Increasing the Number of Tradeswomen at UBC

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COMM 468

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Increasing the Number of Tradeswomen at UBC

UBC Building Operations and UBC SEEDS Program

Commerce 468 – Marketing Applications Keystone Project Report
April 7th 2014

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The critical issue that the University of British Columbia Building Operations (UBCBO) is faced with is one of social sustainability - increasing the number of female tradespeople within the organization to reach the provincial average of 5%. An internal review of UBC’s current hiring processes did not reveal any systemic issues to the underrepresentation of females in the trades workforce.

Research in the form of one-on-one interviews with both female and male tradespeople currently employed at UBCBO provided in-depth information into the ways that these tradespeople had heard about UBCBO, as well as their reasons for remaining with the employer. Further analysis led to the finding that the low female participation rate came as a result of a lack of awareness about UBCBO as an employer.

This recruitment-marketing plan is geared towards increasing the awareness of UBCBO as an employer for certified tradespeople. First, the issue of brand management is tackled - UBCBO needs to realign key advertising materials to strengthen the employer brand of diversity. This realignment is in response to literature review findings that women judge the diversity of a workplace based on inconspicuous aspects of the advertising message.

To generate leads and spread information regarding new job postings, UBCBO needs to utilize social media outlets, particularly Twitter. A new Twitter account would link UBCBO to the BC trade certification schools, thus creating interaction between newly certified tradespeople and UBCBO. A physical presence through workshops at trade certification schools would be used to raise a general awareness of UBCBO as an employer of skilled female tradespeople.

Once employer brand management and lead generation are underway, UBCBO needs to make sure that potential female tradespeople follow through with applications. The wording of job postings pertaining to skilled tradespeople positions needs to be re-evaluated to become comparable to those of competitors in terms of length, density, and positioning of key statements. As a last note, UBCBO needs to review the policies that are preventing the hire of external apprentices – it is understood that this is a complex issue, but research has shown the many benefits of this program in retaining top talent across the trades.
SITUATION ANALYSIS

CATEGORY/INDUSTRY DEFINITION

When thinking about a career in skilled trades, many people believe that it consists of custodian or unskilled laborers. Trades, however, refer to the completion of an educational program that trains, in both the classroom and onsite, and requires a strong foundation of math, reading and critical thinking. Once the education is completed, trades-people are certified with a red seal, and are certified to a Canadian standard. Generally, trades fall into four main categories: construction, transportation, manufacturing and services. As well, there are more than 200 different types of trades across Canada.

CATEGORY ANALYSIS

A career in trades provides opportunity, competitive wages in the short and long term, job security, and employment satisfaction for apprenticeship completers, compared to non-completers and graduates of other technical programs. Being in skilled trades means playing an integral role in the economy and society. Canada is dependent on these skilled tradespeople working in the designated trades in order to keep the country going. There are a lot of opportunities that come with being in trades. With the hundreds of different categories to choose from, it could suit the needs and interests of many different individuals. It combines both, on-the-job training and in-school learning, giving apprentices experience and providing them with skills to work in many different fields.

TRADESWOMEN

Currently, given a provincial average of 5%, UBCBO has a below average female representation within their workforce (Statistics Canada, 2014). Within the next two year UBCBO is looking to meet the provincial average by hiring additional skilled tradeswomen. The group of women that UBCBO is trying to attract are already living in the Lower Mainland as the cost of relocation may not be feasible for candidates outside the Vancouver area. The customers identified are red seal certified tradeswomen looking for desirable career opportunities. UBC hires for job-specific vacancies and does not look to bring in apprentices, thus stressing the readily skilled, red seal certified workers.

COMPANY ANALYSIS

UBC prides itself in being a leader in the sustainable revolution. Since 1990, UBC has been a living laboratory, achieving national recognition for successes such as reaching Kyoto targets on schedule, pioneering the u-pass, and attaining an ‘A-level’ rating in the Sustainable Endowment Institute’s Green Report Card. The sustainability initiatives that have been previously implemented tend to revolve around three key pillars: social sustainability, environmental sustainability and economic sustainability. Often, sustainable initiatives are implemented by the student body as students from all faculty take part in campus initiatives to fulfill UBC’s ambitious goal of being the national driver of societal change. UBC’s Social
Ecological Economic Development Studies (SEEDS) Program is the main touch point for students looking to make a sustainable change while earning course credits at the university. Since 2000, the SEEDS Program has worked with over 4500 students, and produced over 800 sustainability initiative reports.

