Ego State Components in Help Wanted Advertising
James W. Schreier

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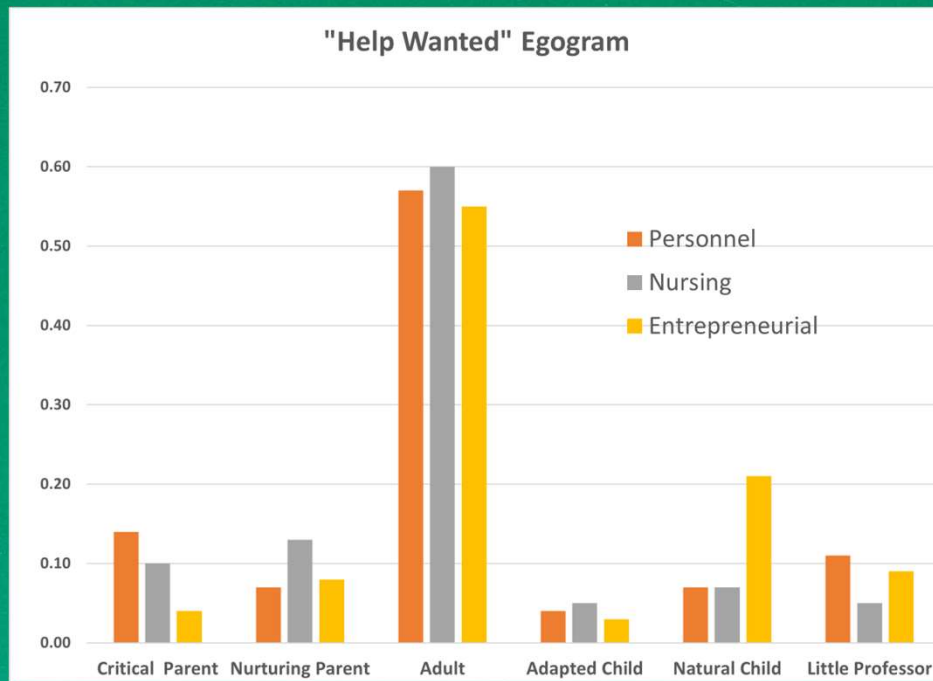
"Help Wanted" Egogram

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Abstract

Transactional Analysis (TA) is a theory that can be applied to the principles of classified recruitment advertising. Organizations attempt to attract and select qualified applicants through various advertising approaches ranging from the classified "help wanted" ad to full page corporate recruiting ads. Similarly, job seekers make decisions about which jobs to apply for based on the messages sent by the company through the ads. The Ego State model in TA allows for analysis of recruitment ads to insure that the ads correctly portray the job, the organization, and the person desired. In a study of 200 classified advertisements, it was found that the Adult ego state dominates recruitment messages and that there are significantly different ego state profiles for different job categories. Implications for practical applications and future research are noted.

Classified recruitment advertising is a popular, significant source of employees for many organizations. In the context of changing demographics, increased use of recruitment advertising for a corporate image development and the inclusion of career information (Evans, 1978), quality effective advertising copy is extremely important. An analysis of recruitment advertising copy using the fundamental concepts of Transactional Analysis (TA) demonstrates problems in the current format of many ads and opportunities for increased effectiveness.

Recruitment Advertising

Consumer advertising has been examined from a transactional viewpoint. McClain and Kruse (1980), in their analysis "Transactions in Advertisements: Understanding Messages," state:

> Advertisements are transactions in which the advertiser offers a product and the potential consumer decides to purchase or not to purchase. Thus, advertisements are a medium in which psychological and social messages may agree or disagree, cross or be congruent. Stimuli and response is of advertiser and potential consumer and may come from and tend to 'hook' different ego states (p.17).

Classified recruitment advertising is a unique form of advertising in which organizations offer a product (job). Consumers or job seekers must not only react to the attractiveness of the ad but must use the information contained in the ad to make career decisions and determine if they are qualified for the position being offered. Game playing is possible as employers attempt to attract hundreds of applicants and job seekers apply for hundreds of jobs (Boyce, 1983).

Major studies on recruitment advertising indicate that the goals of recruitment advertising are to describe the job being advertised, attract the applicant to the position, specify the qualifications that the individual must have, and describe for the individual the response they should make in order to be considered for the job. These goals do not specify that the information should be strictly "Adult" in appeal. Jobs differ substantially in their content and the need for involvement of the person from various ego states. In addition, job environments differ significantly and have significant impact on an individual's success and satisfaction in a particular job. Therefore, it could be expected that recruitment ad content would differ substantially.

