



Educational Tips for the Detection of Résumé Padding

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Abstract: While there is no truly accurate method to determine how many organizations are victimized by résumé fraud, there are strong indications and incidents that résumé embellishments are on the rise and becoming a thorny growing problem. Employees, by virtue of their duty of care and fiduciary loyalty to their employers, should exercise extreme skepticism in verifying the information provided on applicants' résumés. Tips are by far the most common method for exposing résumé fakers. Tips emanate from jealousy, resentment, and any other personal disagreements or grudges. Hence, being an academician, with first-hand knowledge of the work of search committees and a certified fraud examiner (CFE), and in an attempt to bring into focus as many red flags of résumé embellishments as could be reviewed here as possible, to help employers and search committees members become more effective fraud fighters, I am writing this research to share ideas and tips on breaking into the code of résumé padding.

Keywords: Résumé padding, CV embellishments, fraud triangle theory, detection of résumé fraud.

1. INTRODUCTION

While there is no truly accurate way to determine how many organizations are victimized by résumé fraud, there is evidence that the rate is increasing. A host of multiple factors, e.g., financial, social, etc., have complicated job retention rates, contributed to increasing the numbers of laid off employees and created several hurdles for fresh university graduates trying to place themselves on the job map. For example, financial crises have caused many institutions and companies to adopt severe austerity measures represented in shrinking their work force, assigning the work of two employees to one person, and halting new appointments to an indefinite time until further notice and improvements in the economy. Even when there is a job vacancy, hundreds of desperate job seekers hurry up and submit a résumé with the hope of succeeding in being the

first to snatch the vacancy. Unfortunately, such an unthinkable and unpleasant situation has put too much pressure on persons wanting to keep their current positions, those without work and new university graduates seeking employment to do whatever it may take to find a job to sustain themselves and support their families.

The situation has even got worse with many prospective employers, being unrealistic sometimes, and requiring a specific number of years of work experience and unexceptional levels of professional skills as a condition to keeping work positions and applying for any newly advertised vacancies in their institution(s), which, in turn, led some employee to faking professional development activities and new job seekers to opt for résumé exaggerations and concoctions. As a result, we find some authors urging job seekers to lie in their resumes. The following is an example:



“It is not uncommon for hiring managers to have fantastical expectations of the experience level of the ideal candidate. In reality they may not get a single candidate that satisfies all of their fantasies. They write down required experience and skill levels in the job description to make themselves look good to upper management, giving the impression that they are so good at hiring that they will find a magical and perfect employee.” (*Fake Resumes: The Machiavellian Guide to Getting a Job*)

Opportunities to commit fraud, Albrecht (2008) says, may be created by individuals, or by deficient or missing internal controls. Therefore, proactive résumé fraud prevention and detection controls are a vital part in managing the risk of fraud. Because of the high cost of résumé fraud for the institution and the individual résumé fakers, this serious issue has garnered increased media attention in recent years. In cases of résumé fraud, institutions downplay the incident out of fear of losing reputation, legal ramifications and looming possibility of employee’s defamation.

2. DEFINITIONS

2.1. What is résumé fraud?

Résumé fraud is a kind of lying and/or deception. Miller (1982, p. 410), as cited in Neuliep and Matteson (1990), defines it as “... message distortion resulting from deliberate falsification or omission of information by a communicator with the intent of stimulating in another or others, a belief that the communicator himself or herself does not believe.” According to Merriam Webster’s Dictionary of Law (1996) as quoted in Manurung and Hadian (2013:4), the definition of fraud is:

Any act, expression, omission, or concealment calculated to deceive another to his or her disadvantage, specifically, a misrepresentation or concealment with reference to some fact material to a transaction that is made with knowledge of its falsity or in reckless disregard of its truth or falsity and with the intent to deceive another and that is reasonably relied on by the other who is injured thereby.

A more specific definition of résumé fraud is “the practice of misrepresenting one’s achievements or contributions to a particular field, with the aim of inflating one’s record or role(s) for the purpose of securing an unfair advantage over others in competitive endeavors” (Cleary, Walter and Jackson, 2013, p. 2363).

