JOB EXPERIENCES OF 2010 RIZAL TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY BUSINESSMANAGEMENT GRADUATES: CORE ESSENCES

Renilda A. Magsino,

Faculty, College of Business and Entrepreneurial Technology
Rizal Technological University
Boni Avenue, Mandaluyong City, Philippines.

Ester T. Edralin,

Faculty, College of Business and
Entrepreneurial Technology
Rizal Technological University
Boni Avenue, Mandaluyong City,
Philippines.

Ethelyn C. Verdadero,

Faculty, College of Business and
Entrepreneurial Technology
Rizal Technological University
Boni Avenue, Mandaluyong City,
Philippines.

ABSTRACT

Two hundred eighty-nine 2010 business management graduates of the Rizal Technological University, a state university in the Philippines were traced and their employment experiences solicited using the social networking site, the Facebook (FB). Using the descriptive research design, the data were used to portray the traced graduates' employment profiles and capture their reflections to explore a wider array of dimensions and be able to give light on the graduate employment situation that would contribute to solving the government's education and economic problems. One hundred eighty-six or 64% of the 289 traced graduates were found to have verifiable employment data. Out of the 186, 43 or 23% were working for banking and finance-related sector and 39 or 21% were in trading and merchandising. The study showed that most of the graduates were able to start a career path by gaining entry to prestigious companies. Five themes emerged from the 16 reflections: self confidence in performing assigned tasks, positive attitude, value of experience, traits developed in school and financial considerations. The themes that emerged reflected three core essences or factors that made them stay or contributory to their being retained by their employers on the job: financial or being able to buy what they want and help the family in the daily expenses; attitude, self-confidence and skills developed in school, as contributory to their work performance and retention; and experience, the main reason for staying on the job despite physical and emotional difficulties.

Keywords:reflections, graduate employment, themes, tracer studies, job experiences, nominal group interviews.

INTRODUCTION:

Employment statistics trend in Asia had not progressed at the same rate as tertiary education enrolment, which increased from 28.6 million in 1970 to 152.2 million in 2007 (UNESCO, 2012). Its findings anchored on the concept that employability is the result of many factors and that graduate unemployment in the Philippines has largely been attributed to structural or skills mismatch. This happens when jobseekers are not seen by employers as equipped with the needed skills. The situation affects the fresh graduates who get frustrated at not being able to land a job or whose probationary contracts not renewed for varied reasons. The implication is not just the nation's economics. Studies have shown that experiences of new entrants to the labor force have profound influence on their future social, economic and behavioural fortunes (Green, Shuttleworth&Lavery, 2005 as cited in UNESCO study 2012). Job seekers or young workers who encounter negative experiences have a higher probability of encountering further work-related disadvantages later in life, as well as social exclusion, poverty and ill-health (Baum & Mitchell, 2008, cited in UNESCO Study, 2012).

Aside from graduate employability concerns, tertiary institutions of learning are pressured to cope with the demands of employers. The problem seen by Kuk and Hughes (2003) is not professional preparation from schools but what seasoned practitioners believe as the gap between what new professionals know and what they can do. This is congruent to Bridgstock's (2009) findings that technology have changed the concept of employability. She explained that generic skills required by employers cannot guarantee employment. Over and above the skills is the ability to self-manage the career-building process. It therefore becomes imperative for the academe and employers to find out the naturally occurring characteristics and perspectives of newly-hired graduates after a tracer study has been conducted to come up with samples from which associations could be determined. This endeavour could be strenuous due to dearth in literature. After all, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) had conducted only 5 nationwide graduate tracer studies in 12 years (UNESCO, 2012). It is understandable since the Philippines is not alone in this predicament. In 1980, Rosen, Taube & Wordsworth, as cited by Renn& Hodges, 2007 (published in the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators Journal, 2007, Vol. 44, No. 2 p. 370), found that "it has been over 25 years since an open-ended study on the experiences of new professionals has been published".

