

Graham (2001) conducted a three-year study to determine the preparation of entry-level agriculture graduates for employment as perceived by employers and found that employers placed a strong emphasis on the skill areas of teamwork, employability, dedication, and initiation. In terms of communication skills, employers rated listening as the most important. Character traits such as honesty, dependability, and integrity were also valued by the employers in this study.

More recently, Robinson, Garton, and Vaughn (2007) surveyed College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources graduates and their immediate supervisors at the University of Missouri. They concluded problem solving, decision-making, organization and time management, risk taking, listening, creativity, innovation, and change, lifelong learning, and motivation were the skills entry-level graduates most lacked. These skills represented the areas needed for curriculum enhancement. In contrast, written communication was the skill least in need of curriculum enhancement.

While identifying needed skills is crucial, it is also important to determine how competent students are at performing the skills needed in the workplace. Radhakrishna and Bruening (1994) sought to determine the skills and experiences deemed necessary for agribusiness graduates in Pennsylvania. They found that students and employees of agribusiness graduates alike agreed the employability skills identified were more important than the graduates' ability to perform them.

One means for gaining competence in employability skills is through work experience (Knight & Yorke, 2003). Typically, employers prefer to employ people who have had work experience and can demonstrate what they have learned as a result of their work experience. Work experience can be improved by incorporating entrepreneurship modules to the curriculum, receiving better career advice, and completing portfolios that inform employers of what they learned because "It could be objected that higher education is primarily about developing advanced understanding of worthwhile subject matter, not about employability" (p. 8).

The bottom line for graduates is being able to transfer the skills and knowledge learned in the classroom to the workplace setting. However, making the transition from higher education to the workforce can be difficult. Crebert, Bates, Bell, Carol-Joy, and Cragolini (2004), stated "the transition from university to employment often brings insecurity and unease" (p. 48). Graham and McKenzie (1995) concluded that the transition process from higher education to the workforce is difficult. One reason this transition is difficult is because graduates are not fully prepared for what industry demands of its employees. Graduates lack the readiness needed to perform to the standards of the employers (Crebert, et al., 2004).

A possible reason graduates struggle to adjust and fit in is because they have a misconception of what the workplace entails. Graham and McKenzie (1995) suggested graduates' perceptions about their employment are too high. "Many new graduates expect higher earnings, higher levels of appointment and higher status in their first job than the market can offer them" (Crebert et al., 2004, p. 60). Therefore, it is imperative to assess the level of job satisfaction of graduates and assist in preparing them for realistic expectations concerning the workplace.

Job satisfaction is the perception people have about their jobs (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Martin, 2002; Rowden, 2002) and is imperative ". . . in determining whether or not graduates remain in their chosen career" (Garton & Robinson, 2006) p. 32). Martin, Milne-Home, Spalding, and Jones (2000) concluded "there is . . . a need for institutions to monitor graduate satisfaction, better prepare them for employment, and explore the relationship between these two dimensions" (p. 203). Graduate satisfaction is important because ". . . satisfied alumni tend to supply jobs to new graduates who studied at their institution" (Schmidt et al. as cited in Martin et al., 2000, p. 200).

Theoretical Framework

Bandura's (1977) Self-Efficacy Theory served as the theoretical lens for this study. Bandura (1993) stated "efficacy beliefs influence how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave" (p. 118). Further, "Perceived self-efficacy is defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (Bandura, 1994, p. 71). Bandura (1993) contended that general task accomplishment was dependent upon one's self-efficacy, and that a personal efficacy in employability skills either allows or hinders one from advancing in a chosen career field (1997).

Bandura (1994) identified four main sources of his self-efficacy theory: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social (verbal) experiences, and somatic and emotional states in judging one's competencies (physiological arousal). The first source is mastery experiences. Bandura stated that people develop a stronger sense of self-efficacy when they are able to master certain tasks and experiences. Depending on the task, mastery experiences should require various amounts of time and effort to accomplish.

Experiencing vicarious learning is the second source of developing one's sense of self-efficacy. Watching and observing others, or having a certain task demonstrated by a model, is an effective means for learning and developing one's efficacy. Likewise, observing an ineffective model or an effective model that fails at completing the task can lead to a lower sense of self-efficacy.