UBC as an institution has developed a uniform guideline for all university departments to use during the hiring and recruitment process. This process consists of various steps to maintain uniformity in the overall hiring process as well as steps to avoid recruitment biases, maintain equality and ensure the inclusion of minority groups. UBC’s recruitment guide include progresses to be followed through pre-recruitment, preparation and placing the advertisement, choosing and maintaining lack of bias in the selection committee, the general guidelines of the selection process and identifying the successful candidate. The university also suggests departments to use Equity Employment Surveys (EES) to track diversity in their searches. UBC provides examples of such surveys links for the departments to be able to create one. Hence, the university does take extensive measures to ensure their hiring process is just, uniform amongst departments and free of any form of discrimination against minorities. After the recruitment process, there is a standard procedure for conflict resolution and management for all employees at UBC. Each department at UBC has a HR Advisor available to talk about any issues an employee may face and acts as a source of coaching, advice and assistance. This is a very common procedure adopted by most employers.

Statistics for female applications appear promising on first look. At 7.58% in 2012, the percentage of total female applicants to trades position at UBC is in line with the industry average. However, once landscape technicians & landscape technologist are taken out of the equation a mere 5.28% of applicants were female. At the next stage of the hiring process, the interview, it can be noted that 11.36% of qualified individuals interviewed in 2012 were females. This shows a strong effort to increase female labor force participation; however, the statistics is skewed slightly by the number of females applying to be landscape technicians and landscape technologists. Ignoring this specific trade, none of the individuals interviewed in 2012 were female. This 0% application rate is a result of potential applicants lacking required qualifications.

**COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS**

There is great demand for female talent, given the limited supply of skilled female tradespeople. Therefore, generous compensation packages as well as a diverse and safe work environment are required to attain top skill. There are several immediate competitors of UBCBO which offer similar work experiences, benefits and schedules. The cities of Vancouver, Richmond, and Abbotsford offer similar experiences for landscape technicians, painters, utility workers, and sign makers. BC Hydro, PWL, Fortis BC and Rona Canada are all listed as top diversity employers for women and minorities in carpentry, electrical, and plumbing. An initiative by SPARC (Social Planning and Research Council of BC, 2012), which UBC was not a part of, developed case studies of employers that are leading diversity trends in Vancouver.

A recent study(Mossop, 2013)of British Columbian workers identified Fortis BC, BC Hydro, and the City of Vancouver as ‘Dream Employers’. UBC was also on this list. While this
study did not specify which departments of these Dream Employers were weighted most heavily, it is apparent that there is stiff competition for UBC for top talent in Vancouver.

**PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS**

Given that UBCBO is a unionized employer, there were barriers and limitations within the scope of the project that need to be respected. The current union regulations were outside of the scope of our ability to influence change, and therefore, any recommendation regarding union regulations or the apprenticeship program could not physically be enacted within the immediate future. Another assumption we made, in discussion with the client, was the lack of significant budget increase involved in any of our recommendations. In our research and suggestions, no recommendation could require an increase to the current UBCBO budget. The last assumption our group made in regards to the UBCBO project was that the department followed the overarching systemic policies and regulations governed by the University of British Columbia as a whole. The university takes great measures to ensure equality and non-discrimination within its policies, and the UBCBO adheres to the same quality and ethical standard.

**GOAL**

In an effort to increase social sustainability, UBCBO wants to meet or surpass provincial standards in relation to Human Resource practices. The specific goal we will focus on is increasing the percentage of female tradespeople working at UBCBO to the provincial average of 5% in two years.

**INTERVIEWS AND ASSOCIATED FINDINGS**

To gain insight on the attitudes, opinions and behaviors of current employees, we conducted eight interviews with trades workers currently employed by UBCBO. Of these interviews, four were with females employees and four were with males (see appendix 2 for a full list of the questions asked). Key findings from these interviews include; reasons for choosing UBCBO as an employer, the main reason for low female application rates, and the importance of apprenticeship programs in increasing female labor force participation rates. Additionally, it was noted that no significant barriers to females in the labor force were perceived by either male or female interviewees.

