"Why didn't you hire a PhD graduate?" A critical examination of recruitment, selection and onboarding practices of employers seeking to hire researchers. (0265)

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It is difficult to advise PhD candidates and research supervisors on what to expect and how to prepare for a non-academic career. The PhD started being offered by Australian Universities in the mid 20th century to train future academics. Presently, the PhD typically follows an experiential learning model: you learn to become an academic by doing academic work in the form of an original research project that is written up as a dissertation. The PhD should deliver the next generation of academics and equip them with the skills necessary to navigate our complex bureaucracies, but increasingly the degree is being looked to to deliver research knowledge workers. More than 60% of graduates now seek employment outside academia on completion of their degree. We know very little about where these graduates go and what barriers and opportunities there are for them in non-academic workplaces. This research seeks to increase our understanding of why employer and recruiters' practices around selecting and hiring PhD graduates.

To date there has been very little exploration of non-academic employers' hiring, employment and onboarding practices with respect to PhD graduates. What little exists tends to focus on the views of senior executives and representatives of peak bodies. For example, the most recent Australian Research of this kind, based on a sample of 69 senior executives, suggests that most thought PhD graduates were valuable to their business, but a significant number only think they are valuable when they have had industry experience. However, a gap exists between what we know about how leaders think about PhD graduates and what happens in practice. There is currently no research on the practices of recruiters and HR professionals actually tasked with assessing and selecting job candidates for interview, or the decision makers in organisations who decide to hire them.

This research seeks to address this gap by identifying those employers actually looking for PhD graduates - or people with PhD graduate skills and examining the decision making and hiring practices. We were interested both in employers who hired PhD graduates, and those who could have hired a PhD graduate, but chose not to. We used a machine learning approach (Mewburn, Grant and Suominen, 2017) to identify employers who had a need for a employee with research skills at a PhD level. We approached these employers, or their proxy (usually a recruitment firm), to see what happened in each case - seeking to understand the decision making process around who was eventually hired into these advertised positions. Using this selection technique we go beyond broad, conceptual attitudinal research and learn from the experiences of people actually tasked with hiring researchers into non academic workplaces. This research gives us a more nuanced and actionable understanding of the barriers and opportunities that exist for PhD graduates seeking to work outside academia. This knowledge is useful for universities seeking to help their candidates find work after graduating the doctorate, including supervisors and the candidates themselves.

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