

Industry Leader Interviews

Advanced Manufacturing

Docking Institute of Public Affairs

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Methods

Docking Institute of Public Affairs personnel interviewed leaders from advanced manufacturing companies in the State of Kansas from May 12 and May 23, 2008. Advanced manufacturing companies were identified using North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS) codes 31000 through 33999, excluding any aerospace and defense, motor vehicles, and construction industry businesses. The list of advanced manufacturers to contact for interviewing was obtained from the Kansas Department of Labor. Twenty industry leaders were interviewed. The sample was not randomly drawn. Rather, the employers with the largest workforces were targeted for interviewing. The responses shown in this report are suggestive and not inferential – similar to that of a focus group.

With input from Wichita State University's Center for Economic and Business Research, the Docking Institute designed an interview schedule to assess industry leaders' perceptions of strengths and weaknesses of their cluster's workforce quality and supply in Kansas, types of training on basic and industry-specific skills most needed among new hires, and anticipated growth in cluster workforce needs over the next 10-15 years.

Findings

The first few questions of the interview ask the respondent to estimate the number of workers that fall into each of these categories:

- Clerical workers and office support staff
- White-collar professionals like executives and sales (but not engineers, designers, etc...)
- Engineers, designers, and similar positions that require advanced degrees as entry level requirements
- High-skilled blue-collar workers that are specially trained or learned their current jobs through years of on-the-job-training
- Low-skilled and semi-skilled blue-collar workers

The percentages provided by each employer for each category were collected. Figure 1 shows the aggregation of the percentages for each job category. The figure shows that more than half of the employees of the advanced manufacturing companies interviewed are low- and semi-skilled blue collar workers. White-collar professions, clerical workers, and high-skilled blue-collar workers make up 11%, 12%, and 16% of the workforces of the advanced manufacturers interviewed. Four percent are engineers, designers, and others working in fields where advanced degrees are required.

Figure 1: Aggregation of Percentages of Workers

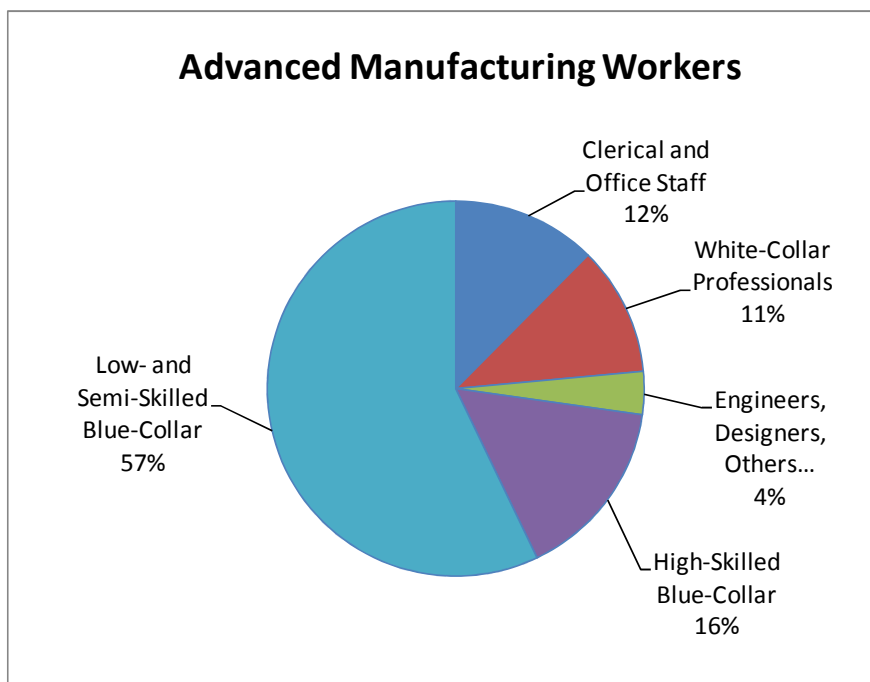


Figure 2 shows the responses to questions addressing the supply of workers available for hire. The answer options are shown in the legend in the upper-right corner of the figure. The figure shows that, of the employers interviewed, six suggest that there is generally an abundant supply of low- and semi-skilled blue collar workers. However, five employers suggest that there was a large shortage of these types of workers.