Classified advertising does not contain as much factual information as one would believe.

One major study (Walsh, Johnson, and Sugarman, 1975) examined two newspapers' help wanted ads and found that:

> "neither newspapers' help wanted ads offered the job seeker information which is adequate or precise or easily obtainable for the self screening process. Thus these newspapers' help wanted ads ... fell short of their potential as a job search tool" (p. 38).

Classified help wanted advertising is most effective if it contains key job information concerning the work duties and qualifications of the individual to be hired. Therefore, it is clear that the ad content must contain not only information about the job but information presented in a way that effectively portrays a message about the job and the company. This cannot be done if the ad contains pure "Adult" information which explains only *what* responsibilities the job includes, *who* can be qualified, *where* it is located, and *how* and *when* to apply. This straightforward and primarily informational portion of the ads needs to be maintained. However, it does not have to be the only content in the classified recruiting message. One particular expert in recruitment called for a view of employee recruitment as marketing a product aimed at satisfying specific needs and wants including a clear understanding of applicant motivation (Stoops, 1980). The principles of Transactional Analysis provide a way of analyzing recruitment ad content and indicate directions for improving the content and effectiveness of classified help wanted advertising.

Research Design

A research project was designed to examine the issues raised by the need for effective recruitment advertising and a possible approach based on the concepts of improved communication through Transactional Analysis. The research design included the selection of a sample of recruitment ads, the definition of job groupings, training of evaluators, evaluation of the ads, and the formulation of specific research hypotheses.

A stratified random sample of classified display ads was selected from four major newspapers, two from midwestern cities, one from the east coast, and a national business publication. Two hundred ads were selected, twenty from each newspaper, from the following major job categories: Financial, personnel, engineering, clerical, accounting, nursing, marketing, scientific, enterpreneurial, and operations. Classified display ads were used because they are usually more imaginative in writing style. These ads, although they are more expensive for both placement and composition, serve a dual purpose in attracting applicants and providing corporate image advertising (Meyer and Donaho, 1979). The ads were selected by an individual familiar with the job groupings but unfamiliar with the research hypotheses and the intent to evaluate these ads using the principles of TA.

The ads were evaluated by a group of nineteen college seniors trained in the principles and concepts of Transactional Analysis and in principles of employment advertising. The student volunteers, from a course in employment concepts, were given general guidelines on evaluating the ads, an evaluation format, and specific assistance on information pertaining to specific ego states. For example, they were given several pages of information on word cues for the Parent, Adult and Child ego states. They also received training on Transactional Analysis including a text (James, 1975), readings, and a film presentation. They were told to evaluate each of the two hundred ads using an ego state evaluation form, carefully evaluating each ad following the ego state clues provided, and to determine the appeal of the ad in the mind of the prospective employee. Inter-rater reliability was checked and significant correlation was found for each job category.

The statistical analysis used included an examination of mean scores for each of the two hundred ads for six ego state components — Critical Parent, Nurturing Parent, Adult, Adapted Child, Natural Child, and Little Professor — and more specifically, analysis of the mean scores for each of the ten major ad categories. T-tests to determine significant differences between means were conducted to develop the final analysis.

Two major hypotheses were formulated to evaluate the ego state components in the recruitment advertisements.

1. Recruitment advertisements will contain primarily Adult ego state messages.

2. There will be significant differences in ego state profiles of the different job groupings.

These differences will be predictable in direction.

The specific sub-hypotheses under the second major hypothesis are too numerous to include because of the broad nature of the research study with ten job groupings and six major ego state variables. These hypotheses, however, included some of the following examples. It was predicted that the entrepreneurial class of ads would contain more Natural Child appeal and less Adult information than the other groupings; that the nursing job grouping would contain more Nurturing Parent appeal than other groupings; that the operations job grouping would contain more Critical Parent appeal; and that the financial and accounting job groupings would also contain more Critical Parent appeal than other job groupings, for example nursing and marketing.

