ОБЩЕСТВЕНИ КОМУНИКАЦИИ И ИНФОРМАЦИОННИ НАУКИ
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CANDIDATES' EXPECTATIONS OF THE APPLICATION PROCESS FOR A VACANT POSITION

Sakeela Sathananthan

University of Library Studies and Information Technologies

Abstract: *The title of this scientific publication is "Candidates' expectations of the application process for a vacant position". The aim of the study is to examine candidates' expectations of an application process. At the same time, previous experiences with application processes were for the consequences to be illuminated. In addition, the main objective was to obtain data on the expected aspects of candidates in the context of an application process for a vacant position. This includes expectations regarding the information provided, communication channels, response times and manners. In the context of the study, a quantitative research method was chosen to investigate the above-mentioned aspects. A digital questionnaire was used to survey 100 people online, who answered a total of 18 questions. The evaluation of the survey made it possible, among other things, to identify the exact and expected components from the perspective of candidates in the context of an application process.*

Keywords: *Candidates, Application Process, Expectations, Vacancy*

INTRODUCTION

According to Buckmann, the common application process is characterized by applicants judging it as a one-dimensional process. This is due to the fact that the impression is often created that the applicant must present himself or herself to the potential employer in the best possible way (cf. Aebischer et al. 2017, 36).

However, according to Buckmann, it is of significant importance that the employer also presents itself to the candidate in the best possible way during the application process in order to guarantee the highest possible level of cultural fit between the candidate and the employer. In conclusion, it is inevitable for an employer to convince the candidate's expectations of the application process as well as possible (cf. Aebischer et al. 2017, 92).

Buckmann explains that candidates expect to receive information about the application process and the application itself, for example, through the job advertisements or career website. This includes information on how the candidate can apply, which aspects he or she must take into account, and how the application process is actually structured. Candidates also expect information about interview partners to be published as part of the application process so that they can find out more about these employees for the interview (cf. Aebischer et al. 2017, 148).

According to Kochhan et. al, candidates expect information about the application process and the application to be presented intuitively and transparently, for example in the form of YouTube videos or posts on social platforms or on the company's career website. Conveying an authentic and

realistic picture of the corporate culture, corporate atmosphere, and interviews with employees through photos or likewise through videos, also meets candidates' expectations of the application process. This allows them to consolidate the motivation to apply and reflect on the fit with the company (cf. Kochan et al. 2021, 28).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research section presents the research method used to conduct the study. Investigating candidates' expectations of an application process is the goal of this work. In addition, a sample is used to examine how good previous application processes were, what duration is expected in feedbacks, and what kind of interaction is expected. Finally, the information, communication channels, and application opportunities candidates hope to receive during the application process were also examined.

A quantitative study was conducted by completing an 18-question questionnaire with 100 respondents. Using an online tool, a questionnaire was created and sent to a specific target group. At least 100 complete surveys were required. The survey participant was not contacted beforehand. The first question asked about gender, and the responses were male, female, and diverse. Due to the fact that this study was intended to be representative of both gender groups, males and females were surveyed in equal proportions of 50% each.

The second question asked about another demographic factor, age. The minimum age of respondents was 18, as this is the average age to enter the workforce, such as through an apprenticeship or degree program. The maximum age of the survey participants was 67, which is the current retirement age.

To ensure comparability, the third question referred to the respondent's qualification level and the answer options were based on the German qualification framework. If it was not possible for the respondent to classify himself in the German qualification framework, he had to classify himself as "unskilled".

The fourth question aimed to identify the target groups for this study and to exclude those who were not relevant to this study. Only individuals who are currently employed in some capacity or seeking such employment are relevant to this study. The target groups for this study are trainees, students, student workers, interns, employees, workers on parental leave, the unemployed, and people seeking employment. If self-employed, freelancers, and retirees were selected for this question, these participants were disqualified from the survey. This was determined because they typically have no or no representative connection to the subject of the survey. Since they either do not have well-founded opinions on the subject, the self-employed and freelancers are usually unable to make any statements about experiences and expectations of application processes in companies. This also applies to retired employees, since the study mainly examines people who have a relatively recent connection to the topic under investigation.

The fifth question relates to the number of work experiences, as this can be compared with the number of training periods and their quality.