Nine employers suggest there is an adequate supply of clerical workers and office support staff. Eight employers suggest that there is a small shortage of these workers.

Six employers suggest the there is an adequate supply of high-skill blue-collar workers, but five suggest there is a small shortage and four indicate that there is a large shortage.

Regarding engineers and designers, 11 employers suggest that there is small shortage and three suggest a large shortage.

Finally, 10 employers suggest that there is a small shortage of white-collar professionals and five suggest there is an adequate supply.

Figure 2: Supply of Workers

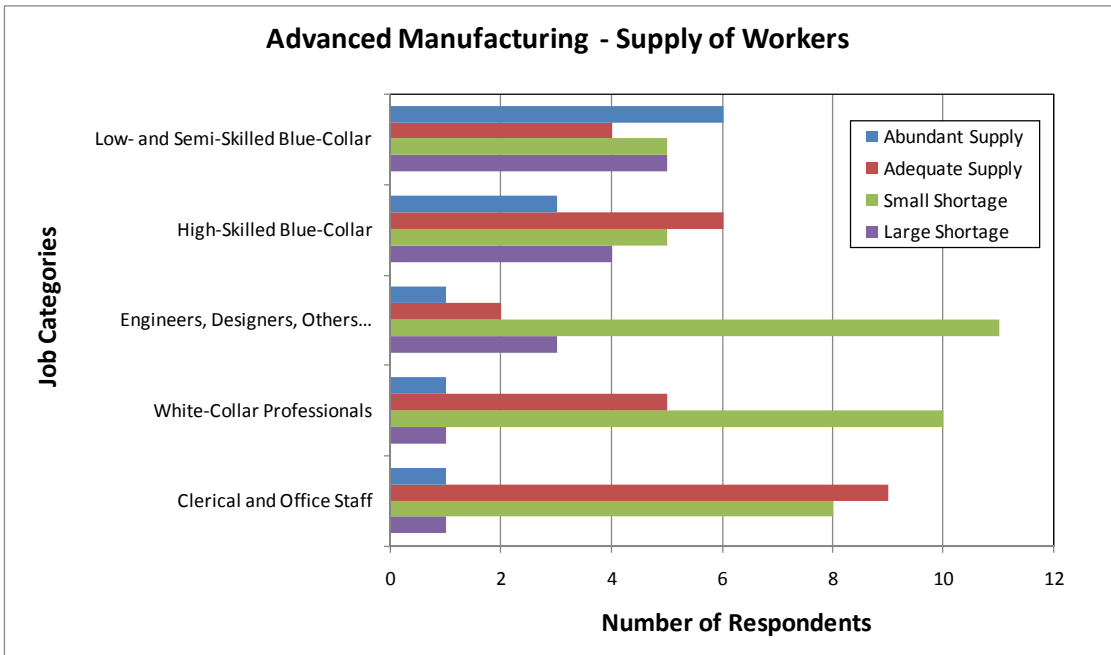


Figure 3 shows responses to questions addressing the ease of hiring workers today compared to five years ago. The figure suggests that employer perceive that it is more difficult to hire new workers today. A few employers suggest that it is easier to hire low- and semi-skilled blue-collar workers and high-skilled blue-collar workers today.

