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**Acquiring skills and attributes necessary for
employment in junior administrative roles**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

Tertiary pre-employment skills based programmes are designed to assist students in gaining the skills and academic qualifications needed to gain employment. This study explores the skills and attributes needed to gain employment in the business administration field. It explored this from the perspective of students and also from prospective employers' points of view.

This research included a review of literature within the field of study and also focused on the delivery, material and outcomes of some business administration programmes. The teaching rationale of one polytechnic was also included as it showed how the way students learn and the desired outcomes have influenced the method of delivery.

Integral to this study was the use of questionnaires that students and prospective employers filled out, and interviews with three employers and three students. This brought to light their views on skills and attributes, along with what they perceived as being important in gaining and giving employment opportunities.

The research makes recommendations, from an educator's perspective, on what is required to enhance students' opportunities for employment within this field, and how programmes can be developed to allow opportunities for students to develop skills and attributes valued in business occupations.

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Introduction

I am a full time Programme Manager and Tutor at Whitireia Community Polytechnic, preparing students for employment in the Office/Administration field. This field includes such occupations as receptionist, administrators, personal assistants, office executives, data entry operators and/or accounts clerks. I love teaching and enjoy encouraging and ultimately helping students to succeed in their goals, whether to gain employment or some form of personal development. Throughout my years of teaching, the curriculum by which we deliver our material has changed and updated in response to changes in technology and the work environment. The systems within which we teach also has changed. In 1993 we changed from in-house certification to qualifications based on the NZQA unit standards. We deliver units towards NZQA National Certificates in Business Administration and Computing Level 2 and 3, and Business Administration Level 4. These certificates are recognised in New Zealand as pathways into a career in an office.

The research originated from an interest sparked by conversations with students and my peers, and also from my own personal desire to see students gain employment in their chosen field. I wanted to explore what skills and qualities employers look for in their prospective junior administration staff. Did they want skills such as word processing, spreadsheets, how to write letters and memos, or how to lay out a document correctly? Or alternatively, did they look for attributes such as time keeping, presentation, enthusiasm, commitment and attitude?

My own theory is that people need a variety of both skills and attributes to perform effectively in a job, but that employers will employ only people who show an array of attributes that the employers deem necessary, as well as holding some of the specific skills they require.

I wanted to make sure that our students have the best possible chance of gaining employment, and I also wanted to present information that students

could access¹, specific to the Porirua area, that might inspire and encourage them to learn new skills and attributes. It is with this in mind that I have used a very plain and simple style of writing, which would make this research available to a wide audience. I wanted to find out what employers sought from our graduates, and if there was anything missing in our programmes which employers wanted included in the future.

As the NZQA Business Administration and Computing Certificate results are reported only on a “credit” or “no credit” assessment basis, I encourage students to use their tutors from their programmes as referees in respect to employment. The frustrating thing about this, that I and other tutors have experienced first hand, is that the comments we give sometimes prevent a student from successfully gaining a job. The questions that are asked at referee point are about a mixture of skills and attributes. From my own experience, students graduate with good skills, and we as referees can positively answer questions about these. However their demonstrated attributes on a programme sometimes force us to answer other questions less positively. What arises from this frustration, is the question of why students, in some instances, do not learn, or do not show, desirable attributes while they are on the programme. I hoped the research would be able to answer this question also.

I have theorised that students do not realise these attributes are important to employers, and so by asking students about this, I could identify what skills and attributes students think employers look for in junior administration staff. This data provided a foundation for a comparison with the views of prospective employers on desired skills and attributes for office positions.

An Evolving Perspective

The purpose of this section was to provide a personal perspective to this study and highlight my own philosophical assumptions about employment in office situations. I reflected on my own educational background, and why I chose to

¹ I will write a short paper outlining the thesis and results that will be available for students from Whitireia Community Polytechnic

direct my career towards the tertiary sector and the pathway open to me now within my current position.

I have been firmly committed to adult education for the past eight years in a tutoring capacity, assisting students in their learning endeavours. At Whitireia Community Polytechnic, this is a full time academic role with 21-22 contact tutorial hours per week and 14 duty hours, totalling 36 hours a week on campus. Over the last year, my role has changed to that of Programme Manager where I have only 5-10 contact hours, while the remaining hours are involved with administration of our programmes. The students we recruit are often 'second chance' students or people who are embarking on a major change within their lives. 'Second chance' refers to a student who has not done well at a traditional secondary school, or someone who is coming back into education after a significant break which, in a lot of cases, was to raise a family. The remainder of the students consist of school leavers and people retraining to enter the workforce in a different career. My educational aim was to ensure that students achieved a desirable outcome from their study which may open other academic opportunities in the future, or lead into a chosen employment position or, simply put, that students' achieved the goals they set when embarking on the programme of study.

My Own Personal Pathway

I believe that education needs to be a positive experience for the student to enable them to uptake, challenge and develop understandings to make academic headway. Until I personally entered tertiary education, my own educational history was bleak and, retrospectively, I believe this was due to lack of direction and fulfilling a parental prophecy of failure. After being forcibly enrolled in a tertiary institution to get basic office skills, I found myself in a position that had directed and meaningful outcomes. A career path was not purposefully mapped, but it was a clear and clutterfree pathway towards employment in an office environment.

This past experience fosters a desire within me that students achieve relevant and meaningful outcomes within a training programme that emphatically prepares them for their own chosen paths. My past educational experience also allows me to empathise with a large range of students who come through our doors. Many come from the same bleak educational background as myself – often failing the traditional secondary school pass/fail system and coming to tertiary education burdened with past poor learning experiences. There is also a correlation between my own personal upbringing and family circumstances – from a low socio-economic area to my current place of work which is also located within a low socio-economic area. So having a similar background to some of our students has been advantageous in enabling me to empathise with them.

Many students arrive burdened with more than poor learning experiences and I am still in awe of their ability to learn with their diverse backgrounds of life experiences, family commitments and personal disasters. All come with a desire to better their formal education, most with the hope of gaining employment.

After my own experience at a polytechnic, or technical institute as they were called then, I entered the workforce in a junior office position and after a few years left to travel overseas. On my travels around the world there were many events that inspired me to go back to education on my return to New Zealand, but primarily it was a sense that I had more to offer because I felt as if I had not achieved 'enough' in my education. My parents were in awe that I wanted to go on to more education, because they didn't want me to fail – how could I succeed in university if I had not achieved in secondary school? However, at that stage, I was surrounded by friends and other family who believed I would succeed and it was through this encouragement that I did succeed in graduating from both university and teachers college. The values here were career mapping, (a sense of direction) and studying in a positive environment.

My Current Role

After more travel overseas I fulfilled a desire to help others achieve educationally when I gained employment at Whitireia Community Polytechnic as a tutor in their business administration programmes within the Office Systems Centre of Learning. This role was much more fulfilling than merely helping students achieve academically, as it allowed me the privilege of encouraging and assisting students on an educational pathway that empowered them to begin a life-changing journey that affected not only them but often many of the people, family or whanau around them. The programmes within the Office Systems Centre of Learning prepare students for business administration certificates and employment in office environments in a variety of roles. Seven years later I now manage the Office Systems Centre of Learning.

The tutors on our team all possess the desire to see students succeed and it is this strong and dedicated team that strives to ensure the programmes have outcomes that help students gain employment in their chosen field. Sometimes the outcomes are not employment, but we continually endeavour to make the learning experience a positive one which very often leads to positive life changes for the individual.

As Programme Manager and with a strong supporting tutorial team, I have some scope to create and change programmes, taking into account societal and employment trends. It is within this context, that the question for this thesis arose. To make sure our students achieve desirable outcomes from our programmes and can map a career path, we need to know exactly what employers look for in our graduates. It would also be useful to know what our students think employers look for.

Thus the focus of this thesis was on finding out what employers and student perceive and expect when making links between educational programmes and being in employment. This focus was addressed by taking a mainly qualitative approach, alongside a small snapshot quantitative questionnaire. I wanted to explore people's views in order to gather an insight into these issues.

Pre Employment Office Career Programmes

The Office Systems Centre of Learning at Whitireia is the umbrella under which the Office Administration Programmes sit. The qualifications the students work towards are the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) National Certificate in Business Administration, Levels 2 and 3 and Business Administration, Level 4. The career paths for graduates from the programmes range from junior to more advanced office administration roles. Each organisation offering the NZQA Certificates can tailor the qualification² to meet demand within their area, and they can choose to offer units that come under a domain or subject area (Appendices 1, 2 and 3 detail the qualification requirements). This approach ensures students have a wide subject knowledge applicable to gaining employment in an office.

Each individual polytechnic or provider decides how to build their NZQA certificate and this relies on the staff and people within the polytechnic to make decisions based on their identified local employment needs or outcome objectives. As long as the required credit values within the domain or subject areas are met, there is freedom to choose from a variety of units. This freedom makes it ideal to tailor a qualification to meet employment needs in geographical areas. In Porirua, this allows us to tailor the qualification for the Porirua market. Therefore research is essential to know what the employers seek so that the students graduating from the programmes have a qualification that suits employment within their local area.

Background: The Business Administration Programmes

There are three different programmes designed for different learners enrolled on our business administration programmes. Level 2³ is designed for beginner computer users with little or no experience of either computing or office work. Level 3 is designed for people with some computing and administration skills who are seeking to upskill. Level 4 is designed for people who are willing to commit to a full year of study and who have an administration career plan. All

² See page Appendix One, page 113

³ The levels relate to NZQA's National Qualification Framework.

the programmes have two distinct parts: Computing – designed to enable students to learn the computing skills they will need to work in an office; and Administration – designed to enable student to learn office procedures and attributes expected in today's business environment.

Computing is taught in a computing room and business administration is taught in our Virtual Business Centre. The Porirua Campus has a purpose built Business Centre which was designed to simulate an office environment with work stations and many self paced 'jobs' which each student has to complete. The logic behind the creation of this environment was that if the Business Centre was operated like a 'real' business then students would emulate the behaviour expected in an office, as demonstrated by the staff. With role-plays and direction from staff, the students would learn not only administration functions, but the expectations of business behaviour and attitudes in a business context.

Programme Reviews and Links with Industry

The Office Systems Centre of Learning has an Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee acts as a communication/advocacy and accountability link between Whitireia Community Polytechnic and relevant businesses, organisations, industry and client groups, national bodies, other related education and training providers and community stakeholders. The Advisory Committee can ensure that communication is a two way process. Firstly it gives advice and recommendations to the Whitireia administration and staff for greater effectiveness and responsiveness to the needs of industries and our community. Secondly, the external members can have an advocacy and liaison role with regard to Whitireia within their own organisations or areas of operation and influence. This committee meets three times per year and some excerpts from the last few meetings have been included later in this paper.

All programmes at Whitireia Community Polytechnic are formally evaluated every five years; the last one for the Office Systems Centre of Learning was conducted in 2001.

Programme Review and Advisory Committee

The Office Systems programme was last formally reviewed in 2001. The Review Panel consisted of a Porirua City Council representative, a Mental Health Support Work Tutor from Whitireia, the Vice President of AAPNZ (Association of Administrative Professionals New Zealand), a UCOL Programme Leader and a Computing tutor from Whitireia. The commendations of the programme included positive feedback from students and good links with industry through networking, work experience and employment placements. (Montgomery, 2001). The links with industry are reflected in the Advisory Committee membership, and their input into committee meetings help ensure the programmes meet the market needs in Porirua. The Advisory Committee members agree that the programmes are preparing students well for employment. One member in a meeting 23 March 2005, stated that “the graduates [my company] employed last year are all working extremely well and the programme trained them well for the job” (Office Systems Advisory Committee, 2005).

Research Questions

Although the feedback from the Advisory Committee and Programme Review was encouraging, this study has been undertaken to find out if Whitireia Community Polytechnic graduates are prepared for the workplace with the skills and attributes that employers sought within the Porirua region. The first two research questions were intended to gain a better understanding of the skills and attributes required specifically for the office/administration area, from employer and prospective employee points of view. The findings might also identify any skill needs in the Porirua region that might not currently be covered in the Whitireia business administration programmes, and could be addressed in future. With this in mind, the following two research questions were developed.

1. What skills and attributes do employers in the Porirua region look for in their junior office/administration staff?

2. What skills and attributes do students from Whitireia Community Polytechnic's Business Administration and Computing programmes think employers look for in prospective junior office/administration staff?

I also wanted to find out if there were other skills and attributes not currently included in Whitireia's business administration programmes that were desirable in the workplace and that could be effectively taught and assessed. This resulted in one further research question:

3. What skills and attributes do business employers think are necessary for employment, and can these can be incorporated into the Business Administration programmes of study offered at Whitireia Community Polytechnic.

Structure of Thesis

The thesis was organised into the following chapters:

Chapter 2 Literature Review

The first part of this focused on pre-employment office career programmes and looked at some definitions of skills and attributes. I then explored work that had been undertaken by other researchers in comparable studies to find trends that related to this study. Following this I investigated student learning theories, as they helped identify the types of learning that takes places in the simulated 'Business Centre'. As the students in the business administration programme have very diverse ethnic origins, I then explored some cultural aspects of people of Polynesian, Maori and European ethnicities in relation to learning.

The chapter finishes with consideration of age-related ethical issues and the changing face of the workplace, before summing up what was covered in the chapter.

Chapter 3 **Research Process**

The research questions brought to light the choice of research process and ethical considerations that had to be taken into account. The design was explained for both the employer and student questionnaires, along with reasoning into why each question was asked. I have explained how the quantitative data from the questionnaires and the qualitative data from the interviews have been recorded and analysed. I finished this chapter with an explanation of the interview questions and a short discussion on some limitations of this research project.

Chapter 4 **Findings**

This chapter outlined the findings of the questionnaires, presenting the data both graphically and verbally. The subsequent interview findings were presented using excerpts from transcribed interviews.

Chapter 5 **Discussion**

The research questions provided a starting point for this chapter, in which all three research questions were addressed. This chapter weaves together issues from the literature and the findings from the research study, together with my own thinking and observations. I discuss the themes that have emerged from this research and relate them to the Business Administration programmes of study within Whitireia Community Polytechnic.

Chapter 6

Conclusions, Recommendations and Reflections

This short chapter discussed the impact this research may have on the current business administration programmes and ideas for future studies.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

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Introduction

This chapter begins with an exploration into competency based assessment and how it is applied within the business administration programmes at Whitireia Community Polytechnic. In order to determine exactly what skills and qualities employers look for in prospective office employees, it has been important to determine the difference between skills and attributes and, therefore, the second section focuses on these. I have then reviewed literature from comparable studies, followed by briefly outlining some adult learning theories important in this study, to correspond with our own teaching methods. I have looked at some cultural differences between Pakeha, Maori and Pacific people and, in addition, reviewed literature about age that could be related to employment issues. I have finished this chapter by introducing the research questions which have arisen from the literature and study objectives.

Competency

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (1997) defines competency as the ability of individuals to apply knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to standards of competence required in specific contexts. This definition is relevant for education and training purposes where the results of the programmes of study are in NZQA units and certificates. The results are gained through assessing student skills and competencies in specific areas. According to Boam and Sparrow (1992), competency is a measure whereby competency is seen as any aspect of the inner person, normally displayed as behaviours, which allows them to perform competently or, in other words, competency is an outcome measure. Birkett (1993) sees competency similarly – competency is related to the manner in which individual attributes, such as knowledge, skill and attitudes, are drawn on in performing tasks in specific work contexts, resulting in overall job performance. Rudman (1995) sees capability as a precursor to competency, where an individual has the capability to perform a specific task because they have the necessary knowledge and skills, but individuals do not become fully competent in the task until they have had some experience. Competencies are building blocks that enable the student to use their skills in a

holistic and integrative manner within a variety of contextual situations (Rainsbury, Hodges, Burchell and Lay 2002). In my opinion, if someone can do a task successfully on their own, then the performance shows competence.

In terms of education and working within the New Zealand Qualifications Framework towards National Certificates in Business Administration and Computing, the performance criteria of the unit standards are generally skill based, i.e. the student is assessed as able to perform a function to a certain level. This is certainly so in the assessments conducted in the business administration and computing area (an example of a typical unit standard can be seen in appendix 4). Within the learning environment, attributes such as commitment, enthusiasm and honesty are aspects of a hidden curriculum in which personal and social qualities are taught or embedded into the programmes, but they are not assessed via NZQA National Framework. These skills are taught by example and practice, and students are encouraged to demonstrate qualities that are needed in the workforce. NZQA does not have units on enthusiasm, commitment and showing an amiable personality. Attributes also include broader aspects such as being a team player, showing responsibility, and perseverance in seeing a task through to completion. We use the Business Centre (simulated work office) to create a business environment so that the students have opportunities to develop and apply the attributes needed in certain situations in an office setting. Students are encouraged to practise and develop attributes that staff explain are considered desirable to employers.

From investigating the NZQA framework, I expected the skills to be easily identifiable and the attributes to be less likely to occur on the framework, primarily because they are difficult to measure. This is exactly what I found – skills were easily identified and attributes difficult to locate (appendix 4).

The formal programme outcomes do not include these desirable attributes, as they cannot be assessed on the National framework and are very difficult to accurately measure. In this study, I hoped to gain an understanding of students' attitudes towards this hidden curriculum by asking them about work

related activities and attitudes addressed in the Business Centre and about learning attributes that employers may find desirable.

Hidden Curriculum

Rowntree (1981) defines the hidden curriculum as: "All the beliefs and values and understandings that are passed on to the student in an educational institution, not through formal teaching but, unconsciously, through what the institution demands of the student". Husen and Postlethwaite (1985) state that "the hidden curriculum may be seen as covert, unintended, implicit or simply unacknowledged", but within Whitireia's business administration programmes it is something that is acknowledged, discussed, and very much intended. It is immersed within the Business Centre environment, but hidden from view in terms of assessment and traditional teaching methods. Ottewill (2005) argues that students will be far more receptive to what they are being taught if this is not belied by what they see around them and that managers must model good practices for employees to emulate. Tutors model behaviour that they assume employers seek, in the hope of encouraging and reinforcing this type of behaviour from students. They also create role-play situations for students to practise and develop these behaviours.

Skills and Attributes

Hofstrand (1996) describes "soft skills" as those possessed by self-motivated, conscientious workers with initiative to learn on the job. The Evening Post's (2002) article on interpersonal or "soft skills" lists these as communication, listening, multi-tasking, diplomacy and adaptability. Rainsbury, Hodges and Burchell (2002) also use the terminology of soft and hard skills: Soft – interpersonal or behavioural; and hard – technical aspects of performing a job. Baker and McGregor (2000) studied desirable characteristics in potential employees, that I would label 'attributes' – integrity, energy, drive, enthusiasm, appearance. Hard skills were more specific and task-orientated and soft skills were the personal attributes of the worker. Other literature defines these skills and attributes as skills and qualities or abilities.

Attributes and skills are classified in many ways and Birkett (1993) breaks these down into cognitive skills, which are the hard skills required to do the job, and behavioural skills which are built up from personal characteristics such as principles, attitudes, values and motives which are part of an individual's personality (Birkett, 1993). Essentially though, across areas of study, there is an agreement that attributes are a person's personal traits and skills are the techniques used in jobs they are able to perform.

I have defined skills as something a person can do, such as a task they can perform, or a piece of computer software they can operate. It is something tangible that can be assessed. Attributes are the less tangible qualities of the person, their work ethic, their moral code of conduct and the 'essence' of a person. In this study, 'hard skills' are what I have called 'skills' and 'soft skills' are what I have called 'attributes'. In this study, I have identified skills as tangible things people learn to enable to them perform their job i.e. literacy, numeracy, communication and computing skills. Attributes are defined as the qualities a person holds such as enthusiasm, personality, and commitment.

There are also some confusing papers that have not defined the differences between skills and attributes. Medford (2000) reports that the key to employment is employability and goes on to identify the top ten skills that employers seek in an employee. The title of this paper, was "Top ten skills NZ employers are looking for" – it then went on to list what I see as a mixture of both skills and attributes. These were:

1. Strong verbal and interpersonal communication
2. Problem solving
3. Sound academic achievement
4. Self motivated/self management/self starter
5. Analytical and conceptual
6. Flexible and adaptable 'can do' attitude
7. Team player
8. Strong written communication
9. Energy and enthusiasm
10. Creative/innovative

Victoria University's Employment Skills Survey (Medford, 2003) identified 10 top skills/attributes sought after in university graduates. As with Medford (2000), this research mixed both skills and attributes, listing the top 10 skills/attributes as:

1. Strong verbal and interpersonal communication skills
2. Self-motivated/self management/self starter
3. Team player
4. Sound academic achievement
5. Analytical and conceptual skills
6. Strong written communication skills
7. Flexible and adaptable 'can do' attitude
8. Problem solving skills
9. Energy and enthusiasm
10. Professional ethics

(Medford, 2003)

This survey was a repeat of one conducted in 2000, with similar results to (Medford, 2000). The emergence of Professional Ethics, Medford speculates, could well be attributed to a global scene characterised by volatile markets, fraud and accounting scandals, and internet scams.

In fact there was plenty of evidence in literature about the difference between skills and attributes, and Buck and Barrick (1987) in particular thought attributes rather than technical competence (what I have called skills) were more important in junior entry level jobs. They did, however, group reading, basic arithmetic and other basic skills as attributes rather than skills. They grouped as skills those items involving technical competence. Within my own area I would define technical competence as higher level computing, oral and written skills, and attributes, as Cotton (2001) did, with aspects like a positive attitude and cooperativeness. For my questionnaires to employers and students I placed numeracy into the skill based list even though Buck and Barrick had

listed it as an attribute. I did this because numeracy can be learned and accurately assessed.

Cardinal (2003) discusses the questions an employer should ask at an interview and categorically states that the employer should be in search of attributes as the main consideration and skills as a secondary factor only. In fact he goes on to note that attitude and aptitude are more important than skills, as skills can always be taught at a later stage. I believe this is not wholly correct. I cannot think of one job that does not require some form of basic entry level skill. A manual factory worker would still need a base skill level (i.e. communication) before being trained on a specific procedure. Cardinal's (2003) paper also assumes that skills are easier to teach than attitudes, as attitudes are intrinsic to a person. This interesting point, I thought, was worth investigation in this study.

My Position

For the purpose of this study I defined skills being measurable functions or actions that a person performs, and attributes as less tangible qualities that a person possesses. In the questionnaires I developed to use in this study, I divided skills and attributes into two different sections. I did not want a confused picture of skills and attributes to emerge that I would then need to separate.

Other Studies

Research on what employers look for in Junior Office Staff

At the beginning of this research I looked for material on what employers looked for in junior office staff. It has become evident that there is material available on what employers wanted from employees and about the qualities employers looked for in their potential staff members. Arnold and Davey's (1994) paper *Evaluating Graduate Development*, found that from a graduate perspective, soft skills are seen as being less important than hard skills, because it was perceived by graduates that technical or hard skills were relatively more critical in getting a job.

Arnold and Davey's (1994) literature suggests that students and new graduates perceive hard skills as more important than soft skills. It would seem likely that if this is so, it will influence students' study habits and attempts at skill development. Such a practice may lead to students focusing on the more technical or content aspects of their studies, rather than developing their soft skills such as their personal and interpersonal skills.

Within the field of employer expectation of their employees, communication was an issue highlighted frequently. A study by Bamford (2000) looked at what was meant by "good communication skills" as this can be interpreted very widely. She discovered that employers felt that the covering letters and CVs provided evidence of the candidate writing skills and that extra curricular participation and achievement gave evidence of teamwork. The interview itself was used to judge verbal presentation, conversation ability, confidence, dress, attitude and listening ability. What was also interesting was that she found there was an increase in requirements for communication skills in the words used in situations vacant advertisements between 1985 and 1997. This increase might be in response to the increasing number of students perceived as exiting education without communication and writing skills.

In the article *Making Education and Career Connections* (1997) a panel of business and industry officials, asked employers, what they were looking for in employees. Many respondents listed communication as a vital skill. One respondent was quoted as saying

"I agree very strongly that communication skills are one of the strongest "soft" skills that are needed". Another respondent "The key is finding people who come to you with communication skills and the ability and willingness to learn. You can give them specific training and get them up to speed pretty quickly." (Hofstrand, 1996, p51).

Kretovics and McCambridge (1998) found differences between large and small business requirements for potential employees and speculated that large manufacturing organisations, for example, might recruit on college campuses

and could require strong technical backgrounds in order to keep pace with their competitors. Small, entrepreneurial venture need self-starters because they face all the demands of a larger company, but without the ample resources that size can provide. Their study noted that small business emphasised communication skills over computing skills, the need for a good fit between the individual and the corporate culture, and the personality attributes of self-starter, responsibility and leadership potential. Service business emphasised relationship building and sales skills. The conclusion of this study showed paramount connectedness between the type of employer business organisation and the skills or attributes they seek.

This is noticeable in Baker and McGregor's (2000) study where employers assessed the importance of characteristics of Accounting students. Students vastly underestimated the importance of both average and above average personal integrity compared to employer groups. This attribute would be significant if a person were employed in an accounting position because of the nature of the role.

"Employability skills are the attributes of employees, other than technical competence, that make them a asset to the employer" (Buck and Barrick, 1987, p29) These employability skills include reading, basic arithmetic and other basic skills, problem solving, decision making, and other higher-order thinking skills, along with dependability, a positive attitude, cooperativeness and other effective skills and traits. Broken down into basic skills, higher-order thinking skills and effective skills and traits, they found those nearly all employers named as vital were dependability, responsibility and a positive attitude to work. They call these employability skills. This study concluded that applicants need not be highly educated, but must possess a solid foundation of these skills and that employers value these generic employability skills above specific occupational skills. It continued that these skills are best learned when they are included among instructional goals and explicitly taught. Certainly from my own experience in the classroom, I agree that these attributes are highly attractive, but I also firmly believe that, for some people, they are not part of their personal and social background, and so they have enormous difficulties understanding

the validity of these skills and, quite often, fail to develop them during a programme of study. Again within the current framework that is taught towards the National Certificate in Business Administration and Computing, these types of attributes are not assessed or rewarded. Desirable as they might be, I question Buck and Barrick's (1997) view that employers value these generic employability skills above specific occupational skills. They may well desire them in addition to specific occupational skills, but would they employ people without them? I think not.