The sixth question deals with the frequency of participation in application procedures. "Never", "1 to 2 times", "3 to 5 times", and "More than 5 times" are the possible responses. When the answer options "1 to 2 times", "3 to 5 times" or "More than 5 times" are selected, an implemented skip logic is activated. This leads to the respondent answering how many application processes they have already gone through, as well as the average quality of these processes. Due to the branching logic, the respondent must also answer the expected duration for feedback and the expected way of dealing with it. At the same time, survey participants are asked about what information, communication channels, and application opportunities they hope to receive during the application process.

If a survey participant answers "Never" to the question whether they have already participated

in an application process, they are automatically disqualified due to the stored branching logic, as they cannot make relevant statements and present data on the topic under investigation.

The following questions and answer options were asked:

Gender
a. Female
b. Male
c. Divers

1. Age

2. What is your highest degree?
a. Unskilled
b. Education
c. Bachelor/ master craftsman/ technician/
d. Master/ Business economist/ Diploma
e. PhD

3. What is your current professional situation?
a. Trainee/ Student/ Working student/ Intern
b. Employed
c. Self-employed
d. Freelancer
e. Retired
f. Parental leave
g. Unemployed/jobseeker

4. How many years of professional experience do you have?
a. Until 2 years
b. 2 to under 3 years
c. 3 to under 5 years
d. 5 to under 7 years
e. 7 years to under 10 years
f. 10 years and more

5. How many times have you participated in an application process?
a. Never before
b. 1 up to 2 times
c. 3 up to 5 times
d. More than 5 times

6. How would you rate the average quality of the application processes you have gone through so far?
a. Bad
b. Mediocre
c. Very good

7. I expect the application process to present the company and thus the potential employer in the best possible way.
   a. Does not apply
   b. Applies
   c. Applies very much

8. I expect information on the application process and application to be presented transparently and intuitively in the advertised vacancy or on the career website.
   a. Yes
   b. No

9. I expect from the application process that the company presents itself in the best possible way and treats me as a candidate like a customer.
   a. Does not apply
   b. Applies
   c. Applies very much

10. I expect an acknowledgement of receipt of my application within…
   a. Up to 24 hours
   b. Up to 48 hours
   c. Up to 72 hours

11. I expect an acceptance or rejection regarding my sent application at the latest within…
   a. Up to 5 days
   b. Up to 10 days
   c. Up to 15 days
   d. Up to 20 days

12. I expect the following information to be provided for an interview:
   a. Conversation participants
   b. Location of the conversation
   c. Duration of the conversation
   d. Expected questions
   e. Documents, materials, etc. to be brought along
   f. Dress code
   g. Information regarding the coverage of costs that arise

13. An application process must be designed as follows....
   a. Personal
   b. Professional
   c. Fast
   d. Informative
   e. Transparent
   f. At eye level
   g. Honest
   h. Authentic

14. What ranking would you make in prioritizing an application opportunity?
  a. By e-mail
  b. Via an application form
  c. By post
  d. Via a social media platform such as LinkedIn

15. I expect the following communication channels to be provided as part of the application process:
  a. E-Mail
  b. By phone
  c. By chat
  d. By chat bot
  e. Whatsapp

16. I expect companies to implement the following aspects so that I can use them to gather information and make an impression during the application process.
  a. Career page
  b. Corporate videos
  c. Presence on social media platforms
  d. Trial work day
  e. Involvement of potential colleagues

17. I expect the following aspects to be included in a job advertisement in an appealing, professional, transparent, informative and realistic manner:
  a. Company presentation
  b. Title
  c. Tasks
  d. Expectations of the profile requested
  e. Benefits
  f. Presentation of the individual steps during the application process
  g. Contact person of the company
  h. Documents to be submitted with information on file format and file size

RESULTS
A total of 100 people participated in the survey. 49% of the participants were female and 49% of the participants were male. 2% of respondents identified themselves as diverse. A total of 49 female respondents, 49 male respondents, and two individuals identifying as diverse participated in the survey. 43% of respondents were between the ages of 18 and 29, 28% were between the ages of 30 and 44, 25% were between the ages of 45 and 60, and 4% were over the age of 60.

With a share of 38%, the majority of respondents indicated a completed apprenticeship as their highest degree. A master's degree or diploma ranked second with a share of 26%. Most of the survey participants had a bachelor's, technician's, specialist or business administration degree. 10% of respondents were unskilled, and 4% stated that they had a doctorate.

