

# Graduate Expectations of Employment Training

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## ABSTRACT

The transition from academic study to work is a process involving identified stages. An expectation is developed prior to employment. If these expectations do not eventuate then the result is dissatisfaction and stress, at least until the graduate is socialized into the organization. Training expectations have been reported as being a commonly unmet item. A report that one of our own students was seriously affected by this situation motivated us to undertake an initial study to identify whether unrealistic training expectations are common. It is not apparent that this is a typical issue with our graduates. However, the issue is now recognized and will be considered when developing courses and counseling students prior to graduation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

On meeting graduates after they have become settled into their new life in the workforce, conversation often turns to the students' transition from academic study to their new role. This transition is a critical stage in the development of young professionals (Lee, 2004).

Normally students survive the transition without too much trouble. Occasionally things are not as ideal. This was brought to our attention with one particular case in which the transition was so stressful that a very high achieving graduate resigned from an apparently excellent position within the first month. One of the main reasons given was that the training provided by the employer did not meet the student's expectations

Our response to the news of this case was "Well what did they expect"? Rather than being rhetorical, this is an excellent question that warrants further investigation.

What *do* the graduates expect?

## 1.1 Transition to Work

A number of researchers have suggested that the process of assimilating into an organization follows several stages (King & Xia 2001, Feldman 1981)

\* Anticipatory socialization (Expectations develop prior to employment)

\* Encounter (Expectation meets the reality of employment)

\* Metamorphosis (organisational socialisation)

A recent study documents the phases of transition that occurred with a cohort of students that were recruited by a major company in the United States. Lee (2004) noted that during the encounter stage, recruit dissatisfaction was due in large part to the type of training that was received following employment. The encounter phase involves a "reality shock" as the graduate adjusts from the academic environment to the workplace. Lee (2004) notes that the recruits associated "training" with a formal lesson or a class; while the workplace supervisors expected the recruits to be more self-directed in their learning. The supervisors expected the graduates to learn through the tasks at hand and by using resources such as documentation and access to colleagues. The recruits did not recognize this as training at all.

Lee (2004) largely attributes the expectation of formal training to the extensive interview process experienced by the recruits. However, in addition to the cues received during the recruitment process, it is possible that the students have developed an expectation of their likely work environment during the years that they were studying.



ing for the eventual job. Lee's study indicates that the dissatisfaction and stress experienced during the encounter phase related directly to the mismatch between the student's expectation and the reality of the workplace.

It may be that the students' transition through the encounter phase and into organisational socialisation can be eased by giving students a more realistic expectation of the mode of learning that is typically expected in the workplace. It may be possible to embed the development of this expectation within coursework and to prepare the student for eventual self-directed learning.

Our initial study sought to determine whether or not this really is an issue with our students prior to employment. What do the students actually expect?

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study is very much an initial investigation. The motivation for this study, as mentioned, was the rapid resignation of an extremely promising graduate. We decided to begin the investigating not long before the graduation of another cohort of students.

A survey was quickly designed and pilot tested with a small number of non-graduating students (n=3). Questions in the survey were based on issues identified in Lee (2004). These issues included whether the student felt confident that they were well prepared for the position they were seeking, and the type of training they would receive (formal/informal). We also added questions that queried the students' commitment to undertaking further training independently of the workplace and items that asked the student their preference for training delivery methods.

An online survey was offered to all students graduating from the Bachelor of Information Technology at the end of 2004 (n=50). 13 responses were received, of which all but one was male, ages ranged from between 20-24 through to between 50-54 with and median age in the 30-34 band. The completion rate was rather disappointing but this was an exceptionally busy time in the life of the graduands. A certain amount of survey fatigue was also present, one student commented that this was the fifth survey that he had completed in the week, and it was only

Wednesday.

The survey was designed to try and identify the graduates' attitude towards undertaking further training and professional development, along with their expectation of the professional development they will receive within the near future. The results would be used to indicate whether a more focused study, and perhaps intervention, was required. We also took the opportunity to ask several questions that were not directly related to this study. These are not reported here.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1 Confidence in Preparation for Employment

The students were asked "How well prepared do you feel for working in your preferred field"? Responses are shown as Table 1.