It is clear from the literature, that employers' wants are directly related to the type of business, but that generally most desire a mix of both skills and attributes. This multi-skilled mixture is also identified in Victoria University's Employment Skills Study where the survey showed that it is a combination of certain skills and attributes which is the key to employability. (Medford, 2003)

In summary, I conclude that employers desire in a potential employee a mix of both skills and attributes. Skills are easily assessed via the NZQA framework - attributes not so easily. It is reasonable that businesses would seek employees with skills to complement their business, whether they be big or small. There are common attributes which would improve employability, as it appears most employers want employees with attributes such as enthusiasm, a willingness to learn, and commitment to the job. As stated previously, the Whitireia Business Centre was designed to simulate an office environment, thus encouraging students to understand and develop general attributes required in business environments. If, and it appears as if it is so, employers seek both skills and attributes, educational facilities should aim to teach both, but the question remains whether attributes can be taught, accurately assessed, and acknowledged. Under the current NZQA framework, this is not addressed.

Research on what students thought employers looked for in Junior Office staff

Rainsbury, Hodges, Burchell and Lay (2002) undertook a study to rank workplace competencies from graduate and student perceptions. Graduates ranked both hard and soft skills more highly than did students, but the study did

confirm the hypothesis that students and graduates perceived both hard skills and soft skills (attributes) to be important.

The study confirms that students and graduates agree with the findings of other studies such as Kemper (1999), McMurchie (1998), and Spencer and Spencer (1993) which found that superior performers require competence in both hard and soft skills.

Coll, Zegwaard and Hodges (2002) study showed that Waikato University's science and technology students perceived 'ability and willingness to learn' to be the most important competencies in the workplace. Business students ranked 'customer service orientation' highly, and both business students and science and technology students saw this as increasing in importance in the future. These findings suggest that both sets of students from different sectors (business and science and technology) have a well-developed sense of the importance of service for the customers in a modern commercial context.

In Australia, Dymock and Gerber (2002) looked at the nature of workplace learning and the transition from a vocational training college to work. This is the closest research I found to my own, as the students were seeking similar career objectives and the programmes of study were somewhat similar. Their research subjects were from an Executive Secretarial Skills programme and a Hospitality and Tourism programme, both one-year full-time programmes. One of the outcomes of the research was that the students generally thought they had learnt many skills and attributes in the programme that were then transferable to the workplace. On attributes such as timekeeping, for example, one respondent in this study said:

"...in a class situation you have an assessment and you may be able to get an extension and lose marks but you can't just lose a mark in the workplace because it is real people and if you are not prepared to get

the job done then they are going to lose some money.” He thought therefore that time management was important in his office and that he had ‘probably not’ learned that in the college.

(Dymock and Gerber, 2002, p26)

The skills they learnt on their programme are transferable, but how the students go about the acquisition of skills and attributes is worthy of further investigation. The next section looks at how and where student learning takes place.

Student Learning

Illeris (2002) discusses a view of adult learning theory that seems to reflect the learning that takes place within our business administration programmes. The premise is that human learning comprises a mixture of cognitive, emotional and social learning. That is, a student learns when a connection is made between the learning material and the student’s social self. Illeris (2002) emphasises the interaction between an individual and their surroundings that shows that learning is a social process. A triangulation of factors (see Figure 1) shows diverse forces that allow for adult learning opportunities. This theory is responsive to the fact that learning is intertwined, combining past and present experiences to enhance learning.

The diagram in Figure 1 illustrates that for the acquisition of learning to take place, the material or activity must be presented to a student who has a purpose for wanting to learn. Additionally, if the material they are learning can be put into a workplace framework, then the acquisition of learning is more likely to take place.

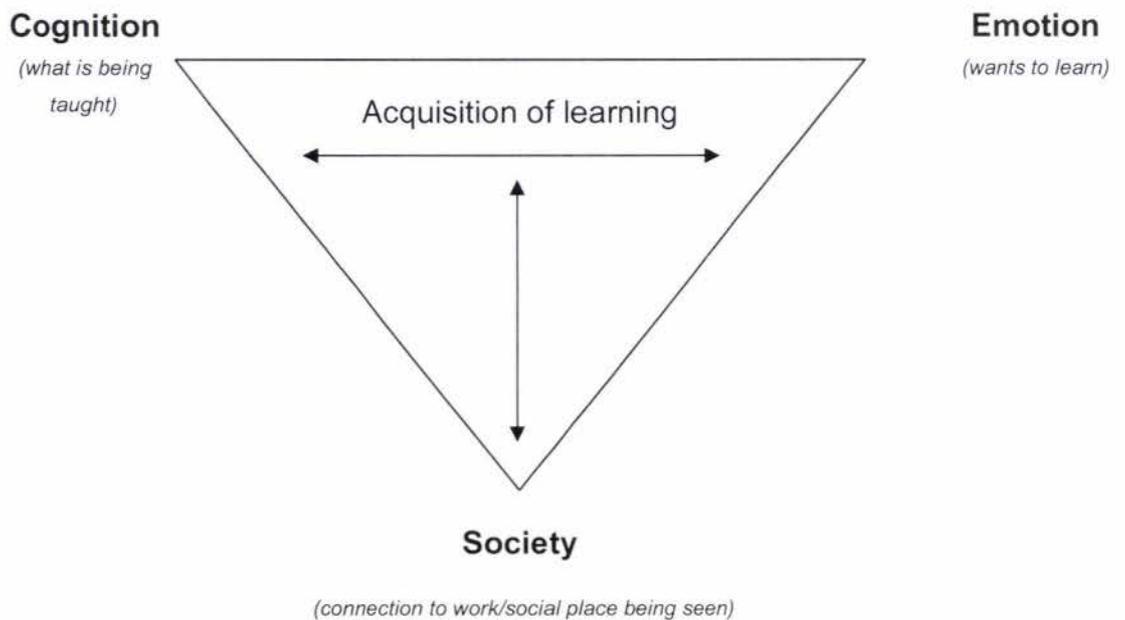


Figure 1: The Interaction between dimensions in the tension field of learning
 (Illeris, 2002, p118)

As an educator, I can see relevance of this in our learning environment. The learning needs of adult students need to encompass both their social and emotional needs, and the 'Contemporary Learning Theory' outlined above appears to be broad enough to encompass the diverse teaching and learning needs required on our programmes to assist students in their endeavours. It is also reflected in Wenger's (1998) social theory of learning which embraces various other dimensions which all collaboratively enable the student to identify their learning in relation to their community, and the practice they hope to enter (see Figure 2).

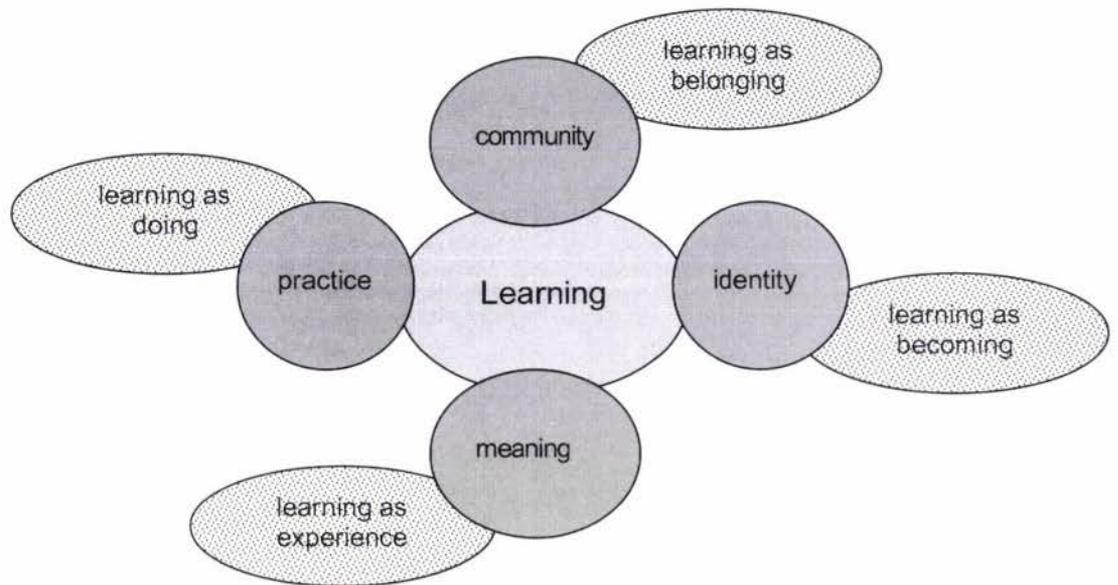


Figure 2: A social theory of learning
(Wenger, 1998, P5)

I agree that, if a skill that tutors are trying to teach is something a student feels is irrelevant or unnecessary for their employment objectives, then they would have no framework to connect the knowledge to, thus might possibly fail to uptake the knowledge. Rogoff (1990) argues that learning is achieved through connectedness between past, present and future learning and that learners must be able to reflect on the relevancy for themselves. Some of the students' learning in Whitireia's programmes is conducted within a simulated business environment which emulates a realistic setting to create relevance for applying the new learning.

Informal Learning in the Workplace

The simulated business environment at Whitireia Community Polytechnic was designed to emulate an administration office in a business. Students are encouraged to come to the Business Centre dressed for the workplace to further remove the environment from an educational scene to that of a workplace. It was envisaged that students would behave in a more businesslike fashion to match the environment, and with simulated roleplays, scenario settings, self directed learning and some structured teaching, they would benefit from not only the standard learning of practices and functions within the Business Centre but also incidental learning i.e. learning from involvement, mistakes, trial and error, expression of beliefs and values, and also learn from

observing the action of others. Marsick and Watkins (1990a, 2001) define “incidental learning” as a by-product of some other activity such as sensing the organisational culture, or trial and error experimentation. They describe informal learning as not classroom based, but intentional and learner-controlled, and incidental learning as a subset of informal learning. The Business Centre captures both informal and incidental learning by trying to put activities within a business context, using the Business Centre as a simulated office. Garrick (1998) discusses informal learning as something that happens in everyday contexts as part of day-to-day life, and the Business Centre simulates this environment in the hope that students will learn relevant skills and qualities.

Dymock and Gerber (2002) examined the transition from training to work and what skills and attributes students needed to further develop in the workplace. They found that respondents said that the subjects in the training programmes’ addressed most of what they needed to know in the workplace, but that once people enter the workplace, they begin to build on what they know. They also commented that there was a difference between the classroom and the workplace:

“If there is something you don’t understand, in the classroom you usually want to know straight away so you go and ask the teacher, when you are in the workforce you tend to work it out more for yourself, particularly because you don’t want to be seen as not knowing what you are doing and asking questions every five minutes or so”.

(Dymock and Gerber 2002, p27)

The Business Centre was set up to encourage this type of behaviour and the challenge for both tutors and students is to effectively manage the situation to enable learning to take place.

The attributes considered in this research study are ones considered desirable for employment and are largely personality based. The developmental theory of Piaget (1952, 1972) recognised that individuals learn from the environment and

assimilation and accommodation help learning take place. Assimilation is the process of absorbing new information and fitting it into an already existing framework, whereas accommodation is forming new schema when there is no existing cognitive structure appropriate for understanding new information.

Freud (1958) and Erikson's (1968) developmental theories focus on the individual as the centre of the development process, but pay little attention to development within families and communities, including the workplace. A study of Pacific families notes their family is the focus of development, not the individual (Drewery and Bird, 2004). When considering enhancing or altering personality factors, the limited nature of the business administration programmes, together with limited contact hours, would suggest that personalities cannot be altered in any significant way in a short time through educational programmes.

Influence of Culture on Perceptions and Attributes and their Value

Polynesian

Within the Porirua City, where this study took place, there are significant numbers of Maori and Polynesian people. Polynesian people can be classified as Western Samoans, Cook Islanders, Tongans, Fijians and Niueans (Statistics New Zealand, 1995). Notwithstanding the differences in culture that exist between Pacific Island nations, certain characteristics are common to most of them. Traditional society is characterised by the importance of the extended family, strict hierarchical systems and status as a basis for interpersonal relations (Grattan, 1985; Sahlins, 1967). In contrast to the Pakeha social system, traditional Pacific Island communities can be characterised as societies where status is assigned on the basis of who a person is, rather than by what a person does (Parsons, 1951).

Polynesian status is assigned on the basis of who a person is, i.e. their lineage, and in this tradition, chiefs have considerable power and are entitled to service

from other members of the community. This service may be in the form of labour, money or food (Chong, Moya, Thomas, 1997). The rigid status differentials characteristic of Pacific Island societies that expect conformity and obedience as a show of respect, may also permeate into the current lives of the students and employers whom I have interviewed. As Pacific Islanders of high standing expect conformity and respect, those of a lower standing would be expecting to show these characteristics when employed in a junior office position.

Approximately two thirds of Pacific Islanders in New Zealand are island born (Statistics New Zealand, 2001) and have had a traditional upbringing. Additionally, for the first generation of Pacific Islanders born in New Zealand, traditional values still play an important role (Fitzgerald and Howard, 1990; Macpherson, 1994). While some socialisation into New Zealand society will have occurred over the last few decades among Pacific Islanders living in New Zealand, especially those born here, traditional values are still an important influence on their attitudes and behaviour. At Whitireia within our business administration programmes, we consistently see our Pacific Island students prioritising their family obligations before their own personal study and this is to be expected as it conforms to their traditional family values.

Pakeha

The term Pakeha was coined by the indigenous Maori people of New Zealand, to refer to people who are not Maori. Today it refers to non-Maori New Zealanders of European heritage. Pakeha society is characterised by the nuclear family and has a high degree of individualism (Pearson, 1994; Hofstede, 1984), when compared with indigenous Maori and Pacific Island cultures. It is a more achievement based society where status and recognition of an individual are given on the basis of what a person has done. This achievement based society allows for the possibility that anyone can achieve higher status, and is characterised by social mobility of their members (Smith, Dugan and Trompenaars, 1996). In general terms, Pakeha society values individualism, personal responsibility and independence.

Maori

Maori people are the indigenous Polynesian people of Aotearoa/New Zealand. As with any culture, values are able to adapt to changing circumstances and vary from person to person and group to group. I have attempted here to outline very general characteristics of Maori people, as I have done with both Pakeha and Polynesian people previously. I do not claim expertise in Maori philosophy, and have identified only characteristics that are important to this study. In traditional Maori society, rank and seniority of descent are taken seriously but each and every person is also important and not to be dismissed (Patterson 1992). Work within Maori society was usually a cooperative venture, family based, and everyone involved knew what was being done and why. Decision making was by consensus, not top-down command. Maori decision making requires consensus and time is secondary to communal support and trust (Avery, Everett, Finkelde and Wallace, 1999). With traditional values like these, one can see why family or whanau continue to be an important value to Maori people. The two most striking Maori values are a keen respect for place, especially home topography, and the honouring of family and ancestors (O'Connor and MacFarlane, 2002).

Some of the previously discussed attributes that employers seek may not 'fit' into the cultural norms of some groups, and so cultural differences need to be acknowledged when programmes focus on attributes for the workplace.

Changing Attitudes to Work

Attributes are built up from personal characteristics such as principles, attitudes, values and motives. These attributes, in contrast to cognitive skills, are a function of an individual's personality (Birkett 1993). It is this personality that employers look to understand to see the type of attributes a prospective employee would bring into the workplace. Anecdotally people discuss the work ethic of others to highlight their view of an attribute. 'Work ethic' is tricky to define but could be described as the basic belief that every person should do

his or her very best, irrespective of reward. It is more than the concept related to ideas of right, wrong, and fairness.

In my role, I constantly hear anecdotal comments from staff and employers lamenting the “lack of work ethic” among the younger generation. The comments generally sound like:

These young people just do not work as hard as we do

They are not committed to their work

They take less pride in their work

They are not disciplined

These types of statements affirm a perception that if they (our students/young generation) could only have “our” work ethic, productivity, pride and discipline, then they would find success and fulfilment in their work/study. Every evolved society has an ideology of work and, with this, employees’ perceptions about work ethic have changed (Hamilton-Attwell 1998)

1. **Ethical values evolved in the past** - at some earlier stage, advanced societies possessed a coherent set of social values, and the majority were socialised into accepting these values. The followers of these values may feel disillusioned and see themselves as the last of a dying breed.
2. **We can teach them** – things used to be better and there is an elite group that is still committed to work. The followers of this feel that, given enough power, they could instil this work ethic in the workforce – especially the youth.
3. **Different strokes for different folks** – there has never been a time that employers and employees felt the same about work, and work related ethical values are derived by changes in economic and social structures. (Hamilton-Attwell, 1998)

These broad definitions can also be related to Western’s (2001) generational ethic theory. His research is based on his assumptions that each human being

is an individual, and that people who were born in a common general time span and who share key life experiences often have similar attitudes to work.

Western (2001) concludes that an employee's perception of work can possibly be linked to the generation in which they were born. His research goes on to categorise people from recent generations as follows:

Silent generation: (Over 60 in 2005)	You get respect by hard work and you are rewarded with loyalty from your employer.
Baby Boomers: (40-59 in 2005)	Work is equal to self worth, contribution and personal fulfilment.
Generation X (up to 39 in 2005)	They want to spend time on things to improve the quality of their lives.

Zemke, Raines and Filipczak (2000) continued this research and redefined the ages to:

The Veterans (Silent generation) born between 1922 – 1943

The Baby Boomers born between 1943 – 1960

The Gen Xers (Generation X) born between 1960 - 1980

The Nexters born between 1980 – 2000	Expect to work more than 40 hours per week to achieve the lifestyle they want. They believe in collective action, optimism about the future, ready to sacrifice personal pleasure for collective good.
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Martin's (2005), research agrees with Zemke's (2000) description of Nexters, apart from "ready to sacrifice personal pleasure for collective good" as this theme was not included in her research.

Western (2001) identifies that people in the first three different categories have been raised with different emphasis in their lives which is likely to affect attitudes to work.

The 'silent generation', who are over the age of 60, were raised by authoritative, overprotective parents and probably had a very structured school experience with clear rules and guidelines. There was great economic hardship and people struggled to make 'ends meet'. When they entered the workforce they expected to possibly stay their whole working life with one firm. They expected to work hard but to be rewarded for their loyalty.

The 'baby boomers', aged 40-59 were a generation who were raised in more prosperous and optimistic times, were exposed to higher education and questioned the status quo. Authority and the integrity of leaders was questioned and the 'baby boomers' equate work with self worth, contribution and personal fulfilment.

Many of the 'generation x' have grown up with two parents working, and may come from single parent homes. Their schooling experience was focused on team based learning in a positive environment. Born in the information age with advanced technology, they expect instant response and satisfaction. Raised watching their parents work long hours and sacrifice leisure time for success at work, they desire work where they can find a balance between work and leisure. They want good pay scales and job satisfaction at an early level with immediate gratification for work well done. They do not have the same organisational commitment as older members of the work force (Western, 2001). This view is also reflected in Arsenault (2004).

The trend emerging from Western's (2001) literature is that as each set of labelled generations goes by, people appear to have less respect and honour for the workplace. The emotional commitment to an organisation is less compelling - companies can not offer the long-term employment and stability to employees. If we could document a next set of generation, people under 25, you might expect this trend to continue, but this is not the case according to

Brownstein (2000). He discusses how each generation attempts to solve a problem facing the previous youth generation, corrects the behavioural excesses it sees in the current midlife generation, and fills a social role being vacated by the departing elder generation. Following this theory, the Nexters or Millennials will have traits similar to the Silents. Bounds (2000) describes Nexters as being very positive about their future because of the recent robust economy and significant technological and economic advances. The recent impact of September 11 has significantly affected Nexters, encouraging patriotism, and a fear of danger that may endure throughout their lives (Kantrowitz and Naughton, 2001). An interesting comment from Bogdanowicz and Baily (2002) is that "long term employees react negatively to the self-sufficiency of Xers and see their unwillingness to defer gratification and commit to long term objectives as a reflection of a poor work ethic". (Bogdanowicz, Bailey, 2002) These differences in generational thoughts and expectations may relate to a lack of understanding about generational differences.

Educating students and tutors about possible differing work ethics between generations could help break down some of the barriers erected from within. Perhaps the key to ethics is an understanding that if a young person is seeking employment, they may well be employed by a baby boomer who has a different set of work ethics. If we showed our students a clear picture of the ethics a baby boomer might expect in the workplace, there might be a more harmonious work relationship.

The Changing Face of the Workplace

In today's knowledge economy, society's general values appear to have changed. Although in a larger, more multi-cultural society it is increasingly difficult to make generalisations about common values, many people appear to value resourcefulness rather than predictability, being sensitive rather than muscular, and being creative rather than obedient. It is no longer the norm to expect to stay with one or two employers for your working life. Students we see in education today can expect to experience many different jobs and employers in their work life, and our job in the teaching profession is to prepare them with

portable skills they can take from one occupation to another. The skills we offer must apply to a range of situations to broaden employment opportunities and create a foundation to build on by acquiring specific knowledge later as needed for a particular job.

Conclusion

The investigations from this literature review have raised some interesting view points, relevant to this research. The way I have identified skills and attributes, is reasonably consistent with the way other researchers have in similar research. There has not been significant studies carried out in the business administration field, especially containing ideas from a student's point of view in relation to what skills and attributes employers seek from applicants for junior administrative roles. There were studies from other areas and these showed that students in those studies primarily believed that skills were more important than attributes for gaining employment.

The "virtual" Business Centre that operates as a training area for development of administrative skills and attributes, appear to link the elements which encourage the development of informal learning. Wenger's, (1998) model of social learning, alongside Marsick and Watkins (1990a) definitions of informal and incidental learning theories appear to support the environment tutors create in the Business Centre as a valid learning tool.

The changing attitudes to work and work ethic was explored as it may help understand why some students anecdotally appear to refrain from practicing attributes that are desirable in the workplace. As employers tend to be of an older generation than the people they employ in junior administrative roles, this may account for a mismatch of general work ethic.

Chapter 3 - Research Process

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Introduction

This chapter details the approach taken in the research project. The chapter begins with a discussion of the reasons for the choice of the research method used, followed by the details of the research process itself. A summary of the overall planning involved in undertaking the research, the ethical considerations and a detailed account of how the research was carried out is presented. I have explained the reasoning behind the questions in the questionnaire and the interview process. The chapter ends with a discussion of some of the perceived limitations of this research.

I restricted the area of study to the Porirua City area. I did this because graduates from Whitireia Community Polytechnic's business administration programmes often seek work within the Porirua area and the catchment of students is also from this area. Although we have some students from the Kapiti and Wellington districts, predominately students are from the Porirua region and seek to find employment in this area.

The Research Questions

The research questions as identified in the literature review were to find out:

1. What skills and attributes do employers look for in their junior office/administration staff?
2. What skills and attributes do students from Whitireia Community Polytechnic's Business Administration and Computing programmes think employers look for in prospective junior office/administration staff?
3. What skills and attributes do business employers think are necessary for employment, and can these skills can be incorporated into the

The Choice of Research Process

This research project was undertaken to gain an insight into and an understanding of employers' and students' attitudes and expectations of requirements for a junior office/administration role. The research that best addressed this was an interpretive approach, requiring data gathering designed for developing understanding and insight. The data needed to answer the research questions was partly quantitative and partly qualitative. Quantitative, to give respondents an opportunity to rank skills and attributes; and qualitative, to expand on people's answers to give depth and explanations where needed. With this in mind, I chose to use questionnaires that had both quantitative and qualitative questions, and used follow-up interviews to further expand on issues that were raised.

Merriam (1998) describes this type of research design as that of "qualitative enquiry" Merriam (1998) claims that qualitative research lends itself to the study of educational practice, emphasising that research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education.

Tolich and Davidson (1999) suggest that the choice of qualitative methodology is made when there is a need to study reality from the point of view of the subject, or in this case, the subjects, both students and employers.

These approaches to research fitted with my own assumption that education is a social activity, and that people's intentions and expectations in relation to education need to be understood. This focus lends itself to social research from a human interaction perspective. Given my own education and social background, it was a rational choice to research in a way that allowed my

inquisitiveness to be used as a tool. I wanted to gather the perspectives of others' thoughts and use the information in a meaningful way, in this case to reflect on the teaching topics and practices in the programmes with which I am involved. As Merriam (1998) states, the drive to conduct basic qualitative research should be to seek quality subjective information in order to discover, analyse and understand a phenomenon, process, or perspective of the people involved.

Although this research has both quantitative and qualitative aspects to it, the reasoning behind using both these methods was to combine their findings. Davidson and Tolich (1999) argue that the two research methods stem from differing paradigms, with qualitative methods better suited to an interpretative paradigm and quantitative methods fitting a scientific or positivistic approach. Quantitative methods include questionnaires, surveys and experiments and concentrate mainly on consistency of results, looking to explain and generalise about the subject of the research. The questionnaires in this study were used to gather a synopsis of what both employers and students thought about the skills and attributes needed for junior office/administration staff. The subsequent interviews gave some more insight and explanation of issues raised in the questionnaires. Qualitative research methods include interviews, focus groups, participant observation or ethnographical field work which seek to interpret and understand the research subjects and for this research, were used for further exploration of topics arising from the questionnaires.

Reinharz (1992) states that quantitative research, because of its methods, requires large samples and arises out of hierarchically structured research teams, which are often funded by government grants and corporations. Such large undertakings require capital and therefore attract vested interest. Davidson and Tolich (1999) are more concise in stating that the quantitative approach gives the researcher the breadth while the qualitative provides them with the depth. In this case, the quantitative data gave the foundation and the qualitative data gave some limited depth. My sample was very small, and the research outcomes were limited because of the small nature of this study. It was more important from a researcher's point of view, to be practical and select

methodologies that were most fitting for the research purpose. This research project was small in nature, so a few in-depth interviews combined with limited statistical data fitted the task.

Although I did not seek large samples for this research, the methods of choice fitted the questions to be answered.

When the research was initiated I had anticipated using focus groups to gather more detailed information, but as the research unfolded and the time constraints of this project became obvious, the decision was made to have individual taped interviews, with follow-up questions if necessary. With a mixture of both the statistical data from the questionnaires and communicative dialogue from the interviews, I hoped to gain employers' and students' perspectives around the topic of skills and attributes of junior office/administration employees.

Ethical Considerations

Applications were made to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC) and Whitireia Community Polytechnic's Research Committee for the approval of the process of the research project to be undertaken. MUHEC approval of the proposed procedures to be used was confirmed before research began (appendix 5). Permission from Whitireia Community Polytechnic Research Committee (as part of the research application) was obtained to contact students who were likely candidates to carry out questionnaire data collection and subsequent interviews (appendix 6). Approval was also given to name Whitireia Community Polytechnic within the research and subsequent reporting (appendix 6). The application made to MUHEC detailed ethical procedures for dealing with 'human subjects', anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent. Those items are further detailed below.