Results

The results of the data analyzed supported both of the major hypotheses and for the most part all of the specific hypotheses formulated as part of the second major hypothesis. The vast majority of the ad content was Adult with an average percentage content of 57% and a range of 48% to 63%. Significant differences also existed in almost 50% of the possible comparisons. Figure 1 is a Help Wanted Egogram for all of the ten major occupational classifications. Significant differences exist in each of the ego state areas. The Help Wanted Egogram demonstrates that the majority of the ad content is directed toward the Adult ego state and focuses on the what, who, where, how, and when of the advertising message. The second highest ego state component is the Critical Parent and was perceived by the evaluators as that information which rigidly restricted applications. Statements like applicants "should" have certain qualifications composed a small but significant part of many ads. The Nurturing Parent appeal contained in many of the ads pertained to salary and benefits and other statements pertaining to the corporate environment which made the perspective job candidate feel welcome in the organization. Adapted Child focus was not present in many of the ads to a great extent while Little Professor appeal was evident in some of the jobs and Natural Child appeal existed in small quantities except for one job grouping where it was predicted to

exist to a much higher degree. Selected results from the six ego state comparisons are shown in Figure 2.

The data show that both of the major hypotheses are supported and that significant differences do exist in help wanted recruitment advertising in the ego state messages presented.

Summary

Recruitment ads are designed for the purpose of informing the reader about the responsibilities of the job, company goals, benefits and salary, and required qualifications. The recruitment ads analyzed show a strong focus on the Adult ego state. Many of the ads include small but significant messages aimed at other ego states. The Parent ego state, especially the Critical Parent, is evident in some ads. In this respect the ad suggests to the reader things like the qualification one *should* have to be a successful candidate or what experience *would* be highly *preferred.* The Parent ego state also gives support and encouragement. Ads offering to "guide you through everything" or to "join the team" are examples.

Some ads appeal to the Child ego state, mostly the Natural Child or the Little Professor. Those offering challenging assignments or exciting opportunities for career growth are aimed at the Natural Child as well as those seeking an aggressive or highly motivated individual. Words like imaginative, creative, original thinker, self-starter and innovator may appeal to the Little Professor.

Conclusions

The results of this evaluation indicate opportunities for human resources professionals involved with recruitment advertising and opportunities for additional research using Transactional Analysis. The first conclusion is that Transactional Analysis can be used to analyze the content of recruitment advertising. Additional research is therefore possible as organizations attempt to appeal to different ego states in recruitment advertising and utilize this information to recruit and select individuals effectively. This leads, however, to the more applied conclusion for the human resources profession. Do ads correctly portray the jobs they are representing? Consequently, can more appropriately written ads representing an integration of all ego states attract more satisfied
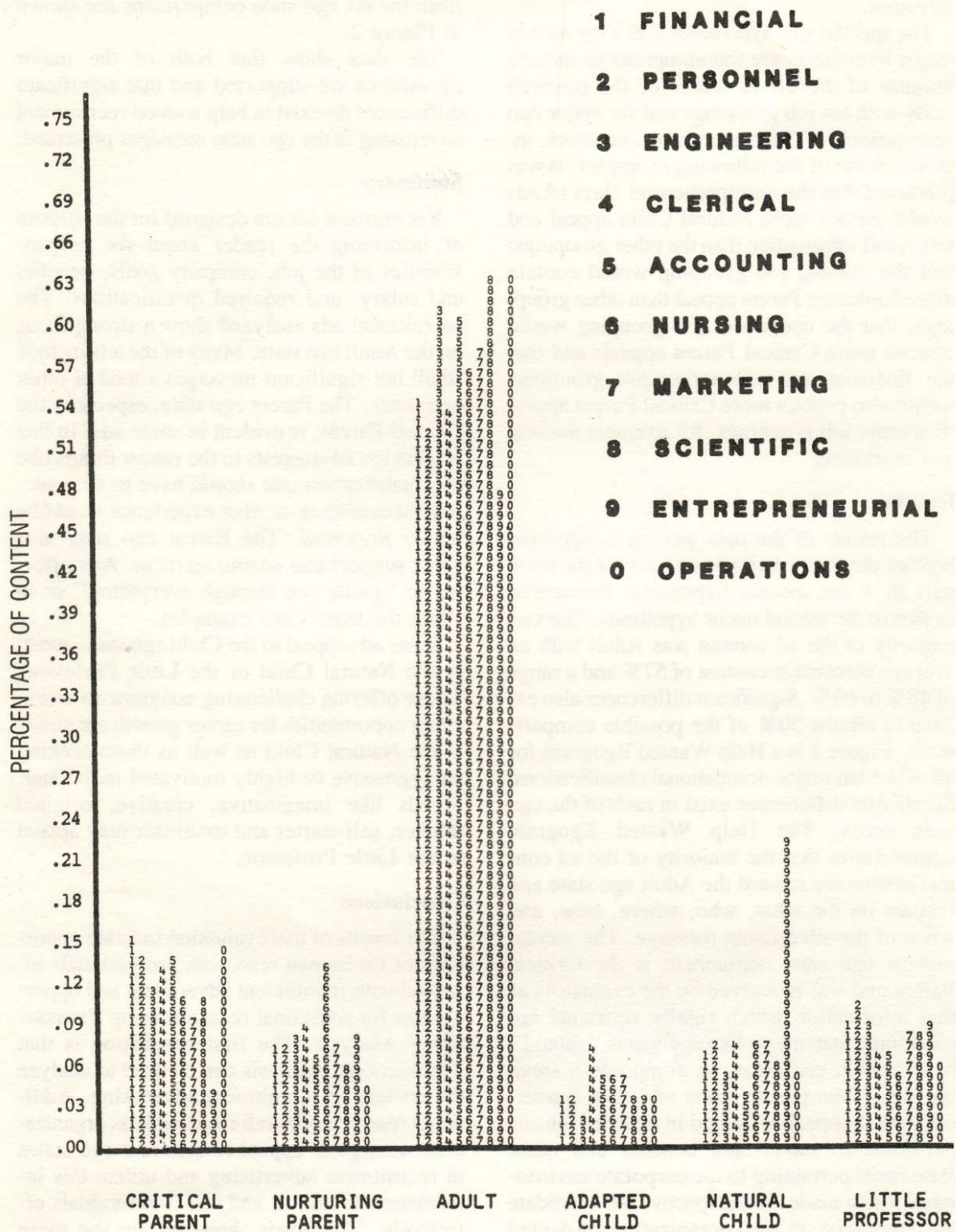
Figure 1
Help Wanted Egogram