It is clear that the motive in résumé embellishment, whether portrayed as ‘padding’, ‘doctoring’ or ‘fraud’, is to employ fabricated or intentionally misleading information in order to get a leg-up on others and thereby increase one’s probability of keeping one’s job or getting a job. The motive of misleading others regarding one’s identity is an attempt to better oneself through guile, duplicity, omission or hyperbole—all intentional misrepresentations (Bok 1978; Keyes 2004; Wexler, 2006). In the same vein, McFarland and Ryan (2000, p. 812) define résumé embellishment as “intentional distortion on the part of the applicants” in an attempt to increase their chances of attaining a job position.

3. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

There are strong indications and incidents that résumé embellishments are on the rise and becoming a thorny growing problem (Hedayati, 2012, Nosnik, Friedmann, Nagler and Dinlenc (2010)) As Kidwell (2004: 177) notes, ‘[e]vidence from anecdotes, newspaper accounts and survey research indicates that padding résumés with false or marginal accomplishments, presenting misleading information on résumés, while deviant, is not unusual.’ Albashrawi, 2016; George, Marrett and Tilley, 2004; Guillory, and Hancock, 2012. Koeppel, 2006; Kuhn, Johnson and Miller, 2013; McFarland and Ryan, 2000; Synyak, 2014; note that there is a big surge of fraud activities. For instance, Guillory and Hancock (2012); Koeppel (2006) and Synyak (2014) point out that misrepresentation on résumés appear to be common. Indeed, George, Marrett and Tilley (2004), in a study they conducted on how many people lie in their résumés, report that about 90% of their study participants admitted to misrepresenting information provided on their résumés. Experts estimate that 20% to over 50% of job applicants lie to embellish their credentials.



In this regard, McQueeney (2006, p.141) mentions that résumés are inherently personal documents because they showcase foundational experiences and backgrounds while also reflecting personal attributes; as such, résumés also offer many opportunities for ethically ambiguous and problematic situations to arise. Kuo, Schroeder, Shah, Shah, Jacobs and Pietrobon (2008) adduce that “[p]rofessionalism has become a focus for educators in multiple disciplines. Despite this trend, falsified résumés have become increasingly common. They go on and elaborate that “[e]ven individuals with respected leadership positions in large corporations, government agencies, educational institutions, nonprofit agencies, and military organizations have been found to have falsified information on their resumes” (p.485). On the other hand, individuals applying for job vacancies are able to artificially inflate their previously or currently held job titles in order to gain apparent value for the hiring organization, whether through alleged experience associated with the respective job title, or responsibility or projects assumed to have been taken on in past jobs. In spite of all that said above, résumé fraud, according to Fleming and Miles (2012), is not specific to desperate new graduates looking for jobs in a fiercely competitive market, but also is committed by seniors and top level professionals.

With bigger and better jobs and respective titles as great opportunities in reach, applicants, who are also only humans, might either purposefully commit one of the following or be tempted to fall victims to such deeds as major misrepresentation in résumés, with approximately 25% of all résumés displaying such flaws. When the organizational representatives were asked their opinion of applicant faking, the employers stated that detecting faking is a matter of experience (90%). Of those, 34% indicated that resume faking has actually increased, while 33 % also admit, that results of reference checks had surprised them, just as 33% indicated that they initially misjudged applicants. To avoid applicant faking to the extent possible, the organizational representatives rely on thorough background checks as well as questioning of references and potential follow-up interviews (85%), use

triangulation through the presence of a second or third organizational representative during the interview (55%), and search of the Internet (33%), in particular social network sites.

A survey by a New York Times research team (March, 2008) indicates that 89% of job seekers and 49% of hiring managers in the New York City metropolitan area believe that a substantial number of candidates “pad” their résumés. Hiring managers who believe that a substantial number of résumés are padded believe that 52% of the résumés they receive are padded. Only 13% of job seekers surveyed admitted to ever having falsified their résumés. Konstantakos, Laughlin, Markert and Crosby (2007, p. 487) demonstrate that a disturbingly large proportion of publications listed on academic job seekers’ applications cannot be verified. They report that it is unknown whether this behavior simply represents error, is reflective of the overall ethical climate of our times, or, more disturbingly, portends lack of integrity in other professional settings. Moreover, they note that “[t]hirty-three percent (196 of 596) of publications could not be verified.

