

EMMA PFEILER

Organizational Behavior Intern

Karen M. Gil Internship Program, Fall 2020



**KENAN-FLAGLER
BUSINESS SCHOOL**

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My worksite was Kenan-Flagler Business School, which consists of faculty and programs that explore business and society's biggest questions, shape public discussion and policy, and contribute innovative and relevant knowledge to an array of fields.

ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR UNIT

My internship was in the **Organizational Behavior Unit**, which is the crossbreed of social and behavioral psychology in the context of organizations, specifically the workplace and corporate world. They use a scientific approach to produce groundbreaking research that helps us to understand **interpersonal dynamics**, (i.e., how people act and interact within groups).

DR. OVUL SEZER

My mentor was Dr. Ovul Sezer, an associate professor at the business school. Her research combines the fields of social psychology and behavioral neuroscience as she focuses on **"impression mismanagement."**

RESEARCH PROJECT

BACKGROUND

Prior evidence suggests that we habitually engage in impression management (Jones & Pittman, 1982), often highlighting our successes as a way to shape others' positive impressions of us. However, is this same pattern true when we promote others, for example, when writing recommendation letters for them. Recommendation letters are a commonly used tool that provides information about an applicant's previous experience and qualifications (McCarthy & Goffin, 2001).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- > Is there a discrepancy in how we recommend others versus how evaluators perceive them? How might this mismatch impact the opportunities for the applicants?
- > How do recommendations shape the success of applicants?
- > Do recommendations' mentions of effort vs. ability vary by applicant gender, recommender gender, or a combination of other power/status demographics?

STUDY OBJECTIVES

- > Compare how much effort vs. ability was described in the open-ended responses.
- > Determine if the effort and ability that recommenders rated for the applicants matched the effort and ability that the evaluators rated.

METHODS

The data (recommendation letters) was obtained through a graduate admissions program at a university in the UK.

- > Descriptive and correlational tests were used to assess quantitative data.
- > Open-ended data was coded to test a couple predictions.
- > Both the quantitative and coded data was analyzed through (1) text/language analyses programs (e.g., LIWC and EL) and (2) linear regression analyses.

RECOMMENDATION LETTER QUESTIONS (RLQ)

1. How long have you known the applicant and in what capacity?
2. What do you consider to be the applicant's main strengths?
3. What do you consider to be the applicant's main weaknesses?
4. What is your opinion of the applicant's suitability for an MBA program?
5. Is there any other information which you feel is relevant?

POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS

Findings may demonstrate more concrete ways for recommenders to write letters for applicants by establishing how and why their letters will lead to increased evaluations of applicants for jobs, programs, etc.

INTERN ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

My role in this study focused on coding the qualitative data obtained from the recommendation letters. This was done in two parts: Ranking and Open-ended.

Table 1. Peer Ranking System

6	OUTSTANDING (Top 5%)
5	EXCELLENT (Top 10%)
4	VERY GOOD (Top 25%)
3	GOOD (Top 40%)
2	AVERAGE
1	BELOW AVERAGE
0	NOT KNOWN

Table 2. Ranking Variables

INTELLECTUAL CAPACITY
CAPACITY FOR COMMUNICATION: ORAL & WRITTEN
ABILITY TO WORK HARD
PERSERVERANCE
LEADERSHIP
CREATIVITY
WARMTH & SOCIAL SKILLS

PART ONE: *Ranking*

Each applicant was rated against their peer group based on the answers to RLQ's 2-5, using the ranking system seen in **Table 1** to assign a number for each variable seen in **Table 2**.

PART TWO: *Open-Ended*

Responses to RLQ #4 and the scale in **Table 3** were used to code how much the recommender talked about the applicant for variables in **Table 4** and **Table 5**.

Responses to RLQ #5 and the scale **Table 3** were used to code how much the recommender talked about the applicant for the variables in **Table 5**.

Table 3. Open-Ended Scale

0	Not at all
1	It's mentioned once
2	It's mentioned multiple times

Table 5. Open-Ended Variables

EFFORT
POTENTIAL
ABILITY
CREATIVITY
POSITIVE ATTITUDE
PERSERVERANCE
INTELLIGENCE
TEAM ORIENTATION

Table 4. Fit Variables

BACKGROUND/EXPERIENCE
[APPLICANT] BENEFITTING PROGRAM
PROGRAM BENEFITTING [APPLICANT]

THE GIL EXPERIENCE

This internship has provided me with the opportunity to gain hands-on research experience in an environment and context I had not previously encountered.

Professional Development

- > Formatting resume/CV
- > Elevator Pitch

Skills Gained

- > Data coding
- > Excel proficiency

LESSONS LEARNED

This semester, I learned how to perform one of the initial steps of data processing in behavioral psychology: converting qualitative data into quantitative data to prepare it for analysis.

A unintentional gain I got from working on this specific project was a new perspective on how recommendation letters vary and the power they have to influence the perception of the applicant, both positively and negatively.

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Chelsea Ewing, Karen M. Gil Internship Program Manager

KAREN M. GIL
INTERNSHIP PROGRAM
in Psychology & Neuroscience