




UNDERSTANDING THE LIMITATIONS OF APPRENTICESHIPS ON RECRUITMENT INITIATIVES




IMPLICATIONS OF A NEW TREND WITH OLD-WORLD ROOTS
BY JEFFREY MOSS

As unemployment continues to be at record lows, companies are seeking innovative ways to attract, develop, and retain early career professionals. Some companies are looking to the past, while others are embracing the future of work to find a scalable solution.

Experiential learning has always been a vital component of launching one's professional career. Be it formal programs tied to learning the trades to the informal mentoring that takes place at every company whereby new hires learn from experienced professionals, learning while doing is key. While on-the-job learning has always taken place, apprenticeships are experiencing a resurgence  driven by the challenges of hiring early career talent intersecting with under and unemployment rates of facing early career professional. Viewed through the lens of attacks on colleges and universities, apprenticeships appear to be the magic wand that will ensure companies have a pipeline of early career talent.

Unfortunately this magic wand is not magic. Like most initiatives, apprenticeships are nothing without challenges. Consider the impacts on hiring diverse talent, scalability, and supporting early career readiness before launching or expanding an apprenticeship program.

Apprenticeships are not about hiring

While apprenticeships are being positioned as a way to provide equitable access to professional roles,  the reality is that at best they are subsidized training programs, and at worst are creating an alternative path that actually limits opportunities career development. For example, in comparing AON's apprenticeship program  to its 10 month Launch Program  for traditional campus hires, it is apparent that apprenticeships provide not only a different pathway into AON, but a different career path.

To be clear, these types of apprenticeship programs provide an incredible opportunity for those who



consciously choose not to attend college, as they offer an alternative that is superior to most opportunities available to those without a college degree. However, they do not improve the pathways to professional roles.

Specifically, the root cause of professional inequity has little to do with the training that new hires receive, but rather the reliance on signals to determine who is provided with those opportunities. Like all hiring decisions, companies rely on a variety of signals to assess individuals such as interviews, assessments, artifacts from prior experiences, or network. Unfortunately, when recruiting college students, there is an abundance of reliance on academic institution brand, major, and GPA as there are few other signals as compared to recruiting experienced professionals.

In fact, this was the foundation for why internships emerged – no longer would companies need to rely on the signals of academic

pedigree. Unfortunately, with an increasing reliance on summer internships to serve as pathways to full-time roles this has not happened. Specifically, while the stakes of an internship are not as high as a full-time hire (they do end in 10 weeks), given an average cost of \$7,000 per intern and the time commitment of managing these programs, companies continue to rely on these same signals thereby providing and increasing advantage for those with the family and academic connections to get those precious few slots.


This challenge is why we are seeing an increasing acceptance of experiential recruiting initiatives. While there are a variety of different models, the best examples provide opportunities for companies to engage college students on short-term, professional projects. By lowering the stakes and commitment of a company, HR professionals can expand their reach beyond the traditional talent pools, more effectively (and efficiently) assess candidates

Above
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earlier in the process, and offer an on-demand resource to hiring managers.

Difficult to scale

Compared to the 1,951 new college graduates hired by Accenture,  the 27 apprenticeships offered through the Apprenticeship 2020 program represents less than 1.4% of its campus hiring (and that ignores the thousands of internships offered each year). While Accenture's intentions are positive and one can argue if this is a fair comparison, by any measure 27 represents a tiny fraction of the opportunities available to those interested in launching their career with Accenture.

While I can't speak for Accenture, given its mission I am confident it would prefer to provide opportunities for every interested career launcher to both learn more about the organization and to demonstrate their skills. However, given the 10-24 month commitment, apprenticeship programs are difficult to scale. Beyond the risks associated if the fit is not "right" (from either a company's or the apprentice's perspective), business needs fluctuate throughout the year making it difficult to consistently engage a massive number of apprentices on top of the traditional new hires (who are really also apprentices with a different title and background).

