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Creative, Innovative, and Collaborative Librarians Wanted: The Use of Personality Traits in Librarian Job Advertisements

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Creative, Innovative, and Collaborative Librarians Wanted:
The Use of Personality Traits in Librarian Job Advertisements

Personality traits are often used in academic librarian job advertisements to describe desired candidates. These personality traits can be a part of the description of the position, listed as preferred or required qualifications, or found in the description of job duties. Job applicants may self-select out of applying for a job advertisement after finding the words “dynamic” or “passionate” used to describe desired candidates if they do not believe they have those personality traits. Other job advertisements do not use personality traits to describe desired candidates, but use adjectives to define the university or library itself in order to describe the culture or environment.

Different librarian positions may require different skills, but do they require different personality traits? Is every institution looking for the same librarian personality? This study looks at the use of personality traits in academic librarian job advertisements to determine what personality traits are listed in job ads and how they compare to the Big Five personality dimensions and their prediction for job success and performance. Although content analyses of job advertisements have been conducted within library science studies and a few have looked personality traits, no studies have examined their link to job performance.

Looking at personality traits in librarian job advertisements can help library administration, search committees, and other recruitment personnel in the hiring process. Determining what personality traits should be used, if any, can help attract the right candidates for the position. By examining the personality traits used, institutions can choose to craft a message that truly reflects what they value in desired candidates.

Literature Review

Content analysis of job advertisements is a research methodology used in library science studies. Studies have looked at specific positions such as the undergraduate and first year librarian (Todorinova, 2018), digital librarian (Choi & Rasmussen, 2009), emerging technologies librarian (Radniecki, 2013; Partridge Menzies, Lee & Munroe, 2010), instructional design librarian (Shank, 2006), and public library director (Henricks & Henricks-Lepp, 2014). Assessments and reviews of the use of this methodology within the library science literature (Kim & Angnakoon, 2016; Harper 2012) have shown its increased prevalence and an interest in using job advertisements to view the library workforce and its changes.

The use of personality traits in job advertisements in librarianship has received mixed support. Librarian job advertisements have shown a need for creative science librarians (White, 1999), creative E-resource librarians (Sutton & Collinge, 2018), innovative cataloging librarians (Geckle & Nelson, 2017), and dynamic public library directors (Henricks & Henricks-Lepp, 2014). Geckle and Nelson (2017) note the trend of using personality traits, but fear that “if we allow such non-task related qualities to influence hiring decisions, libraries could be missing out on the very talent that is sought after” (p.61). Benjes-Small and Miller (2017) encourage the use of personality traits and suggest “if you identified a need for enthusiasm, empathy, or creativity within your [instruction] program then writing your job ad in a way that will attract candidate with these qualities is essential” (p.26). Williamson and Lounsbury (2016) studied the personality traits of librarians and found librarians to be more “apprehensive, cautious, flexible, focused, imaginative, open-minded, respectful, self-reliant, serious, tender-minded, and trusting” than a general normative group of other occupations (p.141).

The link between personality and job advertisements has also been studied in the broader management and personnel literature. Studies have criticized the use of personality traits in job advertisements as turning traits into commodities (Cremin, 2003), while others have used traits to match an applicant's personality to the organizational culture (Carless, 2005). Stevens and Szmerekovsky (2010) note that using personality traits in a job advertisement can help make selection easier and reduce time and money. The use of specific traits has been used to find team players (Bäker, 2015), safe employees (Fruhen, Weis & Flin 2015), and inclusive managers (Johnson, Winter, Reio, Thompson, & Petrosko 2008). Personality-based recruiting has been linked to finding person-job fit (Asseburg, Homberg & Vogel 2018; Van Hoye & Turban 2015) attracting underrepresented groups (Newman and Lyon 2009; Wille & Derous 2017), and identifying gender bias (Rubini and Menegatti, 2014; Gaucher & Friesen, 2011).

Management and personnel literature have used the Big Five personality dimensions to study job performance (van der Linden, te Nijenhuis, & Bakker, 2010; Saldago & Tauriz, 2014). Although some studies have found issue with defining structure within personality research, the Big Five is seen as a valid personality model (McCrae & Costa 1987). Once researchers agreed on the five dimensions, in a meta-analysis study the dimension of conscientiousness was useful for predicting job performance in five different occupational groups (Mount & Barrick, 1998). Peeters, van Tuijl, Rutte, and Reymen (2006) performed a meta-analysis on the use of the Big Five to determine team composition and performance. Hurtz and Donovan (2000) also studied the connection between job performance and personality using the Big Five. The link between personality defined by the Big Five and creative employees has also been studied (Christensen, Drewsoon, & Maaløe, 2014).