Prospective student participants for the questionnaires were provided with an information sheet (appendix 7) about the research project. The student questionnaires (appendix 8) and information sheets were distributed by a tutor

other than myself to the classes on the students' orientation day and the questionnaires were completed and collected at the same session. No names of participants were asked for or recorded. The exception to this was if a student agreed to be interviewed, in which case they filled out a form including their name and contact details. This was collected separately from the questionnaire.

Employer participants for the questionnaires (appendix 9) were provided with an information sheet (appendix 7) about the research project. The questionnaires and information sheets were posted to the employer once verbal consent had been given during a preliminary telephone enquiry. Two self addressed envelopes were included, to enable the employer to send back the completed questionnaire and interview consent form separately in order to protect the anonymity of questionnaire responses.

It was important to me that the data for this study would be trustworthy and a true account of what students and employers really thought for themselves. With many Polynesian students, I did not want them answering the questions in a way they thought would please me, but more I wanted their honest response. Because of this I chose to give questionnaires only to students for whom I was not their tutor. Although I was the Programme Manager for the programmes, these students did not have daily contact with me, which might have swayed their responses. The questionnaires were given out on day one of the semester, before they could be indoctrinated with what tutors believed, and before tutors began instructing them on why they were learning specific material. In this way I hoped to gain their initial impressions in the questionnaires.

Both student and employer participants could respond on the questionnaire attachment (returned separately) to indicate they were agreeable to an interview, if needed, at a later stage. I subsequently selected two employers and two students who were willing to be interviewed. I contacted each person individually by telephone and interview dates and venues acceptable to them were organised. The employers were interviewed at their workplaces, one

student was interviewed at her home, and the other was interviewed over the phone at her workplace. The depth of data from these four was not as detailed as I would have liked, so I chose to conduct two more interviews, one employer and one student. The first of these was conducted at the employer's workplace, and the student came in to Whitireia and I interviewed her in my office.

All participants in the interviews signed a consent form (appendix 9). Audio tapes and interview transcripts were stored in a locked cupboard at my private residence and electronic data stored on my laptop which is password protected. Analysed data was collated on paper and transferred to computer word processing and saved on hard drive. All data analysis material (paper and hard drive) was stored at my personal residence accessible by only key or via password on my personal laptop computer. At the end of this research project, the completed questionnaires and interview transcripts will be stored at Massey University and destroyed after five years. Individual tapes will be offered back to the participants at the end of the study. The data extracted from the data analysis will be used only for the purposes of completing this research project and any other written reports or articles that may arise from this research.

I have made stringent efforts to prevent personal identification of the participants in the presentation of the research findings. Confidentiality for the proposed interview subjects was ensured by several methods. Firstly, the taped interviews were accessible only to me and I transcribed all the material myself. In addition references to names and businesses (other than Whitireia Community Polytechnic) were removed from the presentation of the findings so that the respondents could not be individually identified (pseudonyms were used in the reporting). Confidentiality of quantitative data from questionnaires was maintained by collating responses numerically.

Designing the Questionnaire

In beginning this research, I contacted Marilyn Lockyer from Waikato Institute of Technology who provided me with some previous research she had done in this area. This research, similar to my own, gave me a starting point to begin my questionnaire design. I specifically designed the questionnaires to be short, easily understandable and concise as I did not want prospective participants to be discouraged from answering them, and when I first discussed the concept of questionnaires with colleagues and friends, people generally were concerned about how long the questionnaire would take to complete. I did not want to discourage people from responding if the length of the questionnaire was too long. Alreck and Settle (1995) advised that errors and oversights are inevitable and warned of survey limitations and the need for careful wording of the questions in the survey. They cautioned on the importance of wording the questions in such a way that over-generalisation, over-specificity, over-emphasis, ambiguity, or leading or loaded questions were not used, nor questions that would contribute to bias. I also wanted the two questionnaires – one to employers and one to students - to be similar in structure and focus so that I could compare the responses to the questions from the two groups.

In designing the questionnaires for both students and employers, I had to be extremely careful to use plain and simple English, as many of the students had a very limited previous education, and many had English as a second language.

I designed an initial employer questionnaire and trialled it on staff members within Whitireia Community Polytechnic and friends who had been involved in research before. Each suggestion from this group was given careful consideration and either included or excluded in the final questionnaire design. Some alterations were needed to ensure they understood the question as I had meant it to read. There was some difficulty in understanding question one, so after much thought and discussion, I decided to add bracketed information about what I meant by *Personal Characteristics, General Abilities, Specified Skills, and Knowledge*. Other changes were grammatical or semantic to add

clarity. Following this I amended the student questionnaire to reflect the changes in the employer questionnaire and trialled it on three past students. Their responses to the questionnaire were favourable and no changes were made. I used a mixture of Likert-style, open and ranking type questions. Tashakkori and Teddie (1998) suggest that pragmatism seems to be a good justification for taking a mixed method approach because of its intuitive appeal – “study what interests and is of value to you, study it in the different ways that you deem appropriate and use the results in ways that can bring about positive consequences within your value system” (Tashakkori and Teddie, 1998, p30).

Employer Questionnaire Design

Demographics - Employer

GENDER

HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU BEEN IN YOUR CURRENT POSITION

WHAT IS YOUR POSITION TITLE

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF YOUR PRIMARY BUSINESS

WHICH NATIONALITY DO YOU IDENTIFY WITH

AGE

I chose to do a section on the demographics of the employers as I wanted to know if there was a wide variety of different types of employers from the Porirua region. The employers' gender, title, number of employees and nationalities were sought to identify any significant trends within sections of demographics. When the questionnaires were collected, it would also help identify that I had a cross section of different types of businesses so that the data was a reflection of a range of businesses rather than just one or two types of businesses. I asked for the number of years the employer had been in their current position to ascertain if there was a range of experience among employers.

Question 1

Q1 Please rank the following categories in order of importance for a junior office/administration staff member from **YOUR** point of view: 1 being **most important** and 4 being **least important**

Personal characteristics (temperament, values, interests, motivation, how you react in situations).....
General abilities (problem solving/reasoning, things you are good at)
Specific skills (practised technique, skills you can perform, computing skills, writing).....
Knowledge (the things that you know and understand).....

I gave considerable thought to the way I asked this question, and added the bracketed words after many of my colleagues had difficulty understanding exactly what each term meant. Morgan and Smith (1996) grouped the attributes and experience of employees into the same four categories, and I thought this extremely useful to replicate to get a broad overview.

Question 2

Q2 Please rank the same categories in order of importance according to your expectations the last time you employed a junior administration employee. 1 being **most important** and 4 being **least important**

Question two asked the same question, but this time was according to the last time the employer employed a junior administration employee. This question was to determine if employers made employment appointments according to their beliefs.

Question 3

Q3 What was the outstanding feature that impressed you enough to hire your last junior administration employee

This question was to identify some qualities in prospective employees that lead to employment. It was open ended to encourage participants to think of new or different ideas.

Question 4

Q4 What are some examples of characteristics that influenced you in **NOT** employing someone on that occasion

This question was to identify any trends that I had not anticipated of why employers chose not to employ someone.

Question 5

Q5 Would you make the same choice of employee if you were to fill the position again Yes No

Why _____

This question was asked to identify if they would appoint the same person again and to check how successful the employer's last selection process had been.

Question 6

Q6 Please rate the following **SKILLS** in order of importance for junior administration employees. Rank this list from 1-5
1 being **most important** and 5 being **least important**. Please give each skill a rating.

This question asked respondents to indicate on a five point Likert scale (of importance), the skills needed by a junior office/administration employee. This was used to identify the skills employers deemed the most necessary and which were not as significant. The list was put into alphabetical order so that the researcher's own rankings of importance could not show through. There was also an open-ended section employers could fill in, asking them if there were any other skills that were not included in the list, and there was space for them to comment.

Question 7

Q7 What **skills** would you like to see added to the courses that are offered to better equip prospective junior administration staff for the work force

This prompted employers to think and comment about other skills that might be taught on the business administration and computing programmes.

Question 8

Q8 Please rate the following **ATTRIBUTES** in importance for junior administration employees. Rank this list from 1-5
1 being most important and 5 being least important. Please give each attribute a rating.

This question is similar to question 6, the difference being question 6 asked for skills, and question 8 asked for attributes. The logic behind the question is the same.

Question 9

Q9 What attributes would you like to see encouraged in the courses that are offered to better equip prospective junior administration staff for the work force

This question gave room for the employer to list or discuss any issues that had not been raised, any attributes that were not included in my list and that they would like to see encouraged in our programmes.

Student Questionnaire Design

This questionnaire (appendix 7) was similar to the employer questionnaire with corresponding lists of both skills and attributes that the students had to rank.

Demographics - Student

GENDER: Are you Male Female **Age** <20 21-30 31-45 46-60 >61

WHICH ETHNIC GROUP DO YOU IDENTIFY WITH: _____

The demographics section for the students only asked for gender, age and ethnicity as these were the only relevant comparable areas.

The remainder of the student questionnaire had only six questions as opposed to nine for the employer questionnaire, the difference being that the employer questionnaire asked more about their previous employment patterns and the student questionnaire asked mainly about skills and attributes. I again kept the questionnaire to only two pages so that it would not appear long and daunting to the student. In this way I hoped to get a greater number of responses.

Selection of Participants

Informed consent was sought from the participants in order to protect their interests and to honestly inform them of what the research would entail.

Employer Participation

I began the research process with an investigation of employers within Porirua. Participants for this part of the research were firstly sought from businesses within the Porirua area. I sourced contact details of all businesses in the Porirua region from Porirua Business Development, and at random selected businesses from the list to telephone to ask if they would participate in the research. I telephoned each business asking to speak to the person who "was the most likely to hire office staff". I gave a brief outline of the study and asked if they wished to participate. If the prospective participant agreed I sent out an information pack, interview consent form, questionnaire and two self addressed

return envelopes. One envelope was for the interview consent form and one envelope was for the completed questionnaire.

Eighteen employers were contacted to explain the research project, and asked if they would like to participate by filling out a questionnaire. Two employers did not want to participate in the research project as one did not feel she had a lot of knowledge in this area and the other declined to fill in the questionnaire. Sixteen questionnaires were therefore sent out to employers and 14 questionnaires were returned. The response rate from employers for this research study was 78%. Six employers agreed to be interviewed, and ultimately three of those were randomly selected and participated in separately taped interviews.

Student Participation

On 9 February 2004, students gathered at the Whitireia Community Polytechnic for orientation into the Business Administration/Call Centre and Office Skills Programmes. After a formal powhiri and general orientation, they were then divided into their appropriate classes and sent to a classroom for programme orientation. Once in their rooms tutors from the Office Systems Centre of Learning distributed 58 questionnaires (appendix 7) and information sheets (appendix 6) which the students could choose to fill in or not. Students returned their forms during the session and placed completed forms in one labelled box and Interview Consent sheets in another labelled box. Of the 32 returned, questionnaires 26 were used in the study. The response rate of correctly filled in forms from students for this research study was thus 55%. The remaining 6 questionnaires were filled out incorrectly and in such a manner that they were unusable for this study. Ten students offered to be further interviewed, but owing to time constraints and lack of contact details only three were eventually interviewed.

Analysis of Data

Questionnaires

Numerical data from the questionnaire was then quantitatively recorded with each response marked, recorded, and collated into an Excel spreadsheet to show frequency of responses. I used a highlighter to mark repeated ideas or phrases that emerged from open-ended responses, which were then collated and analysed to identify trends. This was done for all employer items and then all student items. As the data from the questionnaires were relatively short, I did not use computer software to explore the data, but relied more on interpretive insight from myself, to find themes and ideas emerging from the data.

When questions were asked in the questionnaire where the participants had to rate a skill or attribute from 1-5, I used two methods to represent the data.

1. Graphed the information to show a visual image of frequency of responses.
2. Added the 1's, 2's, 3's, and 4's to get a total score from all respondents for each item (note that a high score represents a negative response, and a low score a more positive response).

My reasoning behind adding the scores was that this gives an overall measure against each skill or attribute comparable to other data. If some participants ranked a skill as a 1 (most important) and others rated it as a 4 (least important) then the added totals would give a figure that would relate to its importance when ranked against other totalled scores.

Interviews

The questions used for the interviews were semi-structured and covered similar ground to those in the questionnaire. I hoped that, as the participants expressed their views, this would bring about more in-depth responses and an

opportunity for follow-up questions. The questions asked during the interviews were based on the those outlined in appendices 10 and 11. Appendix 10 shows the interview questions for employers and appendix 11 shows the interview questions for students. Appendix 12 shows the revised interview questions to students, which were altered after the questionnaires had been analysed. The questions for the interviews were selected with a view to finding answers to the main theme of the research project: What skills and attributes do you think employers look for in junior administrative/office positions? The first question asked this to see if anything new was introduced that was not in the questionnaires, that I could further develop. Following this, the questions were used as a guideline within the semi-structured interview or discussion.

Two students were initially selected to be interviewed from the 10 students who indicated they would be willing to be interviewed. I selected the students by randomly drawing out two responses, and it was fortunate that they were from differing age groups and had different backgrounds. As the data from those two did not cover some points, I chose later to interview a third student, a young Samoan student who had successfully graduated from the business administration programme and had continued with her studies.

The responses from employers saying they were willing to be interviewed were fewer than from the students. Six employers agreed to be interviewed and I initially randomly chose two. When I contacted them one employer was keen to be interviewed to express her views and an interview time and date was set up and the interview was conducted.

One of the employers volunteered another staff member who had not filled out the questionnaire but was in a position of hiring junior administrative/office staff. It was difficult to find a time that was suitable and after three missed appointments I sensed in her an unwillingness to participate and she agreed with this. I did not continue. A different employer was then contacted and subsequently interviewed.

As with the student interviews, I later chose to interview one further employer from my initial group and approached a middle aged Maori woman who worked in a small organisation. She agreed and was subsequently interviewed.

The interviews took from 19 minutes to 41 minutes to complete. The employers and students who participated were articulate and collectively provided me with a range of insights into their beliefs about their experiences of skills and attributes needed for junior administrative/office staff.

The interviews were audio taped and I then transcribed them. Transcriptions were done immediately (within 12 hours) so that I still had a good feel for the information that had been collected during the interviews. The six transcribed interviews were then analysed using the structured questions as a beginning classification. Common themes and threads were pulled out of the data by repeated scanning, identification of likely themes, collation of the data into common groupings, and introspection and evaluation.

Some Limitations of this Research

This study focused on the perceptions of some employers and prospective employees who were drawn from only one sector of a wide business administration band. It is very much a snapshot taken at the period of time the research was being conducted and the findings can really be applied only to the particular programmes within the study. Programmes in business administration undergo change every year; since this research began an example would be that *Creating Web Pages* has been added to our programmes and so that topic is not reflected in this study. The viewpoints of students and employers in this narrow sector have not been sufficiently explored in previous New Zealand research, and I wanted to find out their opinions and make suggestions on our programmes that might improve the chance of employment success for graduates.

The sample size of the questionnaire participants was small, and was deliberately confined to the Porirua basin. All available students enrolled in

Whitireia Community Polytechnic business administration programmes at that time were given an opportunity to fill out a questionnaire. The employers in the defined area who agreed to take part in this research provided a good representation geographically and a mix from the occupational, age and ethnicity groupings. As a result of both the sample size and the limited location, the findings from this study are very specific to the programmes and year, and cannot necessarily be generalised to similar programmes at other polytechnics. I acknowledge that the limited size of quantitative data and the random sampling of only three students and three employers for interviews meant my interview data did not necessarily provide rich data. Although the findings are not able to be generalised, they are of value to the specific programmes involved. I also recognise that due to researcher inexperience, my interview techniques were not well developed and know that next time a project involving interviewing subjects was attempted, further upskilling and technique training in this area would be required. As discussed in the Reflections and Recommendations Chapter, the data from this project may well provide enough pilot material to be followed up by a more sizeable research project.

Chapter 4 - Findings

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Introduction

This chapter documents and discusses data collated from questionnaires and from individual interviews that were undertaken for this research. I began this section by looking at the questionnaire questions to employers and their responses identifying significant trends. The student questionnaires were then explained and analysed with some significant trends identified. The subsequent interviews with employers and students were then documented.

I have used two different methods for displaying the results of the questionnaires. Method one: Participants were asked to grade general categories on a scale from 1-4. A number one score represents a high score and four represents a low score. I have used graphs to visually illustrate these results. Method two: The scores for each question were added to give a total figure. If this figure was low, it represented a high overall score, and if the figure was high, it represented a low overall score.

Employer Questionnaires

Eighteen employers were contacted to explain the research project, and asked if they would like to participate by filling out a questionnaire. Two employers did not want to participate. Sixteen questionnaires were therefore sent out to employers and 14 questionnaires were returned. Six employers agreed to be interviewed, and ultimately three of those were randomly selected and participated in separately taped interviews.

Demographics

The demographics section from the questionnaire shows the research was carried out with a variety of businesses. There were differing lengths of time an employer has been in their position, and representatives of different age groups. Table 1 shows the responses to the demographics section and this suggests a variety of employers filled out the questionnaire from the Porirua area.

Health	1	Agri-business	1	Legal	1
Manufacturing	1	Professional	2	Youth Trust	1
Service	5	Science	1	Education	1

Table 1: Type of Business

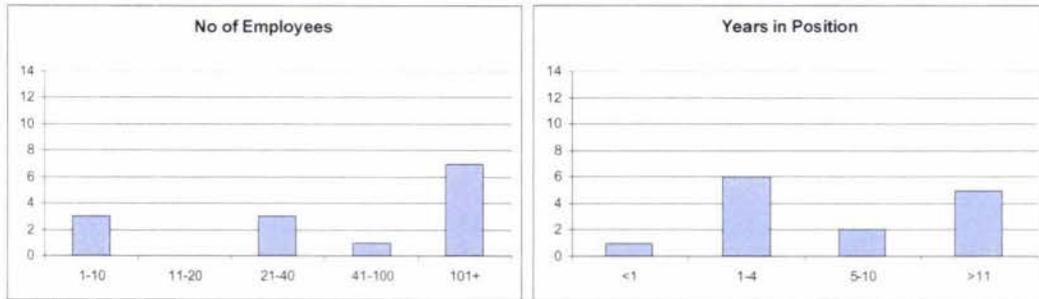


Figure 3: Employer demographic information 1

Administration Consultant	1	Manager	11
Personal Assistant	1	Human Relations Advisor	1

Table 2: Position Title

A respondent's number of years in the position was sought to identify if there was a range of experience held by those employing new staff.

Male and female statistics were taken to find out if there was a mix of genders for this research. There were 5 male respondents and 9 female respondents. Of the 9 female respondents, 7 were in a managerial position. Of the 5 male respondents, 4 were in managerial positions. All had been verbally questioned at the initial telephone call to find out if they were the key person in selection of junior office staff and questionnaires were sent only to those who met the criterion and were willing to participate.

The age section within the demographics was to identify the age of the employer so that a correlation might be drawn between age and expectations. Of the 14 respondents 3 chose not to identify their age, 9 were in the age bracket from 46-60, and 2 from 31-45. This shows that employers, in general terms, appear to be in their middle to late stage of their working life and have

probably worked up to a senior position undertaking the responsibility to seek new employees.

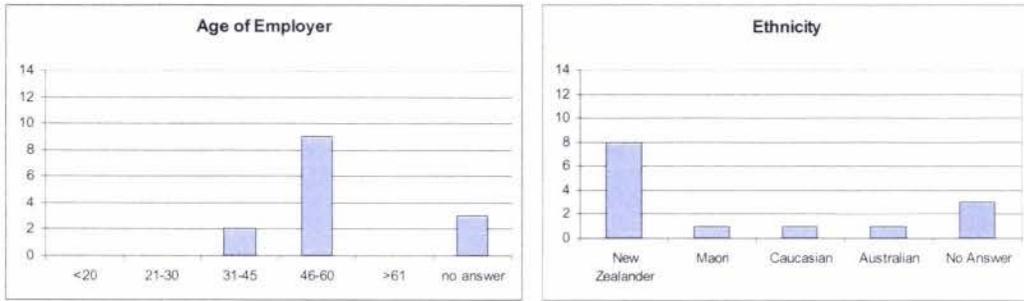


Figure 4: Employer demographic information 2

The ethnicity of the employers was sought to see if there was any pattern between ethnicity of the employer and the qualities they sought in a prospective employee. Three employers chose not to answer this question, and the remaining classified themselves as either New Zealander, Maori, Caucasian or Australian.

Question 1

Q1 Please rank the following categories in order of importance for a junior office/administration staff member from **YOUR** point of view: **1** being **most important** and **4** being **least important**

Personal characteristics (temperament, values, interests, motivation, how you react in situations).....	
General abilities (problem solving/reasoning, things you are good at)	
Specific skills (practised technique, skills you can perform, computing skills, writing).....	
Knowledge (the things that you know and understand).....	

The graphed results clearly show that Personal Characteristics was the first choice of the majority of the respondents, followed by Specific Skills, General Abilities, and Knowledge. When the figures are added to get a total score, Personal Characteristics received the highest rating of 21 (1 high – 5 low), with Specific Skills (30) and General Abilities (32) falling in the middle, followed by Knowledge (40). Adding the figures gives a total score and the graphs illustrate the same information visually.

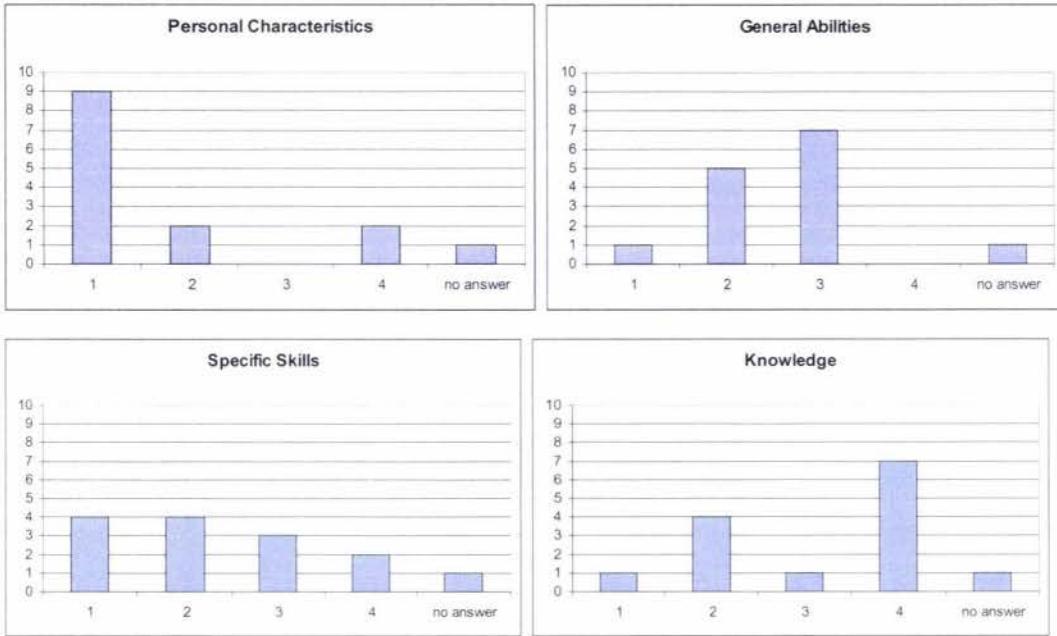


Figure 5: Qualities employers seek in junior office/admin staff

Question 2

Q2 Please rank the same categories in order of importance according to your expectations the last time you employed a junior administration employee. 1 being **most important** and 4 being **least important**

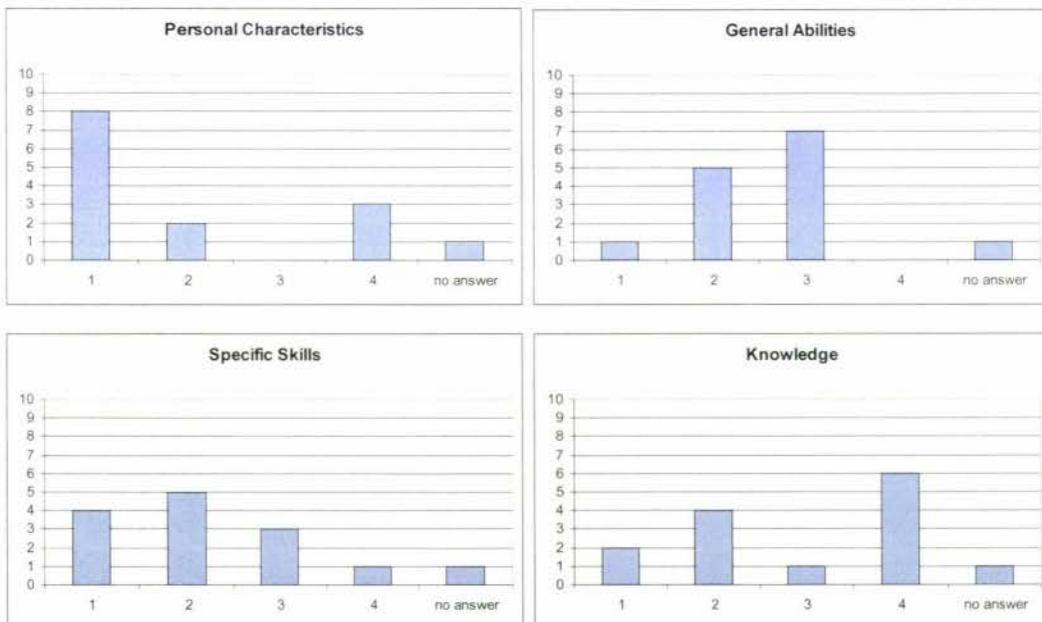


Figure 6: Qualities employers seek according to last employed junior office/admin staff

Question two used the same criteria but asked the respondent to rank the order according to the attributes of their latest junior or entry level employee. All but two respondents duplicated their answer, showing that what employers think is important and what they actually do is very similar. The question also went on

to ask people, if there was a difference in their rating, to explain why, and one of the two differing respondents chose to say

“We have realised the importance of a person “fitting in”. Also in a specialised area it is more important we teach them than they bring what they know.”

Question 3

Q3 What was the outstanding feature that impressed you enough to hire your last junior administration employee

Employers were given the opportunity to express their thoughts on the exact skill or attribute that resulted in the applicant being offered the job. The outstanding feature for most employers was often a characteristic of the person, and no direct link to skills was mentioned apart from one who wrote “Skills, plus ability to add value”. All other comments were along the lines of an attribute.