The third source of self-efficacy is experiencing productive social or verbal percussions. When people are positively reinforced that they are succeeding at accomplishing a task, their sense of self-efficacy is greatly enhanced. However, Bandura warns it is easier to decrease self-efficacy through social percussion than increase it; especially if it is implied that the individual does not possess the skills or expertise needed to complete the task.

Lastly, the fourth source to developing self-efficacy is based upon how people react to certain situations that arise in their performance of accomplishing the task at hand. This is known as the somatic and emotional state. Relieving stressors can increase one's sense of self-efficacy as a result of this domain.

Not only does one's perceived self-efficacy help determine what people believe they can accomplish in the way of skills, it also plays a factor in the decisions people make, such as the career they will enter. Bandura (1994) opined

Career choice and development are but one example of the power of self-efficacy beliefs to affect the course of life paths through choice-related processes. The higher the level of people's perceived self-efficacy the wider the range of career options they seriously consider, the greater their interest in them, the better they prepare themselves educationally for the occupational pursuits they choose, and the greater is their success. Occupations structure a good part of people's lives and provide them with a major source of personal identity (p. 75).

Andelt, Barrett, and Bosshamer (1997) recommended that colleges should seek to identify and survey its employers every three to five years in an effort to determine the skills needed for college graduates as they begin their careers. To that end, a need exists to track graduates in their employment and determine which careers they entered into, if they are satisfied, and if they perceive themselves to be competent and efficacious in performing the employability skills demanded in the workplace.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to track College of Agriculture (COA) graduates ($n = 57$) at the University of Kentucky (UK) to determine their employability status, identify which employability skills they perceived to be needed in the workplace, and assess their overall level of job satisfaction. Specifically, the study sought to identify the level of importance of the employability skills as it relates to graduates' jobs, the level of competence graduates' perceive themselves to possess at performing the employability skills while conducting their work, and the amount of discrepancy that exists between the two in hopes of enhancing the COA curriculum.

Objectives

1. Describe the demographics (gender, academic major) of the graduates.
2. Describe graduates' employment status.
3. Identify the career paths of graduates.
4. Assess graduates' perceptions of the importance of the employability skill constructs needed in industry.
5. Assess graduates' perceptions of their competence level at performing the employability skill constructs needed in industry.
6. Prioritize the employability skill constructs, according to graduates, in need of curriculum enhancement using the Borich needs assessment model.

7. Describe graduates' level of job satisfaction.

Methods and Procedures

The design of the study was survey research. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The population for this study consisted of all UK COA graduates from January 2005 to May 2006 ($N = 594$). It was determined that a random sample of 235 was needed to approximate the population (Krejcie & Morgan, 1960). A 67-item questionnaire was adapted from Evers, Rush, and Berdrow (1998) with responses ranging from 0 – no importance (or competence) to 3 – major importance (or competence). The Borich (1980) needs assessment model was employed to determine where curriculum enhancement could occur by accounting for both constructs (importance and competence) simultaneously. The instrument was reviewed by a panel of experts, in a previous study, for face and content validity and resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of .94.

The questionnaire consisted of four sections, with job satisfaction and demographics comprising two of the sections. The Brayfield-Rothe (1951) job satisfaction instrument, as modified by Warner (1973) was employed for the job satisfaction section. This section consisted of 14 questions on job satisfaction and dissatisfaction factors and employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 - strongly disagree to 5 - strongly agree. The reliability for the job satisfaction section was established through prior research resulting in a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .94 for the summated scale (Cano & Miller, 1992).

To assess the objectives in the study, modes of central tendency and variability consisting of frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used. In addition, the Borich (1980) needs assessment model was employed to address objective 6. Graduates' were collapsed into one of the following categories: sales, management, communications, government agencies, production agriculture, scientists, research assistants, teachers, support staff, financial services, food services, educational trainers (industry), graduate school students, and production associates based upon responses to their chosen career paths.

The Dillman (2004) Tailored Design Method was used to collect data. The frame for the graduates was accessed through the Associate Dean's office in the COA. Specifically, three complete contacts were made to graduates encouraging them to participate in the study. Postcards announcing the forthcoming questionnaire were mailed two weeks before the Christmas holiday in the hope that if the postcard was sent to the graduates' former home address, he/she might be home for the Christmas holiday and retrieve it. In addition to alerting the participants about the study and the fact that they would be receiving a questionnaire in the future, the postcard also encouraged the graduates to respond back to the researcher to update their contact information if need be.