When asked "why did you chose UBC over another similar employer", female employees collectively mentioned how they strongly valued the job stability, benefits and pension provided by UBC. Additionally, the opportunity for advancement and potential for promotion were also strong determinants for their choice of UBC as an employer.

Another significant finding was that all applicants interviewed found out about their position through some means other than the job board itself; including referrals from friends and
family members and apprenticeship programs. This leads us to believe that one key reason for low female application rates is awareness. By focusing on promoting career opportunities, UBCBO can increase the number of total applicants to trades positions. An increase in total applications will, by default, increase the number of female applicants therefore providing an opportunity to increase female labor force participation rates. Secondly, this finding emphasizes the importance of apprenticeship programs in increase the number of female trades workers employed by UBCBO.

In summary, the eight interviews conducted with currently employed trades-workers at UBCBO allowed us to deduce key reasons for low female application rates, key advertising deliverables and other strategic opportunities available to UBC going forward, these items will be discussed further later in this report. Some additional suggestions that arise during these interviews were to invest in protective equipment in female sizes and shorten the length of the hiring process for landscape technicians.

**RECRUITMENT MARKETING STRATEGY**

**BRAND MANAGEMENT**

*Development of Long-Term Career*

UBCBO has done little to engage with employees and promote their employer brand. An employer brand is the image that potential employees hold of an employer. It is generally reflective of the company culture, and is generated by current employees. Employers are not necessarily in control of their employer brand, but they can influence aspects of future marketing campaigns to highlight aspects of the work environment.

At UBCBO, employees work consistent schedules at one location. This is a point of differentiation from traditional trades-oriented work environments, such as construction sites, which require employees to commute to various project locations and work overtime to meet strict building deadlines. The consistent work schedule, coupled with predictability of work, is central to UBCBO’s current brand. In conducting our primary research, we noted that women repeatedly state that ‘work-life balance is an important factor in their choice of a career’. In general, women still hold a majority of family-care responsibility and seek stability to ensure that they can support others - tradeswomen are no exception. In addition to the stable schedule, women valued the ability to be home early in the evening. Interviewed employees brought this aspect of UBCBO frequently, leading to the conclusion that this is a key aspect of UBCBO’s employer brand.

Beyond career stability and consistent work schedules, UBCBO is able to offer employees a wide variety of opportunities to enhance their well-being. UBCBO can boast competitive wages, extended health and benefit plans, and annual educational credits for tradespeople.
Employer brands can also be communicated subtly through imagery and wording used in advertisements, job postings, and online interactions. Women have expressed how advertisements showcasing the diversity of a recruiter’s workforce give significant clues as to the entire working environment of the employer – those that highlight diversity in a natural way are perceived to have the most inclusive environments (MacIsaac, 2012). Women, minority, and disabled workers are portrayed in UBCBO’s current marketing materials, however they are shown to be working traditional jobs, unskilled jobs, or office jobs. These portrayals don’t hurt the brand of UBC or UBCBO, but they can implicitly signal to jobseekers that the trades department of UBCBO is looking for males to fill the positions.

**LEAD GENERATION**

**RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

Social media platforms, such as Twitter and LinkedIn, create a platform for employers and brands to connect with their communities, customers, and clients in an informal setting. It is a valuable tool used by many companies as a means to increase reach when advertising job openings. UBC’s Information Technology department has used Twitter as a tool to advocate for open positions under the handle @UBCITcareers, effectively streamlining the positions to one area. This Twitter account is used exclusively to tweet job postings. This allows potential applicants an avenue to communicate directly with the department at UBC that they are interested in, as opposed to being distracted by the clutter of a university wide account. The last active tweet was in July of 2012.