Motivation, not put off by setbacks

Skills plus ability to add value

Personality, they could relate and convince interviewers they had the right skills

Dress standard, personality

Work ethic, personality and willingness to learn new skills

Personal characteristics, ability to fit in well to a small team

Enthusiasm, willingness to give it a go, ability to handle a varied range of tasks and juggle priorities

Motivation, willingness to do well

Personal characteristics

Honesty and reliability

Attitude to what I call work ethic

Enthusiasm to learn, good time keeper, happy disposition

Personality

The theme emerging appears to be that the final decision of employers on who to employ for a position, appears to be based on an attribute of the candidate.

Question 4

Q4 What are some examples of characteristics that influenced you in **NOT** employing someone on that occasion

I rephrased the previous question to emphasise what employers did not like to see at interview, and to explore whether employers could identify the reason for not employing an applicant. The answers were consistent with question 3, with a few exceptions such as expressions of *slang*, *criminal convictions*, and *jewellery*. A important issue that has come out of this question is *grooming* or *personal presentation*. It comes through very strongly (see bold items in list following) that some employers were influenced by poor personal presentation and did not employ an applicant owing to the way they were groomed. Of the 11 written responses to this question, 7 stated the presentation of the applicant as a reason for not employing them.

Lack of interest, lack of specific and appropriate skills, lack of demonstrated analytical ability

Dress, *casualness of replies, no knowledge of area of work they were applying for*

Sloppy dress standard, *expressions of slang*

Presentation – *I believe if you really want a job you will make an effort in personal presentation*

Poor/inappropriate dress sense

Lack of interest, self centred

*Arriving late, **dress**, ability to listen*

Presentation – *not up to scratch*

Sloppy attire, *easily distracted during interview, lack of sparkle*

Enthusiasm to learn, good time keeping, happy disposition

Personality

Question 5

Q5 Would you make the same choice of employee if you were to fill the position again Yes No

All respondents chose to make the same choice of employee again. This positive outcome suggests that employers have been satisfied with their new employee and it also suggests that if employers are making the right choice of employees to hire, their theories of what factors to take into account when choosing an applicant are successful.

Question 6

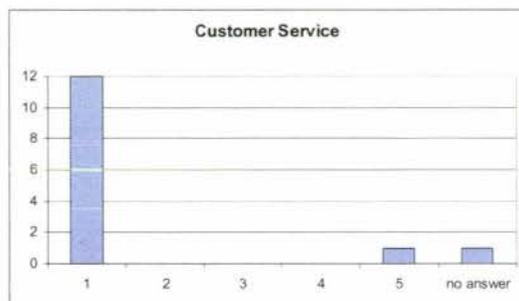
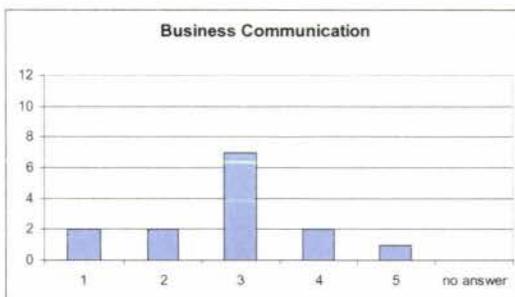
Q6 Please rate the following **SKILLS** in importance for junior administration employees. Rank this list from 1-5
1 being **most important** and 5 being **least important**. Please give each skill a rating.

- Business Communication eg letters
- Customer service
- Database eg Access.....
- Desktop publishing
- Dictaphone
- General clerical skills.....
- Numeracy
- Presentations eg Powerpoint.....
- Reception skills
- Spreadsheets eg Excel.....
- Telephone skills.....
- Word processing skills.....

Any other **skills** you would like to add:

Written and oral skills
Accuracy
Interpersonal resilience, written English
and team orientation

The data shows that the two main skills employers look for are Customer Service (12 number one responses) and Telephone Skills (8 number one responses). The two skills which rated as least desirable were Dictaphone (8 number five responses) and Desktop Publishing (6 number five responses).



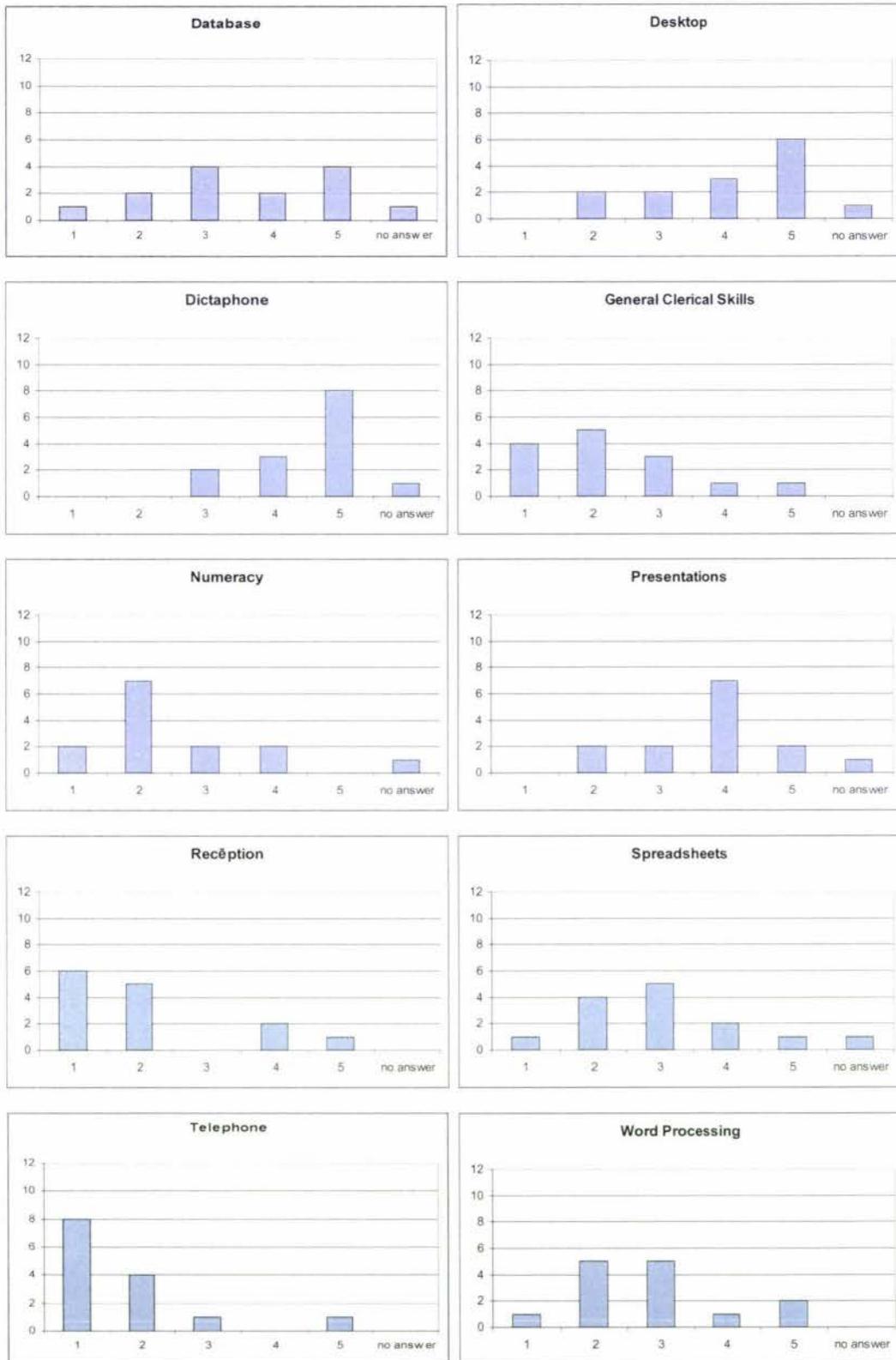


Figure 7: Skills employers seek in junior office/admin staff

These graphed trends can also be identified by adding the scores for each skill (1 high, 5 low, thus the lower the score the higher the overall result). Customer Service (17) and Telephone (24) ranked the two lowest scores, and therefore

are seen as most desirable. Dictaphone (58) and Desktop Publishing (52) ranked the two highest scores, and therefore are seen as least desirable. The overall score for the 12 skills section was 452.

Customer Service	17	Business Communication ..	40
Telephone	24	Word Processing	40
Reception	29	Database	45
Numeracy	30	Presentations	48
General Clerical Skills	32	Desktop Publishing.....	52
Spreadsheets	37	Dictaphone	58

Table 3: Employers' Ranked Skills

The overall score for skills was 452

Included in this section, was an opportunity for the prospective employer to elaborate if there were any other skills they felt were important, but were not included in the list. Most employers did not fill this in, but there were three comments:

Written and oral skills

Accuracy

Interpersonal resilience, written English and team orientation

Question 7

Q7 What **skills** would you like to see added to the courses that are offered to better equip prospective junior administration staff for the work force

This question identified if there were skills needed within the workplace that employers thought could be taught on our programmes. The responses to this question were:

Written and oral skills

Analytical problem solving

General clerical – how to use office equipment, fax, photocopier

**People skills, communicate clearly, politely, appropriate to a wide range of people*

**Dealing with customers, improving performance/processes, handling criticism, interview techniques to gain confidence*

**Grooming, personality test.*

Some of the comments above (*) are what I would have called an attribute, thus suggesting there is confusion among the respondents on what they classify as an attribute or skill.

Question 8

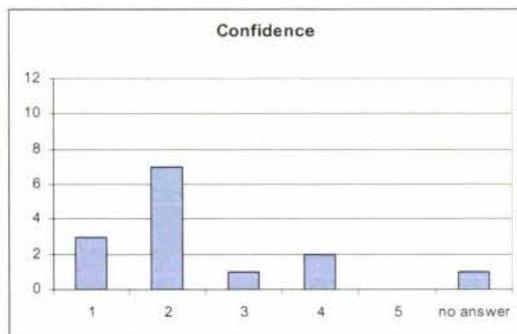
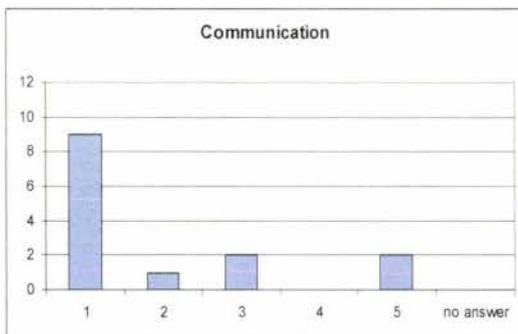
Q8 Please rate the following **ATTRIBUTES** in importance for junior administration employees. Rank this list from 1-5

1 being **most important** and 5 being **least important**. Please give each attribute a rating.

- Communication
- Confidence
- Enthusiasm.....
- Flexibility.....
- Good time keeper.....
- Grooming.....
- Honesty
- Independent work habits
- Initiative
- Problem solving.....
- Reliability.....
- Responsibility

Any other **attributes** you would like to add:

Assertiveness, persuasive ability, team player
Flexibility, enthusiasm
Respect
All important
Trustworthy, perseverance
Team orientation, resilience, achievement orientation, interpersonal skills



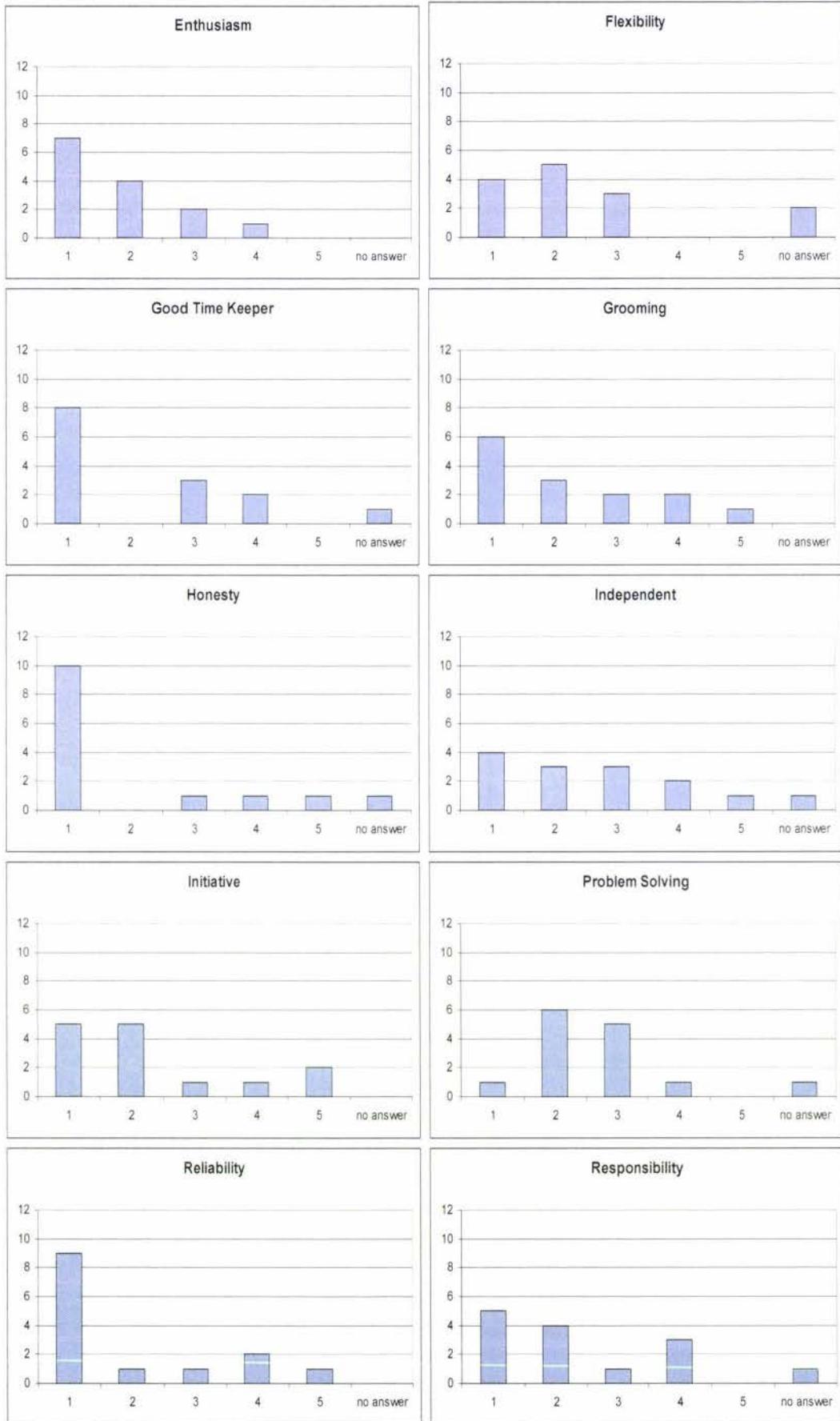


Figure 8: Attributes employers seek in junior office/admin staff

There was much more similarity between the attributes employers found more desirable, than there had been for skills in question 6. The range in responses was also much closer than it had been for the skills. Honesty was the number one attribute with 10 number one responses followed closely by Reliability and Communication both scoring 9 number one responses.

The total added scores show how desirable each attribute was with the lower the score, the more desirable the attribute. The overall score for attributes was 332 compared with skills at 452, therefore it could be assumed that those employers generally think that general attributes of the applicant are more desirable than skills. This corresponds to responses to the initial question one, where attributes was indicated as the most desirable quality.

Honesty	22	Confidence	28
Flexibility.....	23	Responsibility	28
Good Time Keeper	25	Grooming.....	31
Enthusiasm.....	25	Independent Work Habits ..	32
Communication.....	27	Initiative	32
Reliability	27	Problem Solving	32

Table 4: Employers' Ranked Attributes

The overall score for attributes was 332

There was a significant absence of ratings four and five in this section, reflected in the overall lower score (and therefore higher rating) than the skills section overall score. There were some skills which employers rated as not important, yet many attributes they rated as important. When the attributes are listed by ratings (1 high, 5 low) grooming rated as number 9 of 12 and apparently of low importance, yet question 4 shows that this was one of the primary reasons for not employing someone.

The separate section asking about any other attributes, was valuable in trying to identify attributes that I had not anticipated. There were only three responses to question 6, which is a similar question identifying other skills, whereas there

were six respondents who answered this question on attributes. The respondents wrote:

Assertiveness, persuasive ability, team player

Flexibility, enthusiasm

Respect

Trustworthy, perseverance

Team orientation, resilience, achievement orientation, interpersonal skills

All important

Question 9

Q9 What **attributes** would you like to see encouraged in the courses that are offered to better equip prospective junior administration staff for the work force

This question to employers is to understand if employers thought some of these attributes were important enough to be taught within our programmes or if they could be taught in an educational facility. The comments were:

Team player

Reliability, flexibility and responsibility

Perseverance to see a task through to completion

Sense of humour

Student Questionnaires

There were 26 completed questionnaires used in this research. Although there were 32 returned questionnaires, the remaining 6 were very obviously not filled in correctly and were not included in the collation of results.

Demographics

The demographics for this questionnaire are split into three categories: Gender, Age and Ethnicity. As is typical with our programmes, 100% were female of a variety of ages. In 2004, Whitireia Community Polytechnic had 28.39%

international students⁴ but there are rarely any international students enrolled in the Office Administration programmes. From talking to Asian students around the Polytechnic, this appears to be because they perceive office administration roles as very menial and they would not come to New Zealand to study for such a low outcome. They do enrol in other areas of the polytechnic such as Business, Computing and Nursing. There were no Asian people who responded to the questionnaire.

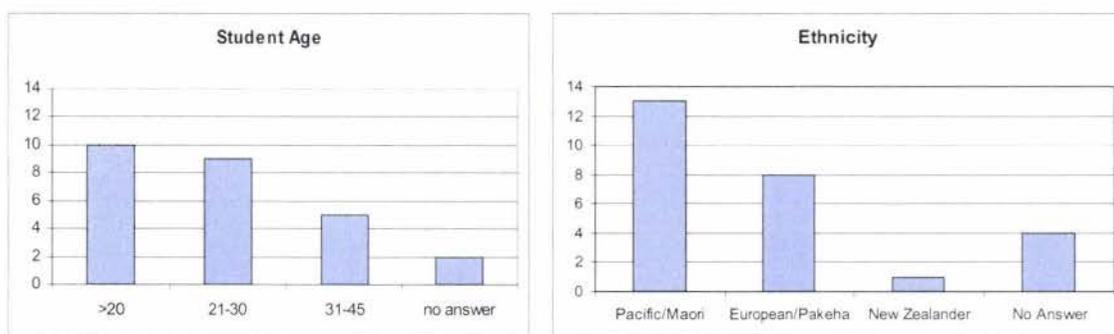


Figure 9: Student demographic information

Question 1

Q1 Which do you think are the most important for a junior office/administration staff member from YOUR point of view - 1 being **most important** and 4 being **least important**

Personal characteristics (temperament, values, interests, motivation, how you react in situations).....	
General abilities (problem solving/reasoning, things you are good at)	
Specific skills (practised technique, skills you can perform, computing skills, writing).....	
Knowledge (the things that you know and understand).....	

⁴ An international student is a person enrolled to study in New Zealand who doesn't hold either a New Zealand passport or have permanent residency status.

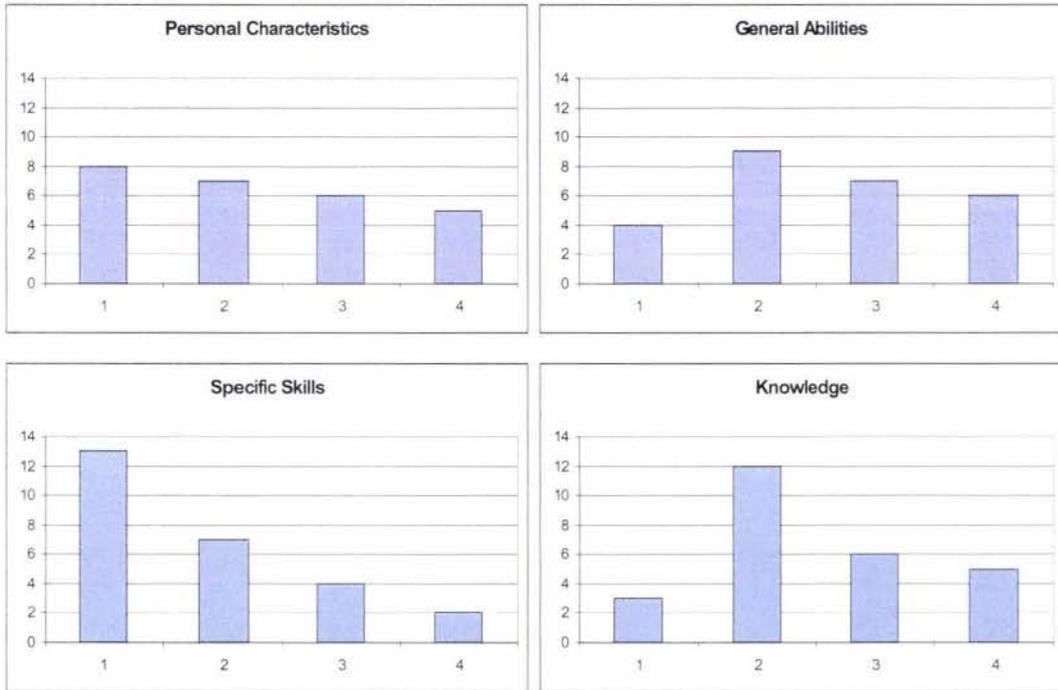


Figure 10: Qualities students think are needed in junior office/admin staff

As the graphs illustrate, students believe that Specific Skills are very important with half the respondents indicating this as the most important (1). When the scores were added up, the students' responses show that Specific Skills (47) was significantly ahead of the others - Personal Characteristics (60), Knowledge (65) and General Abilities (67) (as before, low scores represent high ratings).

Question 2

Q2 What do you think are most important for a junior office/administration staff member from an **EMPLOYERS** point of view - 1 being **most important** and 4 being **least important**)

Personal characteristics (temperament, values, interests, motivation, how you react in situations).....

General abilities (problem solving/reasoning, things you are good at)

Specific skills (practised technique, skills you can perform, computing skills, writing).....

Knowledge (mastery of information, the things that you know and understand).....

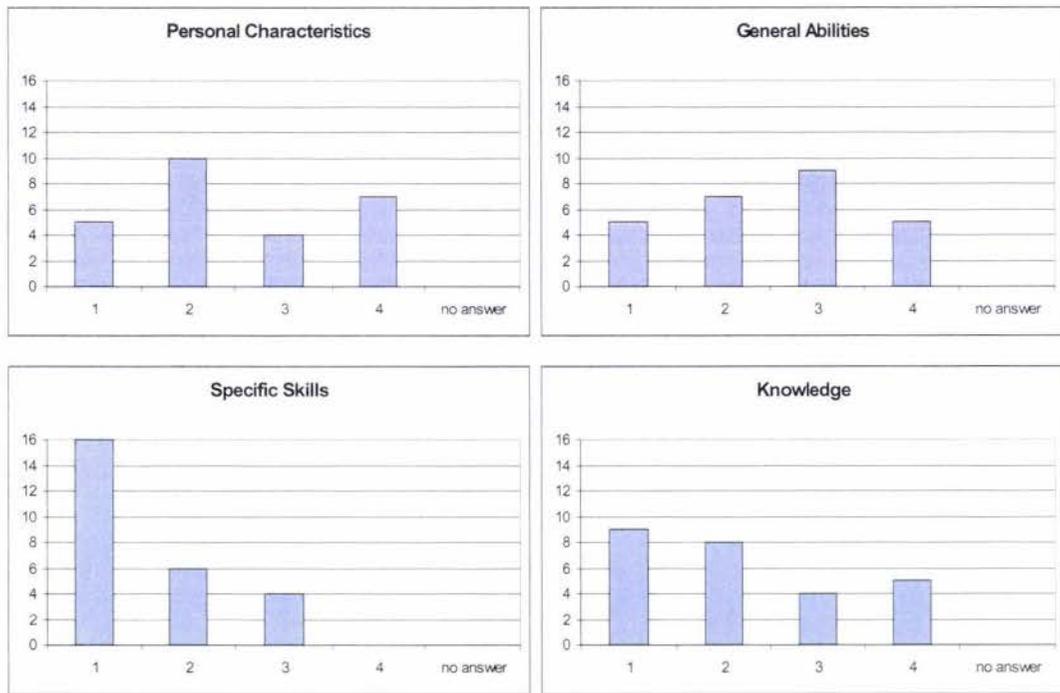


Figure 11: Qualities students believe employers seek in junior office/admin staff

Overwhelmingly, students thought that employers of junior office/business administration staff looked for Specific Skills as a main factor, followed by Knowledge, Personal Characteristics and General Abilities. The interesting discrepancy between students' thoughts and their expectations of employers is that students rated Personal Characteristics as their second most desired response, but they thought employers wanted Knowledge as their second most desired response.

This trend can be seen when the responses are added up. Students believe employers looked for Specific Skills (40) as the most important followed by Knowledge (57) and Personal Characteristics (65), followed by General Abilities (66).

Employers results showed that they sought Personal Characteristics followed by Specific Skills, General Abilities and Knowledge. The difference between students and employers highlighted here correlate with Arnold and Davy's (1994) paper that showed from a graduate perspective, soft skills are seen as less important than hard skills.

Question 3

Q3 Name five things you think an employer looks for in a junior office/ administrative role

There were some general trends and a few interestingly worded responses to this question. Some noted there were variations on skills eg computing *software, typing, computing, and practical skills*. Two Tokelauan students identified *cleanliness* and *politeness* which were singular occurrences of these words. A very consistent theme was *appearance* or *presentation* with this being mentioned 6 times as *personal presentation*, and 5 times as *appearance*. Skills also came through strongly with 8 references. I have listed the results below in table 2 in broad groupings - skills and attributes.

