

# Industry Leader Interviews

## Construction

Docking Institute of Public Affairs

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## **Methods**

Docking Institute of Public Affairs personnel interviewed leaders from construction companies in the State of Kansas from June 16 to June 26, 2008. Construction companies were identified using North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS). The list of construction companies to contact for interviewing was obtained from the Kansas Department of Labor. Fourteen 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 almost half (45%) of the employees of the construction companies interviewed are low- and semi-skilled blue-collar workers, and more than a quarter (28%) are also high-skilled blue-collar workers. Clerical workers, white-collar professionals, and engineers/designers make up 13%, 13%, and 1% of the workers, respectively.

**Figure 1: Aggregation of Percentages of Workers**

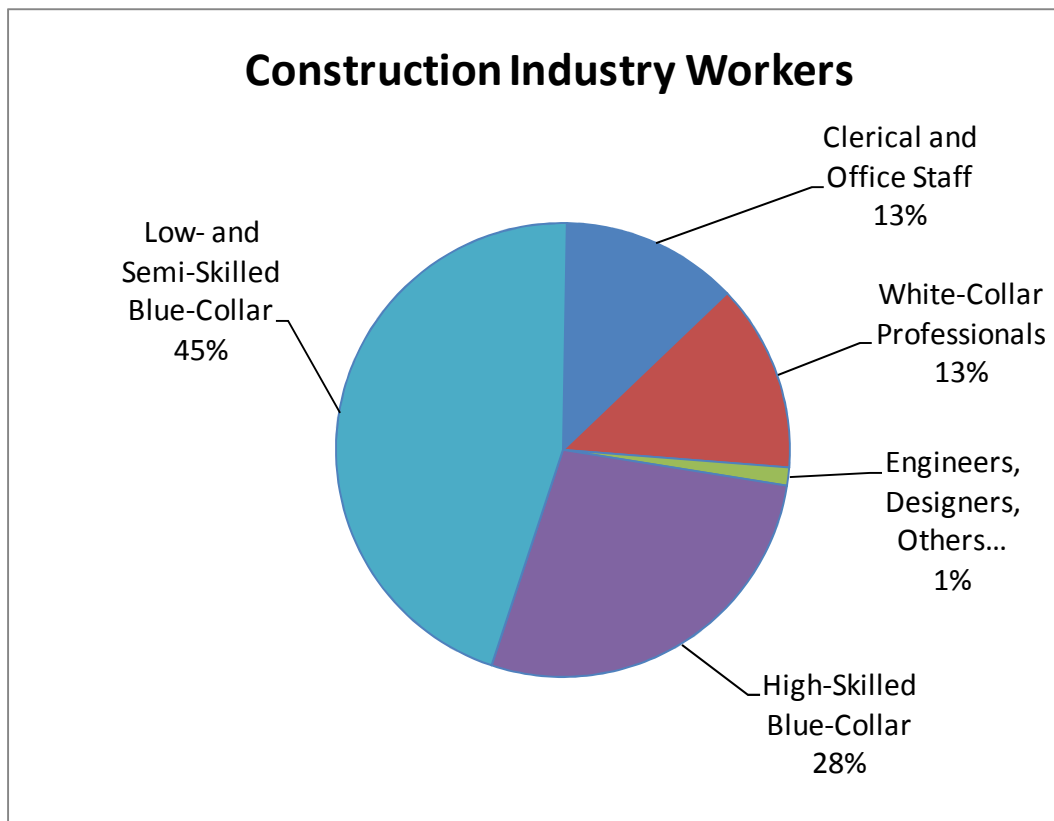


Figure 2 shows the responses to questions addressing the supply of workers available for hire. The answer options are shown in the legend in the right of the figure. The figure shows that, of the employers interviewed, four suggest that there is a large shortage of low- and semi-skilled blue collar workers and three suggest that there is an adequate supply of these types of workers. None suggest that there is an abundant supply.

Four employers suggest that there is small shortage of high-skilled blue-collar workers. Three employers suggest that there is a large shortage and three suggest that there is an adequate supply of these types of workers. No employers suggest that there is an abundant supply of high-skilled blue-collar construction workers.