Procedures

Academic librarian job advertisements were selected from the *ALAJobsList* website. The keyword “librarian” and limiter of organization type to “Academic/Research (College/University)” was used for the start of the search. This study is focused on general academic librarian positions in the United States. Administration and management roles were excluded from the study. A total number of 221 job advertisements were identified for analysis ranging from a posted date of Oct. 1, 2018 to December 31st, 2018. Eight duplicates from this time range have been removed giving a final total of 213 job advertisements. Websites hosting the official job advertisement were examined when needed to obtain the full job advertisement.

Content analysis was used to collect data from the librarian job advertisements. This is “an analytic method used in either quantitative or qualitative research for the systematic reduction and interpretation of text” (“Content Analysis,” 2018, p. 392). An initial coding scheme was developed, and the codes were expanded with additional data from job advertisements. A consistent unit of coding was determined and the data was used to discover frequency within categories.

Each job advertisement was read completely to determine the job title, state, personality traits, and personality trait locations. This data was recorded in an Excel spreadsheet. State and job title were used to identify potential duplicates. The saved job advertisement was reviewed for all potential duplicates. The location codes were summary (the first few sentences or first paragraph of the job ad), description (a detailed description of the job duties and responsibilities) and qualification (a required or preferred job qualification). Only personality traits used to describe the desired librarian candidates were included. Adjectives describing the academic institution, department, or library service were excluded from this study. Identified librarian personality traits were then coded using a Big Five list. The Big Five personality trait list was

compiled from three Big Five inventories (Soto & John, 2017; Goldberg, 1992; Hoffman & Jones 2005). The Big Five personality dimensions are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience. In some Big Five personality dimensions, emotional stability is labeled as neuroticism.

A second analysis was done to assign job categories to the three most frequently used personality traits. A list of each job title using the selected personality traits was created by sorting the personality traits in an Excel spreadsheet. Then, each job title was read and given a category related to librarian job duties.

Limitations

This study is limited to three months of job advertisements on one online job website. No other job advertisements were included. Adjectives describing the academic institution or department were not included. These other adjectives could have a potential to affect job applicants in their decision to apply. Only positions with the word librarian in the title were included. This may exclude positions that are at a librarian level or have similar duties but are not labeled as such. Management or administrative positions were also excluded from the study. All public library and special library positions were excluded from this study. The three-month time span does not reflect a retrospective or yearly look at all job advertisements. Only job advertisements from academic institutions in the United States were used for analysis.

Data Quality

The Big Five list and one job advertisement was shared with three librarians at the author's institution. These pre-testers were used to determine the validity of personality trait selection and coding. Each pretester was asked to identify all personality traits describing the desired librarian candidates. Then, the personality traits were matched to the Big Five personality

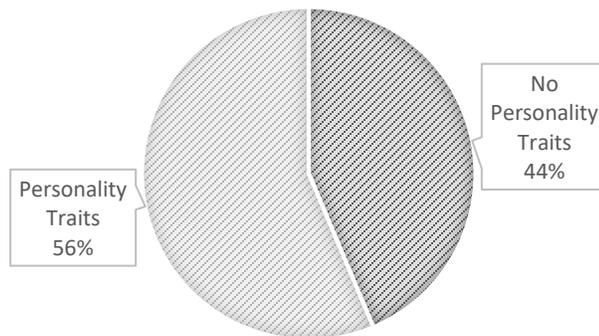
trait list or the most appropriate section. The pretester results were compared to the coding done by the author. Two of the three pre-testers matched the author's identified personality traits with the same Big Five dimensions. The third pre-tester matched all the author's identified personality traits except for one which was coded with a different Big Five category than the author and other pretesters. The Big Five personality dimension that was selected by three of the four total coders was added to the Big Five list. The Big Five personality traits list can be found in the Appendix.