As of September 2013, 73% of online adults use social networking sites\(^1\), including; Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Additionally, 78% of female internet users use social media sites, as opposed to the 69% of male users. LinkedIn and Twitter are the most common platforms used to advocate for jobs, and as of September 2013, 22% of online adults used LinkedIn and 18% used Twitter\(^2\). By utilizing social networking sites to promote open positions within UBCBO, it eliminates much of the search time and required participation from potential applicants. By taking the positions to the potential applicants, the awareness rate of UBC as a trades employer increases, as those who are qualified for the positions have the postings presented to them in their daily activity as opposed to having to directly search for UBC as a trades employer.

The use of Twitter to push postings to UBCBO’s target market is an avenue that is easily implemented and incurs low costs. For this reasons, at the end of this report, we have presented a recommendation as to how UBCBO can more effectively use Twitter to penetrate their target market and reach potential applicants.

**PHYSICAL RECRUITMENT**

It became apparent from the interview sessions that current employees became aware of UBCBO in a variety of ways. The most predominant introduction was through word of mouth from friends, family members, and coworkers in previous jobs. Some people were directed to the
position postings on the online job boards. Referrals from educational institutions, such as BCIT, were also found to have been informative about UBCBO as an employer.

It is required by UBC that UBCBO post all job posting on the online job board. However, this alone was not found to be the most common method used by current employees in discovering their positions. Limiting communication of potential job offerings to one source - the website - is found to hinder the spread of information about that posting.

A strong case study was reviewed as secondary research with regards to physical recruitment. Hawaii’s Women in Technology Program (Andrews) demonstrated how to increase the number of female workers within a skilled labor organization. The ‘Leadership Training Workshop’ helped increase the number of women in registered apprenticeships in the whole state of Hawaii by 59% from 2001 to 2003 (Andrews). This case study relied heavily on creating a physical presence in the community to spread awareness of position openings. Workshops and booting were the primary methods used, through which the organization found success in connecting one on one with program applicants. Applicants felt they better knew what the job would require, and it incentivized them to become involved.

**LEAD NURTURING**

**IMPROVEMENT OF CURRENT JOB POSTINGS**

The purpose of analyzing UBCBO’s job postings was to determine if they were effective in attempting to attract tradeswomen. While UBC has clear guidelines for writing the postings, there are certain measures that must be taken in order to ensure females are encouraged to apply. Non-discriminatory language should be the first and most important consideration on the writer’s mind. If females perceive a male dominated culture through the language used in the posting, such as the use of ‘tradesmen’, they are more likely to act cautiously when evaluating the employer brand.

Additionally, job summaries need to be short and concise, and tell the reader exactly what this job entails. It is important to avoid long, drawn out paragraphs and keep the posting simple. Bullet points or numbering is an effective way to communicate key points while keeping description, tasks and required qualification clear and concise. Furthermore, the posting itself should not take a long time for the reader to get through. Shortening postings will provide an effective way to keep the reader engaged and they will have a better understanding of what is expected of them.

Some key takeaways from the analyses include the following: the works performed sections are extremely detailed and had approximately twenty points. While it is important for potential recruits to know what is expected of them, this seemed to be too long and could potentially be overwhelming to read. This area could be summarized, or even discussed further, in the job interview. The qualifications section was one large paragraph that was difficult to read; this could be broken down into bullet points or numbering to highlight important features. Next,
we found that under the “works performed” section, it jumped to responsibilities of the position, and then back to works performed. This was confusing to read and we suggest that “responsibilities of the position” should have its own section after the ‘works performed’ section. Furthermore, the bullet points should be congruent with the rest of the posting i.e.: 1,2,3,4… a, b, c, d… bullet points, etc. Finally, and perhaps the most important point, is the positioning of the “UBC hires on the basis of…” statement. After a long job posting, this is highlighted at the bottom of the page. It might be worth to see the effect of re-posting this to the top of the page, so that it is the first thing that potential recruits see. This could potentially lead to more applications from target recruits given the individuals are made aware of UBCs emphasized importance on equity hiring.