In response to the question "What is your current professional situation?" 71% of survey participants answered "Employed". Survey participants reported being on parental leave at a rate of 19%. Two percent of survey participants were retired, while 8% were students. Most respondents,

32%, reported having more than 10 years of professional experience. 18% of the survey participants indicated that they had between 7 and 10 years of professional experience. 16% of the participants had between 3 and 5 years of work experience. Since the percentages are each between 10% and 12%, respondents with up to 2 years of work experience, 2 to less than 3 years, and 5 to less than 7 years are distributed comparatively evenly. Respondents with 7 to 10 years of work experience receive the lowest proportion of 6%.

Previously, the questions were answered to create groups of people based on demographic data and to make additional inferences about responses by occupational characteristics and number of years in the occupation and qualifications. The focus is on the relationships between years worked and degree and how these characteristics influence expectations of the application process for a job opening. A total of 100 survey participants stated how often they had already taken part in an application process. The absolute majority of respondents stated that they had already participated in an application process one to two times (37%). According to the survey, 34% of respondents had already participated in an application process three to five times. The remaining 29% of survey participants indicated that they had already participated in an application process more than five times.

The 7th question "How would you rate the average quality of the application processes you have gone through so far?" answered with a rating of 68 points, which is the average rating of all participants. Since 50 points, corresponds to a rating of "average", the rating of 68 points shows that the quality of the application process you have gone through so far is 18 points above average. At the 8th point in the survey questionnaire, survey participants were asked to rate the statement "I expect the application process to present the company and thus the potential employer in the best possible way." with a scale between "Does not apply", which corresponds to zero points, "applies", which corresponds to 50 points, and "applies very much", which corresponds to 100 points. The evaluation of all participants resulted in an average value of 70 points, which is therefore 20 points above the "applies" evaluation and 30 points below the "applies very much" evaluation.

91% of participants answered the statement "I expect the information about the application process and application to be presented transparently and intuitively in the job posting or on the career website." with the answer option "Yes". 9% of the survey participants selected the answer option "No" and thus represent the minority. The statement "I expect the company to present itself in the best possible way in the application process and to treat me as an applicant like a customer." was to be rated on a scale between "Does not apply", which corresponds to zero points, "applies", which corresponds to 50 points, and "applies very much", which corresponds to 100 points. The evaluation of all participants resulted in an average score of 72 points, which is therefore 22 points above the rating "applies" and 28 points below the rating "applies very much".

In response to the question "I expect to receive an acknowledgement of receipt for my application within...", 48% of respondents, and thus the absolute majority, answered that they expect to receive an acknowledgement of receipt within 48 hours of sending the application. 29% of the survey participants chose the answer option in which they stated that they expect an acknowledgement of receipt within 24 hours of sending the application. The smallest percentage of respondents, 23%, expect acknowledgement of receipt within 72 hours of sending the application. When asked within what timeframe they expected a response or rejection to their application after sending it, 42% of respondents indicated within 5 days. 39% of the survey participants indicated that they expect a rejection or acceptance of their application within 10 days. Within 15 days, 12% of respondents expect to hear back about their application. 8%, and thus the minority of respondents, expect a response or rejection within 20 days of sending their application.

In the 14th question, survey participants were asked about the design of the application process. In first place, 66% of respondents stated that they expect the application process to be professional.

An informative application process is expected by 58% and an honest application process by 51% of the survey participants. This is followed by transparency with 37%, individuality with 35% and authenticity with 29% as design components in the application process. Speed is again expected by 27% of respondents. 19% of the survey participants stated that they expect eye level in the design of the application process.

The 15th question asked survey respondents about prioritizing application options. 44% of respondents indicated that they prioritize the application form via an application form and thus this type of application form was selected in first place. In second place, 37% of the respondents chose the application form via e-mail. 13% of the survey participants chose the application form via mail. The application option via social media platforms such as LinkedIn was chosen by 6% of respondents. When asked what communication channels are expected during the application process, 77% of respondents indicated email. 73% of the survey participants stated that they expect a telephone communication channel during the application process. A communication option during the application process via chat is expected by 25% and via Whatsapp by 10% of respondents. A chat bot as an option for communication was indicated by 9% of the survey participants.