Findings

A final number of 213 job advertisements found during Oct 1st and December 31st 2018 were used in this study. Librarian job advertisements for all types of positions including access services, acquisitions, collection development, digital scholarship, electronic resources, first year experience, health sciences, information literacy, metadata, reference, special collections, and systems librarians were found. The use of personality traits was found in 56% (n=120) of the job advertisements. Personality traits were not used in 44% (n=93) of the job advertisements. This shows that a majority job advertisements chose to use personality traits to attract job candidates during this time period as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Percentage of librarian job advertisements that used personality traits

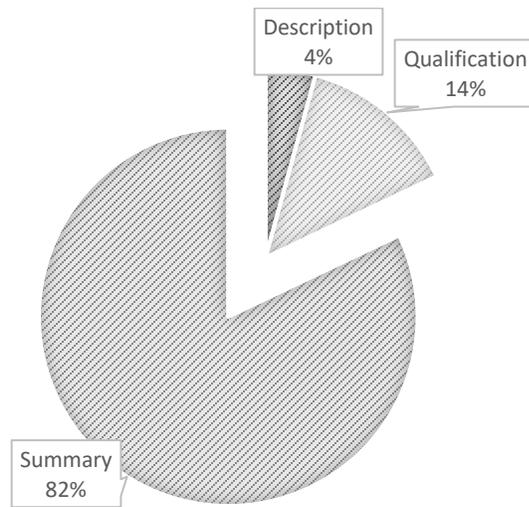


A total of 329 personality traits were found in the 120 job advertisements using personality traits. Of the 329 personality traits, 69 were unique. The largest number of traits used in a single job ad was 7. There was an average of 2.8 personality adjectives used among the total 120 job advertisements that used personality traits. There was an average of 1.5 personality adjectives used among all 213 job advertisements.

The majority, 82% (n=270) of the 329 total adjectives, were found in the summary section of the job advertisement. Only 14% (n=45) of the adjectives were listed as a required or preferred qualification. A small 4% (n=14) of the adjectives were found in the description of job duties. The distribution of personality traits can be found in Figure 2. Two job advertisements listed personality traits in a separate multicultural statement that was coded as the summary section. Another job advertisement had a “key characteristics section” that was coded as description since it was not a qualification, but closely linked to the description of the position.

Figure 2

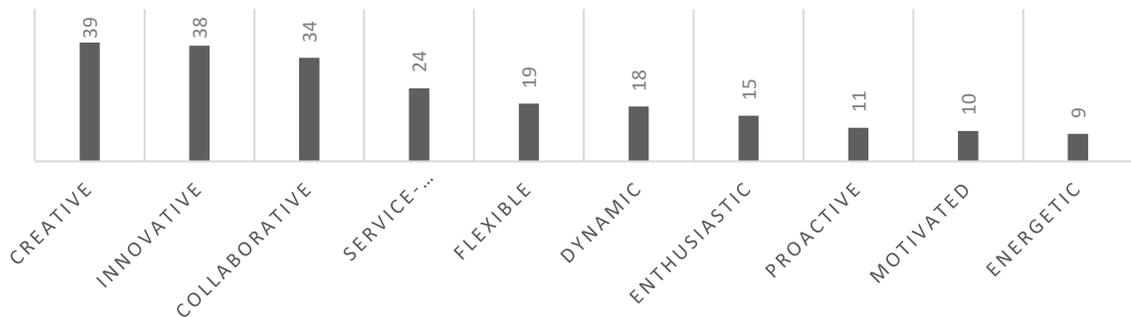
Percentage of personality traits by location



The most frequently used personality traits were creative (n=39), innovative (n=38), collaborative (n=34), service-oriented (n=24), flexible (n=19), dynamic (n=18), enthusiastic (n=15), proactive (n=11), motivated (n=10), and energetic (n=9). These personality traits are illustrated in Figure 3. When the personality traits were grouped together with similar meaning, the top eight remained the same, but the top nine was tied with the addition of the grouping “forward-looking/forward-thinking/future-oriented” (n=10). A complete list of the 69 personality traits used can be found in the Appendix.

Figure 3

Most frequently used personality traits in librarian job advertisements



Creative was used 39 times to describe a librarian candidate in 9 different job categories.

It was used the most (n=14) in general research and instruction positions. It was also found to

describe positions with titles focused on specific subject liaisons (n=10), digital projects (n=4), web services (n=3), electronic resources (n=2), emerging technologies (n=2), student success (n=2), metadata (n=1), and general librarianship (n=1).