Skills	Attributes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • skills x 8* • knowledge x 6 • good communication x 5 • qualifications x 4 • computer skills x 4 • experience x 3 • ability x 2 • education • good at problem solving • mastery of information • verbal and written communication • accuracy • employment history • relevant experience • critical thinking • analysing • problem solving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • personal presentation x 6 • appearance x 5 • motivation x 4 • good time keeper x 4 • attitude x 4 • Initiative x 3 • personal skills x 2 • reliability x 2 • responsible x 2 • personality x 2 • cleanliness x 2 • confidence x2 • hygiene x 2 • politeness x 2 • alertness x 2 • quick thinking • fast learner • well being • hardworking • attendance • compatibility • respect for customers • personality fits in • being able to interact with customers • good employment record • willingness to learn • inviting • dedication • common sense • relationships • following rules • self motivated
<p>I deleted the word <i>rationale</i> as I did not know what was meant by this comment.</p>	

* (x number) refers to the number of times this answer was repeated.

Table 5: Skills and attributes employers sought for administration roles

Question 4

Q4 What do **YOU** think are the most important **skills** for junior administration staff. Please rate each item on the list from 1-5

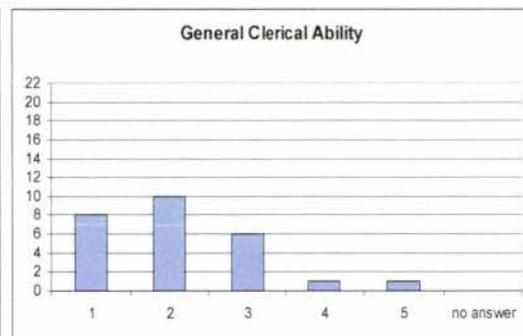
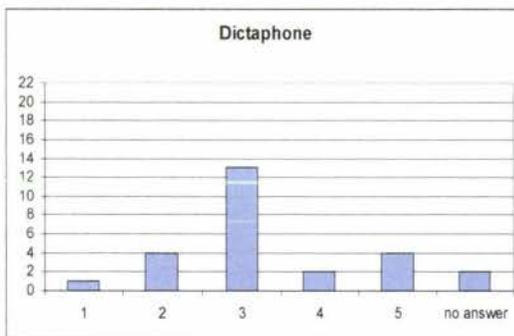
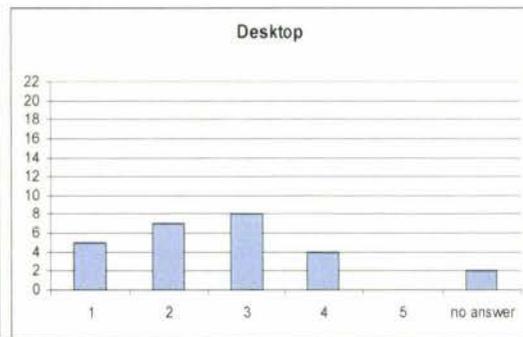
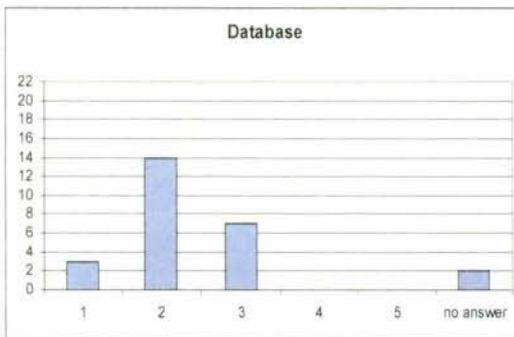
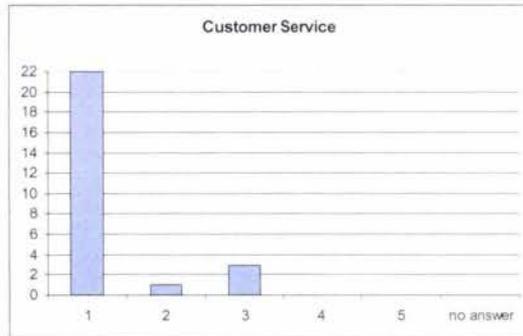
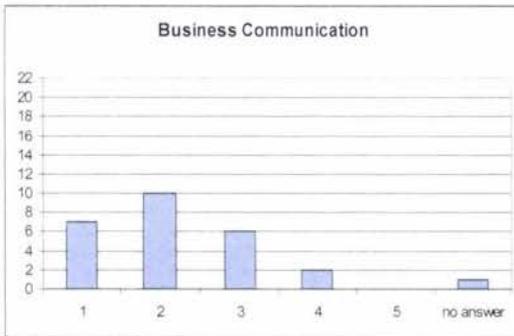
1 being **most important** and 5 being **least important**. Please fill in every box.

Business communication eg letters
 Customer service
 Database eg Access.....
 Desktop publishing
 Dictaphone
 General clerical skills.....
 Numeracy
 Presentations eg Powerpoint.....
 Reception skills
 Spreadsheets eg Excel.....
 Telephone skills.....
 Word processing skills.....

Any other **skills** you would like to add:

Responses received:

*computerised accounting
 communication skills*



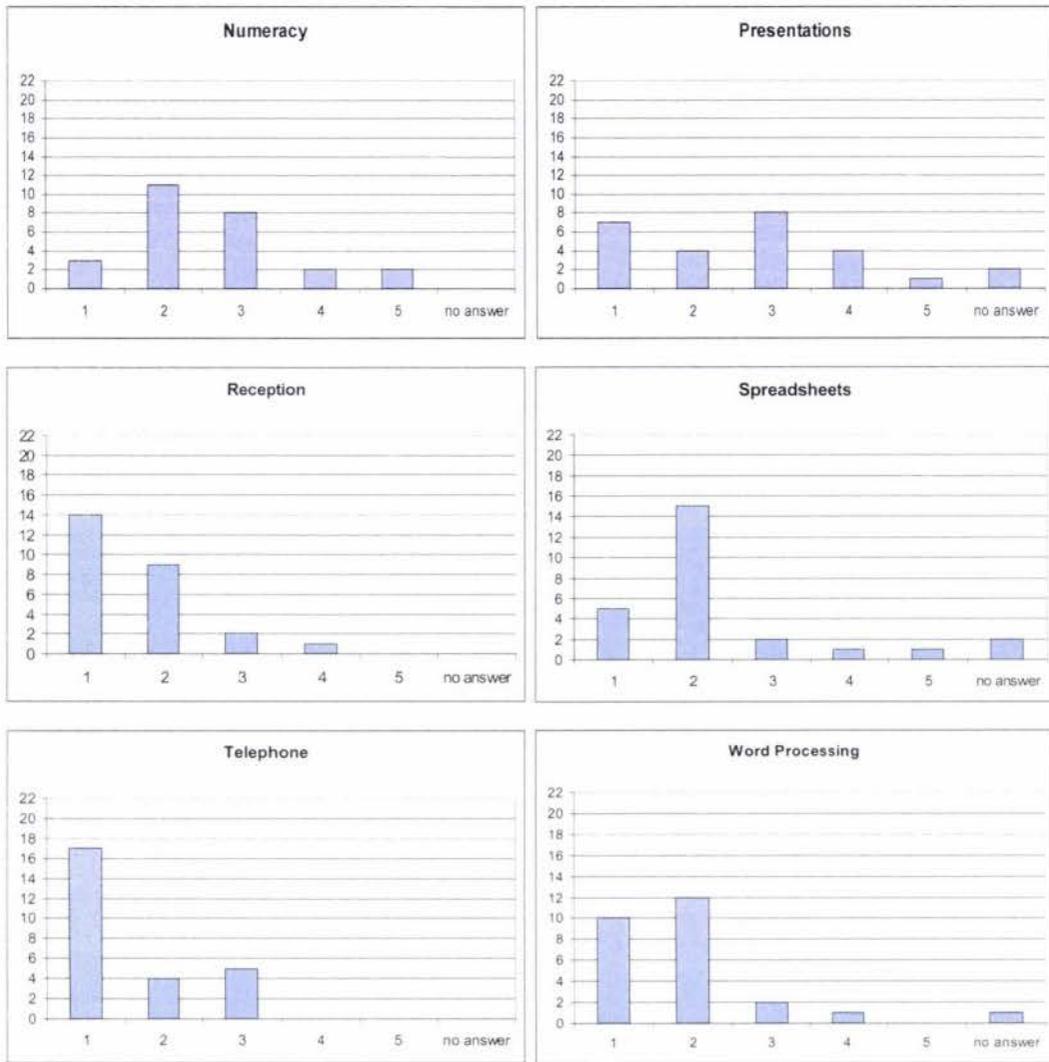


Figure 12: Skills students believe are needed in junior office/admin staff

The results of this corresponded with what skills employers sought in junior office/administration employees. The graphs highlight Customer Service and Telephone Skills as the two dominant trends. Also Dictaphone and Desktop Publishing graphs illustrate that students' believe these skills are not very important to an employer and this corresponds to the information in the employers' graphs of response.

When the scores for each skill is added up the lowest figure corresponds to a most desirable skill (1 high – 5 low). Customer Service rated 33 and Telephone skills rated 40.

Customer Service	33	Business Communication ..	53
Telephone	40	General Clerical.....	55
Reception	42	Desktop Publishing.....	59
Word Processing	44	Presentations	60
Spreadsheets	50	Numeracy	67
Database	52	Dictaphone	76

Table 6: Students' Ranked Skills

The overall score for skills was 631

The question also requested students to identify any other skills they thought were important for junior administrative staff and the only two comments from two different students were a *computerised accounting system* and *communication skills*.

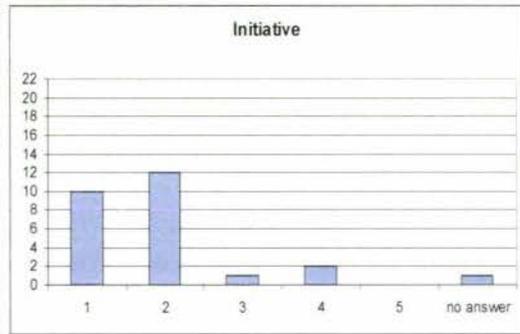
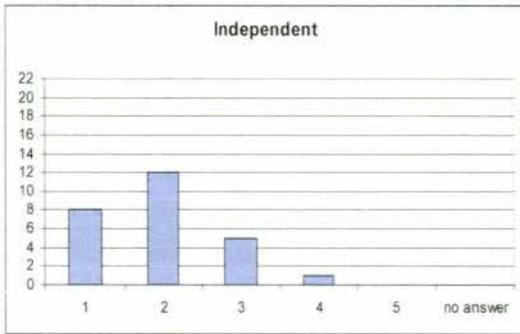
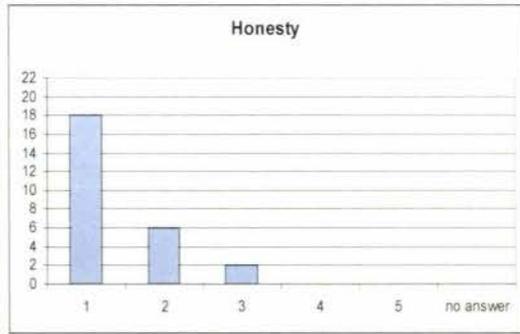
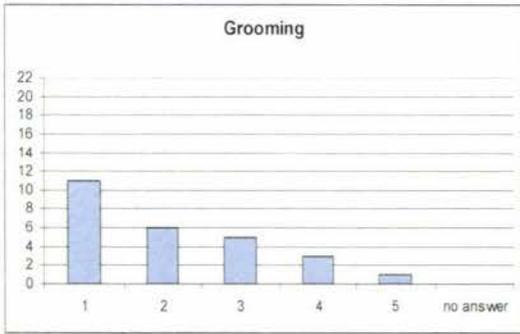
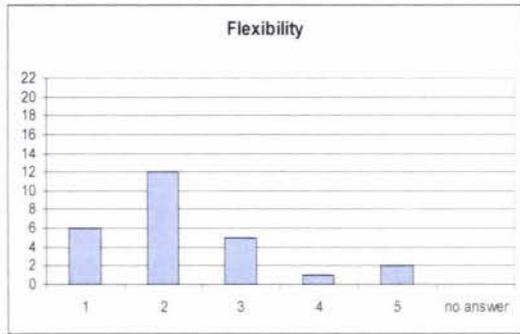
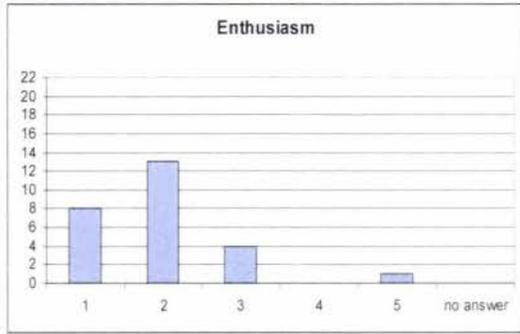
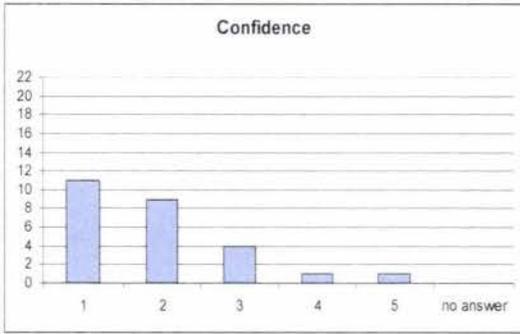
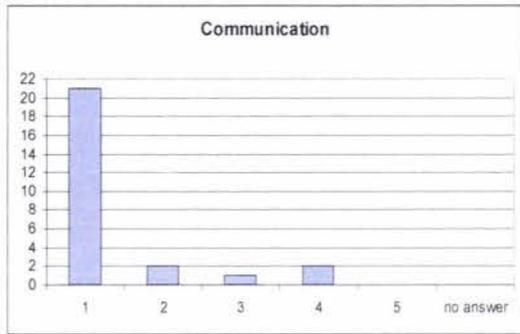
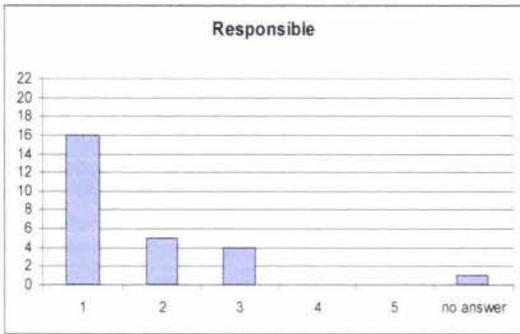
Question 5

Q5 What do **YOU** think are the most important things in the list below for junior administration employees. Please rate each item on the list from 1-5. **1** being **most important** and **5** being **least important**. Please fill in every box.

Being responsible	
Communication	
Confidence	
Enthusiasm.....	
Flexibility.....	
Good time keeper.....	
Grooming.....	
Honesty	
Independent work habits	
Initiative	
Problem solving.....	
Reliability.....	

Any other points you would like to add:

(There were no responses to this question)



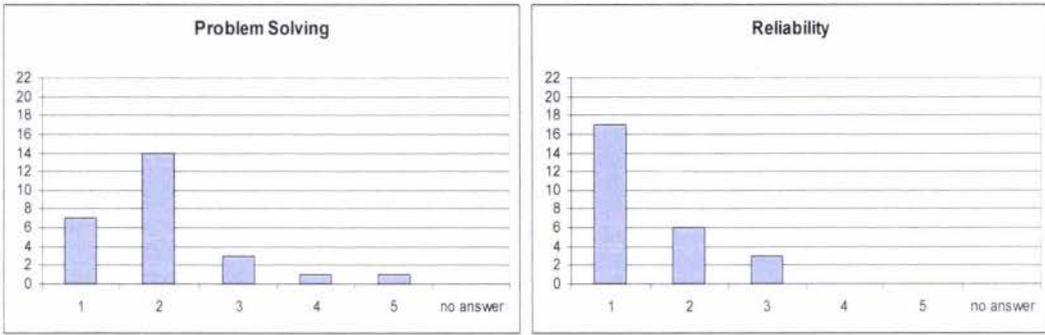


Figure 13: Attributes students believe are needed in junior office/admin staff

I was looking to see whether students' ideas of the importance of attributes in the workplace was similar to that of the employer. I also wanted to see if any new information came up that had not been listed in my provided lists that students thought was valuable. *Communication* had the most desirable responses, with 21 number ones, followed by *honesty* with 18 number one responses. When each section was added for a total score (1 low, 5 high), again *communication* and *honesty* came in with the lowest (most desirable) overall scores.

Communication.....	36	Confidence	50
Honesty	36	Enthusiasm.....	51
Reliability	38	Independent Work Habits ..	51
Being Responsible.....	38	Problem Solving	53
Initiative	45	Grooming.....	55
Good Time Keeper	47	Flexibility.....	59

Table 7: Students' Ranked Attributes

The overall score for attributes was 559
--

The students overall response for attributes was 559 compared to 631 for skills. There were 12 items in the skills list and 12 items in the attributes, therefore these results can be balanced when comparing overall scores. With attributes featuring a lower total rating (more favourable) than skills, this corresponds with employers who also overall scored attributes lower (more favourable) than skills. The results do not appear to correspond with Question 1, however, where students rated Specific Skills as their most favourable response, followed by Personal Characteristics, Knowledge and General Abilities.

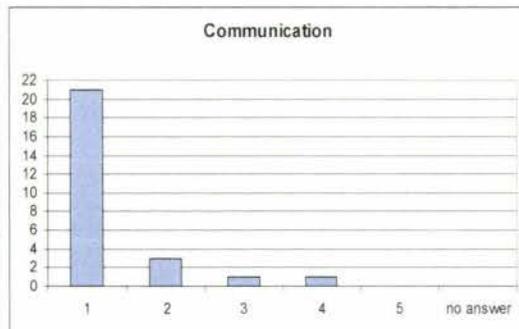
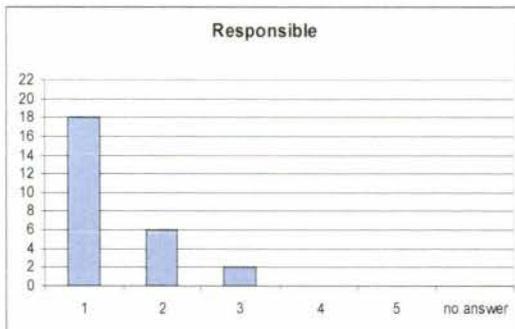
Question 6

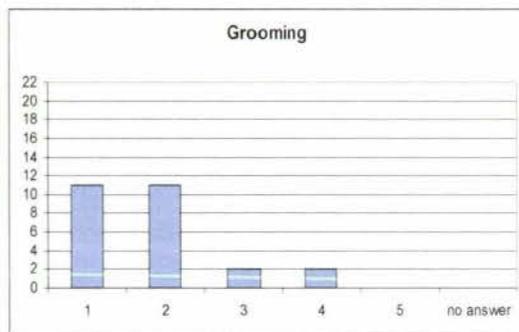
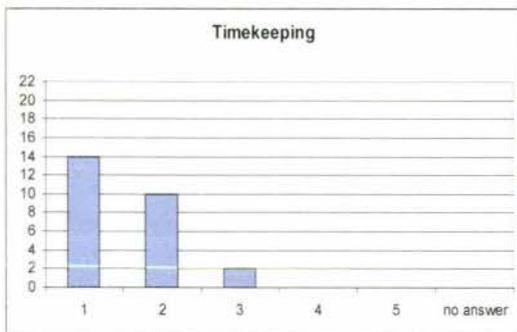
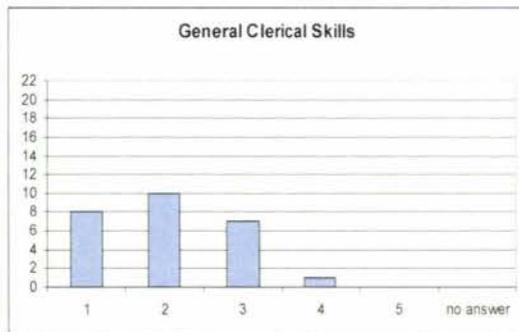
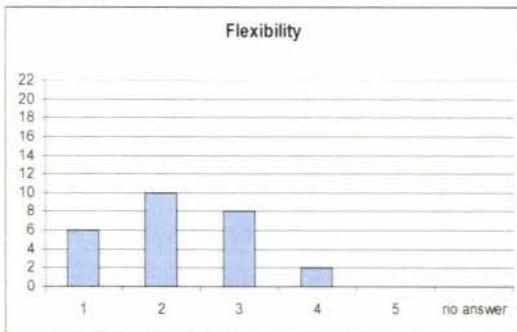
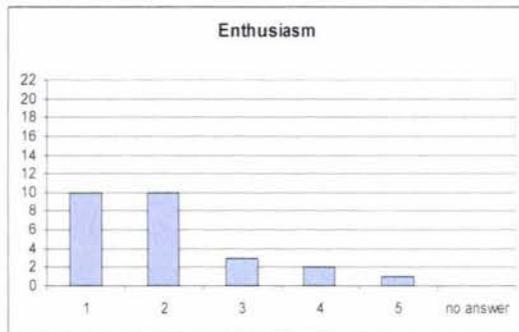
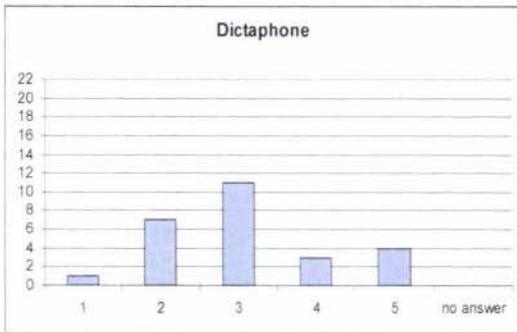
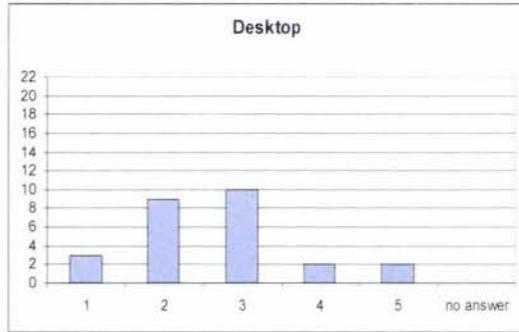
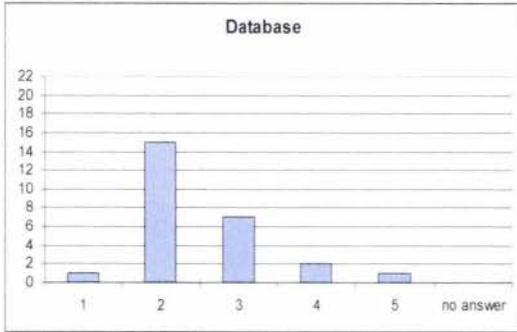
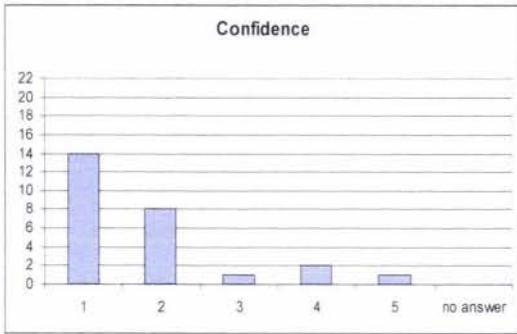
Q6 There are 24 skills and attributes listed below. What do you think an employer thinks is most important. Please rate each item on the list from 1-5. **1** being **most important** and **5** being **least important**. Please fill in every box.

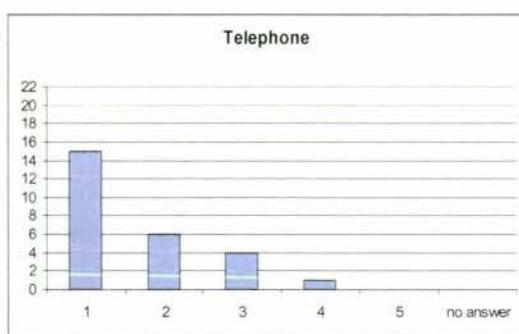
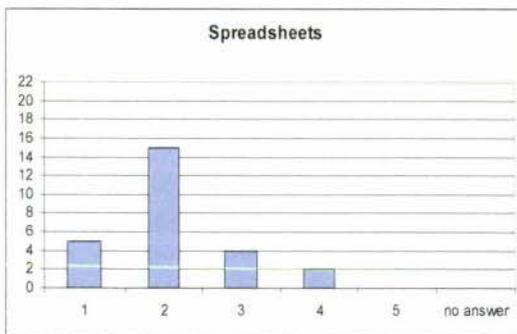
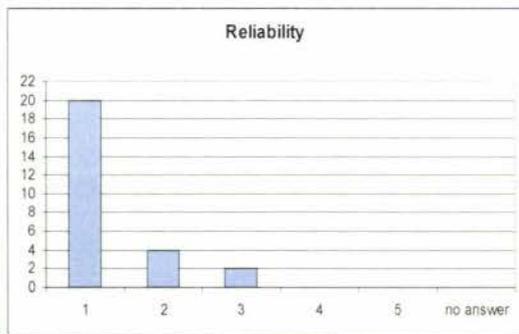
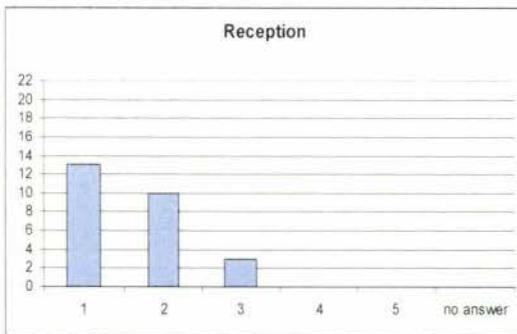
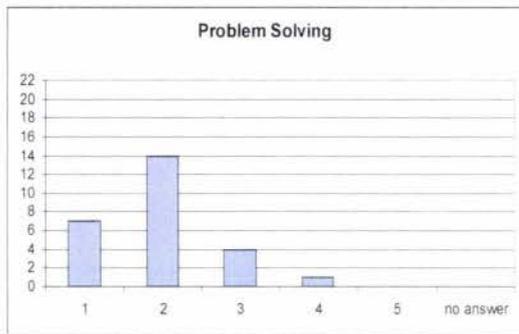
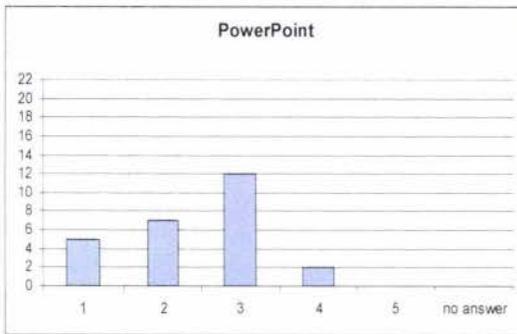
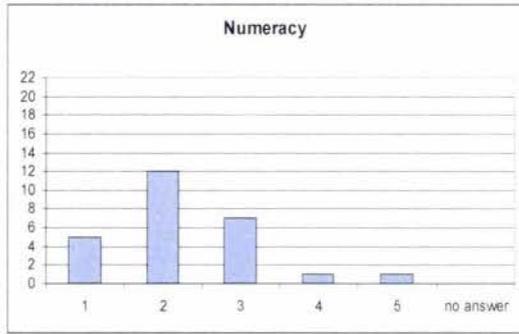
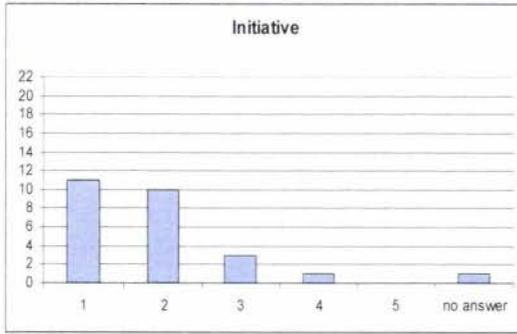
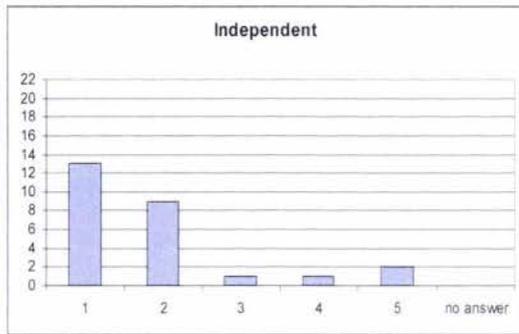
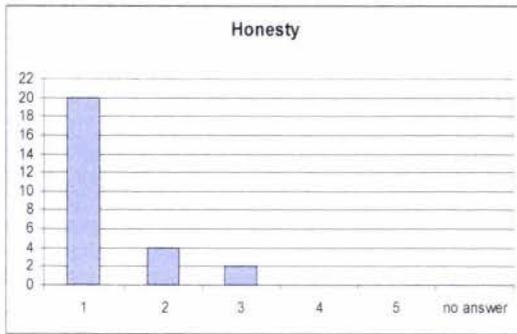
Being responsible	
Communication	
Confidence	
Customer Service	
Database eg Access	
Desktop publishing	
Dictaphone	
Enthusiasm	
Flexibility	
General Clerical Skills	
Good time keeping	
Grooming	
Honesty	
Independent work habits	
Initiative	
Numeracy	
Presentations eg Powerpoint	
Problem solving	
Reception Skills	
Reliability	
Spreadsheets eg Excel	
Telephone Skills	
Word Processing Skills	
Written Business Communication eg letters	

Any other **skills and attributes** you would like to add:

There were no responses to this question.