After allowing sufficient time for the postcard to reach its intended audience, and for the graduates to respond with a more accurate address, the complete questionnaire package which consisted of a cover letter, questionnaire, and pre-paid return envelope were mailed. A follow-up postcard was mailed to non-respondents two weeks after the initial mailing of the complete package. A second complete package was mailed to non-respondents two weeks after the follow-

up postcard. Because the response rate for the first two attempts was below 20%, a third and final contact consisting of a postcard, followed two weeks later by a final complete package, was mailed. The data collection process began in December 2006 and ended in May 2007. With each contact, recipients were instructed to complete the questionnaires and return them to the researcher in the pre-paid, stamped envelope included. In all, 57 participants responded for a 24% response rate. While the researcher recognizes that this response rate is low, proper attempts were made and sustained for five months in an effort to maximize the responses. However, it is strongly cautioned that generalizations not occur beyond the scope of this study.

A contributing factor to the low response rate could be due to the fact that University of Kentucky graduates had not been surveyed in the recent past, and as such, correct addresses were difficult to obtain. Because of the low response rate, it was vital to control for non-response error. Non-response error was accounted for by comparing early and late respondents (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002) because late respondents tend to approximate non-respondents (Miller & Smith, 1983). Specifically, the first 25% ($n = 14$; early respondents) of respondents were compared to the last 25% ($n = 14$; late respondents) of respondents. This represented the extreme ends of the spectrum concerning early and late respondents, allowing for the greatest amount of possible discrepancy. Early respondents were compared to late respondents on their perceptions of the importance of the 16 employability skill constructs as their overall level of job satisfaction. T-tests were conducted to determine if any statistical significance existed in these phenomena with these two groups. The t-tests resulted in no statistical difference. Because there were no statistical differences, the groups were deemed to be similar; thus, the results hold true for and can be generalized back to the sample.

Findings

Objective one sought to describe the demographics (gender, academic major) of the graduates. In terms of gender, 34 (60%) of the respondents were male and 23 (40%) were female (Table 1).

Table 1

Demographics of Responding College of Agriculture Graduates by Academic Major (n = 57)

Academic Major	Male		Female	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Agricultural Biotechnology	3	8.8	2	8.7
Agricultural Economics	8	23.5	0	0.0
Agricultural Education	2	5.9	2	8.7
Agricultural Communications	1	2.9	3	13.0
Animal Science	5	14.7	6	26.1
Forestry	1	2.9	2	8.7
Family Studies	0	0.0	1	4.3
Individualized Agricultural Studies	1	2.9	0	0.0
Landscape Architecture	2	5.9	0	0.0
Natural Resources	2	5.9	2	8.7
Plant and Soil Sciences	1	2.9	1	4.3
Production Agriculture	1	2.9	0	0.0
Public Service Leadership	4	11.8	4	17.4
Total	34	100	23	100

The academic major with the greatest response from graduates was animal science (41%), followed by public service leadership (29%), and agricultural economics (24%). The lowest response rates came from graduates with degrees in individualized agricultural studies (3%), production agriculture (3%), and family studies (4%).

Objective 2 sought to determine the employment status of graduates. Over 90% of graduates were either employed full-time or were enrolled in graduate school (Table 2). The remaining 9% of graduates were either unemployed, employed part-time, caring for family, or had another status of employment not identified (i.e., internship).

Table 2

Employment Status of College of Agriculture Graduates (n = 56)

Employment Status	<i>f</i>	%
Employed full-time	41	73.2
Attending graduate or professional school	10	17.9
Unemployed, seeking employment	2	3.6
Employed part-time	1	1.8
Caring for family full-time	1	1.8
Other	1	1.8

Note. Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

Objective 3 sought to identify the career paths of graduates. Almost 80% of graduates were involved in management (24%), graduate school (22%), sales (13%) teaching (9%) and research (9%) related careers (Table 3). Only 2% of graduates are entering careers in horticulture, communications, production agriculture, financial services, and as production associates.