The 17th question asked survey respondents about their expectations regarding the sources of information available that they would use to research regarding the company and application process. 64% of respondents expect a careers page, 42% expect a presence on a social media platform, and 36% of survey participants expect a company video to gather information and form an impression during the application process. For this, 27% expect a trial working day and 21% of the respondents expect an involvement of potential colleagues as elements to be implemented during the application process to gather information and to get an impression. The last question asked survey participants about the components and information they expect to see in a job ad. Information about the job duties was chosen as an answer option by 58% of the participants. A company introduction was indicated by 46% of the survey participants as an expected component of the job advertisement. Information on benefits was expected by 44% of survey participants. Information on the qualification profile being sought and information on the application process were both expected by 40% of respondents. 37% expect a contact person to be listed for the application process and 36% would like to know which documents have to be submitted and in what form. Information about the title of the position is expected by 22% of respondents.

CONCLUSIONS/DISCUSSION

Now follows the presentation of the conclusions drawn on the basis of the research conducted. All corporate goals are derived from the main objective of maximizing profits. Accordingly, the employees of a company are one of the most important pillars to achieve this main goal. Due to this, it should be an important concern of companies to design a qualitative and high-quality application process for applicants, so that they are convinced of the company and of a job in it. This means that companies should design the application process according to the expectations of the applicants. The conducted survey makes it possible to analyze in detail the expectations of applicants regarding an application process for a vacancy. The analysis makes it possible to derive measures of action for companies so that they can design the application process according to the expectations of applicants. Companies can thus compete for quality employees and counteract potential risks such as loss of turnover, loss of profit and loss of efficiency by attracting the correct number of employees in the required quality at the required time at the required location through a qualitative and high-quality application process. The survey carried out shows that the quality of the application processes completed to date was 18 points above average. This allows the conclusion to be drawn that there is potential for improvement in the application process from the point of view of applicants.

On the basis of the study, it is also possible to derive the action measure that companies must present themselves as potential employers in the best possible way as part of an application process. The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that applicants no longer see themselves as being entirely responsible. They expect companies to also make an effort to leave the best possible impression on the applicant so that he or she decides in favor of the company. This is emphasized once again by the results of the study, since applicants expect not only the best possible presentation of the company, but also treatment of themselves that is equivalent to that of a customer.

Another conclusion that can be drawn on the basis of the survey is the expectations of applicants with regard to information. According to this, applicants expect to find information about the application process and the application either in the job advertisement itself or on the company's career page. In conclusion, companies should ensure that they implement a career page where all necessary information for applicants can be found. If companies do not provide the information by way of a career page, they should at least publish the information transparently in the job advertisement itself so that applicants can actively engage with the application process and consciously prepare and decide for it.

Another recommendation for action derived on the basis of the survey relates to the expected duration until receipt of an acknowledgement of receipt after sending an application. As a result, applicants expect to receive confirmation of receipt within 48 hours of sending their application at the latest. Accordingly, companies should structure their applicant management process in such a way that a confirmation of receipt is sent to the applicant within 48 hours at the latest. The most effective way to do this is through digital applicant management, whereby an automatic confirmation of receipt is sent as soon as an application is submitted. This virtually eliminates the risk of errors and delays in sending confirmation of receipt, which also applies to manual effort.

Companies should design their application process so that they can communicate an acceptance or rejection to the applicant within 5 to 10 days of receiving the application. This is based on the results where this is expected by 42% of respondents. A relative acceptance is experienced by a period of more than 10 days after sending the application, as it was chosen by 39% of the respondents. A period between 15 and 20 days, on the other hand, is only accepted by a minority of 8% to 12%. Thus, companies should avoid using a period longer than 10 days for the feedback on applications.

A frequent component of the application process is an interview. On the basis of the survey conducted, conclusions have been drawn that applicants expect certain information when an interview is imminent. According to the survey, most applicants expect information about whether and which documents or materials they need to bring with them. In addition, applicants want to receive information about the interview participants and the location where the interview will take place. Applicants would also like to be informed about the duration of the interview and the expected dress code. Applicants would also like to receive information about which questions will be discussed during the interview and whether and which costs incurred during the interview will be covered. The derived conclusion is therefore that companies should include the aforementioned aspects when inviting applicants to the interview so that candidates feel fully informed and can prepare and behave accordingly.

