The Employer Potential of MOOCs

A Survey of Human Resource Professionals' Thinking on MOOCs

Alexandria Walton Radford, Jessica Robles, Stacey Cataylo, and Laura Horn (RTI International)
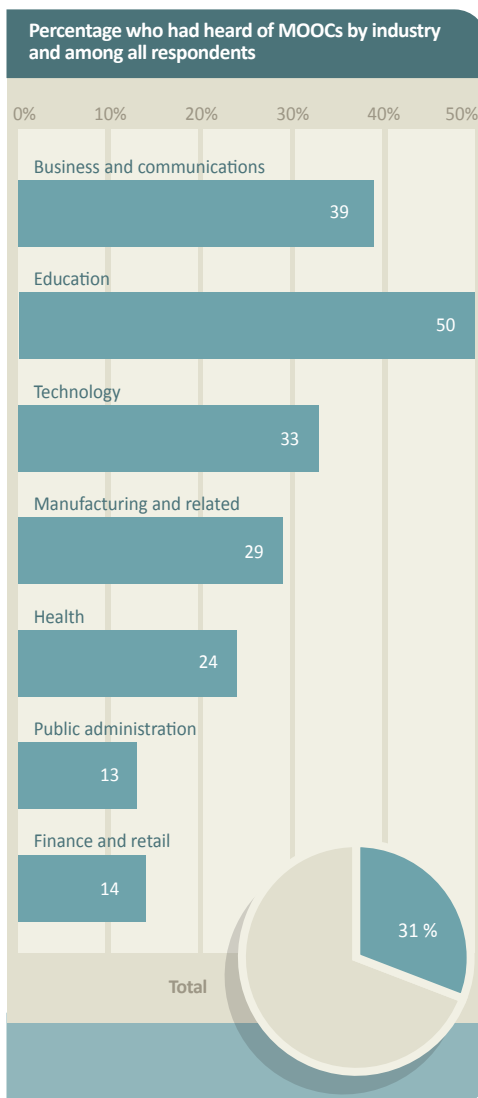Jessica Thornton and Keith Whitfield (Duke University)

Between November 15, 2013 and January 23, 2014, RTI International, in partnership with Duke University, conducted an online survey of 398 employers in North Carolina on their knowledge about and experiences with Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).[1] Human resources staff from **103 organizations (26 percent)** representing an array of industries[2] answered the four questions[3] in the survey. We also conducted follow-up phone interviews with a subset of 20 survey respondents to get more detailed information.

Though a majority of employers had not yet heard of MOOCs at the time of the survey, once they had read a description, most were highly receptive to the potential use of MOOCs in recruiting and hiring decisions, and were especially positive about the role MOOCs could play in professional development training.
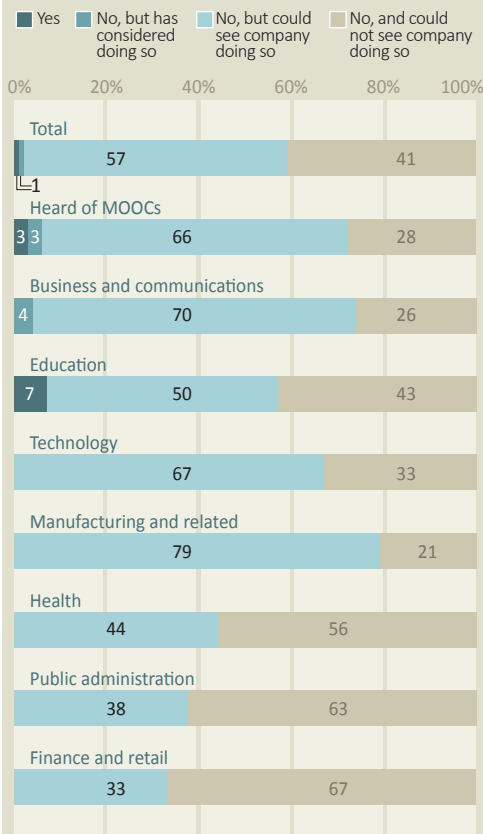
Heard of MOOCS

▌ Some **31 percent** of all respondents surveyed had heard of MOOCs, including 50 percent from organizations in education, 39 percent in business and communications, and 33 percent in technology-related companies.