It is for this reason that the proponents decided to look into these issues to fill in some literature gaps. This research was inspired by the Renn& Hodges 2007 study which got off the ground with 10 participants, the UNESCO Study published in 2012 with 30 samples from graduates who earned their degrees in 2008 and 2009 and the Valle research on the critical reflections of Filipino immigrant accountants on their work experiences in San Francisco Bay Area, published in the Journal of Filipino Studies which had 8 respondents. The above papers have, to a certain extent the same goals as these researchers have aimed for. Although descriptive, this study gave more emphasis on the qualitative aspect and the quantitative approach was used only for the tracer study and determining proportions. The following issues were sought to be explored and described:

1. Employment profile of traced 2010 RTU business management graduates as of March, 2012 and how it compared with some national and foreign studies;
2. Job experiences of the interviewed graduates; and
3. Core essences of the themes that emerged from the reflections gathered from the nominal group interviews.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

Using the descriptive research design, qualitative and quantitative approaches were applied, where appropriate on the following issues:

1. Profile of Traced 2010 RTU Business Management Graduates as of March, 2012:

Initially, the researchers made use of the social networking site "Facebook" (FB) to trace the target graduates. The use of FB proved very effective since studies showed that Filipinos are the fifth heaviest social network users worldwide (Dimacali, 2010). An invitation was posted on the FB wall of one of the graduates in late 2010 which eventually snowballed and yielded 289 in 2012. The invitation requested data on current employment, name, address and nature of business of employer and significant experiences encountered in performing jobs held after graduation. The quantitative and qualitative approaches were applied using desk research technique from   secondary data which, according to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) are principally used in descriptive research. Documentary secondary sources are often used in research projects that also use primary data collection methods, like this study. Secondary data, aside from ease of collection is also cheaper since the expenses incurred in collection have already been paid by the original compiler of information (Churchill, Brown &Suter, 2012). Data gathered comprised the graduates' profile made available to the public through the internet and private messages sent in reply to the invitation. Borrowing   the basic concepts and principles of archival and records management (john.curtin.edu.au/society/archives) these materials could be considered "complete", therefore reliable and trustworthy since these were created by the graduates themselves at a time nearest the period of experience. A record is considered complete when it is a finished, bounded entity comprising structure, content and context and when it has the following elements: date (time and place of creation, transmission and/or receipt); originating address, an author/compiler, an addressee/recipient, and title of subject accompanying its content/message. This concept added validity to data collection.

Although confidentiality was not an   issue for some data, especially those made   available in a public domain at some point in time,   names of graduates and specific names of employers were not divulged for reasons of ethics. Private messages were treated with confidentiality although many of the graduates signified consent to publication. To avoid losing data once the account holders update their profile, the source materials were printed and saved electronically as soon as the data became available.

The quantitative approach was used to determine proportions of people who think and behave in a certain way. This approach is,   according to Churchill, et al. (2012) and Cooper and Schindler (2008) also appropriate for describing characteristics of certain groups and making specific predictions. It is also used to portray an accurate profile of persons (Saunders, 2009). The graduates' employment profile, particularly name and nature of business of the graduates' employers were captured and proportions were determined.

2. Job Experiences of the Graduates:

The qualitative approach was used to study this issue. Five graduates sent private messages narrating their memorable experiences on their jobs in response to the researchers' invitation through the FB posts which were solicited to draw upon as fully as possible social experiences aimed to be explored. Mason (2002, p.64) suggested that "most qualitative researchers view knowledge as situational , and the interview" (in the form of private exchange of messages using the FB) "is just as much a social situation as is any other interaction". The content analysis provided the researchers a means to study human behaviour through the analysis of their communications (Fraenkel&Wallen, 2010). Some of the advantages of using this method, as discussed by Fraenkel (2010) are: the researcher can "observe" without being observed, since the contents being analysed are not influenced by the researchers' presence and it is extremely useful as a means of analysing interview and observational data. The method used here is also a form of narrative research, which, according to Fraenkel (2010) is the study of the life experiences of an individual as told to the researcher. Some messages were quoted verbatim for an explicit narrative of the events as what Mason (2002) is advocating rather than claiming to offer mere descriptions.