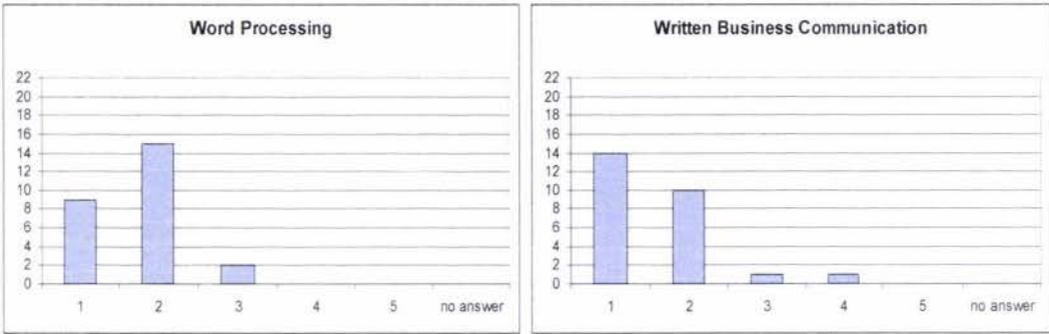


Figure 14: Skills and attributes students believe employers seek in junior office/admin staff

In this question, I mixed both skills and attributes in the hope of correlating with the previous data, to reinforce the trends that have been set.

Communication	34	Grooming	47
Honesty	34	Independent Work Habits	48
Customer Service	34	Problem Solving	51
Reliability	34	Enthusiasm	52
Being Responsible	36	General Clerical Abilities	53
Time Keeping	40	Spreadsheets	55
Written Bus Comm	41	Flexibility	58
Reception	42	Numeracy	59
Telephone Skills	43	Powerpoint	63
Initiative	44	Database	65
WP Skills	45	Desktop	69
Confidence	46	Dictaphone	80

Table 8: Students' Ranked Skills and Attributes

Note: Bold text = attributes

When added, (low scores = high ratings and high scores = low ratings) skills rated 649 and attributes rated 524, again confirming that students thought overall attributes were more desirable than skills. As seen previously, dictaphone and desktop skills were again ranked near the end of the list. The items in bold text are attributes, and the items in normal black text are skills.

Of the top ten skills and attributes, the highest ranking attributes were: communication, honesty, reliability, being responsible, timekeeping and initiative. This is the same response as when I distinguished between skills and attributes. It is also a similar response for skills, which confirms students' choices of desirable skills and attributes.

The interesting point is that question one showed that students believe Specific Skills are very important, with half the respondents indicating this as the most important (1). When the scores were added up, the students' responses showed that Specific Skills (47) was significantly ahead of the others - Personal Characteristics (60), Knowledge (65) and General Abilities (67). This last question shows, however, that when ranking both skills (Specific Skills) and attributes (Personal Characteristics) together, students identified attributes overall more highly than skills. This result may be that within a combined list of both attributes and skills, students realised that attributes would be very desirable to employers.

Interview Results

This section outlines the findings from the interview data. These findings stem from the thoughts and viewpoints about skills and attributes needed in junior office administration staff expressed by three previous students and three employers. The three students had all successfully completed one of the business administration programmes. The interviews were conducted at the end of the programme, whereas the questionnaires were completed at the start. The employers interviewed have, in the past, employed students or had students on work experience from the business administration programmes.

The chapter presents what they said during these interviews, organising the data using common themes that emerged as categories. The conclusions for this chapter, combined with the questionnaire analysis, set the scene for the following discussion chapter which relates the findings back to the literature review, and forward to recommendations.

Student Interviews

Three students were interviewed for the research. The first was a female Pakeha New Zealander in her 40's and successfully graduated from the Business Administration Level 4 Programme. She now works in a part time retail position, and continues to look for work in an office environment. At the time of interview she had just begun the search for office work. For this research project I have given her the pseudonym of Sarah.

The second interviewee was a young female Pakeha New Zealander, who completed the programme and gained a full time junior office administration role. For this research project I have given her the pseudonym of Lana. After completing two 20 week Business Administration Programmes, Level 2 and 3. Lana enrolled and completed the 20 week Level 3 Business Administration Programme. She gained administration employment immediately after completing the level 3 programme and continues to work with the same employer.

The third was a young female Samoan who graduated from two Business Administration Programmes, Level 2 and 3, and then enrolled on a Bachelor of Information and Computing. She continues to study, and is in her first year, studying towards her Bachelor of Information and Computing. She was given the pseudonym of Kura.

All three interviewees were students when they filled out the initial questionnaire and had completed their programmes by the time they were interviewed.

Employer Interviews

The three employers were all from the Porirua region. One of the employers works for an educational facility, and has employed graduates from the business administration programmes. For this research project I have given her the pseudonym of Joanne.

One employer works for a law firm, and she too has employed graduates from the business administration programmes. For the purposes of this research, I have given her the pseudonym of Joyce.

The last employer interviewed works for a small trust training facility and was aware of the business administration programmes, having been previously involved in the work experience scheme. For the purposes of this research, I have given her the pseudonym of Bronnie.

Results

Skills Needed for Employment

Although employers did not rate Specific Skills as their highest factor in the questionnaire from Personal Characteristics, General Abilities, Knowledge and Specific Skills, there was definitely an agreement in all interviews between students and employers that people need a wide range of skills to gain employment. All three students said they went on the programmes to gain the skills they deemed necessary for employment.

Students

Sarah talked about the main things she thought an employer looked for in staff:

“Skills, mature attitude, and being sensible” (i.e. both skills and attributes)

Lana: *“an entry level qualification, and someone with the necessary skill to fit into the organisation...”*

Kura: *"Microsoft – you need to be up to date with the packages and applications".*

Kura also said that she was currently looking for part time administration work and that the main barrier for her was her lack of typing speed. She didn't achieve her goal on the programme of being able to type 50 words per minute, and recognised that this was through lack of practice.

All three students' responses contained emphasis on skills. This follows the theme that students believe employers seek skilled employees for junior administrative roles. Students came on the programme primarily to get the qualifications to enable them to work in an administrative role believing that without the qualification or skills, they would not get work.

Employers

All three employers talked about the need to use the Microsoft Suite software and one discussed the need for specific dictaphone ability. All three also identified typing speed as a necessary skill for employment, and Bronnie was specific about needing good English written and verbal skills. All three stated they would not employ a person without those basic business administration skills.

All employers looked for a skills set prior to interview and as a means of short-listing applicants for an interview. The interview was then used to ascertain if the prospective employee would fit into the workplace and had the attributes the employer sought.

Attributes Needed for Employment

When discussing attributes that students and employers thought were important there was a general correlation of desired attributes. All employers were emphatic about the person needing to fit into the environment of the workplace, being a team player and having the right attitude. The students addressed a range of attributes that they thought were necessary.

Students

Sarah: *"They look for a pleasant and willing personality, looking for someone sensible, who is going to do the job, willing worker who is willing to go the extra mile, loyalty, well groomed (that makes the first impression and if you come in scruffy that just turns them off).*

Lana: *"....and the personality to fit with current staff. They need an eagerness to learn and upskill"*

Kura: *"problem solving and communication skills"*

The students gave a variety of responses to this question, and although grooming rated highly from employers, only one student mentioned it, confirming that students do not realise the importance of grooming from an employers point of view.

Employers

Joanne: *" a good team worker..... Initiative....not shy"*

Joyce discussed the need for employees to be team players, especially as they have only a small team. She also mentioned enthusiasm and having some get up and go, being interested in the job. She also raised the issue of the X factor – some people just have it, and others don't.

Bronnie: *"pure attitude – admin people generally don't have to deal with the public, but a good telephone attitude is a must, communication skills too, but mainly overall their basic attitude must be good."*

Business Centre Environment

The three students and employers were all familiar with the concept and teaching that is administered within the Business Centre environment.

Students

Sarah was adamant in her view that attributes can't be fully taught or learned in the Business Centre as it is a place of training and not 'real work'. Lana discussed that it's hard to get that workplace 'regimented' atmosphere because it is 'just' study and not real.

Sarah: *"Um, you're preparing them but I don't think they understand that once they get into the workforce it is a whole different kettle of fish. If you used that cellphone, the first time you get told off, the second you may even get a writeup. But if you (the tutors) told them (the students) that and lay down the law, I still don't think they would pay attention. you can't change their attitude at their age – they need to learn by trial and error, probably more error."*

Kura thought that attributes cannot be taught but that things like confidence can be increased by participating in role plays within the Business Centre. She also commented that students may not learn in the Business Centre because it is just not 'real' and also that some students may be too scared to try. She found the work experience she took part in a good experience and the employer grading sheet (appendix 13) a useful tool to gain entry into other programmes.

Employers

Joanne thought that we could nurture attributes in the Business Centre, but not teach them. I asked her why students might not learn attributes.

Joanne: *"Because it is not real, I mean you might roleplay it, but it is still the same group of people".*

I also asked Bronnie if she thought we could teach attributes in the Business Centre.

Bronnie: *"No, probably not in an institution. They're (the students) not getting paid, and that's what makes a difference".*

Bronnie also went on to discuss that at Whitireia, there are a lot of people who have not done well in the education system up to now, so their attitude is not always going to be good. She expanded that it's through working in a real employment situation, meeting all different types of people, and realising their value as a person, that will encourage a positive work attitude to come about.

Bronnie: *"There is a different level of enthusiasm that is applied to classroom study as opposed to work experience. I'd be wanting to impress and be wanting to get a job, especially in Porirua as it is a small area and they might know someone who knew me"*

Joyce thinks we are successful in our training as she experiences the students from our programmes first hand but also doubts if attributes can be changed significantly during the short duration of a programme of study.

Joanne commented about the work experience placement saying that this was where the students would learn attributes, because it is a 'real' environment. Joyce also qualified the work experience placements as important because it gives the student an opportunity to see what happens first hand in an office, and therefore how they are supposed to behave.

Specific to Porirua Region

I asked students and employers if there were any issues that they thought were specific to the Porirua region. Sarah thought that some of the issues raised such as commitment to the programme and participating in the Business Centre activities were due to age, and not specific to the Porirua area.

Students

Sarah: *"I think that the generation thing is not specific to Porirua – it's a generational thing"*

She observed that most Pacific Island and Maori attendance in the programme was erratic and she interpreted this to mean they did not care. She was unaware that many Pacific Island and Maori people have extensive family responsibilities, that may be prioritised ahead of their study.

Lana was specific in identifying the Maori and Pacific Island culture and that because of their different cultural values, perceived them as being not as serious as other students, reflected in their absenteeism and commitment to the programme.

Lana: *"Because it's just the way they are, their attitude is not serious – and they have other important things, it's a cultural thing for them. They're away a lot too...."*

Interviewer: *"Why do you think they are away (absent) so much?"*

Lana: *"I'm thinking it has something to do with them taking up a course, just to do it, to give them something to do, to fill in their time. There could be like health issues, and cultural issues that they may have to deal with, but it's just the way they are..... they don't seem to worry if they're late or don't pass something, it's a cultural thing."*

Kura believed that Pacific Islanders learn with hands on practical exercises, and that the Business Centre is an ideal approach. She also emphasised that as many Pacific Islanders had English as a second language, then they might get more benefit from learning through roleplay than theory, as there is less reading or writing involved.

When I asked Kura about cultural issues around studying she replied

Kura: *"Because respect is so important in our culture, if you get behind on your work, you might not want to come back (to your study),"*

because it's too shameful. ... sometimes you have a lot of other things like your family jobs that stop you coming back too."

Employers

Bronnie: Bronnie's comments on this topic, highlighted that the Maori and Pacific people she deals with, have often come from families of unemployed parents, or even grandparents. They need convincing of an outcome that will make a difference to their lives. Their past learning experiences may even be detrimental to their current studies, as they could be expecting poor outcomes as a norm.

Joyce commented on slang which she thought was specific to the Porirua region.

Joyce: *"I mean I don't know how you get it into a programme (attributes), apart from what you are doing, ... speech is a terrible thing to say, but when they use ur, ah and slang I turn off."*

Interviewer: *"Do you think it is cultural?"*

Joyce: *"I think it is yes. Yes it is very reticent"*

Other Points of Interest

Kura suggested that a component of recreation be included on the programme to encourage team building and camaraderie among class members. She believes it is common to lose momentum on a programme of study and that you need more than just the study to keep you motivated. It may help with student retention and success rates.

Overall, the students and employers thought that students were well prepared for the workplace. The employers commented on the overall skills of the students being very good.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

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Introduction

This chapter weaves together issues from the literature and the findings from the research study, together with my own thinking and observations. I discuss the themes that have emerged from this research and relate them to the business administration programmes of study within Whitireia Community Polytechnic. The aim of this is to provide some clarity about the thoughts of students, graduates and prospective employers on the skills and attributes needed in junior office/administration staff. Ultimately the business administration programmes delivered at Whitireia should encompass the general skills and attributes Porirua employers seek, in order to enable our graduates to successfully move along the path from study to employment. The first two research questions provided a starting place from which to launch into this discussion.

1. What skills and attributes do employers look for in their junior office/administration staff?
2. What skills and attributes do students from Whitireia Community Polytechnic's Business Administration and Computing programmes think employers look for in prospective junior office/administration staff?

Question 3 is addressed later in this chapter.

The Attitudes of Employers and Students

Employers

Employers rated Personal Characteristics of a junior office/administration person as the most desirable of the four qualities: Personal Characteristics, General Abilities, Specific Skills and Knowledge. This was also confirmed when the researcher asked questions about the qualities sought when seeking their last employee of this nature. From the interviews conducted with employers, it would appear that Specific Skills were also highly sought after. When an employer receives many applicants for a junior administrative role, employers

appear to screen people according to their skills, and then seek Personal Characteristics at interview stage. To get to interview stage, applicants would have had to have met skill sets, and the interview was then used to ascertain their personal qualities. An employer questionnaire respondent wrote:

"We have realised the importance of a person fitting in."

Joanne (employer) stated:

Joanne: *"Well if they came on board here, we would want the Microsoft suite, we would want them able to try other things, be confident enough to try other things....."*

Joyce (employer) stated:

Joyce: *"We are looking for a good grounding in Microsoft product and good skills in Dictaphone ...we are looking for a team player".*

Employers screened job applicants by skill set first, followed by qualities which are assessed at interview level. Joanne discussed a "skills set" as a set of skills which is used to determine if the person is suitable for the job. We can ascertain from this, that employers seek specific skills as a job requirement, but when it comes to choosing the applicant from interview stage, their attributes are what the employers may base the final decision on. This may be why the responses of employers showed Personal Characteristics as the most desirable of the four qualities.

When employers were asked for reasons why they did not employ someone, the responses were generally related to attributes rather than skills and this corresponds with the findings above. Personal presentation was consistently listed by employers as one of the reasons for not offering a job to a prospective employee. This trend also emerged from Lockyer's (2001) study where grooming was also ranked very highly by employers.

Students

Students ranked Specific Skills as being important when considering an employer's point of view. Students enrolled on the business administration programmes to gain the skills and qualifications that would help them lead to employment. After Specific Skills students then ranked Personal Characteristics followed by General Abilities. As the questionnaire moved to more specific skills and attributes, students began to rank attributes more highly, perhaps realising exactly what the term Personal Characteristics entailed. Employers ranked Personal Characteristics as the most important, but all employers who were interviewed first screened written job applications by determining skill level. Students believe you need skills to get jobs, and they are right in thinking this. I agree with this, as skills are necessary to be considered for an administrative role, and was surprised that employers ranked personal characteristics above skills.

Arnold and Davey's (1994) paper *Evaluating graduate development*, found that from a graduate perspective, soft skills were seen as being less important than hard skills, because it was perceived by graduates that technical or hard skills were relatively more critical in getting a job. Arnold and Davey's (1994) findings correspond with the findings of this present study, even though their research is over ten years old.

Employers who were interviewed clearly stated that the applicants needed to have skills and that they were not willing to base train them. The employers next stressed the importance of a person fitting in, and that attribute was assessed at interview stage.

The overall results of what employers looked for in junior office/administration staff were similar to other studies. Victoria University's Employment Skills Survey (2003) also identified ten top skills/attributes sought after in university graduates. As with Medford (2000), this research mixed both skills and attributes, listing the top ten skills/attributes as shown in Table 9, following.

Medford (2003)

1. Strong verbal and interpersonal communication skills
2. Self-motivated/self management/self starter
3. Team player
4. Sound academic achievement
5. Analytical and conceptual skills
6. Strong written communication skills
7. Flexible and adaptable 'can do' attitude
8. Problem solving skills
9. Energy and enthusiasm
10. Professional ethics

(Medford, 2003)

This study

Employers

1. Customer Service
2. **Honesty**
3. **Flexibility**
4. Telephone Skills
5. **Enthusiasm**
6. Good Time Keeper
7. Communication Skills
8. **Reliability**
9. **Confidence**
10. **Responsibility**

This study

Students

1. Communication
2. **Honesty**
3. Customer Service
4. **Reliability**
5. **Responsibility**
6. Good Time Keeper
7. Written Business Communication
8. Reception
9. Telephone Skills
10. **Initiative**

Table 9: Comparison of ratings of skills and attributes

Note: Bold text = attributes

In Table 9 I have typed in bold all attributes referred to in this study, which generally are not effectively assessed in a teaching environment. I asked the question: What skills and attributes do employers look for in their junior office/administration staff and the list above provides an answer to that. The responses showed that attributes, which we encourage students to learn on our programmes of study, are desirable to employers. These attributes are not however, assessed or documented. Tutors give verbal referees to prospective employers about a student's perceived attributes, but these are purely subjective and the tutor can offer no supportive hard documentation to say the student may possess these skills.

The main differences between the student and employer lists are *flexibility*, *enthusiasm*, and *confidence*, which employers rated much higher than students. This again emphasises students' lack of understanding of the attributes required by employers. Students thought *initiative* would be sought after by employers, but employers ranked this as not important.

The programmes we offer within the business administration field at Whitireia Community Polytechnic give the students the opportunity to learn both skills and attributes. The reason that many of the desirable attributes are not assessed within our classrooms, is that they do not meet any performance criteria in the New Zealand Qualifications Framework unit standards. The hidden unassessed curriculum includes honesty, integrity, enthusiasm and commitment, which are all attributes we encourage students to display when working in the Business Centre, but which are not formally assessed. The difficulty, in practice, is how to encourage students to display these skills when there is no measurable outcome which is meaningful to students who are immersed in a learning environment. A follow-up study into how to assess or at least observe and record these outcomes, and compilation of an attributes-based in-house certificate would be advantageous. From the initial literature review, and from working and discussing with students, attributes may be able to be enhanced or made meaningful, but it is difficult to alter a student's lifetime of personality development in just a few short weeks. The Business Centre is a useful learning environment as the setting encompasses meaningful reasons for

learning. Attributes can be nurtured and encouraged, but in most cases not significantly changed in the available time.

Personal Presentation

When employers were asked to identify a reason for not employing someone, personal presentation was mentioned a significant number of times. Personal presentation is covered in the business administration programme of study and is reflected in students achieving a NZQA unit standard. Employers identified this as an important feature when employing someone. However, when combined with other attributes, employers did not rank this highly. It may be that current dress style does not 'fit' into business style presentation and that perceptions of dress standards may change through different generations. As discussed earlier, Baby Boomers (Western, 2001, Zemke, 2001) are likely to be the employers, with Nexters seeking to be employed. In general terms, the dress of Baby Boomers is more conservative than that of Nexters. The employers may see the clothing of Nexters as inappropriate office attire. Within our programmes we must include discussions on trends and encourage conservative dress, especially for interviews, as it appears it is something employers subconsciously strongly believe in. It is not something employers openly rate as important, but it appears they may use it as a deciding factor against employing someone.

Of the 12 attributes students ranked for this study, grooming (personal presentation) ranked number 11 (second to last). When students were asked for five things an employer looks for in a junior office/administrative role, personal presentation was a consistent theme. This may suggest that students believe personal presentation is important to employers, but not in relation to other attributes.

Joyce (employer) was very frank in saying that nose piercings were not acceptable and would immediately be used against a prospective employee as a reason for not employing them. As she said

“even though we are in Porirua and somebody may be the nicest person, but the nose stud thing, that’s urrrrr and would completely put me off”

This awareness of dress sense is not limited to the Porirua region as Lockyer’s (2001) study in the Waikato demonstrates. Her study also found that employers did not select a prospective employee because of their unacceptable or inappropriate appearance or dress sense.

The Place of Skills and Attributes in Programmes of Study

The following section gives an insight into the findings related to research question 3.

3. What skills and attributes do business employers think are necessary for employment, and can these be incorporated into the Business Administration programmes of study offered at Whitireia Community Polytechnic.

The findings were in agreement with Arnold and Davy’s (1994) study that students have the perception that soft skills (attributes) are not as important as hard skills (performance skills). Students in this study believed that they needed the skills and qualifications to get work. This was one of their reasons for enrolling in a business administration programme. Personal characteristics is an important feature to students but one which, certainly for the students and employers interviewed, is perceived as being difficult to acquire while on a programme of study. This perception may account for why some students do not attain or develop these attributes on their programmes.

Kretovics and McCambridge (1998) study found differences between large and small business requirements for potential employees, which could also be seen in this present study. For example, audio (dictaphone) skills are necessary for administration staff within the legal industry, yet did not occur in any of the other employer questionnaires as an important skill. As a training provider, it is

important to provide the skills the employment industry needs, but mainstream office programmes may not be the place for some specialised skills.

Question 3 of this research asked what skills and attributes do business employers think are necessary for employment, which has been answered above, and whether these could be incorporated into the business administration programmes of study offered at Whitireia Community Polytechnic. Specific skills such as dictaphone and desktop publishing scored poorly in the list from employers of desirable skills. Skills which have less demand could be offered as part time or elective studies. The additional attributes that employers listed are included in the hidden curriculum but, as discussed above, are difficult to assess and accurately record. As employers appear to value these attributes, further investigation into a certificate which is able to recognise these attributes would be valuable to employers.

Workplace Learning

From the literature review, it is evident that for learning to take place, the material must be presented to a student who has a purpose for wanting to learn. Additionally if the material they are learning can be put into a workplace context, then the acquisition of learning may be more likely to take place. This is perfect for the simulated Business Centre, but the difficulty remains that it is a learning environment and not 'real'. Sarah was discussing other students when she said

Sarah: *“At Polytech the teachers say “be realistic” but they (other students) still don’t care because heck it is just a course – that is the prevailing attitude – it is just a course”*

Lana had similar opinions

Lana: *“With the Business Centre there should be more emphasis on that professional environment stuff but then it’s a learning institute – its hard to get that regimented atmosphere you have in the workplace. I mean a course is*

study and you're learning but in the workplace you have to do your job"

Dymock and Gerber's (2002) students also commented on the difference between the classroom and the workplace, noting that the workplace involves 'real' people, and that lack of appropriate action can result in loss of money. The consequences in this situation are felt and realistic, compared to the classroom environment where no similar consequences or sanctions are present.

Employers could not come up with any suggestions on how to encourage students to learn the hidden curriculum within the Business Centre.

Interviewer: Can you think of any way we could encourage our students to learn attributes in the Business Centre

Joyce: *"No – some kids will learn from you and others will not want to learn those skills I suppose, because it's a simulated office."*

This is something that cannot be overcome, and will remain an issue that students need to 'buy into' if they are to gain benefit from the simulated environment. However, a bigger work experience component through placements in firms could be introduced to enhance this type of 'on the job' learning.