**APPRENTICESHIP AS AN ISSUE**

According to Statistics Canada 14% of apprentices within Canada's trade industry in 2011 were female (Statistics Canada, 2014). This is significantly larger than the 6.4% female trades workers within the total industry (Statistics Canada, 2014). Specific to BC the percentage of female apprentices is slightly lower, at 11%, however, it is still significantly above the proportion of female trade workers currently employed within the industry (Statistics Canada, 2014). These statistics, in addition to our previous observation, that 3 out of 4 UBCBO trades women interviewed came to UBCBO either directly or indirectly as a result of the apprenticeship training program, highlight the importance of apprenticeship programs in increasing the total number of female trades workers at UBCBO.

If UBCBO is not willing to take on external apprentices at the present time this option should still be kept in mind and potentially implemented at a later date. Foregoing the opportunity to increase the number of females within the workplace through apprenticeship programs means UBCBO may miss out on talented individuals as they are already 'snatched up' by other employers. Additionally, it puts UBCBO at a disadvantage because the pool of applicants they are selecting from contains a decreased number of qualified female employees.

To successfully implement an apprenticeship program aimed at increasing the number of female trades workers, UBC should look to recruit directly from academic institutions such as BCIT and Thompson Rivers University. Attendance at career fairs will help increase awareness of UBCBO's job postings while serving as a potential screening round for qualified candidates. Utilizing external job board such as BCIT's internal student job posting board would also be beneficial in recruiting top-notch female apprentices.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**RECOMMENDATION 1 - PROMOTION MATERIAL**

In order to attract top tradespeople, UBCBO needs to highlight the long-term focus and opportunity for career development. To communicate these differentiation points, UBCBO must create promotional material in the form of ‘testimonials’ and ‘reason to believe’ stories. Current
employees, with a focus on female, minority, and disabled skilled trades-people should talk about their career development, and the reasons why they have chosen a career with UBCBO. Another beneficial step would be to ask female tradespeople for their participation in creating marketing materials, such as their appearance on website banners, brochures or social media campaigns. Lastly, we suggest updating the advertising imagery and encouraging the use of female tradespeople in the photos as they are engaged in actual aspects of their jobs including using tools, driving machinery and working in a team.

**Recommendation 2 - Twitter Handle Creation**

A Twitter handle for UBCBO would allow for increased penetration of the job market while allowing UBCBO to share relevant information with targeted individuals. Additionally, a specific twitter handle would allow UBCBO to differentiate themselves from UBC as a recruiting department. Potential handles that could be used for the Building Operations account are: @UBCBO, @UBCBuildingOps, @UBCBuildOps. If UBCBO can successfully implement a twitter handle, they have access to close to 35,000 individuals associated with the schools that certify trades people and over 150,000 followers by some of the relevant Vancouver accounts. Given that our research indicated awareness as being a key driver of the low percentage of female applicants, having an instantaneous, clutter free platform to push out job postings would directly and indirectly correlate to an increase in the awareness of the position, as well as add an avenue for potential applicants to engage with and learn relevant information before applying.

**Recommendation 3 - Physical Recruitment**

UBCBO must develop a physical presence in the greater Vancouver employment community in order to spread awareness of the opportunities available to potential applicants. A physical presence would have a three-pronged approach to reach qualified individuals who would suit the position; directly contacting the tradesperson, connecting with someone who may later refer the tradesperson to UBCBO, and establishing awareness with instructors who help guide apprentices through their later careers. Venues such as career fairs, industry tradeshows, and women’s centers are strong locations to start - over time, UBCBO will gain experience as to which specific venues or events garner the right attention and reach the right women, but until then a blanket approach is recommended. Since women are the target market, it is recommended that at least one of the UBCBO employees present at the event be a female tradesperson. This creates a salient image of the diversity of UBCBO, and gives other women an opportunity to learn about the company culture from a source similar to them.

While engaging with people at these venues, it is considered best practice to have promotional material readily available. Flyers, updated with our employer brand management suggestions, give potential applicants material to review after the interaction. It also gives insight into the employer brand credited through employee testimonials. Business cards of female
tradespeople, who might be willing to interact at a later date with potential female applicants, should be available for people who want to follow up. Booth knick-knacks, such as pens and notepads branded with the UBCBO logo and website information, create an easy introduction to a conversation with passing individuals.