Table 3
Career Paths of College of Agriculture Graduates (n = 55)

Rank	Career Choice	<i>f</i>	%
1.	Management	13	23.6
2.	Graduate School	12	21.8
3.	Sales	7	12.7
4.	Teaching	5	9.1
4.	Research	5	9.1
6.	Veterinarian	4	7.3
7.	Support Staff	2	3.5
7.	Government Agencies	2	3.5
9.	Horticulture	1	1.8
9.	Communications	1	1.8
9.	Production Agriculture	1	1.8
9.	Financial Services	1	1.8
9.	Production Associate	1	1.8

Table 4 was constructed to address objectives 4, 5, and 6. Specifically, objective 4 sought to assess graduates' perceptions of the importance of the employability skill constructs needed in industry. Per the table, graduates perceived the employability skill constructs motivation ($M = 2.69, SD = .41$), listening ($M = 2.59, SD = .48$), and problem solving and analytic ($M = 2.55, SD = .39$) to be most important to their jobs in the workplace, respectively. In contrast, graduates perceived written communications ($M = 2.04, SD = .79$), coordination ($M = 2.04, SD = .82$), and visioning ($M = 1.99, SD = .99$) to be least important to their jobs in the workplace.

Table 4
Graduates' Perceptions of the Importance of the Employability Skills and their Competence at Performing the Skills (n = 57)

Employability Skill Constructs	Importance ^a		Competence ^b		MWDS ^c
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
1. Visioning	1.99	.99	1.74	.85	.95
2. Motivation	2.69	.41	2.40	.40	.88
3. Problem Solving and Analytic	2.55	.39	2.31	.44	.68
4. Organization and Time Management	2.49	.42	2.27	.39	.63
5. Oral Communication	2.32	.66	2.19	.52	.59
6. Creativity, Innovation, and Change	2.23	.64	2.09	.64	.55
7. Lifelong Learning	2.51	.50	2.36	.47	.54
8. Written Communication	2.04	.79	2.04	.62	.48
9. Ability to Conceptualize	2.14	.67	2.01	.67	.46
10. Supervision	2.12	.80	2.06	.70	.44
11. Managing Conflict	2.22	.72	2.14	.60	.40
12. Risk Taking	2.15	.69	2.04	.62	.39
13. Listening	2.59	.48	2.53	.44	.30
14. Coordination	2.04	.82	2.08	.78	.23
15. Interpersonal Relations	2.52	.45	2.50	.44	.13
16. Decision Making	2.31	.45	2.15	.46	-.45

^a0 = No Importance, 1 = Minor Importance, 2 = Moderate Importance, 3 = Major Importance

^b0 = No Competence, 1 = Minor Competence, 2 = Moderate Competence, 3 = Major Competence

^cMean Weighted Discrepancy Score

Objective 5 sought to assess graduates' perceptions of their competence level at performing the employability skill constructs needed in industry. Per the table, graduates felt most competent at performing the listening ($M = 2.53$, $SD = .44$) employability skill construct followed by interpersonal relations ($M = 2.50$, $SD = .44$) and motivation ($M = 2.40$, $SD = .40$), respectively. In contrast, graduates felt least competent at performing the employability skill constructs: ability to conceptualize ($M = 2.01$, $SD = .67$), written communication and risk taking ($M = 2.04$, $SD = .62$), respectively, and visioning ($M = 1.74$, $SD = .85$).

Objective 6 sought to prioritize the employability skills, according to graduates, in need of curriculum enhancement using the Borich needs assessment model. A discrepancy score was calculated by taking the summated mean importance rating minus the summated mean competence rating of each employability skill. A weighted discrepancy score was then calculated by multiplying the discrepancy score by the mean importance rating of each independent employability skill. Lastly, a mean weighted discrepancy score was calculated by taking the sum of the weighted discrepancy score for each employability skill and dividing by the number of observations ($n = 57$).

Visioning (MWDS = .95) was the skill possessing the greatest mean weighted discrepancy score. In addition to visioning, seven employability skills possessed mean weighted discrepancy scores greater than .50, including motivation (MWDS = .88), problem solving and analytic (MWDS = .68), organization and time management (MWDS = .63), oral communication (MWDS = .59), creativity, innovation, and change (MWDS = .55), and lifelong learning (MWDS = .54). The four employability skills that rated the lowest, all with mean weighted discrepancy scores equal to or less than .30, included listening (MWDS = .30), coordination (MWDS = .23), interpersonal relations (MWDS = .13), and decision making (MWDS = -.45).