Innovative was used 38 times to describe a librarian candidate in 13 different job categories. It was used the most (n=9) in specific subject liaison positions. It was also found to describe positions with titles focused on general research and instruction (n=8), digital projects (n=6), collection development (n=3), discovery systems (n=2), electronic resources (n=2), student success (n=2) access services/circulation (n=1), data services (n=1), emerging technologies (n=1), scholarly communication (n=1), special collections/archives (n=1), and discovery systems (n=1).

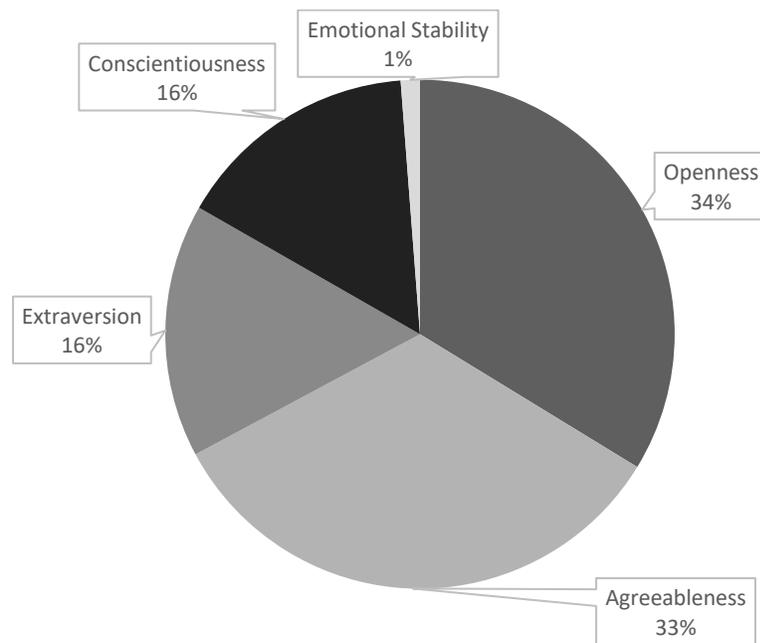
Collaborative was used 34 times to describe a librarian candidate in 12 different job categories. It was used the most (n=12) in general research and instruction positions. It was also found to describe positions with titles focused on specific subject liaisons (n=10), digital projects (n=4), access services/circulation (n=1), assessment (n=1), collection development (n=1), information technology (n=1), metadata (n=1), scholarly communication (n=1), and general librarianship (n=1).

The Big Five dimensions were distributed as followed for the 329 total adjectives: 34% openness (n=111), 33% agreeableness (n=110), 16% extraversion (n=53), 16% conscientiousness (n=51), 1% emotional stability (n=4). This is illustrated in Figure 4. The most frequently used personality traits fell into four of the Big Five dimensions. The dimensions used were openness (creative and innovative), agreeableness (collaborative, service-oriented, and flexible); extraversion (dynamic, enthusiastic, and energetic); and conscientiousness (proactive

and motivated). Emotional stability was not represented in the most frequently used personality traits.

Figure 4

Percentage of personality traits in each Big Five dimension



Of the 45 personality adjectives that were listed as a required or preferred qualification, 49% (n=22) were coded as agreeableness. Conscientiousness amounted to 27% (n=12) of

personality traits listed as a qualification. The remaining categories were openness at 18% (n=8), extraversion at 4% (n=2), and emotional stability at 2% (n=1).

Discussion

As creative and innovative fall into the same Big Five category, it seems that the biggest concern in librarian job advertisements is in the openness to experience Big Five dimension. Why are creativity and innovation sought out more than hardworking and responsible librarians? Mount and Barrick (1998) found that extraversion and openness to experience predicted that employees would learn more during training. The use of the terms creative and innovative however do not seem to be looking for librarians who would be easy to train. In fact, Oud (2008) speaks to a lack of training both in time and depth for new librarians and found only 40% of librarians in the study received formal training. Openness to experience was not found to be a predictor of job performance.

Mount and Barrick (1998) did find that conscientiousness showed a link to job performance in five career groups through a meta-analysis study of over thirty years of literature. These five career groups were professionals, police, managers, sales, and skilled/semi-skilled workers. The personality traits proactive and motivated were the top personality traits used in librarian job advertisements in this dimension. However, conscientiousness makes up only 16% (n=51) of the 329 total personality traits found. Why do librarian job advertisements seem to care little about this dimension? Creative and innovative librarians are wanted more than proactive and motivated librarians. Is one to assume that all librarians would be proactive and motivated, so it does not need to be specifically asked for in a job advertisement? Personality traits in the conscientiousness dimension are not flashy but may attract stronger candidates for future job performance.