As a sign emblematic of our morally elastic times, the website www.fakeresume.com, advertises itself as “[t]he ultimate guide to helping you get the great high paying job you want by helping you lie on your great résumé. Everyone else is doing it, shouldn’t you?” falsifying information is certainly easier with the availability of websites such as www.fakeresume.com!

4. OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

Tips are by far the most common method for exposing résumé fakers. Tips emanate from jealousy, resentment, and any other personal disagreements or grudges (El-Sakran, 2016). Hence, being an academician, with first-hand knowledge of the work of search committees and a certified fraud examiner (CFE), and in an attempt to bring into focus as many red flags of résumé embellishments as could be reviewed here as possible, to help employers and search committees members become more effective fraud fighters, I am writing this research to

share ideas and tips on breaking into the code of résumé padding. Thus, the purpose of this research is to provide meaningful, real-world information on:

- Why résumé padding is committed?
- Who commits it?
- How it is detected?
- How to tighten the door in front of résumé padding?

This research tests the impact of the “Fraud Triangle” elements on the detection and, therefore, the prevention of fraud in résumés.

4.1. FRAUD TRIANGLE THEORY

To become familiar with the phenomenon of résumé fraud and situate it in its context, the reasons that can cause a person to lie on a résumé must be understood. To do so, the researcher has chosen to build on the work of Cressey (1953), who highlighted the notion of “Fraud Triangle”. This concept strongly influences the development of techniques for detecting fraud. According to this model, fraud is based on three legs (see Fig. below): Opportunity, Pressure and Rationalization.

From this theoretical basis, we propose the following research question:

How can the elements of the “Fraud Triangle” facilitate the detection of résumé fraud?

- To answer our research question, we have set the following objectives:
- To provide a comprehensive coverage of the theoretical foundations of the Fraud Triangle Theory.
- To test the impact of the elements of the Fraud Triangle Theory on the detection of résumé fraud.

Dechow et al. (2011); Goode and Lacey (2011) and Okoye et al. (2009) argue that to implement measures indicative of the risk of fraud, it is important to try to identify motivations for committing fraud. These motivations play an important role in résumé fraud detection as delineated below.

Fraud triangle (Fig. 1) describes three factors that are present in every situation of fraud:

4.1.1. PRESSURE

Pressure can include almost anything including lifestyle, economic demands, and others- others include financial and non-financial gains. Pressures that can lead to cheating can be divided into: personal (i.e., internal), societal (i.e. external).

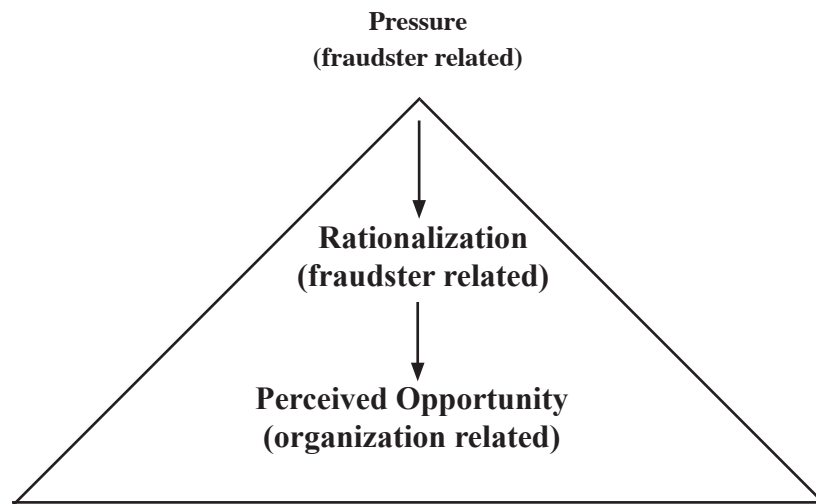


Fig. (1) Fraud Triangle

Source: Cressey, D. R. (1973). *Other people’s money*. Montclair: Patterson Smith (p. 30)



Based on the pressure concept, “Faking résumés may be a response to the unrealistic expectations employers have and the ridiculous amount of skills/credentials they require for almost menial positions” (personal communication, John Hutson, MBA, CFE, 19.09.2017.). This type of external pressure, accompanied with the job seekers’ desires to place themselves on the work map, prove themselves, start gaining after investing too much in education, and starting their own families; may result in some candidates submitting “window dressed”, “smoothed”, “creative”, “hocus-pocus” “shenanigans” resumes, to use the most common terms used in the fraud world (Allen, Larson & Solan, 2013).