  ▶ Through subsequent interviews, those who had heard of MOOCs reported a variety of ways in which they had learned about them. Many discovered MOOCs through the news, some were asked by management to investigate these new courses, and others became aware of them through employee interest.
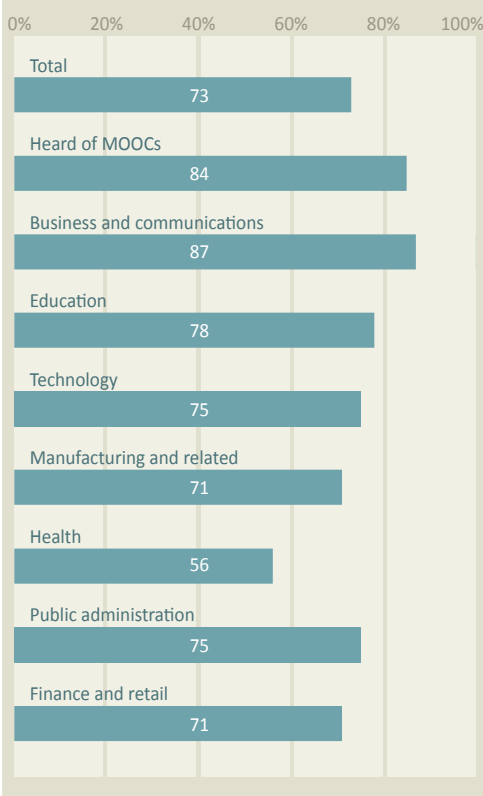

Percentage who had heard of MOOCs by industry and among all respondents

Industry	Percentage
Business and communications	39
Education	50
Technology	33
Manufacturing and related	29
Health	24
Public administration	13
Finance and retail	14
Total	31 %

> *[An] employee brought [MOOCs] to our attention. [We] started discussion groups through Coursera … [MOOCs have been] a great opportunity to provide variety and content to staff … [We] made our staff aware of those opportunities to tailor learning to different topics they are interested in.*

Used, Considered Using, or Open to Using MOOCS for Recruitment

Used, considered using, or open to using MOOCs for recruitment: among all, those who had heard of MOOCs, and by industry

Legend: ■ Yes ■ No, but has considered doing so ■ No, but could see company doing so ■ No, and could not see company doing so

Category	No, but could see company doing so	No, and could not see company doing so
Total	57	41
Heard of MOOCs	3 / 3 / 66	28
Business and communications	4 / 70	26
Education	7 / 50	43
Technology	67	33
Manufacturing and related	79	21
Health	44	56
Public administration	38	63
Finance and retail	33	67

- While only one organization reported having used MOOCs for recruitment and one other had considered doing so (such programs did not even exist until 2012), **more than half (57 percent)** of all organizations surveyed reported that they could see themselves using MOOCs for recruitment.

- Among those who had heard of MOOCs, some 72 percent had used, considered using, or could see their company using MOOCs for recruitment.

- Receptivity was particularly high in organizations in business and communications (74 percent) and manufacturing and related (79 percent).

- In contrast, a majority of employers in health, public administration, and finance and retail could *not* see their companies using MOOCs for recruitment.