The results of the study also showed that applicants have certain expectations regarding the design of the application process by companies as potential employers. It was thus deduced that companies should design the application process to be professional, informative, honest, transparent and individual in order to meet the expectations of applicants. Accordingly, companies should maintain a professional tone with their applicants. In addition, companies should ensure a high level of information both in the job advertisement and throughout the entire communication. Honesty is also a high priority. Applicants expect an honest application process in which they can trust the

information and agreements discussed. As a result, when communicating with applicants, companies should ensure that they only share accurate information with applicants and, most importantly, do so transparently, as transparent communication is also expected. Thus, information should be shared with applicants as directly and proactively as possible and not only upon request. This additionally creates trust and appears authentic, which gives the company credibility during the application process. If companies design the application process according to the values described, they can meet the expectations of applicants and increase the willingness to make a decision so that they choose the company as an employer.

With regard to the application process, the survey revealed that candidates prioritize applying via an application form. The recommended action is for companies to digitize their application process so that they can embed an application form in their job advertisements which candidates can use to apply directly. Alternatively, companies should provide a parallel application option via email, as this is also prioritized by candidates. The two application options mentioned must be implemented in such a way that they meet the aforementioned expectations regarding confirmation of receipt and feedback on the application.

For applicants, communication is an important part of the application process. Candidates assume that they have various communication channels at their disposal that they can use as needed. This may be the case, for example, if potential applicants have questions about advertised vacancies, about the status of their application, or to receive feedback in the event of rejection. The survey showed that applicants expect a communication channel via e-mail as a matter of priority. This should be recognized, especially in view of the progress of digitization, and implemented accordingly by companies.

Based on the study, it was also concluded that companies should guarantee availability by telephone so that candidates' expectations of the application process are met. For this purpose, it is necessary to include information such as the contact person and the corresponding telephone number in the job advertisement. The telephone communication channel and via e-mail should be the standard communication channels of companies that they should implement and provide professionally as part of the application process for candidates. When providing these communication channels, companies should take into account the previously established parameters regarding the duration of feedback.

The establishment of a career page is also a recommended course of action derived from the study in order to meet candidates' expectations of the application process. This should be optimized for display and maintained with the important information on the application process, job advertisements and contacts. In addition to the careers page, which is prioritized, companies should have profiles on the most common online business networks such as LinkedIn. Here, companies should also ensure that profiles are maintained with up-to-date posts and job ads. Both the career page and profiles on business networks can be additionally enriched with a company video, which is also expected by candidates as part of the application process, in order to gain a deeper impression of the company and to check the fit with it.

Applicants also have expectations when it comes to the design of job advertisements. The survey conducted revealed that applicants expect the following information as content in a job advertisement:

- Information about the tasks
- Presentation of the company
- Information about the benefits
- Information on the qualification profile sought
- Information on the application process
- Information on the contact person within the application process

- Information on the documents to be submitted
- Information on the title of the position

The recommended action for companies is to establish the previously listed aspects in their job advertisements in a content-correct, transparent, factual, professional, and comprehensible manner. In this way, companies can ensure that they meet the expectations of candidates and thus receive more applications.

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ОЧАКВАНИЯТА НА КАНДИДАТИТЕ ОТНОСНО ПРОЦЕСА НА КАНДИДАТСТВАНЕ ЗА СВОБОДНА ПОЗИЦИЯ

Резюме: *Заглавието на тази научна публикация е „Очакванията на кандидатите относно процеса на кандидатстване за свободна позиция". Целта на изследването е да се проучат очакванията на кандидатите за процеса на кандидатстване. Същевременно трябваше да се осветли предишният опит с процесите на кандидатстване. Освен това основната цел беше да се получат данни за очакваните от кандидатите аспекти в контекста на процеса на кандидатстване за свободна позиция. Това включва очаквания по отношение на предоставената информация, каналите за комуникация, времето за отговор и маниерите. В контекста на проучването беше избран количествен метод на изследване, за да се проучат горепосочените аспекти. С помощта на цифров въпросник бяха анкетирани онлайн 100 души, които отговориха на общо 18 въпроса. Оценката на проучването позволи, наред с другото, да се определят точните и очаквани компоненти от гледна точка на кандидатите в контекста на процеса на кандидатстване.*
Ключови думи: *кандидати, процес на кандидатстване, очаквания, свободно работно място*

Sakeela Sathananthan, PhD candidate
University of Library Studies and Information Technologies
E-mail: SakeelaS@web.de