

Career development & training

There's no such thing as reality CV

Are CV's worth the paper they are written on? Inherent bias, boasting and downright lies make them virtually worthless, writes **SIMON PANCKHURST**

Anyone that has employed staff has experienced the job applicant that shines like a beacon compare to others who provide comical relief. Their CV glows with relevant experience and qualifications. They look perfect. Anticipation is high.

Then the unthinkable happens. Moments after the interviewers' start gun the sure bet sells themselves out of the job completely. The bubble bursts and thoughts quickly turn to how quickly the interview can be concluded without suspicion.

So why is the tried and true curriculum vitae so good at leading us down the garden path?

It can normally be assumed that job applicants do want the job. (Okay some make this hard to believe but trust me they are trying) So immediately there is a very obvious likelihood the job application is somewhat biased towards strengths over weaknesses. A possible conflict of interest?

If you are applying for a job of course you will always be

looking to put your best foot forward – but recruiters are interested in both feet. Expecting impartiality is completely unrealistic.

But this is the way competition works. Participants 'present their wares and the panel acts as judge and jury. But can you see the difference?

From a recruiters point of view, unlike our selector friends at the sports field or casting directors at a theatre we do not have the luxury of witnessing participants perform and drawing our own conclusions. When shortlisting from a CV, applicants tell us in their own words how good they think they are, with little, if any, hard evidence whatsoever.

For recruiters, can I recommend in future we read CVs with a grain of salt or maybe a spoonful?

And for job applicants, unjustified and woolly statements about difficult to measure soft skills might be doing themselves more harm than good.

Put yourself in the employers shoes when you read "excellent interpersonal skills" or "team player" These responses are so biased, subjective and unsubstantiated that they become quite comical. Why not throw your Mum down as a referee while you are at it?

Good applicants don't waste their or their employer's time with unsubstantiated claims. Just state facts and let them be the judge. "For two years I was a member of a three person team that worked on combined projects 12 to 15 hours a week."

Furthermore sometimes to get a foot in the door, as has been well documented recently, reality is twisted beyond recognition or worse, dishonesty enters the fray.

Can recruiters realistically expect even the most honest and well meaning job applicant to accurately assess their skills and attributes and detail them objectively?

Healthy self efficacy makes this difficult. There is good reason for being optimistic, we

wouldn't get far in life if we didn't believe that sometimes we were a little better than we are really are.

And even in the face of brutally honest feedback it is difficult to accept we might be average or below. So, many wisely (or subconsciously) choose against it.

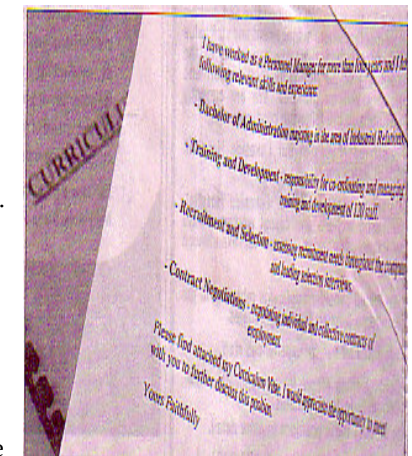
Added to this inherent distortion is the recruitment panel's problem of assessing applicants from totally different backgrounds and with completely different experiences.

Does time with a multi national overshadow employment with a small family business? Is six different positions in three different careers a good example of gathering a range of valuable life experiences and learning from diversity, or a lack of stability?

If we concentrate on exploring where candidates have studied, worked and gathered experience we are at risk of being biased towards institutions, organisations and activities we might have a personal soft spot

for over others that are less familiar.

A better approach might be to focus on the end result, real achievements relevant to the vacant position. Effective professional relationships established, projects completed and problems solved.



Pushing paper: CVs are little more than an opportunity to tell recruiters how good you think you are.

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