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Enhancing Graduate Attributes Utilising Social Media

Eric Bates & Peter Hinch

Abstract

The objective of this research was to ascertain the usefulness of utilising social media to enhance graduate attributes. This study was conducted during one semester and concentrated on one aspect of graduate attributes which were interview skills. Two videos were scripted, shot and edited that focused on interviews from the perspective of both the interviewer and the interviewee. These videos were incorporated into workshops with first year and second year level 8 undergraduate students. Pre-video questionnaires were filled out and post video questionnaires were then filled out. The videos successfully provoked an awareness of the requirements in both situations and were well received. It is recommended that further research be carried out on developing materials and resources that focus on enhancing graduate attributes. These resources could be integrated into a dedicated module and embedded within programmes.

Keywords: Graduate attributes, interview skills, social media, video

Introduction

The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, commonly referred to as the Hunt Report, asks the question ‘*what are the right skills for the graduates of 2015 and of 2030 and what mix of skills should we pursue as learning outcomes of higher education?*’ (Hunt, 2011: 35). The answer that is proposed calls for increased attention to be paid to core skills such as communications and team working skills (ibid). International research also highlights the importance of communication skills for graduates, and indeed ranked first in a list of graduate attributes in a survey of 350 graduate employers in a recent Australian survey (Graduate Careers Australia, 2013). Communications skills were also ranked third in research that sought to determine what were the most important skills new employers look for in new hires (Hart, 2006). Thus, communications skills are a key part of the skills set of graduates.

Further, it has been pointed out that if graduates ‘*understand what employers are looking for and work to develop the skills and attributes they value, graduates will have an edge on the competition*’ (CBI, 2009: 6). Being aware that employers desire such skills should provide students with the impetus to develop these attributes.

The purpose of this research was to produce reusable resources that could be embedded within a communications module and used institute wide. This could potentially lead to the development of a generic module that would be aimed at enhancing graduate attributes. After much discussion it was agreed that interview skills would be the focus of this research.

Interview skills are one of the key factors to gaining employment. It is common practice for an interviewee to be advised on the importance of non-verbal presentation as well as verbal presentation (Bolles, 2008). Such non-verbal cues include the dress code and the sitting position. Indeed, in a meta-analysis on research carried out regarding interview assessments Barrick, Shaffer & DeGrassi (2009) found positive correlations between non-verbal behaviours and interviewer evaluations. This would appear to be common sense. Yet, some research would appear to be contradictory. Tsai, Huang, & Yu (2012) found that non-verbal behaviour had no effect on interviewer evaluations. However, the authors themselves indicate that the different research designs may have contributed to the difference between their research and that of Barrick et al (2009) and further suggest that Barrick et al (2009) may not

have been able to control for other applicant behaviour and as a result the findings may be closer than on first inspection.

Given the proliferation of social media and networks this research set out to produce a series of videos focussing on interview skills. It was expected that the videos produced could utilise social media in a positive way to disseminate their research to the target student cohort and thus maximise its impact and benefits.

Research Outline

In 2012 having been awarded a DIT Teaching Fellowship we had scripted, produced and shot two videos focussing on interview scenarios. Video 1 portrayed a poorly prepared candidate attending for interview while Video 2 portrayed a poorly prepared interviewer conducting an interview. The videos were to be used as a stimulus in class to generate ideas and awareness of the requirements when attending for an interview. It is important to note that the research was not trying to put together videos that could be held up as perfect examples of how to do an interview. Given the different requirements of employers it was felt that this would be too restrictive. Rather, the research set out to produce videos that would provoke debate and discussion among participants and students. Such discussions, it was hoped, would lead to a more enriching and participative experience for the students. To help achieve this it was decided to incorporate a certain amount of comedy. This took the form of exaggerated mistakes and poor behaviour that would perhaps not be typical of an interviewer or an interviewee.

This research paper set out to examine the impact, if any, these videos could have with a group of undergraduate students. One of the researchers delivered a component of a Professional Development module to a group of undergraduate students in the second year of a four year honours degree course. The main thrust of this component was to focus on soft skills such as communications, presentations, group work and also basic writing skills. This module was the best fit to utilise the videos and determine if they were of any use.

Lecture format.

The format of the component lectures was usually workshop type activities and discussions with direction from the lecturer and this was the format that was used for this research. There were thirty three students in the full class (n=33). A short presentation was done beforehand on interview preparation that focussed on issues like anxiety and public speaking. This

section took the form of an open class discussion with participants being encouraged to tell of their experiences in interviews and share with the group. Feelings of excitement and nervousness and fear of failure were discussed in relation to the classic interview scenario. The class was split into groups of five with three groups having six participants. Each group was given out a sheet asking them to discuss and list how they would prepare for an interview (See Appendix A). This was used to try capturing a snapshot of the students understanding of attending an interview. The participants were given ten minutes to discuss this amongst themselves and then one person was designated to speak for each group. The results were written up on a whiteboard by the lecturer for all to see.