When employers were asked if there were any attributes they sought in prospective employees that could be encouraged on a programme of study, they suggested:

"Team player"

"Reliability, flexibility and responsibility"

"Perseverance to see a task through to completion"

"Sense of humour"

These are some aspects of the hidden curriculum that can be encouraged by immersing students within a business environment that simulates an employment situation. When students go out on work experience an employer may be able to grade or comment on these qualities, and the student may take more responsibility for the learning if it is in a 'real' situation. A major conclusion of this research project includes that all the business administration programmes in future should have a compulsory work experience placement where the employer formally grades a student's performance and attributes . Appendix 14 shows the current work experience grading sheet and appendix 15 shows a revised grading sheet. The suggested changes of adding honesty and enthusiasm resulted from the graded attributes scores of employers. Honesty and enthusiasm scored highly from employers in the attributes they seek in prospective employees.

Overall the employers thought, from their own personal experience, that the graduates from the business administration programmes had a good array of skills. Joyce (employer) commented that our successful graduates have the necessary array of skills required for most junior business administration jobs. The Advisory Committee, consisting of employers from the Porirua region, agree that the programmes are preparing students well for employment. With this in mind, employers need to encourage students to continue with their learning, and provide continuing opportunities for learning in the workplace.

Informal Learning

This research shows that the skills we try to equip our students with are required in the workplace. There was a general correlation between the skills employers sought and what students believed they sought. Dictaphone and Desktop Publishing were consistently the two lowest scoring skills from both students and employers. Interestingly, one of the employers who was interviewed made comment about Dictaphone being a highly desirable skill. This shows that employers seek a number of different skills, some which are

specific to their industry. As indicated earlier, skills with limited use for some employers could be taught in a part time, separate component, instead of being immersed in a programme for all students.

The informal learning that takes place in the Business Centre is a vital part of hidden curriculum within each programme. Although only formally rewarded through employer evaluations (as previously discussed) when students participate in work experience, these informal attributes are of primary attraction to an employer at interview stage. This informal learning needs to be made more transparent within the Business Centre and within the overall objectives of each programme. The construction of a certificate with explicit attributes as outcomes needs further investigation.

Initially I questioned if the current Business Centre teaching practices could be enhanced to encourage students to acquire attributes employers saw as desirable. As shown, the Business Centre is a simulated room, one where students role-play and learn what happens in a real business. As it is not 'real', some students do not use the opportunity to develop the attributes employers may seek in administrative staff or incidents do not arise that call for some attributes to be shown. As discussed previously, to have a bigger component of work experience on all business administration programmes would give students an opportunity to work in a 'real' environment. This may help students understand why the attributes are important, and thus create a desire to learn or model them.

I also asked the question of why students, in some instances, do not learn, or do not show, desirable attributes while they are on the programme. My conclusion is that the Business Centre is a simulated environment which some students choose not to fully participate in and where limited incidents or opportunities may occur. Bronnie (employer) relates this to the training not being a 'real' position with remuneration, and the student may need convincing that an outcome will make a difference to their lives. The other employers agreed that the simulation requires a 'buy in' from the student. The students interviewed agreed that because there are no real penalties (for example we do

not pay them and we cannot sack them), some don't take the simulated office seriously. Also, in role plays, students may be given roles they may never have observed in 'real life'.

When a student succeeds in gaining employment, they will continue to learn the attributes required from their peers and managerial staff around them. The managerial staff need to create opportunities for informal and formal learning in the workplace and encourage ongoing learning from their new employees.

Demographics

There was a good mixture of demographic representation among both students and employers. A high percentage of the people who are in a position of hiring junior office/administration staff fall within the 46-60 age bracket, or, as shown in the literature review, within the Baby Boomers category. Western (2001) identified Baby Boomers as people aged between 40-59 years of age with general attitudes similar to: "Work is equal to self worth, contribution and personal fulfilment".

The students' ages within the study were spread, with 19 students aged under 30 years old and 5 aged 31-45 years old. Two students did not identify their age group. With the majority of students aged under 30 years old, they fall into Nexters or Generation X age group.

With employers being in a much older age group than some of our students, the literature points to a potential discrepancy in attitudes and assumptions about work. A Baby Boomer employer equates work to self worth, contribution and personal fulfilment. A Generation X or Nexters student seeking employment may focus more on such things as a balance between their work and social life. A Baby Boomer or Silent may misinterpret this as not being willing or able to commit to the workplace.

With Baby Boomers employing Nexters, the literature shows there can be a poor correlation between work ethic of these two generations. There is no

easy solution to combat the likely differences in work ethic between employers and employees of differing generations. Educating students to understand the expectations of employers, which may be generation based, may not alleviate the situation, but may help by illuminating misunderstandings that may arise.

Maori, Pacific and European Characteristics

The literature review provides some insight into the cultural backgrounds of people from these ethnic groups. This research project did not identify any key differences between responses except that the Tokelauan students' responses were of a more humble nature in their wording, for example

“politeness, cleanliness, alertness, communication skills, being on time”

“cleanliness, alertness, following rules, timekeeping, communication skills”

“respect for customers, good communication skills, good time keeper”

The interview with Sarah revealed her perception of Maori students' unwillingness to commit to a programme of study, but we can identify from the literature review that this may be in response to family having a higher value in traditional Maori and Pacific settings than in Sarah's pakeha values. (O'Connor and MacFarlane 2002). In general terms, some Maori and Pacific students may have more family obligations than some Pakeha students. Rose also suggested that the family commitment and inherent shyness of Pacific people may prevent them from completing their programme of study.

“Because respect is so important in our culture, if you get behind on your work, you might not want to come back (to your study), because it's too shameful. ... sometimes you have a lot of other things like your family jobs that stop you coming back too.”

Lana and Sarah's comments about Maori and Pacific people's lack of commitment to the business administration programmes may be a misunderstanding of their cultural obligations and, as Kura suggests, the

student may not tell anyone their reason for not coming back to their study, through feelings of shamefulness. These are generalisations, and further study into this area would prove beneficial to both students and tutors on these programmes.

Both the employers and students made interesting comments, many of which I had heard before on more than one occasion. Students who lamented others' lack of commitment to the programmes often based that view on a limited amount of knowledge, and often there had been personal and private reasons for students not completing their study. Many of these reasons were family and cultural related issues, but this was not always the case.

I have been told on many occasions that the students are well prepared for the workplace, and employers, from my own experience, have been extremely happy with their graduate employees.

Of the hundreds of students I have personally observed in the Business Centre, some do learn new attributes, but generally we appear to polish the ones they already hold. The next chapter discusses these issues in more depth.

Conclusions

The business administration programmes at Whitireia, in general, appear to be training the students in the skills necessary for employment. Employers did not suggest any additional skills they thought necessary for employment in a junior administrative role. The attributes (or hidden curriculum) that are encouraged on the programme need to be continually reinforced for students and explained and modelled in ways that students can identify with. Students' perceptions that attributes are not as important as skills in gaining employment, can be addressed through education. Attributes that are desirable to employers can be modelled and practised, but tutors are unlikely to significantly change or alter a student's inherent behaviour in such a short programme of study.

Students need to be convinced that a positive outcome from the programme will make a difference in their lives. Career mapping and compulsory work experience placements may help clarify their career direction, thus giving them a framework on which to further develop the skills and attributes taught in the Business Centre within the business administration programmes.

Employers need to encourage and recognise informal and formal learning in their workplace to build on the skills and attributes that business administration graduates bring with them.

I conclude that we need to incorporate more 'real' work experience into our programmes, as there is a great deal of informal learning that takes place in the workplace. No matter how realistic we try to make our teaching, it remains a learning environment in which some students may choose not to fully participate.

The data suggest also that Whitireia Community Polytechnic business administration programmes should:

Career map with students a positive career direction to facilitate meaning and insight into their career choices.

Continue to emphasise the need for a conservative approach to dress within an office environment.

Offer less frequently required skills such as audio (Dictaphone) in part time or evening flexible components, not embedded within a large programme of study.

Chapter 6 – Conclusions, Recommendations and Reflections

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Conclusions

I conclude that, as stated previously, Whitireia Community Polytechnic business administration programmes deliver graduates who are well prepared and skilled for employment in administrative positions. Many attributes, however, although highly attractive to employers, cannot be adequately taught or assessed to give formal recognition. Work experience modules, which are now in some of the programmes, certainly allow the students an opportunity to demonstrate positive attributes in a workplace environment. These work experience modules are highly valuable to students and should be made available in future to all students who choose a business administration career path.

The work experience not only gives students an opportunity to sample what it is like to work in the business administration field, but, for people who have no employment role models, work experience can also provide validation of skills and a confidence booster.

Students need to be convinced that a positive outcome from the programme will make a difference in their lives. Career mapping and compulsory work experience placements, may help clarify their career direction, thus give them the framework on which to build the skills and attributes taught in the Business Centre within the business administration programmes.

The skill base offered to students is adequate and broad enough to cover most initial administrative roles. Employers, overall, appear likely to offer further specific training to employees, especially if they have specialised software. They do not appear to have unrealistic expectations of business administration graduates and, by all accounts, from the small snapshot of employers in the Porirua region, appear happy with the skill level of the Whitireia business administration graduates. A candidate's attitude is often informally assessed at interview stage, primarily to see if they would fit into the business culture of a particular workplace. We must encourage employers of graduates to make opportunities to build on the initial training that new employees come in with.

The main skills employers sought in junior administrative roles from this research were Customer Service and Reception, along with computing skills such as the Microsoft suite.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to enhance students' learning opportunities while studying towards a business administration career path in Whitireia Community Polytechnics Programmes.

- Introduce a work experience component through placements to all students in full time business administration programmes within Whitireia Community Polytechnic
- Promote career mapping at an early stage of the business administration programmes
- Further develop the "Virtual Business Centre" as a place for development of attributes and attitudes that are valued within the workplace
- Revise the "Virtual Business Centre" activities to be more inclusive of opportunities to develop attributes and attitudes that are valued within the workplace
- Make explicit employer and employee responsibilities for recognising and encouraging the need for ongoing learning in the workplace
- Continue to offer up-to-date training in the use of computer packages to meet market demands
- Maintain ongoing and strong links with industry within the Porirua area to encourage opportunities of work experience
- Develop part time options to deliver specific skill requirements for employers

To this end the researcher has already put into action changes to the business administration programme as a direct result of these findings. After discussion with team colleagues, a one-week full-time work experience module was offered this year to students who were nearing the end of their 20 week programme.

This proved successful and will, most likely, be offered again, and incorporated into the programme structure.

A modular programme has been developed to allow easier offerings of part time programmes, such as audio, as a nightclass for 2006.

Future Research

There are areas for further research that I believe will add to the body of knowledge in tertiary certificate level education in business administration.

These are:

- Treat this study as a pilot to lead to wider studies within this field. There is little research from New Zealand Polytechnics in the business administration field.
- Further investigate the cultural factors discouraging full participation of some students' in their programmes of study
- Study how to help people acquire, and how to assess, the attributes that are valued within the workplace
- Develop an in-house certificate and programme which includes attributes desired by employers.

Reflections

I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to undertake this academic process. Although it has taken much longer than I had originally anticipated, there have been many moments of clarity and times when I have enjoyed the solitude and space for introspective thought. Throughout this study, I have been able to make explicit, the reasoning behind my sometimes rational and sometimes rash decision making. This in itself has been illuminating to fully explore the basis of the rationale which I believe in.

I have gained knowledge through the process of questionnaire design, interpretation, interview techniques (some of which I would like to have gained earlier) and the process of undertaking a large piece of research. It has been

gratifying to go back to identify our primary objectives within the programmes which we deliver, and to consider how we go about giving others the opportunity to learn. The research itself was very localised and specific, and therefore generalisations can only be made about the programmes investigated. The outcomes of small and localised research do, however, enable discussion and action plans of further research to be developed. From this research it is possible to see avenues of further research such as programme and certificate development.

In writing this paper, it has become clear that my interview techniques as a researcher were poor. The interviews did not gather, or delve into, enough depth about various topics and it is clear that more practice is needed in this area before embarking on more qualitative research through interviews.

Overall though, the experience has been a positive one. As I said at the beginning of this paper, the environment in which we work (tertiary education) is changeable and therefore research is needed to ensure that the programmes delivered meet market needs and provide positive learning experiences.

Appendices

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Appendix One - NZQA Requirements for National Business Administration and Computing Certificate (Level 2)

Level **2**

Credits **60**

Purpose

The business community seeks people who have a broad range of skills including the ability to use a keyboard, meet production requirements, operate computers, use technology to best advantage, answer telephones, provide customer service, process information, show initiative and contribute positively to the work group or work team.

The flexible structure of the qualification recognises this broad range. It allows providers and employers to tailor programmes to meet individual skill needs that reflect the diverse roles and positions required to meet the business administration and information technology needs of the business community at an entry level. Minimum credits specified for interpersonal communications and writing recognise the need for competencies that underpin all business administration roles.

This qualification is the first of four qualifications in business administration for those seeking employment and/or further training and education through an accredited provider or through work-based training programmes.

The qualification can provide a foundation for the National Certificate in Business Administration and Computing (Level 3) [Ref: 0633], the National Certificate in Business Administration (Level 4) [Ref: 0634], and the National Diploma in Business Administration (Level 5) [Ref: 0370]. Alternatively it could lead to other qualifications in the Business, and Computing and Information Technology fields.

Credit Range

	Compulsory	Elective
Level 1 credits	1	0-19
Level 2 or above credits	-	40-59
Minimum totals	1	59

Requirements for Award of Qualification

This qualification will be awarded to people credited with a minimum of 60 credits, of which 40 are at level 2 or above, and who meet the requirements of the compulsory and elective sections.

Award of NQF Qualifications

Credit gained for a standard may be used only once to meet the requirements of this qualification.

Unit standards and achievement standards that are equivalent in outcome are mutually exclusive for the purpose of award. The table of mutually exclusive standards is provided in the Qualifications Authority *Rules and Procedures* publications available at www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/.

Reviewed standards that continue to recognise the same overall outcome are registered as new versions and retain their identification number (Id). Any version of a standard with the same Id may be used to meet qualification requirements that list the Id and/or that specify the past or current classification of the standard.

Detailed Qualification Requirements

Compulsory

The following unit standard is required.

Field Health
Subfield Occupational Health and Safety
Domain Occupational Health and Safety Practice

Id	Title	Level	Credit
497	Protect health and safety in the workplace	1	1

Elective

- A minimum of 38 credits is required as specified for each of **Sets A to F**;
- the balance of credits to meet the qualification requirements for a minimum of 60 credits, of which 40 are at level 2 or above, drawn from anywhere in **Sets A to G**.

Set A

A minimum of 10 credits is required from the following domain.

Field	Subfield	Domain
Business	Business Administration	Business Administration Services

Set B

A minimum of 10 credits is required from the following domain.

Field	Subfield	Domain
Business	Business Administration	Business Information Processing

Set C

A minimum of 9 credits is required from the following domain.

Field	Subfield	Domain
Computing and Information Technology	Computing	Generic Computing

Set D

A minimum of 2 credits is required from the following domain.

Field	Subfield	Domain
Humanities	Communication Skills	Interpersonal Communications

Set E

A minimum of 3 credits is required from the following domain.

Field	Subfield	Domain
Humanities	Communication Skills	Writing

Set F

A minimum of 4 credits is required from the following domain.

Field	Subfield	Domain
Service Sector	Service Sector Skills	Service Sector – Core Skills

*The balance of credits to meet the qualification requirements for a minimum of 60 credits, of which 40 are at level 2 or above, drawn from anywhere in **Sets A to G**.*

Set G

Field	Subfield	Domain
Business	Accounting	Accounting – Generic
	Business Administration	Any
Core Generic	Core Generic	Any
Humanities	Communication Skills	Any
Māori	Māori Business and Management	Māori Office Systems

Field Humanities
Subfield Health and Physical Education
Domain Health Education

Id	Title	Level	Credit
14250	Examine issues related to sexual harassment	2	2

Transition Arrangements

Version 5

Version 5 was issued in June 2005 following review.

Changes to structure and content

- Minor clarifications made to the qualification's purpose.
- A requirement for a minimum of 3 credits from the domain of Writing added to the Elective, and the minimum required credits from the domain of Interpersonal Communications reduced from 5 to 2.
- The domain of Māori Office Systems, and unit standard 14250, added to the Elective.

People currently working towards version 4 of this qualification may either complete the requirements for that version or transfer their results to this version of the qualification.

Providers are encouraged to offer programmes based on the new requirements from January 2006.

For detailed information see [Review Summaries](#) on the Qualifications Authority website.

Previous versions of the qualification

Version 4 was issued following a review that identified the need for Business Administration qualifications to provide more flexibility to meet the changing needs of employees and employers within industry, and for providers to meet those needs in a constantly changing environment. Specified unit standards were reduced to one only, with minimum numbers of credits being specified for key domains. The elective section was expanded to allow more flexibility, and the purpose statement amended to reflect this.

Version 3 was issued following the review of computing, core generic and service sector unit standards.

Version 2 was issued in following a review of the business and administration unit standards.

Version 1 contained transition arrangements for people credited with computing unit standards that were registered in 1993 and subsequently reviewed.

NQF Registration Information

Process	Version	Date	Last Date for Award
Registration	1	October 1994	December 2005
Revision	2	July 1997	December 2005
Revision	3	November 1998	December 2005
Review	4	June 1999	December 2007
Review	5	June 2005	N/A

Standard Setting Body

NZQA National Qualifications Services
PO Box 160
WELLINGTON

Telephone 04 802 3000
Email nqs@nzqa.govt.nz

Any person or organisation may contribute to the review of this qualification by sending feedback to the standard setting body at the above address.

The next review of this qualification is planned to take place in 2009.

Other standard setting bodies whose standards are included in the qualification

New Zealand Industry Training Organisation – Industrial Health and Safety Advisory Group
NZQA

Certification

The certificate will display the logos of the Qualifications Authority and the accredited provider.

Classification

This qualification is classified according to the NQF classification system and the New Zealand Standard Classification of Education (NZSCED) system as specified below.

NQF Classification		NZSCED	
Code	Description	Code	Description
78	Business/Business Administration	080904	Management and Commerce/Office Studies/Text Processing and Office Tools

Quality Management Systems

Providers and Industry Training Organisations must be accredited by a recognised Quality Assurance Body before they can register credits from assessment against standards. Accredited providers and Industry Training Organisations assessing against standards must engage with the moderation system that applies to those standards. Accreditation requirements and the moderation system are outlined in the associated Accreditation and Moderation Action Plan (AMAP) for each standard.

Appendix Two - NZQA Requirements for National Business Administration and Computing Certificate (Level 3)

Level **3**
Credits **60**

Purpose

This national certificate is designed to:

- recognise a broad range of business administration knowledge and skills required of administrators while allowing them to select credits to match their business administration and information technology related positions; and
- provide recognition of an intermediate level of competence, knowledge and skills to permit and assist a pathway to further education and training.

The flexible structure of the qualification allows providers and employers to tailor programmes to meet individual skill needs that reflect the diverse roles and positions required to meet business administration and information technology needs of the business community at an intermediate level. Minimum credits specified for interpersonal communications and writing recognise the need for competencies that underpin all business administration roles.

This qualification is the second of four qualifications in business administration for those seeking employment and/or further training and education through an accredited provider or through work based training programmes.

Although the National Certificate in Business Administration and Computing (Level 2) [Ref: 0008] is not a prerequisite, this certificate builds on the skills and knowledge recognised by it and can lead to the National Certificate in Business Administration (Level 4) [Ref: 0634], and the National Diploma in Business Administration (Level 5) [Ref: 0370]. Alternatively, it could lead to other qualifications in the Business, and Computing and Information Technology fields.

Credit Range

	Elective
Level 1 credits	0-20
Level 2 credits	0-20
Level 3 or above credits	40-60
Minimum totals	60

Requirements for Award of Qualification

This qualification will be awarded to people credited with a minimum of 60 credits, of which 40 are at level 3 or above, and who meet the requirements as specified in the Elective section.

Award of NQF Qualifications

Credit gained for a standard may be used only once to meet the requirements of this qualification.

Unit standards and achievement standards that are equivalent in outcome are mutually exclusive for the purpose of award. The table of mutually exclusive standards is provided in the Qualifications Authority *Rules and Procedures* publications available at www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/.

Reviewed standards that continue to recognise the same overall outcome are registered as new versions and retain their identification number (Id). Any version of a standard with the same Id may be used to meet qualification requirements that list the Id and/or that specify the past or current classification of the standard.

Detailed Qualification Requirements

Elective

- A minimum of 46 credits is required as specified for each of **Sets A to E**;
- the balance of credits to meet the qualification requirements for a minimum of 60 credits, of which 40 are at level 3 or above, drawn from anywhere in **Sets A to H**.

Set A

A minimum of 25 credits is required from the following subfield.

Field	Subfield	Domain
Business	Business Administration	Any

Set B

A minimum of 10 credits is required from the following domain.

Field	Subfield	Domain
Computing and Information Technology	Computing	Generic Computing

Set C

A minimum of 5 credits is required from the following subfield.

Field	Subfield	Domain
Humanities	Communication Skills	Any

Set D

A minimum of 3 credits at level 2 or above from the following domain OR the specified unit standard.

Field	Subfield	Domain
Humanities	Communication Skills	Writing
Field	Business	
Subfield	Management	
Domain	First Line Management	

Id	Title	Level	Credit
16612	Use effective business writing skills as a first line manager	4	4

Set E

A minimum of 3 credits is required from the following domain.

Field	Subfield	Domain
Service Sector	Service Sector Skills	Service Sector – Core Skills

*The balance of credits to meet the qualification requirements for a minimum of 60 credits, of which 40 are at level 3 or above, drawn from anywhere in **Sets A to H**.*

Set F

Field	Subfield	Domain
Business	Accounting	Any
	Financial Management	Any
	Management	Any
	Public Sector Services	Public Sector Core Skills
Māori	Māori Business and Management	Māori Office Systems

Set G

Credits at level 3 or above from the following domain.

Field	Subfield	Domain
Core Generic	Core Generic	Work and Study Skills

Set H

Field Business
 Subfield Public Sector Services
 Domain Public Sector Courts Practice

Id	Title	Level	Credit
10479	Demonstrate knowledge of the New Zealand Courts structure	3	3
10480	Demonstrate knowledge of the New Zealand constitutional structure	4	4
10481	Demonstrate knowledge of how law is developed and the relationship between different types of law	4	3

Domain Public Sector Maori

Id	Title	Level	Credit
14950	Demonstrate introductory knowledge and understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi in government	3	4

Transition Arrangements

Version 2

Version 2 was issued in June 2005 following review.

Changes to structure and content

- Minor clarifications made to the qualification's purpose.
- A requirement for a minimum of 3 credits at level 2 or above from the domain of Writing and/or unit standard 16612 added to the communication skills requirement.
- The minimum credits from the domain of Service Sector – Core Skills increased from 2 to 3.
- The domains of Māori Office Systems and Public Sector Core Skills, and unit standards 14950, 10479, 10480 and 10481 added to the elective options.

People currently working towards version 1 of this qualification may either complete the requirements for that version or transfer their results to this version of the qualification.

Providers are encouraged to offer programmes based on the new requirements from January 2006.

For detailed information see [Review Summaries](#) on the Qualifications Authority website.

Previous versions of the qualification

Version 1 of this qualification and the National Certificate in Business Administration (Level 4) [Ref: 0634] were issued to replace the National Certificate in Business Administration (Level 4) with strands in General, Business Information Processing, Business Administration Services, and Business Procedures [Ref: 0187] following its review in 1998 and 1999.

The review identified the need for Business Administration qualifications to provide more flexibility to meet the changing needs of employees and employers within industry, and for providers to meet those needs in a constantly changing environment.

NQF Registration Information

Process	Version	Date	Last Date for Award
Registration	1	June 1999	December 2007
Review	2	June 2005	N/A

Standard Setting Body

NZQA National Qualifications Services
PO Box 160
WELLINGTON

Telephone 04 802 3000
Email nqs@nzqa.govt.nz

Any person or organisation may contribute to the review of this qualification by sending feedback to the standard setting body at the above address.

The next review of this qualification is planned to take place in 2009.

Other standard setting bodies whose standards are included in the qualification

Forest Industries Training
NZQA
Public Sector Training Organisation

Certification

The certificate will display the logos of the Qualifications Authority and the accredited provider.

Classification

This qualification is classified according to the NQF classification system and the New Zealand Standard Classification of Education (NZSCED) system as specified below.

NQF Classification		NZSCED	
Code	Description	Code	Description
78	Business/Business Administration	080904	Management and Commerce/Office Studies/Text Processing and Office Tools

Quality Management Systems

Providers and Industry Training Organisations must be accredited by a recognised Quality Assurance Body before they can register credits from assessment against standards. Accredited providers and Industry Training Organisations assessing against standards must engage with the moderation system that applies to those standards. Accreditation requirements and the moderation system are outlined in the associated Accreditation and Moderation Action Plan (AMAP) for each standard.

Appendix Three - NZQA Requirements for National Business Administration Certificate (Level 4)

Level **4**

Credits **60**

Purpose

This national certificate is designed to:

- recognise a broad range of business administration knowledge and skills required of administrators while allowing them to select credit to match their business administration and information technology related positions; and
- provide recognition of an advanced level of competence, knowledge and skills to permit and assist a pathway to further education and training.

The flexible structure of the qualification allows providers and employers to tailor programmes to meet individual skill needs that reflect the diverse roles and positions required to meet business administration and information technology needs of the business community at an advanced level. Minimum credits specified for interpersonal communications and writing recognise the need for competencies that underpin all business administration roles.

This qualification is the third of four qualifications in business administration for those seeking employment and/or further training and education through an accredited provider or through work based training programmes.

Although the National Certificate in Business Administration and Computing (Level 3) [Ref: 0633] is not a prerequisite, this certificate builds on the skills and knowledge recognised by it and can lead to the National Diploma in Business Administration (Level 5) [Ref: 0370]. Alternatively, it could lead to other qualifications in the Business, and Computing and Information Technology fields.

Credit Range

	Elective
Level 2 credits	0-20
Level 3 credits	0-20
Level 4 or above credits	40-60
Minimum totals	60

Requirements for Award of Qualification

This qualification will be awarded to people credited with a minimum of 60 credits, of which 40 are at level 4 or above, and who meet the requirements as specified in the Elective section.

Award of NQF Qualifications

Credit gained for a standard may be used only once to meet the requirements of this qualification.

Unit standards and achievement standards that are equivalent in outcome are mutually exclusive for the purpose of award. The table of mutually exclusive standards is provided in the Qualifications Authority *Rules and Procedures* publications available at www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/.