Legend (categories):

1 FINANCIAL
2 PERSONNEL
3 ENGINEERING
4 CLERICAL
5 ACCOUNTING
6 NURSING
7 MARKETING
8 SCIENTIFIC
9 ENTREPRENEURIAL
0 OPERATIONS

Y-axis label: PERCENTAGE OF CONTENT

Y-axis values: .75 .72 .69 .66 .63 .60 .57 .54 .51 .48 .45 .42 .39 .36 .33 .30 .27 .24 .21 .18 .15 .12 .09 .06 .03 .00

X-axis categories:

CRITICAL PARENT | NURTURING PARENT | ADULT | ADAPTED CHILD | NATURAL CHILD | LITTLE PROFESSOR

Significantly More		Significantly Less
Financial Operational Personnel Accounting Clerical	CRITICAL PARENT	Engineering Nursing Marketing Scientific Enterpreneurial
Nursing	NURTURING PARENT	All Others
Accounting Financial	ADULT	Entrepreneurial Engineering Personnel Clerical Scientific
Clerical Accounting Nursing Marketing	ADAPTED CHILD	Financial Personnel Engineering Scientific Entrepreneurial Operations
Entrepreneurial	NATURAL CHILD	All Others
Personnel Entrepreneurial Financial	LITTLE PROFESSOR	Nursing Clerical Accounting Operations

Figure 2
Ego States - Significant Differences

and successful employees to an organization?

Recruitment efforts are most effective if they do an accurate job of completely portraying not only the job duties but the organizational environment. In some cases this includes the environment of the individuals with whom the person will work and the manager for whom the person will work. This information can be improved through analysis of job duties, requirements, and organizational characteristics using the ego state concepts of Transactional Analysis. If job duties are analyzed according to their ego state components and this information is in turn used in the development of recruitment advertising more realistic recruiting will result.

A significant implication of this research is that correctly portraying jobs and appealing to all ego states of an individual requires more involvement in the analysis, writing, and obviously increases the cost of recruitment advertising. With the increasing demand for more accurate information, equal employment recruiting, and career information, it would appear that the cost of more accurately portraying the jobs, appealing more specifically to desired characteristics, would yield a more successful and satisfied work force for most organizations.

James W. Schreier, PhD, ARM, is Assistant Professor of Management in the College of Business Administration at Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

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NOTE: A set of Help Wanted Egograms and Ego State Difference Exhibits showing specific significant differences is available from the author.