Original Article

Recruiting the competent lobbyist: Career options and employer demands in Germany

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Abstract Germany likely employs Europe's largest national lobby labor force. This article presents a comprehensive study of German lobbyists' workplaces and employer expectations of competencies. It provides insights into emerging requirements for a qualified workforce in a diversified job market. Drawing on multiple sources of statistics, surveys and cases, the first section examines staffing and entry routes for the main employer types – associations, corporations and consultancies. The job market offers a broad range of career options. This includes an emerging set of junior training programs. German employers have devised fully paid apprenticeship models as structured practical learning schemes where rotating workplace assignments alternate with seminar learning. Some employers partner in training alliances. Traineeships are tailor-made and unregulated, but their existence points to a growing employer interest in formally developing a talent base and professionalism. The second section offers a job market snapshot based on 189 advertisements from 2012 to 2014. Job ads can be assumed to be an objective measure of employers' articulated intentions and expectations for a quality pool of applicants. The survey tabulates preferences for experience, academic degrees, knowledge areas, personal, social and method competencies, and specific political expert skills. Results demonstrate a complex interplay of qualifications and requirements. Ads also show great variety and ambiguity, suggesting that lobbying lacks standardized job classifications and a stable common vocabulary. Findings show that organizational settings influence task and competency combinations expressed in job ads. While all employers appear to follow similar recruiting patterns in regard to some qualifications, they also differ. For example, associations and businesses place more emphasis on policy concepts, organizational participation, coordination, administration and direct representation than do consultancies, while the latter stress advisory roles and strategizing. Corporations get less involved in campaign advocacy. Associations focus on members. Consulting firms tend to recruit younger, less experienced staff, and to less often request domain knowledge. Highlighting commonalities and differences, this article may help stimulate discussion on explicating employers' competency-based human capital management and recruiting practices. The results may help develop

guidelines for apprenticeship schemes, continuing education, organized efforts of professional bodies and university curricula.

Germany likely employs Europe's largest national lobby labor force. Its formation can be traced back to the late 1800s. At the dawn of Germany's 'century of associations' (Eschenburg, 1991),[1] a unique managerial class emerged: 'Verbandsbeamte', literally, association civil servants. Untrained, learning on the fly, they 'organized the interests which they themselves did not have' (Ullmann, 1988, p. 118). Developing human resources systematically came slowly and has not been the lobby's strong suit by German standards. It is a country which takes pride in quality work based on orderly career paths, vocational education and formal credentials, and where collective mental programming prizes uncertainty avoidance by relying on well-trained experts (Hofstede, 2014).

The question of what and how lobbyists should learn has gained attention in the past 15 years, spurred by the 1999 Bonn – Berlin capital move. More than a moving-van episode, it catalyzed culture. Sober scholars noted that the lobby 'Berlinized' (von Alemann, 2002). Young guns and self-styled barbarians engaged in hyberbole: the 'public affairs boomtown' Berlin meant 'a quantum leap' and the 'end of Bonn coziness', consultant Axel Wallrabenstein wrote in 2002 (p. 428). Looser, competitive, project-style direct representation and advocacy campaigns emerged as corporatism and association dominance waned: 'The Berlin Republic is noisier, faster and more chaotic than the Bonn Republic, but also more transparent and public' (Wallrabenstein, 2002, p. 428). The neopluralist market today is a crowded room. Bonn had counted 2000 lobbyists (Broichhausen, 1982, p. 35). Berlin estimates today are around 5000 (Alexander *et al*, 2013). The scene extends to 16 federal states, an EU and global network.

For Germans, lobbying is a loan word from English. Outside of professional parlance, Germans often say 'lobbyism' – note the 'ism' suffix, implying a whole system. In 1998, Ronit and Schneider held that state – interest groups relations 'are almost never described as of lobbying': it is 'a foreign word with connotations of secretive policy processes where illegitimate influence is sought' (p. 559). It implies influence seekers are state-unrecognized and not routinely involved in policy-making. Traditional preference is for the ballast-free term 'Interessenvertretung', or interest representation. To call it lobbying was a smear. Today's use is more liberal. 'The rise of the Anglo-Saxon term lobbying is a result of changes in the interest intermediation system', notes Speth (2010, p. 9).