Three employers suggest that there is an adequate supply of engineers and designers.

Seven respondents suggest that there is an adequate supply of white-collar professions, while two indicate that there is a small shortage and two suggest a large shortage of these types of workers.

Finally, eight employers suggest that there is an adequate supply of clerical and office staff, while three suggest there is a small shortage and two suggest there is a large shortage of these types of workers. None suggest there is an abundant supply of clerical and office support workers.

**Figure 2: Supply of Workers**

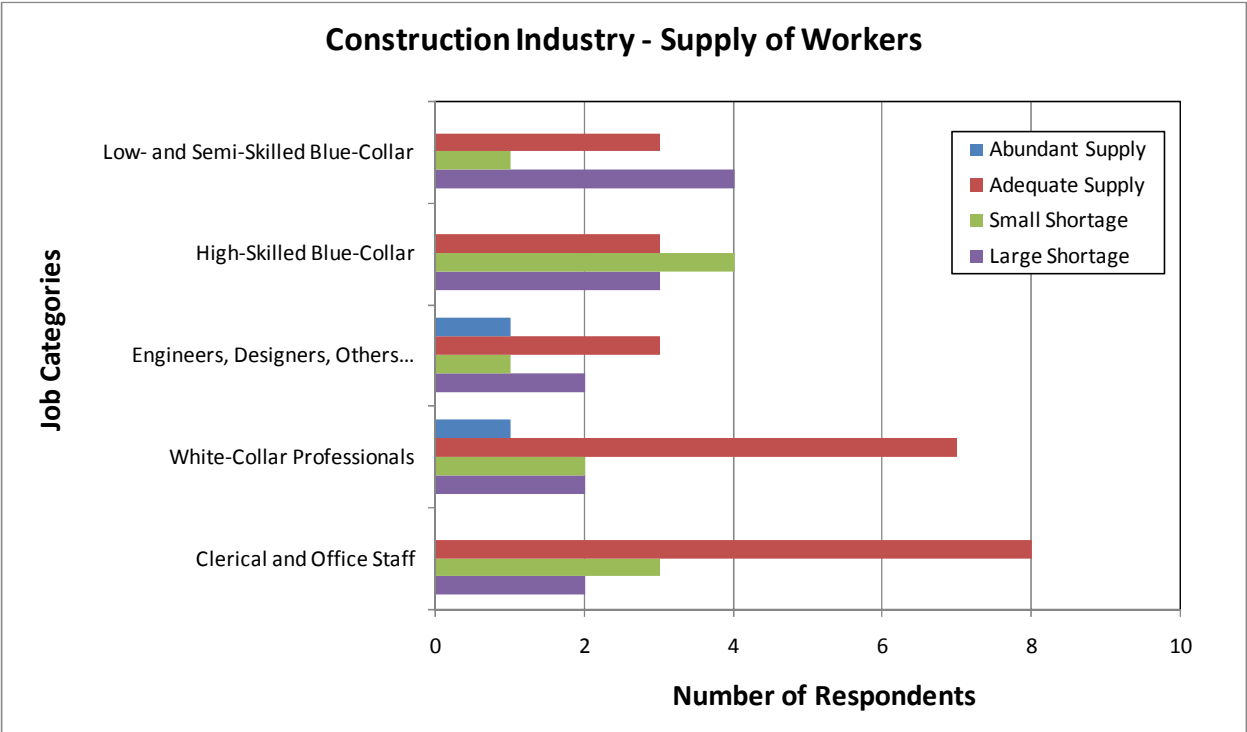


Figure 3 shows responses to questions addressing the ease of hiring workers today compared to five years ago. The figure suggests that employers generally perceive that it is more difficult or about the same to hire new good workers across the board for all types of workers.

One employer suggests that it is easier to hire good white-collar workers and clerical and office staff, each.