3. Core essences from the themes that emerged from the reflections gathered from the nominal group interviews:

The themes that emerged from the nominal group interviews and private messages were coded using a simple qualitative thematic coding analysis template (Trochim&Donelly, 2006). This was done by

sorting the responses and messages into simple categories resulting from the nominal group interviews and gave each category a short label that represented the theme. The nominal group interviews were conducted by the researchers at a Christmas party organized by some of the 2010 graduates in December 8, 2012. Nominal group interviews are similar in characteristics to focus group interviews. The primary difference, according to Churchill, et al. (2012) is that nominal group interviews require written responses from participants. The response form used which was patterned after the question prompts in Renn's 2007 study , is similar to the focus group discussion guide for a focus group interview (Cooper, 2008. p 78 & 655). The conduct of nominal interview went very smooth because of the relaxed party atmosphere. The activity, as planned, required them to think and write before speaking and limit respondent interaction to maximize individual input in an effort to come up with the ideas with the highest priority from where themes will emerge. As what a qualitative approach should be, there was no intervention from the researchers except facilitating the process. The responses were natural and spontaneous.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS:

1.Profile of traced 2010 RTU Business Management Graduates as of March, 2012:

Two hundred eighty-nine graduates were traced through the FB social networking site.Of the 289 traced graduates, 186 or 64% were found by the researchers as having verifiable employment data.The rest (36%) neither have employment data in their FB profile, nor verifiable company names when searched in the list of business establishments in the Philippines. (NSO, 2010)
Table 1 shows the distribution of graduate employment data.

Table 1: Distribution of graduate employment data by sector

Sector	No. of graduates	Percentage	Rank
Trading/Merchandising	39	21	2
Banking/finance-related	43	23	1
Services/consultancy	19	10	4
Manufacturing	9	5	6
Government services	9	5	6
Media	5	3	7
Business Process Solutions	29	16	3
Hospitality	12	6	5
Construction/real estate	9	5	6
Shipping/cargo/logistics	2	1	9
Engineering	3	1.5	8
Agricultural firm	1	.5	10
Utilities	1	.5	10
Telecommunications	3	1.5	8
Others	1	.5	8
Self-employed	1	.5	10
Total	**186**	**100**	

The table above shows that banking and finance-related sector got the top rank with 43 graduates, or 23%; trading and merchandising is 2nd with 39 or 21%; technology/business solutions is 3rd with 29 or 16% and the rest are distributed among the different sectors. Upon scrutiny, it was concluded that majority of the employed graduates or 59.7% work for companies that provide business/finance and management services. Although the study was not able to determine the exact tasks the graduates were performing, the fact that most of them were able to enter the business management sector suggests

that they gained the opportunity to establish a career path.

The UNESCO (2012) study on the graduate employability in Asia revealed that although there are data on the unemployment rate among Filipino college graduates in general, "no recent figures on the employment rate among fresh college graduates are available" (p. 40). This confirmed the observation that there was a dearth in related studies. However, these researchers found a few studies and compared these with the RTU figures.

Table 2 presents the RTU rate of employability as compared with the findings from other studies and reports.