Table 5
Graduates' Perceptions of the Importance of the Employability Skills and their Competence at Performing the Skills (n = 57)

Category	Employability Skill	MWDS
I	Visioning	.95
	Motivation	.88
II.	Problem Solving and Analytic	.68
	Organization and Time Management	.63
	Oral Communication	.59
	Creativity, Innovation, and Change	.55
	Lifelong Learning	.54
III.	Written Communication	.48
	Ability to Conceptualize	.46
	Supervision	.44
	Managing Conflict	.40
	Risk Taking	.39
	Listening	.30
IV.	Coordination	.23
	Interpersonal Relations	.13
	Decision Making	-.45

To prioritize the skills for curriculum enhancement, four categories were defined as a result of the mean weighted discrepancy scores. Category I was comprised of the highest discrepancy scores and consisted of all employability skills with a MWDS greater than .80 (Table 5). Category II was comprised of more moderate discrepancy scores which consisted of all employability skills with a MWDS ranging from .50 to .79. Category III was comprised of the lower discrepancy scores which consisted of all employability skills with a MWDS ranging from .30 to .49. Category IV was comprised of the items that had a negligible amount of discrepancy which consisted of all employability skills with a MWDS below .30. The items with the greatest need for curriculum enhancement were identified in category I because of they possessed the highest discrepancy scores.

The items with the greatest need for curriculum enhancement were identified in category I because of they possessed the highest discrepancy scores. The two employability skill constructs comprising category I consisted of visioning (MWDS = .95) and motivation (MWDS = .88). Five employability skill constructs had a more moderate discrepancy score and comprised category II, indicating a more moderate need for curriculum enhancement. The five constructs in category II were: problem solving and analytic (MWDS = .68), organization and time management (MWDS = .63), oral communication (MWDS = .59), creativity, innovation, and change (MWDS = .55), and lifelong learning (MWDS = .54).

Six employability skill constructs comprised category III due to possessing lower discrepancy scores, which indicated a lower need for curriculum enhancement. The six consisted of: written communication (MWDS = .48), ability to conceptualize (MWDS = .46), supervision (MWDS = .44), managing conflict (MWDS = .40), risk taking (MWDS = .39), and listening (MWDS = .30).

Three employability skill constructs fell into category IV and were perceived by graduates to possess negligible discrepancy scores. The three constructs consisted of: coordination (MWDS = .23), interpersonal relations (MWDS = .13), and decision making (MWDS = -.45).

Objective 7 sought to determine the overall level of job satisfaction of graduates. On the whole, graduates perceived to be satisfied ($M = 3.80$) with their job (Table 6).

Table 6
Graduates' Overall Level of Job Satisfaction (n = 49)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Level of Job Satisfaction	3.80	.53

Note. Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

Conclusions

More male graduates responded to the study than did females graduates. Graduates with degrees in animal science had the most respondents, while graduates with degrees in individualized agricultural studies, production agriculture, and family studies had the least amount of respondents. Nearly half of the responding graduates are involved in careers involving management, sales, and teaching, while over 20% are enrolled in graduate school. Nearly three-fourths of all responding graduates are employed on a full-time basis. Overall, graduates agree to be satisfied with their jobs.

In terms of the employability skill constructs needed in the workplace, graduates perceived motivation to be most important to their job, while they perceived visioning to be the least important skill needed at their job. Graduates perceived themselves to be most competent at performing the listening employability skill, while they are least competent at performing visioning. It is important to note that although the visioning skill was rated at the bottom of both scales (importance and competence), due to the amount of discrepancy, it was included in category I and was perceived to be a skill with the highest need of curriculum enhancement.

In explaining his Self-Efficacy Theory, Bandura (1994) stated that “Perceived self-efficacy is defined as people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives” (p. 71). Therefore, it can be concluded that graduates do not have a strong belief in their capabilities to perform visioning and motivation in the workplace and therefore have a low sense of self-efficacy in these two areas.

