

Stakeholder views on graduate employability

Perspectives on the value of relevant work
experience and academic achievement

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Agenda

1. Introduction
2. Method
3. Results
4. Discussion
5. Takeaway message:
Advice on graduate
employability





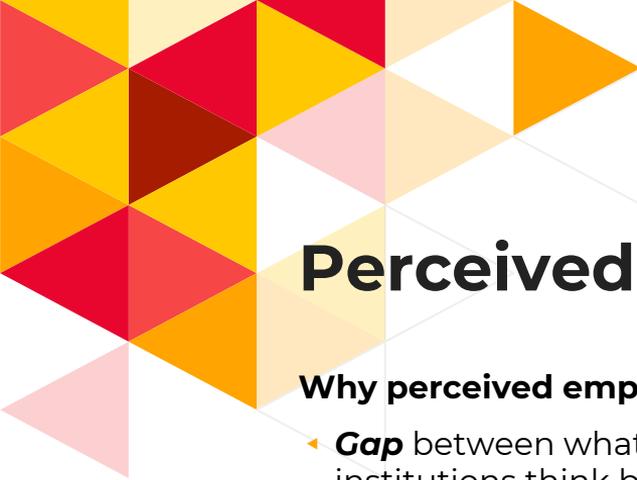
Employability

The concept of employability (Hillage & Pollard, 1998)

- ◀ **Gain initial** employment
- ◀ **Maintain** and **obtain** new employment
- ◀ **Quality** of employment

Why important in university context?

- ◀ For $\frac{3}{4}$ of students, improving job prospects is a **key reason for attending university** (Sodexo, 2016)
- ◀ Recruiters' **frustration** with skills and capabilities of current graduates



Perceived Employability

Why perceived employability?

- ◀ **Gap** between what higher education institutions think boosts employability and what organisations want
- e.g. recruiters value part-time work more than students think (Kinash, Crance, Judd, & Knight, 2018)

Why work experience relevance and academic achievement?

- ◀ Findings of **previous dissertation**
- ◀ **Little research** although many universities suggest that relevant work experience can compensate for lower degree class



Perceived Employability

Past research at a glance

- ◀ CVs with low work experience and high academic achievement least likely hired (Cole, Rubin, Field, & Giles, 2007)
- ◀ Relevant work experience matters more than relevant degree to recruiters (Knouse, 1994)

Hypotheses

- ◀ Relevant work experience increases employability ratings
- ◀ Higher degree classifications increase employability ratings
- ◀ Academics and students place more importance on degree classification
- ◀ Recruiters place more importance on work experience



Method

Questionnaire sent to

- ◀ students
- ◀ academics (social sciences)
- ◀ recruiters/employers

132 Participants

- ◀ 53 students
 - ◀ age $m = 21$, $SD = 1.32$
 - ◀ 7 female, 45 male, 1 other
- ◀ 29 recruiters
 - ◀ age $m = 33$, $SD = 11.06$
 - ◀ 18 female, 10 male, 1 other
- ◀ 50 academics
 - ◀ age $m = 41$, $SD = 9.95$
 - ◀ 26 female, 24 male



Method

2 job descriptions:

- ◀ HR Assistant
- ◀ Business Management Graduate

CV excerpts varied on...

- ◀ degree classification
 - ◀ 1st, 2.1, or 2.2
- ◀ work experience relevance
 - ◀ Relevant or non-relevant

JOB DESCRIPTION: HR Assistant

The role

- Perform daily recruitment administration tasks
- Prepare reports on and manage employee data
- Answer incoming HR queries via email and phone
- Assist employee induction process

The ideal candidate

- Organised and good attention to detail
- Able to work both independently and as part of a team
- Efficient and enthusiastic

Candidate details

Education

MA Business Management and Psychology: 1st class predicted
University of Aberdeen, 2015-2019

Work Experience

Office Assistant, CS Corporate Solutions

May - September 2018 (5 months)

Assisted general administrative and office duties, including answering queries, supporting reporting



Method

Quantitative items

- ◀ "Please rate this candidate's level of **employability** for the position"
- ◀ "How likely do you think that this person would be **hired** for this role?"
- ◀ 7-point Likert scale

Qualitative items

- ◀ "In your opinion, how important is it that a graduate has **relevant work experience**? Why?"
- ◀ "In your opinion, how important is it that a graduate has **performed well academically**? Why?"