Table 2: Comparative data on graduate employment rate, 2010

RTU (local)	National	Foreign
64%	Milan (2010) – 40% Ibon Foundation(2010)* 30%	(US) Rampel (2011) ** 56% (UK) HECSU*** 61.8% UL (Ireland) **** 46%

*Cited by Padilla, A. (2010)
**Rampel, C. (2011) Data for year 2010
***Higher Education Careers Services (2012)
****University of Limerick. Sheridan, A. (2013)

Milan, L. (2010) cited a study titled The OFW Economic Engine, Philippine Reality and Required Reform Arising from Global Financial Crisis which found out that of the one million graduates annually, only 30 to 40% will find any employment. The Padilla (2010) report likewise cited the independent research and advocacy group IBON Foundation's statement that out of every ten fresh college graduates in the Philippines who will join the labor force that year, only three or 30% will be lucky to actually land a job. Rampel (2011) also reported in the New York Times that employment rates for new college graduates have fallen sharply in the last two years. It added that "among the members of Class 2010, just 56% had held at least one job by this spring, when this survey was conducted". In Ireland, the most recently available national rate of graduate employment was 46% for 2010 (Sheridan, 2013). The study revealed that RTU fared better in terms of employability rate compared with other Philippine studies as well as some published foreign literature.

It is worth considering that the Commonwealth Times reported in May 14, 2012 that under a new law, the State of Virginia in the United States is required to publish online the employment rates and average salaries for graduates from each institution of higher education. The purpose is for prospective students and parents to see the statistics for each program and type of degree at each school. However, this US policy runs counter to the UNESCO (2012) findings which considers it contentious to argue that the quality of higher education should be measured solely in terms of employment rate of graduates.

2. Job Experiences of Graduates:

The contents of the private messages of five of the traced graduates who volunteered information revealed not only negative but also desired experiences. The transcripts below were quoted verbatim, to extract more accurate interpretations. Anna considers her 2nd job experience as memorable. She sent the following message:

I am currently employed at … , a subsidiary of … which is a financial service company based in New York. We provide services like online brokerage and related banking products and retail services to retail investors. Our office is at …Makati City. I am a Financial Service Representative. Actually, I just started this month for this job. I resigned from my first job for career growth. I recently obtained my license as registered representative/stock broker in the USA. My job is basically customer service for our investors. It's in a call center set-up. We are answering inquiries like what is happening with the stock market, what are the different types of securities, how are they different from each other, what is beneficial to them, etc. We will also processing (sic) their orders with the securities that they wanted

to purchase or if they wanted to sell their securities.

The message, although very formal and bland, suggested that Anna's work at the time was aligned with her business course. It was evident that she has self-confidence because she had full grasp of the tasks. Bernie, on the other hand, found that having language problem was a very difficult situation one can get into. He wrote:

I am employed at … here at Riyadh, KSA as Training Supervisor. I started here last December 6, 2010. Well, my first months of experience here is very difficult considering that I don't know how to speak Arabic. I have to make adjustments in terms of communicating with people especially that I am working at the Retailing Industry. Actually same things of what I am doing here but the difference is the system. I am Training Supervisor here but same work compared with the ordinary employee, only the difference is the salary. Work here is very hard but if they pay all your compensation, it is worth the sacrifices. My lifestyle have a little bit changed compared with when I was working there in the Philippines as ordinary employee. It will take me years to afford what I have now if I did not come over here.

Bernie's experience is a normal predicament or way of life of an ordinary overseas

Filipino worker (OFW) in an Arab country, particularly Saudi Arabia, that everyone has learned to live by. As with other OFWs, monetary considerations become the main reason for holding on to a difficult work. "Challenging " on the other hand, is how Carol described her experience:

Working with … is very challenging. I am reporting directly to the store manager. I do the final interview, report for work (sic), submission of requirements on process documents, daily inventory of supplies and fixed assets at selling area, etc… Being under operation is worth enough experience for me as a new graduate of a business course. I do the monitoring of all promos and merchandisers, check employee performance in terms of efficiency and effectiveness on their respective jobs. Lastly, I do the monthly manpower reports, tenants' reports and evaluating performances of my staff and recommend them for renewal of contract.