Berlin also heard professionalization talk. The search for identity, quality, ethics, responses to scandals and regulation calls all raised the bar on talent development. The knowledge ecology changed. New trade media, practitioner 'cookbooks', collegial groups' conferences, seminar vendors, academic studies and university programs increased knowledge dissemination and occupational learning to a level unknown in Bonn.

How far can such efforts go? Some believe the vocation is a chimera. 'Lobbying even compared to public relations [is] a low-defined occupational field, in which less of an independent professional existence and need to demarcate boundaries is felt', opines Olfe-Kräutlein (2012); it 'is an umbrella term for diverse intermediary services, not based on special vocational knowledge' (p. 56). She is right: it is a fuzzy work zone. But specialty careers often grow out of interdisciplinary combination. Whether lobbying has enough unique tasks separate from other occupations' turf may be beside the point. Its essence is boundary-crossing work. It may be an 'interdiscipline' driven by an anti-boundary, plurality-promoting logic (Friman, 2010). A question remains what its core is if it does not guard a knowledge monopoly. Perhaps it is simply a practice, an eclectic portfolio of art, craft, and science defined by organization rules, employers' recruiting rationales and practitioners' skills.

This article studies the German workplace to distill insights on what lobbyists can and should learn. It will focus on vocational routes. The article is organized as follows. First, it provides a descriptive overview of workplace data, staffing patterns and entry models for lobbyists working for three employer types – associations, corporations and consultancies. The research rationale is to show the job market's range of career options, diverse organizational settings, and growth trends. Of special interest is the formalized entry route via a junior training program. Germany is a country of vocational apprenticeships, and this includes employment sectors where university graduates dominate. This part of the study seeks evidence for a proliferation of apprenticeship-style training for lobbyist functions.

Recruiting the right lobbyists with the right skills and background is a key component of successful lobbying. It must be imperative for an employer to signal to potential candidates clearly what is expected. This second part of the study examines recruitment based on content analysis of online-job advertisements. How do employers describe duties, formal educational requirements, knowledge and competencies, and what do they most frequently request? Are there differences among employer types, especially regarding education, knowledge and political competencies? The article aims to identify learning areas on the 'demand' side and hopes to stimulate discussion on how to explicate expectations of what lobbyists should learn.

A note on language: German usage of the English term 'public affairs' (PA) is more circumscribed than in the original sense, where it encapsulates an organization's full range of stakeholder relationships. The German meaning puts PA close to political interest representation, it always includes lobbying but may extend to

broader government relations and political communication in society. It is never used interchangeably with general PR.

Workplace Staffing and Entry

This section studies the lobbying job market and employment trends for three main employer types: associations, corporations and consultancies. Lack of data makes it troublesome to track overall trends. Circumstantial evidence suggests the past half decade has seen growth. MSL Group's annual surveys of some 60 major companies and associations show that since 2010, pluralities of respondents indicated they had more PA staff than a year earlier. The proportion of those with staff layoffs was about half that size. The 4-year median of 'more' is 42 per cent and 17 per cent 'less'. On staff size, 5-year medians show PA units' modest size: 46 per cent stated they had 1–4 persons, 24 per cent had 5–15, and only 10 per cent more than 15; 12 per cent had no PA unit (PC, 2009; MSL, 2013, 2012, 2011, 2010). One may infer that PA functions are placed in small units and lack deep specificity; flexibility, breadth and low-supervision work are normal; generalists take most jobs; demand for narrow expertise is low. Hierarchies are flat, which implies that career moves require lateral or employer change ('up or out').

The following will look at apprenticeship-style training programs as entry points and formal learning schemes. This does not refer to internships but to fully paid post-graduate training-focused employment of up to 2 years. They are a norm for example, in law (clerkships), public administration, teaching, or librarianship. They are called 'Referendariat'. Journalism and PR use 'Volontariat' or the English 'traineeship'. Standardization and regulation vary. Off-work seminars are normally part of the package, just as in Germany's 'dual system' for non-academic trainees who rotate from work to vocational-school sequences.