Figure 3: Ease of Hiring New Workers

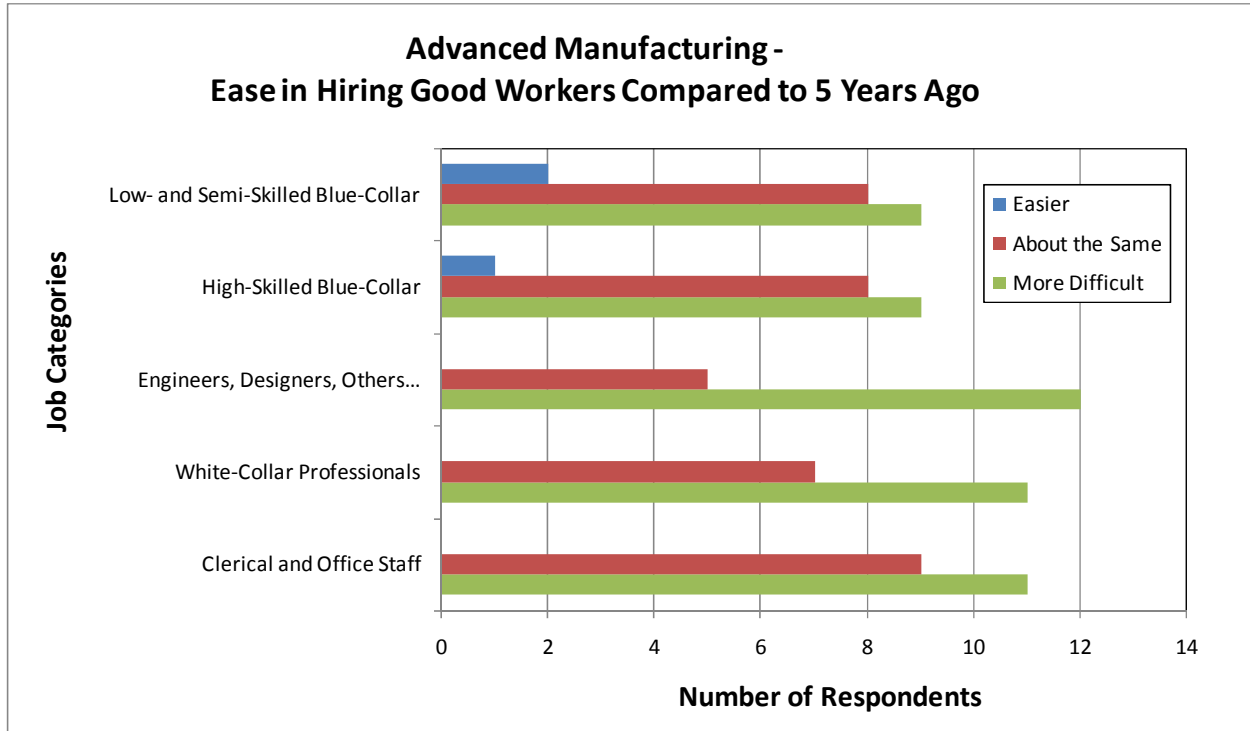
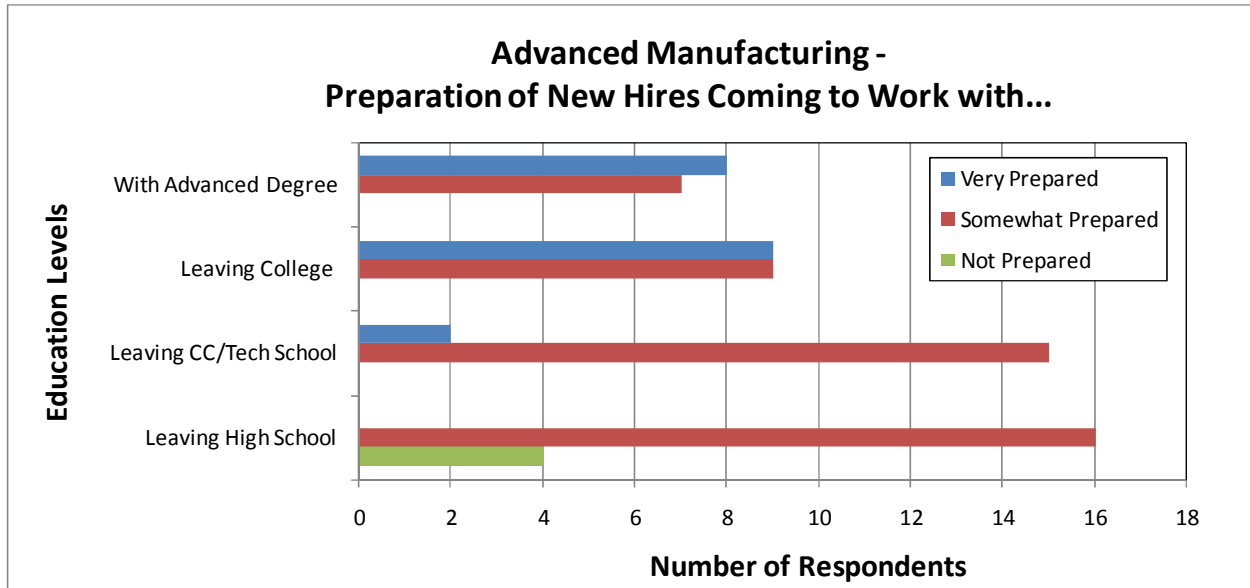