When plotting responses of graduates onto the quadrant analysis model, two employability skill constructs were deemed to possess a high need for curriculum enhancement – visioning and motivation. While motivation was a skill Robinson, Garton, and Vaughn (2007) identified as a need area for entry-level graduates, visioning was not. Constructs perceived to possess a moderate need for curriculum enhancement comprised quadrant II. These constructs included problem solving and analytic, organization and time management, oral communication, creativity, innovation, and change, and lifelong learning. Written communication, ability to conceptualize, supervision, managing conflict, risk taking and listening were all deemed a low need for curriculum enhancement and was represented in quadrant III. Three skill constructs were deemed negligible in terms of curriculum enhancement and were represented in quadrant IV. These constructs consisted of coordination, interpersonal relations, and decision making.

In all, graduates rated 14 of the 16 employability skill constructs higher on importance than their perceived competence level to perform them, with written communication and coordination being the exceptions. This finding is consistent with Radhakrishna and Bruening’s (1994) conclusion that entry-level employees deem employability skills more important than their ability to perform the skills. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that responding COA graduates at this institution possess competence at performing the written communication and coordination skill constructs.

Implications and Discussion

Could it be that visioning is a learned trait best experienced through vicarious means and that because these graduates are entry-level employees, they have simply not had enough time to experience what it means to be a visionary on their jobs? Maybe these graduates have not been afforded an opportunity yet to observe a “visionary model” (Bandura, 1994). As such, graduates may have a lower sense of efficacy toward performing the visioning skill because of this lack of experience. Also, in the somatic and emotional domain of the self-efficacy theory, Bandura (1994) stated that relieving stressors can increase one’s overall sense of self-efficacy. Could it be that a reason motivation is in demand is because these graduates are not adjusting well to their new environment (Crebert, et al., 2004) and are experiencing a number of stressors in their job and are thus not functioning well in these stressful situations? In addition, Bandura (1994) stated that mastery experiences lead to higher senses of self-efficacy. Would additional time and experience on the job present additional opportunities for these graduates to master visioning and motivation and thus have a positive effect on their self-efficacy beliefs with performing these two skills?

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the findings of this study, if UK COA faculty wanted to improve the curriculum, they could do so by focusing on the areas with the greatest amount of discrepancy – visioning and motivation. It is recommended that faculty identify creative ways to assist current students with enhancing their visioning and motivation skill sets. Additionally, attention should be paid to the skills included in the various components of the quadrant analysis model. If faculty are willing to take this study and its findings at face value, then it is recommended that all quadrants be addressed in sequence. Therefore, faculty should modify the existing COA curriculum by including the skill constructs represented in quadrant I. Once all skill constructs in quadrant I have been adequately addressed in the curriculum, skill constructs in quadrant II should be addressed, and then III. Because all 16 of the employability skill constructs were perceived to be of at least moderate importance, they should all be retained in the curriculum.

The findings of this study should be shared with UK COA faculty as a means to improve graduate employability. Current students should be exposed to the employability skill constructs most in demand in the workplace and should thus have an opportunity to learn about how to improve their own skill sets as a result. In addition, the findings should be shared with industry professionals in an effort to build and sustain rapport and maintain open lines of communication between industry professionals and higher education institution representatives.

Recommendations for Further Research

Because of the relatively low response rate, this study should be replicated on a yearly basis to further validate the findings. It is recommended the researcher consider altering the method employed for collecting data. For example, an in-depth interview with the accepting sample might have yielded better responses and insight into the skills in question. Additionally, case studies should be considered as a research tool for collecting data. Using the case study method would allow the researcher to follow graduates at various points throughout their first two years in their profession. Again, this might enrich the data garnered by adding breadth and depth as opposed to the design used in this study.

While this study revealed baseline data for the COA at the University of Kentucky as a whole, future research should consist of additional focused census studies for each academic department represented in the COA. This would bring about a higher level of clarity per each department as to the exact skill(s) in need and thus would allow for adequate enhancements to be made to all curricula.

Bandura (1994) emphasized that people develop a stronger sense of self-efficacy when they are able to master certain tasks and experiences. Therefore, a longitudinal study with these same graduates should be conducted in ten years to determine if graduates remain deficient in the same skills or if other skill deficiency areas have originated.

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