Reviewed standards that continue to recognise the same overall outcome are registered as new versions and retain their identification number (Id). Any version of a standard with the same Id may be used to meet qualification requirements that list the Id and/or that specify the past or current classification of the standard.

Detailed Qualification Requirements

Elective

- A minimum of 36 credits is required as specified for each of **Sets A to E**;
- the balance of credits to meet the qualification requirements for a minimum of 60 credits, of which 40 are at level 4 or above, drawn from anywhere in **Sets A to F**.

Set A

A minimum of 20 credits is required from the following subfield.

Field	Subfield	Domain
Business	Business Administration	Any

Set B

A minimum of 5 credits is required from the following domain.

Field	Subfield	Domain
Computing and Information Technology	Computing	Generic Computing

Set C

A minimum of 5 credits is required from the following subfield.

Field	Subfield	Domain
Humanities	Communication Skills	Any

Set D

A minimum of 3 credits at level 3 or above from the following domain OR the specified unit standard.

Field	Subfield	Domain
Humanities	Communication Skills	Writing
Field	Business	
Subfield	Management	
Domain	First Line Management	

Id	Title	Level	Credit
16612	Use effective business writing skills as a first line manager	4	4

Set E

A minimum of 3 credits is required from the following domain.

Field	Subfield	Domain
Service Sector	Service Sector Skills	Service Sector – Core Skills

*The balance of credits to meet the qualification requirements for a minimum of 60 credits, of which 40 are at level 4 or above, drawn from anywhere in **Sets A to F***

Set F

Field	Subfield	Domain
Business	Accounting	Any
	Financial Management	Any
	Management	Any
	Public Sector Services	Public Sector Core Skills
Education	Educational Administration	Any
Health	Occupational Health and Safety	Occupational Health and Safety Practice
		Workplace Health and Safety Management
Māori	Māori Business and Management	Any

Field Business
 Subfield Public Sector Services
 Domain Public Sector Courts Practice

Id	Title	Level	Credit
10479	Demonstrate knowledge of the New Zealand Courts structure	3	3
10480	Demonstrate knowledge of the New Zealand constitutional structure	4	4
10481	Demonstrate knowledge of how law is developed and the relationship between different types of law	4	3

Domain Public Sector Māori

Id	Title	Level	Credit
14950	Demonstrate introductory knowledge and understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi in government	3	4

Transition Arrangements

Version 2

Version 2 was issued in June 2005 following review.

Changes to structure and content

- Minor clarifications made to the qualification's purpose.
- A requirement for a minimum of 3 credits at level 3 or above selected from the domain of Writing or unit standard 16612 added to the communication skills requirement.
- The minimum credits from the domain of Service Sector – Core Skills has been increased from 2 to 3.
- The subfields of Educational Administration, Māori Business and Management; the domains of Public Sector Core Skills, Occupational Health and Safety Practice, Workplace Health and Safety Management; and unit standards 14950, 10479, 10480 and 10481 added to the elective options.

People currently working towards version 1 of this qualification may either complete the requirements for that version or transfer their results to this version of the qualification.

Providers are encouraged to offer programmes based on the new requirements from January 2006.

For detailed information see [Review Summaries](#) on the Qualifications Authority website.

Previous versions of the qualification

Version 1 of this qualification and the National Certificate in Business Administration and Computing (Level 3) were issued to replace the National Certificate in Business Administration (Level 4) with strands in General, Business Information Processing, Business Administration Services, and Business Procedures [Ref: 0187] following its review in 1998 and 1999.

The review identified the need for Business Administration qualifications to provide more flexibility to meet the changing needs of employees and employers within industry, and for providers to meet those needs in a constantly changing environment.

NQF Registration Information

Process	Version	Date	Last Date for Award
Registration	1	June 1999	December 2007
Review	2	June 2005	N/A

Standard Setting Body

NZQA National Qualifications Services
PO Box 160
WELLINGTON

Telephone 04 802 3000
Email nqs@nzqa.govt.nz

Any person or organisation may contribute to the review of this qualification by sending feedback to the standard setting body at the above address.

The next review of this qualification is planned to take place in 2009.

Other standard setting bodies whose standards are included in the qualification

Forest Industries Training
New Zealand Industry Training Organisation – Industrial Health and Safety Advisory Group
NZQA
Public Sector Training Organisation

Certification

The certificate will display the logos of the Qualifications Authority and the accredited provider.

Classification

This qualification is classified according to the NQF classification system and the New Zealand Standard Classification of Education (NZSCED) system as specified below.

NQF Classification		NZSCED	
Code	Description	Code	Description
78	Business/Business Administration	080301	Management and Commerce/Business and Management/Business Management

Quality Management Systems

Providers and Industry Training Organisations must be accredited by a recognised Quality Assurance Body before they can register credits from assessment against standards. Accredited providers and Industry Training Organisations assessing against standards must engage with the moderation system that applies to those standards. Accreditation requirements and the moderation system are outlined in the associated Accreditation and Moderation Action Plan (AMAP) for each standard.

GENERIC COMPUTING
**Create and use a simple computer
flatfile database to solve a problem**

level:	2
credit:	3
final date for comment:	December 2006
expiry date:	December 2007
sub-field:	Computing
replacement information:	This unit standard replaced unit standard 210.
purpose:	People credited with this unit standard are able to plan, produce, use, and evaluate a simple computer flatfile database.
entry information:	Open.
accreditation option:	Evaluation of documentation by NZQA.
moderation option:	A centrally established and directed national moderation system has been set up by NZQA.
special notes:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1 Candidates are required to plan, produce, use and evaluate one simple flatfile database to provide a solution to a problem. The problem may be either part of the candidate's employment tasks (in the case of workplace assessment) or be a set exercise.2 The supplied brief must clearly identify the problem and the outcomes to be met by the solution. The brief must contain requirements against which the success or otherwise of the flatfile database can be evaluated.3 This unit standard relates to database systems that run on personal computers, or

small computer platforms, rather than mainframe or large computer systems. All references to databases should be taken to refer to flatfile databases only.

- 4 Definitions
A data type is the type of data stored in a field. Data types at this level must include text and number fields.
A plan outlines how the requirements of the brief will be realised. For this unit standard, the plan may be informal, and it may be more appropriate to produce evidence of it during task completion rather than prior to starting the task or project. Evidence of planning may be oral, written, and/or graphic. For additional information on planning, refer to the computing assessment resource at <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/for-providers/resources/index.html>.
- 5 Legislation relevant to this unit standard includes but is not limited to the: Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992, Copyright Act 1994, and their subsequent amendments.
- 6 An assessment resource to support computing unit standards (levels 1 to 4) can be found on the NZQA website at <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/for-providers/resources/index.html>.

Elements and Performance Criteria

element 1

Plan a simple flatfile database to provide a solution to a problem.

performance criteria

- 1.1 A plan is developed to meet the requirements of a supplied brief.
- 1.2 The plan identifies the purpose of the database.
- 1.3 The plan includes a basic outline of the database specifications and/or features required to provide a solution.

element 2

Produce the database in accordance with the plan.

performance criteria

- 2.1 Database fields are established.
Range: fields are formatted in terms of field size, type, and format, as specified by the plan.
- 2.2 Records are entered.
- 2.3 The database is saved to a file.

element 3

Use the database to provide a solution.

performance criteria

- 3.1 The database file is located, opened, and updated.
Range: new records added, records deleted, record fields updated.
- 3.2 Database records are sorted alphabetically and numerically and printed out in hard copy.
- 3.3 Queries are applied to database in order to find requested data occurrences and the results printed out in hard copy.
- 3.4 Data integrity practices are demonstrated in terms of comparison with original information sources.

element 4

Evaluate the database.

performance criteria

- 4.1 The database is checked for accuracy, readability, legibility, presentation, and data integrity.
- 4.2 The database is modified if required and compliance with the brief is confirmed.

Comments on this unit standard

Please contact NZQA National Qualifications Services nqs@nzqa.govt.nz if you wish to suggest changes to the content of this unit standard.

Please Note

Providers must be accredited by the Qualifications Authority or a delegated inter-institutional body before they can register credits from assessment against unit standards or deliver programmes of study leading to that assessment.

Industry Training Organisations must be accredited by the Qualifications Authority before they can register credits from assessment against unit standards.

Accredited providers and Industry Training Organisations assessing against unit standards must engage with the moderation system that applies to those standards.

Accreditation requirements and an outline of the moderation system that applies to this standard are outlined in the Accreditation and Moderation Action Plan (AMAP). The AMAP also includes useful information about special requirements for providers wishing to develop education and training programmes, such as minimum qualifications for tutors and assessors, and special resource requirements.

This unit standard is covered by AMAP 0226 which can be accessed at <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/framework/search/index.do>.

Appendix Five – Massey University Human Ethics Committee Approval

Human Ethics Committee: Wellington

21 August 2003

Janine Dean
21 St Johns Terrace
Tawa
WELLINGTON

Dear Janine

Re: MUHEC: WGTN Protocol - 03/125
What are the similarities and differences between what students *think* prospective employers want in junior office staff and what employers *actually* want in junior office staff

Thank you for the above protocol that was received and considered at the Massey University Wellington Human Ethics Committee meeting on 13 August 2003.

The protocol was approved, subject to approval by Mr Jeremy Hubbard, Acting Chair, of the reply to the following questions and comments.

SECTION B: PROJECT INFORMATION

11. Give a brief background to the project so that the significance of the project can be assessed

- Second paragraph, tidy up and clarify the third sentence, i.e. "*.....why they anecdotally no not appear*" etc

SECTION D: PARTICIPANTS

41. How much time will participants have to give to the project?

- The Committee queried whether the time allowed for the focus group is adequate for the number of questions.

SECTION I: TREATY OF WAITANGI

82. If Maori are not the focus of the project, outlined what Maori involvement there may be and how this will be managed

- Whilst it is noted that a Pacific Island liaison officer will be available for consultation if necessary, is there someone in a similar position with regard to Maori?

CONSENT FORM

- Fourth bullet point, change “*your name*” to “*my name*” and “*you give permission*” to “*I give permission*”

INFORMATION SHEET

- Please amend the second sentence of the Committee Approval Statement to read: “*If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Mr Jeremy Hubbard, Acting Chair, Massey University Wellington Human Ethics Committee, telephone 04 801 2794 ext 6358, email J.J.Hubbard@massey.ac.nz.*”

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS

- Change “*Which Nationality do you identify with*” to “*Which ethnic group do you identify with*”

Please supply to Norma Wiley (Secretary) one copy of your reply.

Any departure from the approved protocol will require the researcher to return this project to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee for further consideration and approval.

Yours sincerely

Jeremy Hubbard (Acting Chair)
Massey University Wellington Human Ethics Committee

Cc: Alison Viskovic, College of Education, Wellington

Appendix Six – Whitireia Community Polytechnic Ethics Committee Approval



Phone: 04 237 3103 ext 3614

Email: g.williams@whitireia.ac.nz

MEMORANDUM

TO: Janine Dean

FROM: Glenys Williams

DATE: 7 November 2005

SUBJECT: Research: *What are the similarities and differences between:
What students think prospective employers want in junior
office staff*
and
What employers actually want in junior office staff

This is to confirm that your application for ethical approval from the Whitireia Community Polytechnic Research and Ethics Committee was approved at the meeting dated 27 August 2003.

The committee offered congratulations to Janine for a well-constructed proposal on an interesting research topic and recommended research staff relief for 2004.

Approval was given to use Whitireia Community Polytechnic's name within the context of the thesis.

Please contact me should you require any further assistance/information.

Appendix Seven - Information Sheet

Department of Social and Policy Studies in Education
Massey University, Wellington Campus

INFORMATION SHEET

**What are the similarities and differences between:
What students *think* prospective employers want in junior office staff
and
What employers *actually* want in junior office staff**

Researcher(s) Introduction

My name is Janine Dean and I am a full time tutor at Whitireia Community Polytechnic preparing students for employment in the Office/Administration fields. I love teaching and enjoy encouraging and ultimately helping students succeed in their goals of employment. Throughout my years of teaching, the curriculum by which we deliver our material is constantly changing, and is updated in response to both technology and the work environment.

I am also a student at Massey University studying towards Master of Education (Adult Education), and this research will enable me to complete this course of study.

This research is intended as both a tool to enable our courses outcomes to match with what employers are looking for in their junior office/administration roles, and also as an affirmation to students to help them succeed in attaining the right skills and attributes.

The research will use a questionnaire to employers asking what skills and attributes they look for in junior office/administration roles. This will be followed with an optional interview to go into this topic in more depth and discuss any related issues. There will also be a questionnaire to students studying for a career in office administration roles asking what skills and attributes they think employers are looking for. This will be conducted in February 2004. Following this, the students will be invited to participate in a focus group with the researcher to go into the topic in more depth and discuss any related issues.

Project Contacts

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor to discuss any issues or questions you have about the research.

My contact details are Janine Dean Ph Wk (04) 237-3100
ext 3827

School of Office Systems and Tourism
Whitireia Community Polytechnic
Private Bag
PORIRUA

My supervisor for this project is: Alison Viskovic Ph Wk (04) 801-2794
ext 6713

Senior Lecturer
College of Education
Massey University
Wellington

Participant Recruitment

Employer participants for this questionnaire have been selected randomly from the Porirua Region. Employers will receive a phone call from me first, requesting permission to send this questionnaire and for you to complete it. This will be followed by an interview if necessary and consent has been given. I am hoping for a minimum of 15 completed questionnaires to enable me to make some generalizations about employers within the Porirua area.

Whitireia Polytechnic students, whom I do not teach, who are studying towards business administration and office jobs, will be invited to participate in the research. Only those present on the day the questionnaires are distributed will be invited to participate. At the end of the questionnaire they will indicate if they are willing to be involved in a focus group.

Project Procedures

The information that you provide in the questionnaire, interview or focus group discussion will only be used as data for this research and will not be disclosed to parties other than myself and my supervisor, Alison Viskovic. Your completed questionnaires and interview or focus group transcripts will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at either my work or home address and will be destroyed after 5 (five) years.

At the completion of my research you will be invited to attend a presentation of the main findings at Whitireia Community Polytechnic. A copy of the completed thesis will be held at both Massey University and Whitireia Community Polytechnic.

No participants will be individually named or identifiable in any reports.

Participant involvement

Employers' participation within this research is to fill in a questionnaire which should take no longer than 10 minutes and this may be followed by an individual interview of no longer than 60 minutes.

Student participation within this research is to fill in a questionnaire which should take no longer than 10 minutes and this may be followed by a focus group discussion of no longer than 60 minutes.

Participant's Rights

Completion and return of questionnaire implies consent. You have the right to

- decline to answer any particular question,
- withdraw from the study at any stage up to and within one month of completing the questionnaire;
- ask any questions about the study by contacting the researcher or supervisor;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

Committee Approval Statement

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, WGTN Protocol NO 03/125. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact, Mr Jeremy Hubbard, Acting Chair, Massey University Wellington Human Ethics Committee: telephone 04 801 2794 ext 6358, email J.J.Hubbard@massey.ac.nz..

Appendix Eight - Questionnaire For Students

This questionnaire is designed to establish what you think employers are looking for in junior office/ administration roles.

DEMOGRAPHICS

GENDER: Are you Male Female **Age** <20 21-30 31-45 46-60 >61

WHICH ETHNIC GROUP DO YOU IDENTIFY WITH: _____

Q1 Which do you think are the most important for a junior office/administration staff member from **YOUR** point of view - 1 being **most important** and 4 being **least important**

Personal characteristics (temperament, values, interests, motivation, how you react in situations).....
 General abilities (problem solving/reasoning, things you are good at)
 Specific skills (practised technique, skills you can perform, computing skills, writing).....
 Knowledge (the things that you know and understand).....

Q2 What do you think are most important for a junior office/administration staff member from an **EMPLOYERS** point of view - 1 being **most important** and 4 being **least important**)

Personal characteristics (temperament, values, interests, motivation, how you react in situations).....
 General abilities (problem solving/reasoning, things you are good at)
 Specific skills (practised technique, skills you can perform, computing skills, writing).....
 Knowledge (mastery of information, the things that you know and understand).....

Q3 Name five things you think an employer looks for in a junior office/ administrative role

Q4 What do **YOU** think are the most important **skills** for junior administration staff. Please rate each item on the list from 1-5

1 being **most important** and 5 being **least important**. Please fill in every box.

Business communication eg letters
 Customer service
 Database eg Access.....
 Desktop publishing
 Dictaphone
 General clerical skills.....
 Numeracy
 Presentations eg Powerpoint.....
 Reception skills
 Spreadsheets eg Excel.....
 Telephone skills.....
 Word processing skills.....

Any other **skills** you would like to add:

Q5 What do **YOU** think are the most important things in the list below for junior administration employees. Please rate each item on the list from 1-5. 1 being **most important** and 5 being **least important**. Please fill in every box.

Being responsible	
Communication	
Confidence	
Enthusiasm.....	
Flexibility.....	
Good time keeper	
Grooming.....	
Honesty	
Independent work habits	
Initiative	
Problem solving.....	
Reliability	

Any other points you would like to add:

Q6 There are 24 skills and attributes listed below. What do you think an **employer** thinks is most important. Please rate each item on the list from 1-5. 1 being **most important** and 5 being **least important**. Please fill in every box.

Being responsible	
Communication	
Confidence	
Customer Service	
Database eg Access.....	
Desktop publishing	
Dictaphone	
Enthusiasm.....	
Flexibility.....	
General Clerical Skills	
Good time keeping	
Grooming.....	
Honesty	
Independent work habits	
Initiative	
Numeracy	
Presentations eg Powerpoint.....	
Problem solving.....	
Reception Skills.....	
Reliability	
Spreadsheets eg Excel.....	
Telephone Skills	
Word Processing Skills.....	
Written Business Communication eg letters	

Any other **skills and attributes** you would like to add:

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire. Returning this questionnaire is deemed as consent to use the information for this research. The information within will remain entirely anonymous.

If you are willing to participate in a group to further discuss what employers look for in junior office/administration employees, please fill in this form with your contact details and hand it in separately from the questionnaire, so that your questionnaire remains anonymous.

Name:

Address:

.....

Contact telephone number:

Contact email address:

Appendix Nine - Questionnaire For Prospective Employers

This questionnaire is designed to establish what skills and attributes you look for in prospective staff in junior office/administration roles.

DEMOGRAPHICS

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF YOUR PRIMARY BUSINESS:

Legal Professional Service Trades Communication Other _____

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

1-9 10-20 21-40 41-100 100+

WHAT IS YOUR POSITION TITLE

Manager Supervisor Partner HR Manager Other _____

HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU BEEN IN YOUR CURRENT POSITION

Less than 1 1-4 5-10 More than 11 years

GENDER: Are you Male Female Age <20 21-30 31-45 46-60 >61

WHICH ETHNIC GROUP DO YOU IDENTIFY WITH: _____

Q1 Please rank the following categories in order of importance for a junior office/administration staff member from **YOUR** point of view: **1** being **most important** and **4** being **least important**

Personal characteristics (temperament, values, interests, motivation, how you react in situations).....
 General abilities (problem solving/reasoning, things you are good at)
 Specific skills (practised technique, skills you can perform, computing skills, writing).....
 Knowledge (the things that you know and understand).....

Q2 Please rank the same categories in order of importance according to your expectations the last time you employed a junior administration employee. **1** being **most important** and **4** being **least important**

Personal characteristics (temperament, values, interests, motivation, how you react in situations).....
 General abilities (problem solving/reasoning, things you are good at)
 Specific skills (practised technique, skills you can perform, computing skills, writing).....
 Knowledge (the things that you know and understand).....

If there was a difference in your rating of question one and two, please explain:

Q3 What was the outstanding feature that impressed you enough to hire your last junior administration employee

Q4 What are some examples of characteristics that influenced you in **NOT** employing someone on that occasion

Q5 Would you make the same choice of employee if you were to fill the position again Yes No

Why

Q6 Please rate the following **SKILLS** in importance for junior administration employees. Rank this list from 1-5

1 being **most important** and 5 being **least important**. Please give each skill a rating.

Business Communication eg letters		Any other skills you would like to add: _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
Customer service		
Database eg Access.....		
Desktop publishing		
Dictaphone		
General clerical skills.....		
Numeracy		
Presentations eg Powerpoint.....		
Reception skills		
Spreadsheets eg Excel.....		
Telephone skills.....		
Word processing skills.....		

Q7 What **skills** would you like to see added to the courses that are offered to better equip prospective junior administration staff for the work force

Q8 Please rate the following **ATTRIBUTES** in importance for junior administration employees. Rank this list from 1-5

1 being **most important** and 5 being **least important**. Please give each attribute a rating.

Communication		Any other attributes you would like to add: _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
Confidence		
Enthusiasm.....		
Flexibility.....		
Good time keeper.....		
Grooming.....		
Honesty		
Independent work habits		
Initiative		
Problem solving.....		
Reliability		
Responsibility		

Q9 What **attributes** would you like to see encouraged in the courses that are offered to better equip prospective junior administration staff for the work force

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire. Returning this questionnaire is deemed as consent to use the information for this research. The information within will remain entirely anonymous.

If you would be willing to be interviewed to explore further, what employers look for in prospective junior office/administration employees, please fill in this form and send back with your questionnaire or if you prefer, place in second self addressed envelope and return to me. This form will be kept separate from your questionnaire, and your questionnaire will remain anonymous.

Name:

Company you work for:.....

Address:

.....

Contact telephone number:

Contact email address:.....

Appendix Ten – Consent Form

Department of Social and Policy Studies in Education
Massey University, Wellington Campus

**What are the similarities and differences between:
What students *think* prospective employers want in junior office staff
and
What employers *actually* want in junior office staff**

CONSENT FORM

THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF FIVE (5) YEARS

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. I understand that completion and return of questionnaire implies consent. I also understand that I have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question,
- withdraw from the study at any stage up to and within one month of completing the questionnaire;
- ask any questions about the study by contacting the researcher or supervisor;
- provide information on the understanding that my name will not be used unless I give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview or my part of a focus group being audio taped

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

I agree to keep confidential any information that I gain during a focus group discussion.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Full Name: _____

Appendix Eleven - Interview Questions to Employers

**What are the similarities and differences between:
What students *think* prospective employers want in junior office staff
and
What employers *actually* want in junior office staff**

Prospective interview questions for employers

1. What skills or attributes do you think are most important in junior administration staff?
2. Why are these important?
3. What skills or attributes do you feel are missing from prospective junior administration staff?
4. Do you think these skills/attributes could be taught?
5. Why do you think these skills/attributes are missing?
6. Can you think of any broader reason why some of these skills/attributes may be missing?
7. Do you think any of these issues are specific to the Porirua area.

There may be other questions that arise after the questionnaires have been analysed.

Appendix Twelve - Interview Questions to Students

**What are the similarities and differences between:
What students *think* prospective employers want in junior office staff
and
What employers *actually* want in junior office staff**

Prospective focus questions for students

1. Having filled out the questionnaire already, do you have any questions you would like answered?
2. What do you think employers look for in junior administration staff?
3. Why?
4. What skills or attributes do you feel are missing from prospective junior administration staff?
5. Do you think these skills/attributes could be taught?
6. Why do you think these skills/attributes are missing?
7. Can you think of any broader reason why some of these skills/attributes may be missing?
8. Do you think any of these issues are specific to the Porirua area.

There may be other questions that arise after the questionnaires have been analysed.

Appendix Thirteen - Revised Interview Questions to Students

**What are the similarities and differences between:
What students *think* prospective employers want in junior office staff
and
What employers *actually* want in junior office staff**

Prospective focus questions for students

1. What skills and attributes do you think employers look for in junior administration staff?
2. Why?
3. Having completed a business administration course, is there anything in your preparation for employment, from the course, that you think was not covered?
4. Having recently been a student, do you think you behave much differently in the workplace than you did on the programme?
5. Thinking about the previous question, do you think others would?
6. Why?
7. Employers rated personal presentation i.e. dress as a prominent feature for not employing someone. What do you think about the personal presentation component on the course?
8. What skills or attributes do you feel are missing from prospective junior administration staff?
9. Do you think these skills/attributes could be taught?
10. Why do you think these skills/attributes are missing?
11. Can you think of any broader reason why some of these skills/attributes may be missing?
12. Do you think any of these issues are specific to the Porirua area.

Appendix Fourteen - Work Experience Evaluation Form

Whitireia Community Polytechnic
Faculty of Service Industries and Trades

National Certificate in Business Administration Level 4

Student Work Experience Appraisal 2005
(to be completed by Employer)

NAME OF STUDENT: _____

NAME OF COMPANY: _____

ATTENDANCE: _____

PUNCTUALITY: _____

DUTIES CARRIED OUT BY THE STUDENT: _____

Please rate the student on a scale of 1 (Excellent), 2 (Very Good), 3 (Good), 4 (Needs to improve), 5 (Poor), on the following topics where appropriate.

Topic

Communication Skills	1	2	3	4	5
Word Processing	1	2	3	4	5
Computing Skills	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to relate to other staff	1	2	3	4	5
Responsibility	1	2	3	4	5
Initiative	1	2	3	4	5
Willingness	1	2	3	4	5
Attitude	1	2	3	4	5
Personal Presentation	1	2	3	4	5

Please make a general comment about the student. Continue overleaf if necessary.

Signed:

Date:

Name:

Appendix Fifteen - Revised Work Experience Evaluation Form

Whitireia Community Polytechnic
Faculty of Service Industries and Trades

National Certificate in Business Administration Level 4/3/2

Student Work Experience Appraisal 2005
(to be completed by Employer)

NAME OF STUDENT: _____

NAME OF COMPANY: _____

ATTENDANCE: _____

PUNCTUALITY: _____

DUTIES CARRIED OUT BY THE STUDENT: _____

Please rate the student on a scale of 1 (Excellent), 2 (Very Good), 3 (Good), 4 (Needs to improve), 5 (Poor), on the following topics where appropriate.

Topic

Communication Skills	1	2	3	4	5
Word Processing	1	2	3	4	5
Computing Skills	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to relate to other staff	1	2	3	4	5
Responsibility	1	2	3	4	5
Initiative	1	2	3	4	5
Willingness	1	2	3	4	5
Attitude	1	2	3	4	5
Personal Presentation	1	2	3	4	5
Honesty	1	2	3	4	5
Enthusiasm	1	2	3	4	5

Please make a general comment about the student. Continue overleaf if necessary.

Signed:

Date:

Name:

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