Figure 4 shows the responses to questions addressing the preparation of new hires that have recently graduate from high school, community college or tech school, or college. The figure also shows the preparedness level of employers with advanced degrees. The figure suggests that four employers find employees to be unprepared for their workplace upon leaving high school.

Nine employers suggest that college graduate are very prepared for the workplace, but nine also suggest they are somewhat prepared.

Figure 4: Preparation for New Hire



Tables 1 thru 3 provide responses from “open-ended” questions. Each table includes the question(s) asked of respondents as well as the responses grouped into themes. The answers are ordered by most prevalent first.

Table 1 shows that reading and writing skills are areas needing improvement among high school graduate and community college and technical school graduates. Improvement of fundamental mathematical skills and work ethic skills is needed among all three student groups, according to employers.

Table 1: Skills and Skill Sets Lacking or Needing Improvement

Thinking of skills or skill sets needed at the workplace, are there certain skills that _____ seem to lack or that could be improved upon?		
High School Graduates	Community College or Technical School Graduates	Four Year, Advanced, and Specialized Degree Holders
1. Fundamental Reading/Writing Skills	1. Fundamental Reading/Writing Skills	1. Practical Application of Education
2. Fundamental Mathematical Skills	2. Fundamental Mathematical Skills	2. Fundamental Mathematical Skills
3. Fundamental Keyboarding/Computing Skills	3. Fundamental Keyboarding/Computing Skills	3. Software Knowledge/Experience
4. Shop Class/Trade Skills-Welding, Design	4. Interpersonal Communication Skills	4. Interpersonal Communication Skills
5. Work Ethic/ Willingness to Learn	5. Work Ethic/Company Loyalty	5. Work Ethic/Company Loyalty

Table 2 shows responses to a question asking out needed training for current and future workers that the public education system might appropriately address. Basic keyboarding and computer operation skills are most often mentioned by respondents. Skills relating to knowledge of purchase orders and invoices are also mentioned items.

Table 2: Training Needs that Public Education Might Address

When thinking about new AND current workers, do you have industry-specific training needs that the public education system might appropriately address?
1. Basic Keyboarding/Computer Skills
2. Knowledge of Purchase Orders and Invoices
3. AutoCad
4. English as a Second Language
5. General Clerical Skills
6. Manual Press and Molding
7. Industrial Fiberglass Arts
8. Professional Etiquette

Table 3 shows the response to a question about training needs 10-15 years in the future. The table shows that many of the anticipated needs are the same as those listed in Table 1. Employers seem to suggest that employees currently lack reading and writing skills, mathematical skills, and keyboarding skills, for example, and that these will be problem areas in the future.

Table 3: Training Needs in 10-15 Years

Thinking about your industry in the next 10-15 years, in what areas do you think future employees will need additional training or improvement?
1. Improved Reading and Writing Skills
2. Improved Mathematical Skills
3. Keyboarding/End-User Software Skills
4. IT Skills
5. Customer Service Training
6. Interpersonal Communication Skills
7. Improved Grammar
8. Safety Training
9. English as a Second Language

Finally, Table 4 shows some quotations from the interviews.

Table 4: Quotes from Interview Respondents

Additional comments regarding workforce training.
"Today's graduates seem to have a sense of entitlement, and a lack of company loyalty."
"Graduates do not seem to possess a willingness to work hard, take direction, or commit to a position."
"One of the biggest challenges companies face is an unwillingness of qualified applicants to relocate."