**Figure 3: Ease of Hiring New Workers**

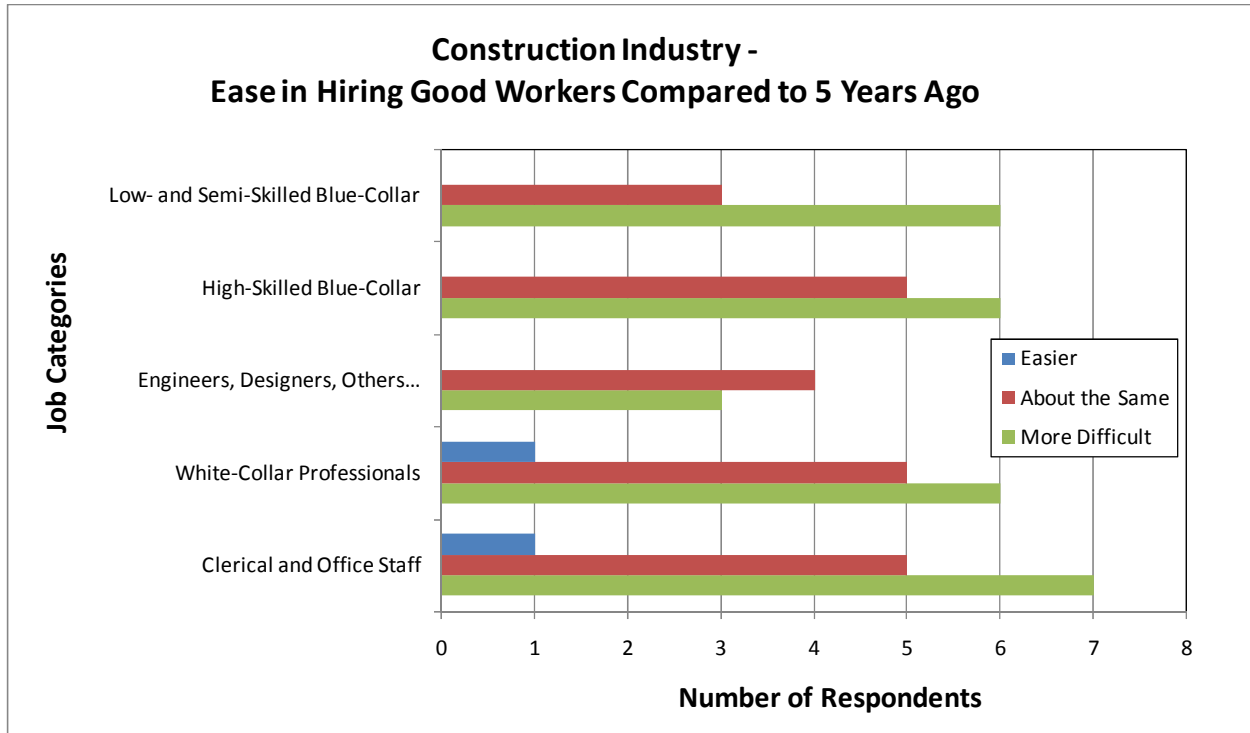
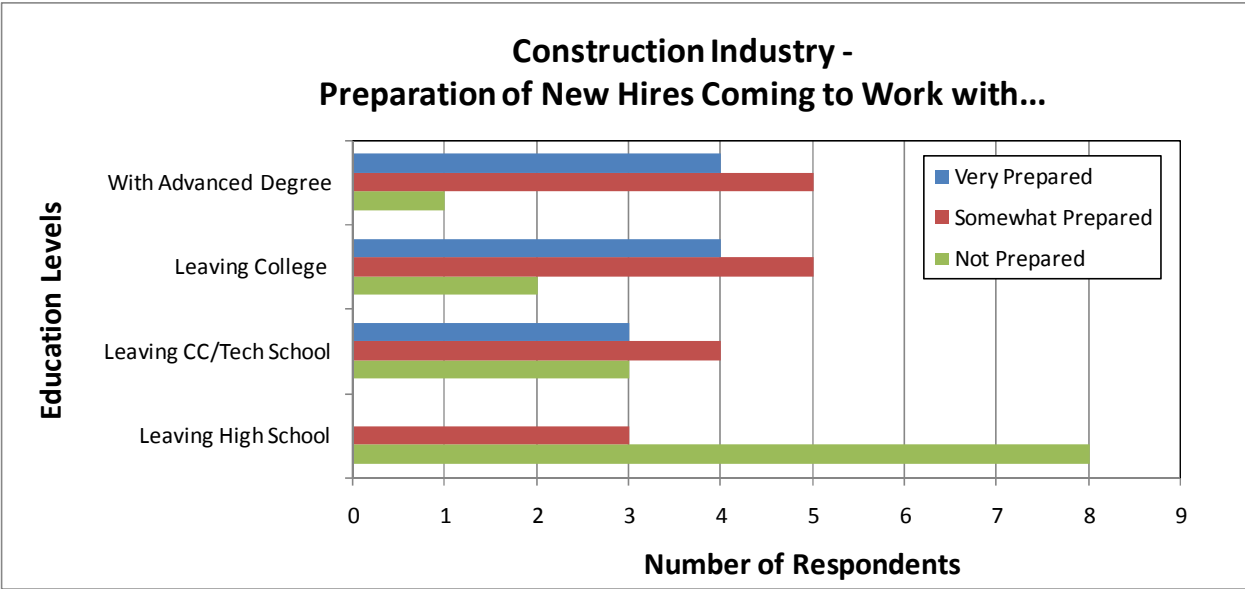