Several forms of misrepresenting achievements on a résumé, based on the faker’s job, are:

ACADEMICIANS’ PUBLICATIONS

All publications listed on academicians’ applications/résumés should be carefully scrutinized. Most importantly, all publications categorized under the titles in-progress, under review, and accepted for publication, must be approached with due diligence and professional skepticism. That is, applicants should be requested to submit evidence to support the claims made on their résumés, otherwise, unfounded to be publications should be discounted and ignored. Furthermore, veracity of all submitted evidence(s) should be verified.

Another issue that may be manipulated and misrepresented by academicians is the percentage of contributions in research or research supervision. This calls for applicants to submit a statement detailing their role in joint researches. Some academicians may practice deceit through a tweak of some publication and having it published in more than one venue under a different title and with minor changes in contents. Therefore, all claimed publications should not be taken at face value, and must be read to confirm that they deal with different research topics. A related issue is hiding publications used for a previous promotion. In other words, some academicians

may submit researches used for earlier degrees or promotions toward another promotion. To overcome such a behavior, applicants should be required to submit, along with the new application, a copy of all researches submitted for previous promotions for verification purposes. Other academically related activities such as, committee memberships, reviewer work and exaggerated or fake job history, are subject to several embellishments. It is not uncommon to hear that persons have listed a part-time job with an institution as a full time position for a longer period of employment. Also, there are cases when academicians’ résumés claimed that they work as reviewers for some academic journals, and upon visiting the mentioned journal’s website for verification, their names were not there!

A thorny and challenging issue that many societies are encountering in plenty nowadays is the problem of phony certificates/degrees, or what is known now as ‘diploma mills’. These days there are many online websites advertizing and providing degrees for work or life experience alone, with no studies or exams involved, charging a flat fee per degree as opposed to charging students by the credit, course or semester. Ironically, diploma mills often use names that sound similar to well-known colleges or universities (Fleming and Miles (2012, p. 31). Fake professional certifications and affiliations are depriving people with the right qualifications from getting employed. Unfortunately, many institutions have been the victims of the work. When the fakers were discovered, the hiring institution admitted that they did not check and verify the credentials submitted to them. This, of course, does not stop them from the blame that they did not do their work properly and that their hiring procedures are at fault. Now, many well known universities, realizing the huge numbers of fake certificate in the markets, have created a list of their graduates that hiring institutions need to visit for verification. Furthermore, Ministries of Higher Education in the countries where the hiring institution is stationed could be contacted for queries regarding accredited academic institutions listed on one’s résumé.



Fabricated professional levels of knowledge of languages, IT software and other highly required skills (i.e. communication skills) are another concern. A big number of applicants, unknowingly or intentionally, may inflate such skills. For example, a group of applicants may possess some level of these skills, but may not be depicted on a *résumé* as accurately and honestly as they should be. For instance, some may, under the skills section, say the following:

Knowledge of Arabic, English, Urdu and Korean,

not realizing that this broad description needs to be qualified, made specific and measurable. To do this, the applicant could say:

Excellent spoken and written Arabic (native language) and English and basic survival skills in Urdu and Korean.

As for those who may, on purpose, exaggerate their skills levels, interviews could be a good venue for exposing them, in addition to, subjecting them to tests in the skills listed on the *résumé* as detailed below.

The above misrepresentations could be foiled through careful scrutiny of claims made on *résumés*. Making this a work practice will tighten the doors in the face of creating opportunities for embellishments.

4.1.2. OPPORTUNITY

A. *Opportunity is the situation that allows some cheating to go on unnoticed. Such opportunities are normally created by the weaknesses in the organizations' internal control systems. Such weaknesses should have serious implications for both the unit's committee search members and for the HR personnel. That is, when those persons only depend on the carefully structured and well written résumés submitted to them by the vacancy applicants, and assume that the information recorded on the résumé is valid; that is, accepted the data in good faith and never suspected any wrongdoings, this simply indicates that they helped the résumé fakers get a job for which they did not qualify- an action that does not exonerate*

caretakers of any wrong-doing.