- In interviews, respondents were asked why and how MOOCs might be used for recruitment:

> *[We have thought about using MOOCs for recruitment] because primarily we look for people with computer science degrees to succeed in roles here, but now with competition the way it is, it's difficult to recruit experienced individuals. We are looking for creative ways to do things."*

> *"This is a tight market. … Any tactic that we could use to get our name to talented developers would be useful."*

View of Using MOOCs in Hiring Decisions

Very positive and positive views on using MOOCs in hiring: among all, those who had heard of MOOCs, and by industry

Category	Percent
Total	73
Heard of MOOCs	84
Business and communications	87
Education	78
Technology	75
Manufacturing and related	71
Health	56
Public administration	75
Finance and retail	71

- **About three-quarters** of organizations viewed MOOCs very positively or positively (73 percent) with respect to their potential influence in hiring decisions for job applicants who had taken job-related MOOCs. Positive views were even more frequent among those who had already heard of MOOCs.

- Organizations in business and communications as well as education were especially likely to view MOOCs as either positive or very positive in their potential for helping with hiring decisions.

- Interviews indicated that while traditional degrees and credentials were still necessary qualifications for jobs, respondents tended to view MOOC course taking as an indication of greater motivation.

> *If [an applicant] is trying to educate themselves, it says something about the individual. [It shows that individual wants] to stay on top of what is going on in their field."*

> *"[I] see it as someone who wants to further their education and do more for themselves, to develop themselves, [to develop] a higher emotional intelligence."*

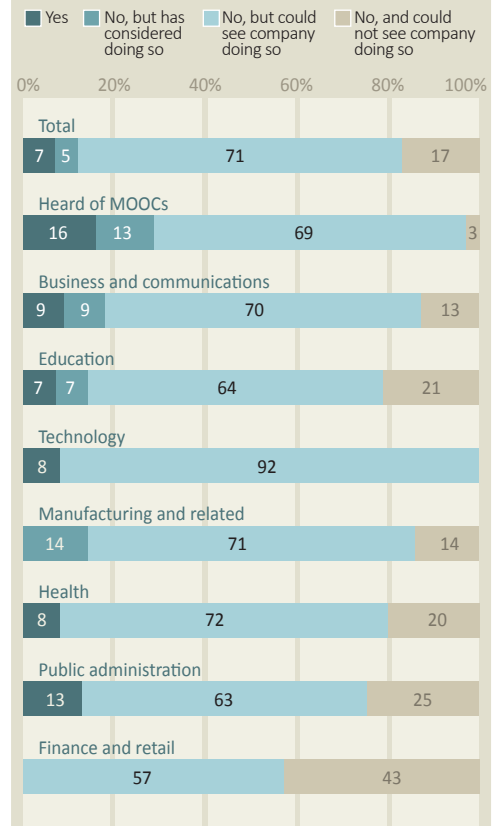# Used, Considered Using, or Open to Using MOOCs for Professional Development

▌ **More than three-quarters** of organizations had used (7 percent), considered using (5 percent), or could see their companies using MOOCs (71 percent) for employees' professional development.

▌ Large majorities of respondents across industries reported being open to using MOOCs for professional development, including all of the companies in technology.

▌ In interviews, a number of respondents felt that highly specialized and technical MOOCs would help fill critical gaps for small numbers of employees for whom they could not develop courses. At the same time, several respondents saw a need for skills like "leadership," "management," "dealing with customers," and "account management."

> " *I can see people who want to advance, who need to advance their education. We have a tuition reimbursement program but it is limited. If someone thought that they could go online and take a course on something or take classes for certification I think people WOULD really jump on it."*

> *"We're always looking for ways and options for team members to engage in ongoing learning to help the business grow. We have a small internal training and [human resources] staff; we're only going to be able to deliver so much content. We know we're not going to be the subject matter experts. We've encouraged people to have their own exploratory learning experience.*

> *"It could be applicable to everyone. Low level support staff [could take] classes on how to be more organized and have better time management … all the way up to higher level employees that want to learn about networking."* "

Used, considered using, or open to using MOOCs for professional development: among all, those who had heard of MOOCs, and by industry

Legend: ■ Yes ■ No, but has considered doing so □ No, but could see company doing so □ No, and could not see company doing so