Working for associations

German lobbying, one may say in Schattschneideresque style, was long unthinkable save in terms of associations. They still supply the bulk of lobby jobs. But few association jobs are political. Employment Agency statistics[2] reveal that interest-representing trade and employer groups retain 81 300 staff, employee groups 10 500. Civic, cultural, charity groups and parties have 352 000 (BA, 2014c). As for top positions, statistics list 7000 'directing staff of interest organizations' (of these, 42 per cent are university graduates) (BA, 2013). Under old definitions, the 2011 data listed 14 700 'functionaries, association secretaries' (28 per cent graduates) (IAB, 2014).

The German Society for Association Management estimates that there were 15 500 associations in 2012 (1990, 10,100); of these, only 8700 had full-time management. Around 1500 had a primary or secondary seat in Berlin (DGVM and DVM, 2012). This may be an indicator of political activity. Another is voluntary accreditation in the federal parliament's register, dubbed the 'lobby list' but only allowing associations. The November 2014 list had 2218 groups (Bundestag, 2014), up from 1600 in 1999 and 635 at the register's start in 1974 (Sokolowski, 2005, p. 33). It is often misconceived to be dominated by business groups. They made up half the list in 1974 but shrank to one-third by 2005 (Sokolowski, 2005, p. 38).

In secretariats, surveys count an average of five to seven persons; few headquarters retain over 20 (Busch, 2006, p. 8; DGVM, 2008; Russ, 2011, p. 80). A few peak groups employ more than 100, but many for general services. For instance, the Düsseldorf-based Association of German Engineers (VDI), a lobby heavyweight, has three persons in Berlin but overall 120 staff (with its commercial annex, 500) serving 150 000 members and 12 000 active volunteers in 600 bodies and 15 state chapters (Von Vieregge, 2012).

Kienbaum Consulting's long-running association surveys have always shown a hiring preference for law and business/economics majors. In 2011, 89 per cent of managers (all levels) were university graduates. Some 30 per cent of all academic workers were business/economics majors (2009: 27 per cent), 28 per cent (23 per cent) lawyers, 21 per cent (24 per cent) engineers or natural scientists, all others made for 20 per cent (26 per cent) (Heiden, 2011, p. 10; Kienbaum, 2011). The 'Verbandsjurist' or association lawyer holds a special place in traditional corporatist symbiosis with Germany's legalistic government culture. Jurists dominate the senior civil-service cadre (Schwanke and Ebinger, 2006, p. 233). Ministries expect lawyerly responses as they routinely call on associations to consult on draft laws. Groups also need lawyers for legal monitoring, member advice, litigation or collective bargaining. 'Verbandsjurist' jobs lure attorneys who lack the top exam grades needed to join state service or prime law firms. It is an attractive option for all-rounders who enjoy a mix of politics, communication and service (Foderà, 2009; Gottschalk, 2011). Associations also have a bias for executives with law degrees (Fleitmann, 2011, p. 7).

Russ (2011) found in a representative association panel that three-quarters did not believe they suffer from a lack of skilled staff, aging staff, high turnover or high wages (p. 80). Russ, like others, suggests that talent management is a low priority. 'What dominates is staff administration, less individual personnel development', notes Schneider (2009, p. 41). Compared with business, groups offer less pay and prestige. Career ladders are shorter. Thus, associations often recruit among themselves. An adage is, 'once in an association, always in an association' (Schneider, 2009, p. 40). Prejudice holds that 'those who can't make it in business work for the association' (Fleitmann, 2009, p. 10). Trade groups have an image of probity but also 'dullness, conceptlessness, and bite inhibition' (von Vieregge, 2010, p. 23). A negative job cliché is the 'background administrator, committee minutes-taker and

reserved one-track expert', notes Fleitmann (2011, p. 7). Busch (2006) cites a view of 'a refuge of conservative employment situations' that 'structurally resemble public bureaucracy' for 'experts with administrative orientation rather than entrepreneurial thinking' (p. 6).