Had they wanted to practice their professional role, they would have left no stone unturned and verified everything listed on the applicants' *résumés*. Employees with the right qualifications and a strong sense of ethics should do their work professionally. In this context, it is relevant to mention and elaborate on Jensen and Meckling's (1976) concept of agency. They define an agency relationship "as a contract under which one or more persons (the principal(s)) engage another person (the agent) to perform some service on their behalf which involves delegating some decision making authority to the agent". In light of this, the opportunity provided to the *résumé* fakers is created by ineffective control that allows individuals to take advantage. In other words, the trusted employees have failed in their duties of care and loyalty. "The duty of care (emphasis in original) (Fraud Manual, 2016) means that people in fiduciary relationship must act with such care as an ordinarily prudent person would employ in similar positions. Corporate officers, directors, or high-level employees, as well as other people in a fiduciary relationship, must conduct their business affairs prudently with the skill and attention normally exercised by people in similar positions. Fiduciaries who act carelessly or recklessly are responsible for any resulting loss to the corporate shareholders or other principals. Damages may be recovered in a civil action for negligence, mismanagement, or waste of corporate assets. (p. 2.216). In the same vein, "The duty of loyalty (emphasis in original) requires that the employer/agent act solely in the best interest of the employer/principal, free of any self-dealing, conflicts of interest, or other abuse of the principal" (p. 2.216).

Therefore, it is incumbent upon all concerned parties to do their work thoroughly and efficiently by leaving no stone unturned and exploring all possible avenues. Moreover, they should know that detection of *résumé* padding has implications for search and interview committees' composition. That is, the members on these committees should be



from varied educational backgrounds, and each should focus on a section(s) of the résumé. For example, one should be an academician; another should be familiar with social life activities, such as volunteer work, etc. The justification for this is that some applicants may include what may be termed “difficult to verify activities” such as a clean-up campaigns held to clean Sharjah beaches. In such cases, it is the applicants’ sole responsibility to submit evidence (i.e. certificate of appreciation or participation) to confirm the claim listed on the résumé. Yet, search committee members must exercise professional skepticism, contact previous organizers/employers and ask whether the applicant is suitable for rehire, do reference checks; by calling references given and verifying their true nature by conducting internet searches on them. Also, they should conduct education and certification verification, contact the issuing organization to verify educational qualifications. Negligence in this regard may have serious and irreparable consequences for the organization’s reputation and stakeholders’ well-being. Here is a real life example from a public hospital in an Arab country, in which a sham doctor was discovered to have faked a medical degree! Had this person’s qualifications been properly scrutinized and complaints against his performance taken seriously, he would not have been given the job in the first place, or he would have been exposed earlier!

To uncover résumé fraud, it is absolutely necessary that HR department personnel be involved in candidate interviews. Those (HR personnel) should possess the ability to solicit honest answers to tough questions. The following list of activities will help tighten controls and possibly deter job seekers from giving in to temptation to commit résumé fraud.

- Checking and verifications of details of references supplied, through making contacts with them. These references may be fake; therefore, verify true nature of references’ work and identify through internet searches of public records. If they work as university professors, check employing institutions’ website to verify

that the reference is working there. Also, internet tools and social media platforms, LinkedIn, Facebook, etc., can be checked to verify real existence of those references. Ms. Adina L. Conroy, a certified fraud examiner and employee with Conroy & Associates, Inc., (personal communication, 2017), recommends that “to avoid an applicant’s friend from making a false verification, we only accept contact information that can be confirmed as currently owned by the employer, ie business phone, business mail. If the company is no longer in business, we verify the contact worked for the company in the manner reported to us”.

- Compare contact details for applicant and those for references. The reference may be a spouse, a relative, or a friend or an accomplice or the applicant himself.
- Verify publications online. Some maybe unusual; others may be opinion articles in newspapers, not academically peer-reviewed articles.
- The HR Dept., in collaboration with the relevant dept. search committee, can institute policies and procedures to help detect résumé fraud, and not accept résumés at face value. These are:
 - Always maintain an attitude of professional skepticism throughout the résumé audit process.
 - Sharing news about candidates with other institutions.
- It should also be known that searches should commensurate with the kind of and sensitivity of the position the candidate is being hired for. For example, if a person is being hired for a female hostel guard position, they should be investigated for criminal records, theft, rape, alcoholism, etc. The same is true for sensitive positions in commercial institutions. It should also be made incumbent on candidates to have their credentials attested by an official body representing the country they obtained them from.