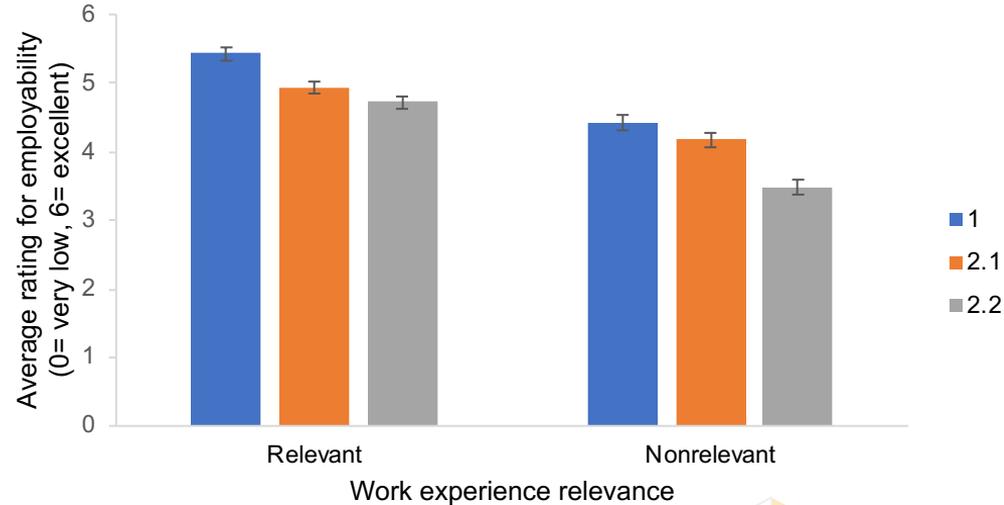
Results

For ratings of both employability and likelihood of being hired

- ◀ Main effect of **relevance**
- ◀ Main effect of **degree classification**
- ◀ Interaction between degree classification and relevance

→ You can set yourself apart from others with a high degree classification and relevant work experience, but if you have relevant work experience, you'll be fine

Interaction between degree classification and work experience relevance



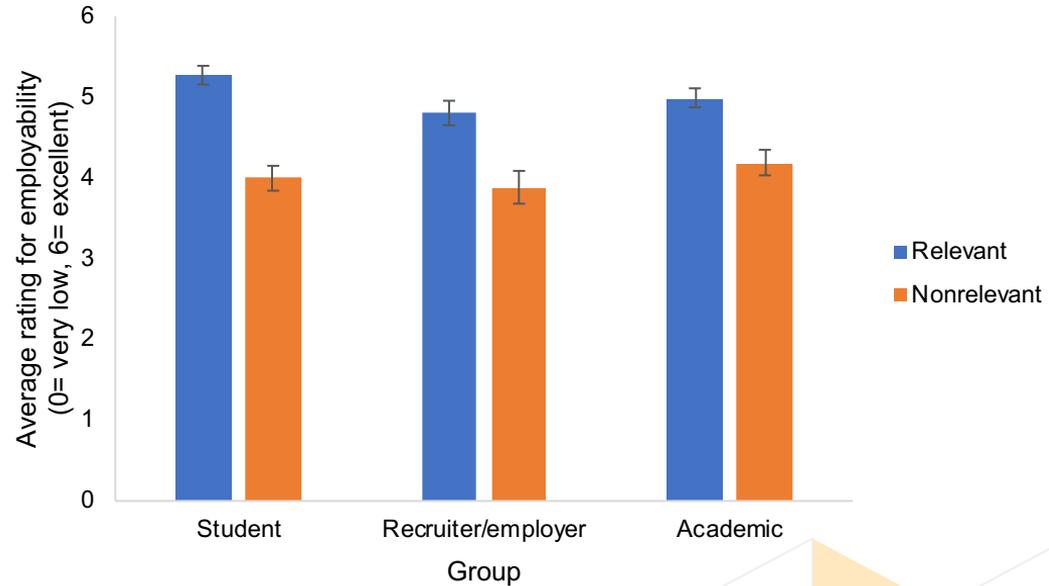
Results

For ratings of employability

- Interaction between group and relevance

→ Students seem to place more emphasis on relevance than recruiters and academics