Diana Comment On Her Multi-Tasking Job:

I am assigned at the design department under the …. Project (US Client) as their administrative assistant and sometimes as HR assistant and coordinated with … regarding the applicants to be interviewed and hired. It is a multi-tasking job as I have said… but I really enjoy working with them although our office hour is a little bit late (1 to 10 pm). But super enjoy! I've learned a lot in this kind of industry.

Diana enjoyed multi-tasking. She didn't mind working on an erratic work schedule

and seemed to be excited about having an American client which is expected from an Asian neophyte.

Work, for Eric on the other hand was not easy since he started working right after graduation. His message :

Being a field HR representative is hard especially the problem with transportation but I took it anyway thinking it would be a good experience and stepping stone for something better. I went through and experienced scolding and humiliation to a point of almost giving up but I ended staying and hoping to reach my goal, which is financial and gaining experience for my future job.

3. **Core essences were gleaned from the themes that emerged from the nominal group interviews and personal messages. Five themes emerged from the 16 reflections lifted from the posts, messages and nominal group interviews.**

Table 3 shows these themes which were self confidence in performing assigned tasks, positive attitude, value of experience, traits developed in school and financial considerations. For purposes of the study, the term self-confidence was taken to mean as belief in one's abilities, a mental attitude of trusting or relying on oneself. Positive attitude, on the other hand is being able to accept, with grace, situations that are inevitable.

The definitions were agreed upon during the discussions to be able to come up with standard

interpretation. The themes emerged naturally as the participants discussed what were written on their prompt sheets. After the session, these prompt sheets were collected back by the researchers to guide them in the analysis of the themes.

Table 3: Simple Qualitative Thematic Coding Analysis (Trochim et al. 2006)

PERSON	Theme 1 Self-Confidence	Theme 2 Positive Attitude	Theme 3 Value of Experience	Theme 4 Skills Developed in School	Theme 5 Financial Considerations
1	X				
2	X		X		
3					X
4	X			X	
5	X				
6			X	X	X
7	X	X			
8		X		X	
9		X	X		
10		X			X
11					X
12			X	X	
13			X		
14		X		X	
15	X			X	
16				X	X

The themes that emerged reflected the following core essences:

- **Financial:**

Being able to buy what he wanted , send siblings to college and help parents in house expenses was Alvin's main concern when he first started working for a big fast food chain as Manager. But he found out later that the position was very stressful especially when he has to face an angry client or reprimanded by higher supervisors for problems in his branch.
Bernadette likewise was not thinking long-term when she was hired. All she was concerned about was to have work and help her parents financially.

- **Attitude, Self-Confidence and Skills Developed in School:**

The study showed that most of the graduates were able to start a career path by gaining entry to prestigious banks, financial institutions, and well-known companies. Most of the participants attributed their good attitude gained from school as a factor for being praised at work and be retained on the job. Marie said she always have positive thoughts that hunting for a job is creating one's future. Once she gets what she wants, she avoids complacency because she wants to go up the ladder. She believes that grabbing an opportunity is just like taking a risk. She welcomes failures and sacrifices because these are part of success. Time management helped her go through the frustrating moments and closing a deal with an unsure client gave her a great feeling.
Christian also considered good attitude as a virtue that could lead him to better opportunities. Early in his job, he had already set his mind on following orders. He learned a lot from the trainer who helped him handle cash properly to avoid shortage. Good attitude, according to him helped him go over many problems at work and accept wholeheartedly the criticisms which he considered constructive.
He was happy for the financial rewards that helped his family in many ways and save some money for future ventures.

- **Experience:**

Next to financial considerations, the concern for gaining experience was the main reason for staying on the job despite difficulties.Those employed by prestigious companies with very rigid selection and hiring process such as Philippine National Bank, Banco de Oro, Land Bank, IBM Philippines, San Miguel Corporation, United Laboratories, AP Moller-Maersk Group, Globe Telecom and Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company, to name a few were already assured of quality work experience to capitalize on in the building of their career path.

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