Chapter 9
The End of the Job Title: The Prospects of Analytics in the Staffing Industry and How to Deliver Them

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ABSTRACT
The staffing industry, despite being a global, multi-billion dollar business, has not yet widely exploited the use of business intelligence to make companies more competitive. Staffing companies are far removed from developing enterprise wide analytics and their analytical capabilities are either impaired or localized in their approach. Business intelligence commonly used in many other industries to optimize processes, reduce costs, or develop new services is dormant in staffing. This chapter analyses some of the root causes that impair the industry’s ability to develop analytics. While some originate in specific market conditions that are reflected in the design of IT systems, it is the absence of a common nomenclature to classify job categories that prevents consistent data management and the ability to integrate data across divisions and geographies. The chapter introduces the application of information extraction and expert system to generate artificial job classifications that could replace existing ones, which are largely based on conventional semantic notions. Under the assumption that companies in the staffing industry can deploy shared and common job classifications across their IT systems this chapter presents a range of service improvements, new services and data driven insights that are presently unrealized.

INTRODUCTION
When Yahoo appointed a senior executive in the role of “Head of the Hive for Cranium” (translation: director of public relations), the note did not create much of a stir. The reader easily comprehends that the job title was meant to be humorous and convey an air of irreverence and creative wordplay than indicating what the person actually did. The seemingly incongruous invention of a job
titles is symptomatic of a larger trend that sees the meaning of job titles rapidly deteriorating to the point that it becomes the subject of ridicule or irony.

Anyone working in the Information Technology (IT) sector or in an IT related industry will know the exasperated looks of relatives who inquire about one’s profession and given an answer, inevitably reply: “But what is it that you do?”

The diversifying of the professional landscape creates all sorts of new, overlapping and hybrid functions and thus again breeds a multitude of job titles, which are increasingly nonsensical and considerably detached from general comprehension.

As the descriptive function of a job title becomes less important, other interests and purposes impose themselves. Inspired by a sense of political correctness, job titles are invented to try to dignify menial tasks. Education Centre Nourishment Production Assistant (dinner lady) came only second place in a poll about silly job names (Coles, 2007).

Instead of a pay rise, an employer might choose to give a staff member a more gratifying job title that leads to a burgeoning number of pompous sounding names that eventually arouses not respect but suspicion. Frequently, employees see their job titles changing while the nature of their work or the degree of responsibility did not change at all.

This very recent phenomenon contrasts with the way a professional title used to be the subject of fierce protection going back to medieval times when craftsmen and artisans formed guilds, which rewarded their members with titles that were given out only after a strictly defined process of apprenticeships, exams and accreditations. These vouched for its bearer to confirm that he possessed all the skills and the knowledge that were associated with a title. To usurp such a title, without proper accreditation, was considered an offence and subject to punishment.

The primary aspect and significance of a job title rests therefore in its semantic compactness, the ability to compress a wealth of information into a short string of words. In an ideal world of unadulterated job titles, sender and receiver would exchange within a single term, a vast range of professional skills and experience that otherwise required a lengthy description. The clarity and preciseness of a job title in the past was the result of rigorous codification, aggregating a defined set of data (skills) into a universally understood category.

The job title however is now a relic from a time when the professional landscape was less diverse and careers used to follow a clearly defined and predictable path, when the choice of an academic field for example correlated with a husbanded profession.

Practical Application of Job Titles

The dizzying number of job titles and the process of inflation that comes along with it has real, tangible and costly economic consequences. The job title used to serve a vital function as the prime matching criteria that brought together a suitable applicant and a potential employer in need of specific skills. As this function has been irreversibly eroded, both sides, applicant and employer, are now forced to descend to a level below: A lengthy narrative of qualities and skills to advertise demand and offer respectively. A useful aggregate has been irretrievably dissolved into its components.

Recruitment is concerned with finding and selecting the best candidates in a talent market to ensure the competitive fitness of a company. It is a time consuming and complicated task that consists in both drafting and advertising a job profile and then best matching the incoming flood of applications (CVs) against it. It is costly due to the sheer elaborateness of the process itself and the countless man hours that are invested in it, as well as the expenses that it might incur when one gets it wrong and employs a person who turns out to be not suitable for the position. Industry experts estimate the cost of replacing an exempt employee (“exempt” from wage and hourly regulations) at
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