Yet Russ (2011) found about half of associations invest in continuing education, up from 37 per cent 5 years earlier (p. 82). They can find commercial, non-profit and university vendors for multiple association-management topics. For example, the prominent firm Kölner VerbändeSeminare claims since 1996 to have trained 6000 staff in 'Management & Lobbying,' 'Communication & Marketing,' and 'Law & Tax' (KVS, 2014).

Apprenticeship routes

Associations commonly hire university graduates directly for 'Referent' desk-officer jobs rather than through a traineeship scheme. If smaller groups employ trainees, they often do so by participating in a federal peak group's training alliance. Some have quite a history. In 1954, the Federation of Employer Associations (BDA) launched a junior directors training scheme, 'Geschäftsführernachwuchsprogramm' (GFN). It has 428 alumni (Rennicke, 2014). 80–90 per cent of BDA recruits are lawyers past the law clerkship ('Referendariat') so they are admitted to the bar, so the 2-year GFN is a second traineeship for them. While it is open for politics or economics majors 'who want to link rigorous academic work with political will to make a difference', the priority is to train lawyer–lobbyists who double as labor counsel. This is key at regional chapters where trainees spend most time (BDA, 2014). The Federation of German Industries has a 24-month plan. Trainees run the gamut of policy units, regional groups, Brussels or big-firm bureaus. They tend to legislation; support committees; draft position papers, articles, speeches; organize projects, events, and delegation travel (Knipper, 2009; BDI, 2012). The Diet of Chambers of Commerce and Industry runs a 12-month circuit of four 3-month posts (in Berlin, two local chambers, one abroad); trainee salaries are €1900 a month plus travel and foreign allowances (DIHK, 2014).

For senior staff from across the nation, these three peak groups jointly run an Institute for Social and Economic Policy Training (ISWA) in Berlin. It started in 1964 to upskill 4000 academic staff on the rationale that groups' continuing education was retarded (Franke, 1968, p. 107). Free-of-charge seminars come in two tracks: public policy and skill-building, that is, communication, lobbying, negotiation, law, services and management (ISWA, 2014).

The German Farmers' Association (DBV) has partnered since 1948 with Andreas Hermes Academy in Bonn and Berlin. Its association training program ('Verbands-Training-Programm', VTP) is for full-time junior staff of agrarian groups, often 1-year trainees with an agribusiness degree who serve at county, state, federal and

EU posts. A 32-day certificate curriculum teaches economics, food and farming policy, negotiation, media skills and group leadership. Regional voluntary leaders aged 22–30 sign up for an 'Agriculture and Interest Representation' program. Called 'the long course', it puts two dozen participants in a 2-month boarding school. Besides lectures and workshops, they meet experts in Bonn, Berlin and Brussels, and travel abroad. They simulate, role-play, and even practice social etiquette at mock political receptions. Alumni meet yearly for a congress (AHA, 2013, 2014).

Some groups with large communication units offer 1–2-year 'Volontariat' schemes with a PR focus but include PA-type work. Others choose to dedicate training to political work. For instance, the Federation of Small and Medium Enterprises in Berlin places a 'trainee for public policy and economics' for 18–24 months, offered to politics, economics or business graduates with policy analysis skills (BVMW, 2014). Labor unions, too, run traineeships, for example, metal workers' IG Metall; energy, chemical and mining workers' IGBCE; and hospitality, agriculture and food union NGG. In 12–18 months, trainees rotate to local and central offices, work on strategic projects, and attend classes in communications, politics and law. University graduates have become more numerous among 'secretaries-in-training' (Molitor, 2009). IG Metall, expecting 40 per cent of its 1100 staff to retire by 2017, launched its scheme in 2000; of 400 alumni, one-quarter came from university (Einblick, 2013, p. 5).