**Table 1: Confidence in Preparation**

Excellent	Good	Neutral	Fair	Poor
0	4	6	3	0

A cluster around the middle of this simple five point scale is perhaps not surprising. These students were currently applying for work and possibly apprehensive about the entire transition process and their ability to perform. We would be surprised if either extreme was selected, and extremely concerned if students felt that their preparation for work was poor. It should be noted that these students only have a belief on this topic. It is only after they have been working for a while that they would be able to advise on how prepared they actually were for their job. The disparity between academic courses and actual workplace practices is an important and long recognized issue (Lee, Koh, Yen, Tang 2002).

### 3.2 Expected Training

Participants were asked to identify the type of training they expect to undertake in the next three years, multiple responses were allowed.

The participants were asked "Approximately how many days of formal training do you expect to receive in your first year of working". The responses were as follows:

1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 7, 14, 15, 25, 30, 60 (two respon-

**Table 2: Training Expectations**

	<b>Response Total</b>	<b>Response %</b>
I don't expect to get any more training	0	0
My employer will make sure I have on-the-job training	2	15%
My employer will provide or organise formal training	5	38%
I will undertake formal training even if it's completely up to me and outside of work	10	77%
My training will probably be self study	9	69%
Please add any further comment: * I intend to carry on studying where I can fit it in , to always keep myself up to speed.	1	8%
<b>13 Respondents in total</b>		

**Table 3: Preferred Training Delivery Method**

	<b>1 Most Preferred</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4 Least Preferred</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
Classroom and lab – formal training, away from work, with an instructor	46% (6)	38% (5)	8% (1)	8% (1)	13
Online or distance course with an instructor available via email and/or phone	0% (0)	33% (4)	42% (5)	25% (3)	12
Self study from books or online material (no instructor)	17% (2)	33% (4)	33% (4)	17% (2)	12
Workplace learning – occasional small instruction sessions at work that related directly to the tasks I am doing	50% (6)	25% (3)	8% (1)	17% (2)	12
<b>Total Respondents</b>					13

dents skipped this question).

The median of those who responded is 7 days.

Table 2 indicates that all students expect to engage in some form of training, but there is a recognition that this may not come from the employer. The “estimate training days” amounts to a wild guess on the part of the student, but we feel that it may indicate some extent or “ball park” of the student’s expectation. Considering the median is 7 days, along with Table 2, we believe that there is not a widely held expectation that an employer will provide extended, formal training.

However, there does appear to be some individuals holding expectations that are highly unlikely to eventuate. We would be very surprised to find that a new employee that engages in 30 or 60 solid days of formal training in their first year.

### 3.3 Preferred Training

While it is not directly related to workplace expectation, we were also curious about training delivery methods that the respondents may prefer.

The question was posed: “If you were told that you had to train for something. What type of training do you prefer?”

We interpret Table 3 as showing that students like formal delivery. Perhaps this is due to familiarity. They are just finishing a three year programme that largely uses this delivery means. Slightly higher on the “preferred” rating though is workplace learning with small instruction sessions at work. Online/distance learning and self study appear to be ranked close together (with online being less preferred). If this is a commonly held attitude then online courses targeting the workplace may very well have the local bookstore as a direct competitor.

## 4. CONCLUSION

This survey was only ever intended to give an indication of whether we should be concerned that students typically have an unrealistic expectation about their likely work environment prior to entering the workplace. The survey was hastily designed as the population was due to become inaccessible following graduation. There are several design issues that would need to be addressed if a follow-up study is to be undertaken.

The survey is a simple “pulse check” to see if any further attention is warranted. The results are worth noting but not alarming. It appears that students expect more professional development than we believe they will receive – but not an excessive difference. Some comments, not reported here, indicate a healthy cynicism about the amount of formal development they will receive in employment.

The transition from academic study to the workplace is a major life-change for students. As educators in a vocational field we have a responsibility to prepare the student, as best we can, to enter and adjust to the workplace with as little trauma as possible.

Lee’s (2004) study identifies unrealistic training expectation as a major source of dissatisfaction. We have identified some students who hold similar expectations, one case which motivated

this study. However we believe that these unrealistic expectations are not typical.

We will continue to reflect on the transition that the students will eventually undertake. The best preparation we can give appears to be a well developed ability to engage in self directed study and problem solving. We will continue to build these aims into our general curriculum and consider these issues when counseling students that are approaching graduation.

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