**RECOMMENDATION 4 - RE-EVALUATING THE APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM**

Modification to the current apprenticeship program at UBCBO will allow for the company to increase the number of employed female trades workers with greater ease. Currently, when an apprenticeship opportunity arises, priority must be given to internal hires. This limitation means that UBCBO forgoes the valuable opportunity of training female trades workers and developing life-long employment relationships. As result, we recommend that UBCBO immediately begin revising union regulations in order to take advantage of the increased number of females currently attending trades schools and participating in apprenticeship programs.

Once these regulations have been modified, UBCBO should look to promote the apprenticeship program to various trades-schools within BC. University career fairs will serve as one of the most effective means of reaching the target market, increasing awareness of the apprenticeship program, and pre-screening potential applicants. Additionally, given that individuals attending these institutions are currently living in BC, they are most likely to remain in this location and therefore stay on with UBCBO after completing of the apprenticeship program.

**FINANCIALS**

Our financial numbers come from research into different activities and ideas that are part of our final recommendations. Taken to mind that there is not a large financial budget to work with, we believe that these options are the most feasible.

Firstly, a one-day exhibitor package to the BCIT careers fair will costs $650 plus GST. This option gives UBCBO the physical presence at the career fair they need to actively engage. The exhibitor package comes with a draped tradeshow booth inclusive of tables and chairs, exhibitor profile and logo in the Careers Fair Student Handbook, exhibitor profile and logo on the Careers Fair website that has a link to the careers section of your corporate website, one job posting on eJobs, and a continental breakfast and lunch (British Columbia Institute of Technology, 2014).

Furthermore, we believe that posting jobs on the BCIT job board (eJobs) will prove beneficial in attracting the target market. BCIT charges $60 per post which stays active for 21 days. They charge a resume downloading fee of $10 to download resumes of applicants to your position. This will include up to 20 resumes for a 30 day period. Statistical data to highlight the benefits of this program shows that each job receives an average of 70 hits by students and that
eJobs averages over 300 qualified resumes per month (British Columbia Institute of Technology, 2014)

Our further costs would include a photo-shoot for re-shooting promotional materials to use in flyers and UBCBO web pages. The estimated cost for the photographer, materials and developing of the photos is $400. Our social media platform will be free of charge as we do not see further costs accompanying the addition of these tools.
APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1
Appendix 1.1 - Testimonial Example
“I have worked at UBCBO for five years. Each day I feel like I learn something new. Whether it is a new way to do my trade, or a cool tidbit of information from my colleagues, I feel like I am continuously growing. UBC Building Operations has given me so many opportunities to tailor my career to fit me as an individual.”

Appendix 1.2 - Reason to Believe Example
“As a mother of three, I was worried that returning to work in my trade meant that I would not be able to juggle my kids’ after-school commitments. But working at UBC Building Operations has allowed me to stay active in my kids’ lives. I am off work by 4pm daily, and have all weekend to spend with them. The reliability of the scheduling means that I will definitely be there for their piano recitals.”

APPENDIX 2
Appendix 2.1 - Questions asked to female interviewee’s
1. Implicit Association Test; "Can you tell us the first ten words/phrases that come to mind when you think about working here, at UBC Building Operations".
2. How long have you been working at UBC Building Operations?
3. Where else have you worked? Trades and otherwise?
4. How long were you a red seal journeyperson before applying for your position at UBC?
5. How did you find out about the position at UBC?
6. Why did you choose UBC over another similar employer?
7. Did the fact that UBC is a unionized employer have an effect on your decision?
8. What keeps you at UBC?
9. What do you wish you could change about working at UBC?
10. Would you or have you ever promoted working at UBC to colleagues?

Appendix 2.2 - Questions asked to female interviewee’s
1. Implicit Association Test; "Can you tell us the first ten words/phrases that come to mind when you think about working here, at UBC Building Operations".
2. How long have you been working at UBC Building Operations?
3. Why did you choose UBC over another similar employer?
4. What is the work environment like on a normal day?
5. Why do you think there are less women working in trades?
6. Can you see any potential barriers to women working in trades?
7. Do you think there are any steps UBC could take to increase the number of skilled tradeswomen who apply to positions on campus?
8. Is there anything additional you would like to add?
## APPENDIX 3

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WORKS CITED