Pre-video responses.

Both groups were fairly similar in their responses. The following factors were listed:

- dress code,
- eye contact,
- preparation in terms of the questions to be asked,
- to look and be professional,
- dressing appropriately,
- carry out some background research on the company,
- bring references,
- what I have to offer the company,
- stay positive,
- smile but don't grin.

Group 1.

After completing the questionnaire the lecturer wrote the results up on a whiteboard. The videos were shown to Group 1. There was a general sense of excitement and it was evident that the group liked to be shown videos in class. After each video was screened the same short two question survey was given out – see Appendix A – with an additional space for comment. This was carried out immediately after the videos finished before any discussions took place. It was important to capture the participant's initial reactions.

Post video responses:

Post video responses listed items such as the importance of a hand shake in making a good impression, being organised for the interview, being professional in terms of phone etiquette, information for interviewee in terms of signage, job specific questions, and professional conclusion to the interview.

Post video results included always switch off the phone, give a good handshake, correct posture during interview, have prepared questions, positive projection of self, good attitude,

After the questionnaires were gathered a short focus group discussion took place with one of the authors leading the discussion and the second author acting as recorder.

Questionnaire response.

After the collation of the student’s feedback a short questionnaire was handed out to each student to fill out individually (n= 16). The questions were put to the group by one of the authors while the other acted as scribe and recorder taking written notes. The first question put to the group was ‘what was good about the video?’ An overwhelming reaction was the comedic element. The group identified the funny elements as a key point in keeping their attention.

The lead researcher prompted the group regarding the comedic element. The researchers were worried that too much comedy being used could be seen as too slapstick and devalue the aim of the video. The group disagreed with this point.

At the conclusion of the focus group discussion the participants were give a short two question survey to carry out using a Likert Scale ranging from

Question 1.

Question		Agree 5	4	Don't know 3	2	Disagree 1
1.	Do videos work well as a teaching resource?	80%		10%		10%

Table 1 Question 1 results

Question 1 asked Do videos work well as a teaching resource? This question was asked to ensure that it is not merely the lecturers who see the benefit in this utilisation of social media. Previous research by Bates (2011) showed that on a small scale study the participants did not appreciate the use of Facebook as a learning platform. The overall consensus was that the video was a good idea with eight out of ten agreeing while one indicated disagreement and one also indicating a ‘don’t know’. There was a comment box beneath each question and generally the responses were positive. Examples included ‘It will keep the students

interested’, ‘multimedia always works well in the class room.’ The participant that indicated ‘Don’t know’ wrote that ‘lecturers are expected to entertain rather than teach, I am not sure we should be doing this kind of thing.’ Interestingly the participant that disagreed wrote ‘this is not part of your job.’

Question 2.

Question	Agree 5	4	Don't know 3	2	Disagree 1
2. I would be better prepared for an interview after seeing this video.	40%		10%		50%

Table 2 Question 2 results

Four out of the ten participants indicated they would use such a video with their students. Comments included the following ‘I have thought of doing stuff like this myself but never got around to it’ and ‘a selection of these videos would be perfect for my module.’ Despite the majority indicating in Question 1 that the video was a good idea it was surprising that so many of the participants would not actually use the video (50%). However, the comments section provided some elaboration which went some way to explaining the response rate. Comments from participants who would not use such a video included the following ‘I do not have time on my module’ and ‘I do not use media like this’ and perhaps most telling ‘students would expect me to have videos for every class.’ The participant who indicated indecisiveness wrote ‘I am not sure of the learning this would generate, I tend to be slightly sceptical of this kind of thing anyway.’

Question 3

Question	Agree 5	4	Don't know 3	2	Disagree 1
3. The use of comedy is exaggerated.	40%		10%		50%

Table 3 Question 3 results

Conclusions

It is clear that the videos were very useful as a talking point and a means of discussion among the participants. Several items were brought to light that the students deemed to be helpful both in the preparation for being an interviewee and being an interviewer. The majority of lecturers also believed this to be a useful tool. It was clear that the videos must be of a good quality to use in the classroom.

Acknowledgements

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Video 1:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RA-Ja4Z0jaI>

Video 2 can be viewed here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQ13zayCUe4>

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Appendix A

DISCUSSION SHEET

How do you improve your chances of being hired? You have been called for a formal interview. List the factors to be considered in preparing and attending for the interview. Work in groups of four people and assign one person as speaker. You have five minutes to work on this.

Appendix B

Please rate your response to the following questions on the following scale of 5 (Agree Strongly) to 1 (Disagree Strongly)

Question	Agree 5	4	Don't know 3	2	Disagree 1
1. These videos are a good idea.					
	<i>Comment</i>				
2. I would use such videos with my students.					
	<i>Comment</i>				

Appendix C

Focus group discussions questions:

Question 3: what was good about the videos?

Question 4: what was not so good about the videos?

Question 5: what would you do to improve the videos?