Figure 4 shows the responses to questions addressing the preparation of new hires that have recently graduated from high school, community college or tech school, or college. The figure also shows the preparedness level of employers with advanced degrees.

The figure shows that four employers each find employees with advanced degrees as very prepared, four employers find college graduates and community college/tech school graduates as very prepared, and three employers find community college/technical school graduates as very prepared for the workplace.

Eight employers find high school graduates as not prepared for the workplace.

**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 math skills are mentioned as areas needing improvement among high school graduates. Work ethics and welding are mentioned as two areas needing improvement among community college and technical school graduates. Writing skills and social interaction skills are mentioned as two areas needing improvement among college graduates.

**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
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reading Skills and Math Skills</li> <li>2. Punctuality/Arriving Prepared for Work</li> <li>3. Work Ethics/Workplace Behavior for Site</li> <li>4. Basic Equipment Operation</li> <li>5. Social Skill/ Interaction Skills/Team Work</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Work Ethics</li> <li>2. Welding Skills</li> <li>3. Practical Application of Skills</li> <li>4. Social Skills/Interaction Skills</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Writing Skills</li> <li>2. Social Skills/Interaction Skills</li> <li>3. Workplace Behavior for Office/Corporate Environment</li> </ol>

Table 2 shows responses to a question asking about needed training for current and future workers that the public education system might appropriately address. Basic skills in hand tool operation, knowledge of the construction process and industry, and welding skills are the top three areas that employers feel the public school system might address. Work ethics/workplace behavior and team work skills are also areas mentioned by employers.

**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?
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Basic Skills in Hand Tool Operation</li> <li>2. Basic Knowledge of Construction Process/Industry</li> <li>3. Welding Skills/Other Machine Skills</li> <li>4. Reading, Writing and Math</li> <li>5. Work Ethics/Workplace Behavior</li> <li>6. Teamwork Skills</li> </ol>

Table 3 shows the response to a question about training needs 10-15 years in the future. The table shows that employers suggest that employees will need training in work ethics and responsibility, and social skills, interaction skills, and team work, are areas in which employees will need training in the future.

Employers also mention reading, writing, and math, and computer skills as areas in which employees will need training 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. Work Ethics/Responsibility
2. Social Skills/Interaction Skills/Teamwork Skills
3. Construction Industry Process and Operation
4. Reading, Writing, and Math
5. Computer Skills

Finally, Table 4 shows some quotations from the interviews.

**Table 4: Quotes from Interview Respondents**

Additional comments regarding workforce training.
"Most technical school graduates cannot pass our welding test. This area needs improvement."
"Today's culture does not promote an understanding of corporate expectations and appropriate behaviors."
"All people need to be proficient with computers, more and more blue collar workers need to have these skills."