Interaction between group and relevance



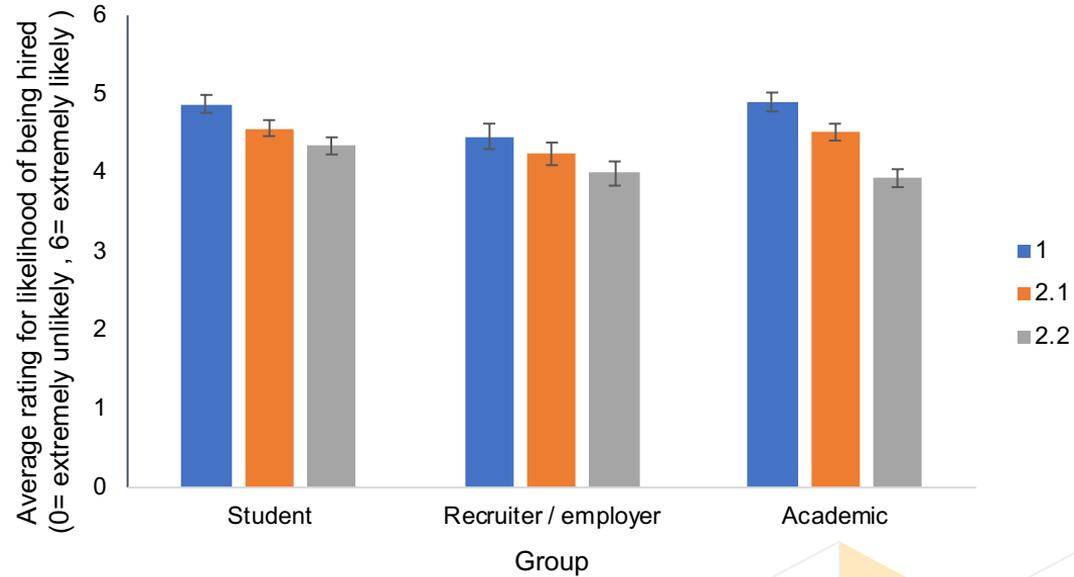
Results

For ratings of likelihood of being hired

- Interaction between group and degree classification

→ Employers seem to put less emphasis on degree classification than students and academics

Interaction between group and degree classification





Preliminary themes in qualitative data

All types of work experience matter

You can set yourself apart from others with relevant work experience

Recruiters are looking for well-rounded individuals

What matters is passion, motivation and the ability to demonstrate them

Everything depends on the type of role you apply for and how willing they are to train you



Discussion

Implications

- ◀ Both degree classification and relevant work experience affect employability
- ◀ But recruiters care less about degree classification than you think

Further analysis on...

- ◀ Why different interactions for different measures?
- ◀ Are the results different for different job descriptions?
- ◀ How about other disciplines?

Limitations:

- ◀ CV excerpts and job descriptions not representative and difficult to make judgments on?
- E.g. Fritzsche & Brannick (2002): inferences based on simplified CVs are not generalisable to inferences based on actual resumes

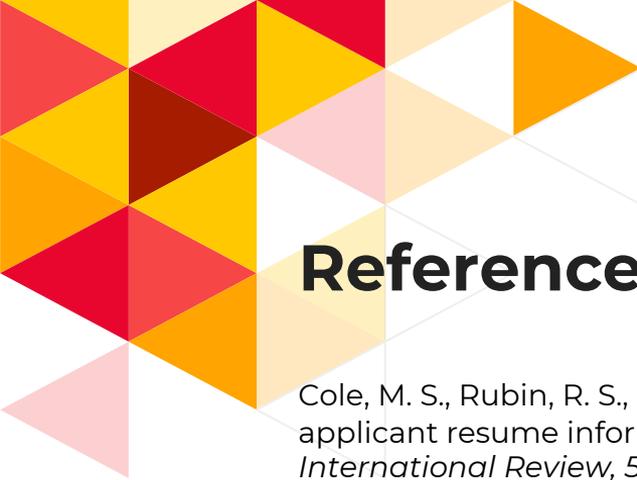
Takeaways

- 1) It's alright to focus on work experience while studying
- 2) It's all about the way you sell and present yourself
- 3) Your personality and capabilities are important





Thank you!



References

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