- All this, of course, should be checked and verified by the search and selection committees and scrutinized by the HR personnel before an offer is made. Members of these committees should also be cognizant of the fact that former employees could be friends or relatives of the candidates. Therefore, all relevant doubts in this regard should be clarified. Also, security clearance should be conducted of candidates' criminal records.
- Other issues are even more mysterious: look for education and work experience and make sure there are no clashes or gaps in between. For example, check graduation date and whether it matches experience listed or not.

Thus, pre-employment checks, although could be time consuming, will save the organization's reputation and give the chance to qualified candidates to help in the advancement of the society as unethical persons may continue to behave in unethical ways!! In this regard, some institutions may decide to delegate the screening and selection processes to pre-employment screening companies. Relying on a recruitment company to select candidates for institutions may be a good first step. Yet, all institutions should do the final checks.

If HR and other concerned parties do not do their job properly, they could be exposed to a claim of negligent hiring. Employees, by virtue of their duty of care and fiduciary loyalty to their employers, should exercise extreme skepticism in verifying the information provided on applicants' *résumés*. In the case this is not the practice, they will be violating the trust and the duty of care their employers placed in them (Fleming and Miles (2012, p. 31). In a nutshell, *résumés* misrepresentations are a result of "poor hiring practices" (Fleming and Miles (2012, p. 38).

4.1.3. RATIONALIZATION

Rationalization is part of the fraud triangle that is the most difficult to measure (Skousen et al . , 2009). They refer to it as set of ethical values that allow certain parties to commit acts of fraud. For example, when fresh graduates

seek jobs they are always refused on the pretext of lack of practical experience and being fresh. This may make them rationalize and justify their unethical practices on the pretext that they have done nothing really wrong and that they are good, decent citizens with rights to have work. This is corroborated by Abdullahi, Mansor and Nuhu (2015:32) who argue that "temptations for misconduct arise when goals do not appear to be attainable by normal means". Therefore, in an attempt to reduce lies on *résumés*, the present author proposes the following recommendations:

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Without proper cooperation between HR and search committees, any countermeasures may falter.

Tell applicants that any lies in a *résumé* will result in prosecution.

Catching a lie on a candidate's *résumé* should raise red flags about a candidate's overall ethics.

Sharing stories of lies on *résumés* with others so that they learn from them how to uncover similar lies in job seekers' *résumés*.

Organizations might consider designing their own *résumé* format that contains specific personal details, which may be intentionally left out of a candidate's *résumé*. This allows organizations to obtain enough details, as seen and deemed necessary by the organization in question.

Provide the tone that *résumé* fraud will not be accepted in any form.

Ask applicants to sign a pledge that their *résumés* are accurate and that the information they contain is correct and accurate.

Include in the in-house *résumé* format a scale on which applicants rate their professional skills.



There could be questions on: how the applicant determines whether he or she is “fluent,” “conversant,” or merely “familiar with” a language?

Apply the same to listing technical skills, such as computer software applications.

Include questions requiring applicants to provide exact dates for previous employment, training periods, last promotion, graduation date, etc. Besides, candidates should be requested to give titles of jobs taken, specific dates job started and ended, and activities conducted.

Additionally, “the job candidate should be required to sign an authorization and release which allows the prospective employer to confirm and examine (Fleming and Miles (2012, p. 38) the information provided by the candidate (p.39). “It is also a good idea for the application to contain statements advising candidates that the company policy is that the misrepresentation of employment credentials- no matter when discovered- will result in immediate termination of employment (p. 39).

5. CONCLUSION

Having prospective job candidates fill in an organization’s tailored résumé may help protect candidates who unintentionally misrepresent information provided. Employees, by virtue of their duty of care and judiciary loyalty to their employers, should exercise extreme skepticism in verifying the information provided on applicants’ résumés, otherwise, they will be violating the trust and the duty of care their employers placed in them.

Based on the above, there is a dire need to spread the culture of honesty. This requires implementing the following:

- Résumé writing should be taught to all university undergraduates (Conn, 2008) They should be told to record activities on their resumes as soon as completed- while they are still fresh in memory
- Set up bodies/entities for training and giving experience to fresh graduates to prepare

them for labour environments, and help them find a job.

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