Not only does this limit the opportunity for the potential apprentices, it also does little to expand access to a broader talent pool. With companies continuing to compete for candidates coupled with an average attrition rate of new hires hovering around 50%, finding a scalable way to identify, engage, and assess candidates is invaluable. As a result, the limited number of apprenticeships that can be offered

does little to help companies access this untapped talent pool. Ironically, these programs often eliminate large swaths of potential talent based upon academic pedigree – in Chicago, the 435 Chicago Apprenticeship Network participants exclusively come from City Colleges of Chicago, ignoring the 84,000+ undergrads who instead chose to pursue a bachelor's degree at colleges in the city.

However, even given the option, many of those 84,000 students would not choose to apply to a year-long apprenticeship. Although they are eager for professional experiences, few of them are certain of the right industry, company, and role. While an apprenticeship or a summer internship is high stakes for a company, the stakes are even higher for someone who has a limited number of summers before accepting a full-time job. As a result, many potential candidates may not even consider an opportunity given their limited information and perceived notions.

Student readiness

And when companies do hire recent college grads, most of them believe a student is unprepared. Does this mean that companies should push to replace colleges with boot camps or philosophy class with coding? No. Does this imply that students are actually ill prepared? Some. Should we find more ways to collaborate with colleges to address this? Certainly.

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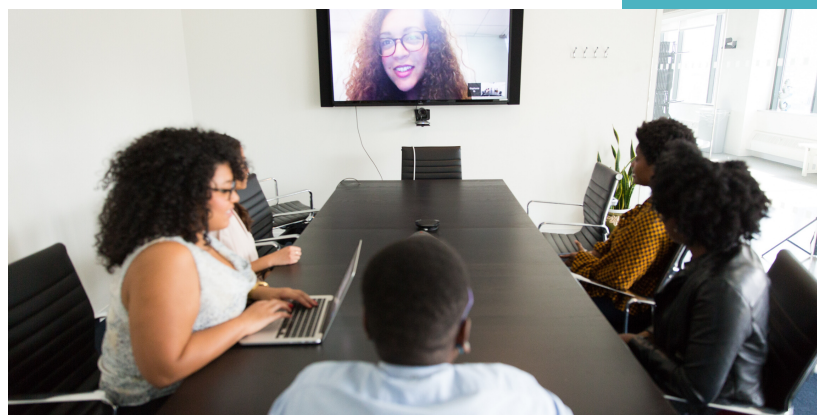


The reality is that when companies complain about job readiness, it is frequently associated with Core Skills such as communication, grit, adaptability, and professionalism. Not surprisingly, these competencies aren't captured in one's GPA or aligned to one's major, both of which are primary drivers of the first pass made in campus recruiting. Nor are these often understood by college students to be skills worthy of honing in class, or communicating in interviews given the aforementioned interview selection process. Therefore, we shouldn't be surprised when there is a perception that students lack skills that are not communicated as valuable nor effectively assessed in the recruiting process.

A scalable solution in Micro-Internships

Fortunately, addressing this challenge is much easier than many of those facing HR professionals. It does not require an investment in reskilling, implementing new technology, or destruction of existing systems. Instead, show college students that you value these skills by giving them opportunities to demonstrate them. Let a potential candidate understand the value you place on problem solving by giving him or her the chance to solve a problem for you. Demonstrate the importance of effective communication by allowing a career launcher to research and create a piece of content on your behalf.

This is an approach already accepted by colleges and universities. They know their students have these skills, and are seeking opportunities to help them understand the crosswalks. But apprenticeship programs limit opportunities for career exploration that goes hand-in-hand with readiness.



Scalable solutions empower all types of career launchers to demonstrate skills with short-term, flexible, on-demand opportunities

Every HR leader (and professional) has projects that arise throughout the year that would benefit from an extra resource who could conduct preliminary research, create a first draft, or provide an outside perspective. By allowing a college student to lend a hand, not only are you providing a hiring manager with an extra resource and demonstrating your appreciation for these skills, you're also gaining and assessing a potentially candidate.