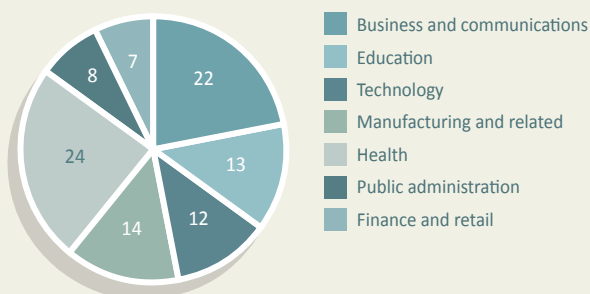| Industry	Yes	No, but has considered	No, but could see	No, and could not see
Total	7	5	71	17
Heard of MOOCs	16	13	69	3
Business and communications	9	9	70	13
Education	7	7	64	21
Technology	8		92	
Manufacturing and related	14		71	14
Health	8		72	20
Public administration	13		63	25
Finance and retail			57	43

[1] Methodology

We obtained 706 email addresses for staff working in human resources for organizations with employees in North Carolina. Over 600 came from Duke's Career Services; the rest were found through referrals or online searches. Of the 706 invitations to participate sent, we received 207 undeliverable responses, suggesting we may have had as many as 499 working emails. Some emails may have been filtered out by companies' software, sent directly to the junk folder, etc. We do not have data on how many received the invitation in their inbox or opened it. The 499 "working email" invitations went to a total of 398 organizations (because for some organizations we had an email address for more than one HR staff member). A total of 103 unique organizations (26 percent) answered all four questions in the survey. The organizations in the study represent an array of industries (see below). Follow-up interviews were conducted with a subset of 20 survey respondents between December 12, 2013, and January 24, 2014. Interview respondents were selected to ensure that those with a range of experience with and knowledge of MOOCs (as indicated by their survey responses) were included in the interview sample.

[2] Industries

The industries included: business and communications (including analytic, consulting, engineering, legal, marketing, social, and travel services), education, technology, manufacturing and related (including agriculture, construction, public utilities, and transportation), health, public administration, and finance and retail (including insurance).

Percentage of organizations that responded to survey, by industry

- Business and communications
- Education
- Technology
- Manufacturing and related
- Health
- Public administration
- Finance and retail

[3] Survey Questions

Question 1: *We are interested in your knowledge, use, and potential use of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in your human resources department. MOOCs are online courses that use social networking to bring together people interested in a particular topic and an expert who seeks to facilitate learning in that topic. Courses generally have no prerequisites, fees, formal accreditation, or required level of participation. MOOCs can be offered in many ways, but Coursera, Udacity, and edX are three of the larger providers of MOOCs that work in partnerships with universities. Some companies are also creating their own MOOCs. Had you heard of MOOCs before this survey?* **Yes/No.**

Question 2: *Some companies are using MOOCs to identify potential employees. For example, some MOOC participants can elect to allow their MOOC provider to share their information with interested employers. The MOOC provider then provides employers with information about MOOC participants who have demonstrated excellent skills for a fee. Has your company used MOOCs in this way?* **Yes/No, but has considered doing so/No, but could see company doing so/No, and could not see company doing so.**

Question 3: *Some prospective employees are noting MOOC courses they have completed when applying for jobs. If the MOOC course completed was relevant to the potential job function, how would your company view such coursetaking in hiring decisions?* **Very positively/ Positively/No effect/Negatively/Very negatively.**

Question 4: *Some companies are using MOOCs created by universities or employers to help existing employees learn new skills and help with their professional development. Has your company used MOOCs in this way?* **Yes/No, but has considered doing so/No, but could see company doing so/No, and could not see company doing so.**

For more information about this survey and its results, contact

Alexandria Walton Radford at *aradford@rti.org*,
Laura Horn at *lhorn@rti.org*, or
Keith Whitfield at *keith.whitfield@duke.edu*