Extraversion was also linked to job performance, but only for occupations who interact with others. Only 16% (n=53) out of the 329 total adjectives were linked to extraversion. Dynamic, enthusiastic, and energetic were among the most frequently used personality traits. Not all librarian positions interact closely with the public. These extraversion traits were found in cataloging, metadata, and systems positions.

If only 14% of personality traits were used as a required or preferred qualifications, and the other 85% of personality traits are not qualifications, why are personality traits used in librarian job advertisements at all? Librarians may not rise to the top of the list of creative occupations, yet it is seemingly the most valued personality trait. How many librarians would describe themselves as creative? Librarian job advertisements are searching for innovative librarians, yet Glassman (2017) notes an "intense pressure to constantly innovate, to throw out the old and invent something new" within librarianship. Personality traits should be selected with care and caution.

Conclusion

Academic librarian job advertisements are looking for creative, innovative and collaborative librarians in many different position types. These three personality traits fall into openness to experience and agreeableness which are not linked to job performance. Should librarian job advertisements focus only on the Big Five personality traits pertaining to job performance within the conscientiousness dimension? Should they focus on extraversion for instruction and outreach librarians? Does every librarian need to be screened for extroversion and conscientiousness? When search committees or human resources create a librarian job advertisement, the use of personality traits should have a purpose. The use of personally traits

from the extroversion or conscientiousness personality dimensions may hiring librarians with better long term job performance.

Personality traits also send a message to librarian job candidates. What message does the search committees or human resources want to send about the institution or library? The entire department or library may need to be analyzed to see what personality traits are needed to fill a roll or complete a department.

How can we find out what personality traits matter to specific librarian positions? Future studies on job performance and librarians should be conducted to see what Big Five dimensions translate into librarian top performers. Research on personality traits linked specifically to librarian job performance has not been conducted. Academic, public, special, and other librarians may have different criteria for job performance and a different need for different personality traits.

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Appendix

Complete list of 69 personality traits found in librarian job advertisements

Personality Adjectives	Count		
creative	39	competent	1
innovative	38	customer-oriented	1
collaborative	34	diverse	1
service-oriented	24	effective	1
flexible	19	efficient	1
dynamic	18	engaging	1
enthusiastic	15	entrepreneurial	1
proactive	11	equity-minded	1
motivated	10	experienced	1
energetic	9	forward-looking	1
forward-thinking	7	imaginative	1
adaptable	6	industrious	1
knowledgeable	6	learner-centered	1
engaged	5	outgoing	1
team oriented	5	patient	1
self-motivated	4	persistent	1
user-focused	4	personal	1
curious	3	positive	1
detail oriented	3	pragmatic	1
hard working	3	production-oriented	1
self-directed	3	resourceful	1
user-centered	3	responsive	1
collegial	2	self-starter	1
exceptional	2	student-centered	1
future-oriented	2	student-focused	1
inventive	2	student-oriented	1
modest	2	talented	1
open	2	technically-grounded	1
open-minded	2	technologically adept	1
passionate	2	versatile	1
productive	2	well-organized	1
results-oriented	2		
service-minded	2		
technologically savvy	2		
user-oriented	2		
accountable	1		
adaptive	1		
analytical	1		

CREATIVE, INNOVATIVE, AND COLLABORATIVE LIBRARIANS

Big Five personality trait list

Extroversion	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Emotional Stability	Openness to Experience
active	agreeable	careful	at ease	analytical
adventurous	caring	conscientious	calm	artistic
assertive	collaborative	dependable	contented	complex
bold	compassionate	efficient	happy	creative
dynamic	considerate	hardworking	not envious	curious
energetic	cooperative	motivated	optimistic	future
engaged	courteous	neat	positive	imaginative
enthusiastic	flexible	organized	relaxed	innovative
excited	forgiving	persistent	secure	intelligent
extraverted	generous	practical	stable	inventive
influential	helpful	proactive	unemotional	reflective
outgoing	kind	reliable	unexcitable	sophisticated
passionate	pleasant	responsible		versatile
social	polite	self-starter		
talkative	respectful	steady		
	service-oriented	systematic		
	sympathetic	thorough		
	trustful	thrifty		
	unselfish	tidy		
	warm			