Working for business

According to trade journal *Politik & Kommunikation*'s database, 145 German and foreign companies run a Berlin bureau (Sömmer, 2014; Personal communication with *Politik & Kommunikation* editor). The number is much higher than in Bonn. Reasons for this growth are geographical and political. Bonn was an association town, direct firm representation was the exception. If firms sought direct talks, Bonn was just a short ride from most headquarters. There was no need to maintain a capital bureau. By contrast, Berlin is far away from the country's business hubs. Unlike most capitals, Berlin is not a major industrial and commercial city anymore. Most big companies fled west after 1945.

Around 2000, firms began to prioritize lobbying unfiltered by associations. This led to a build up of PA units at headquarters and capital liaison offices. Partially these were prestige projects during Berlin's post-1999 boom. While most bureaus hide in modest places, and several DAX-30 blue-chip companies do not have a permanent post, a dozen major firms made architectural statements of stunning modernism or restored Prussian glory in the rejuvenated Reichstag quarter. They opened stylish conference centers, posh product showrooms or boulevard cafés humming with flaneurs: uniquely branded locations where lobbyists host the political class. Beyond socializing, active outposts with content-rich think-tank-style outreach programming

enhance voice and access; this justifies the extra cost (Aurich, 2012, p. 42). It also multiplies PA expectations of what liaisons do beyond lobbying.

'Corporate representative offices, as they are today, are a Berlin phenomenon, not one transferred from Bonn', states Olfe-Kräutlein (2012, p. 163). Behind opulent facades, she found mostly small teams, averaging 3.3 staff in a study of 17 DAX-30 bureaus. Three had a single person (p. 160). Most offices enjoy high rank but not autonomy. They tend to report to a headquarter's PA chief rather than to boards. Rarely do Berlin units command all a firm's PA. Only five could make strategic decisions alone (p. 200). A typical bureau 'seems to be not more, but also not less, than a satellite assigned to an active but rather supporting, not strategically directing role for the firm' (p. 221). Headquarters keep a strong role.

The corporate PA workforce has considerably grown. In a survey of 102 firms, Siedentopp (2010) found 70 per cent had a stand-alone PA unit, while 30 per cent placed PA in another. Almost two-thirds (62 per cent) had a Berlin post. Most units started life in the late 1990s (p. 241). Among 90 firms in the dataset, from 1999 to 2007 Siedentopp saw staff for German PA grow from 185 to 419 employees, and, with overlap, EU affairs staff from 90 to 250. Adding all indirectly involved staff, German PA grew from 516 to 1256, and EU teams from 357 to 957 persons (p. 235). Firms had on average 4.8 staff (median 3) charged with German PA (1999: 3.1, median 1), and with indirect staff, 12.5 (median 3; 1999: 7.5, median 1.5) (pp. 232–245).

Most staff hold an university degree. Siedentopp (2007) counted 91 per cent of department heads, heads of capital offices and others, with (mostly advanced) degrees. A quarter (24 per cent) majored in politics, 17 per cent each in business/economics or law, only 10 per cent in communication (p. 24). Olfe-Kräutlein (2012) found that of 17 DAX Berlin bureau heads, all were university educated: 41 per cent in law, 23 per cent in business/economics, 18 per cent in politics (p. 200).

Apprenticeship routes

General management trainee programs for university graduates are popular among major companies. They get an occasional exotic bird keen on rotating to PA units or capital bureaus. But that is no routine and safe route to PA job entry. Few company traineeship schemes focus on non-market external affairs. Deutsche Post DHL (2013) has a 'GROW' program (18 months) in corporate functions, placing trainees in the CEO's staff; those with prior politics exposure work in the Berlin bureau. Deutsche Telekom (2014) runs 15–18 month project-style CEO-area traineeships with a 'Public & Regulatory Affairs' track. Dow Chemical Germany (2013) has a 12–18 month 'Public Affairs & Government Affairs Development Program' deploying in communications, community relations and political posts. Large PR units may subscribe to 'PR Volontariat' with PA stages. Auto-maker BMW (2014) recently

added to its 24-month PR 'Volontariat' an 18-month 'Trainee' track with team projects and a half-year abroad, focused on 'dialog with media members, the public, political institutions and organizations'. Recently online retailer Zalando (2013) sought a 1-year 'Volontär Politische Kommunikation', and gaming firm Schmidt Gruppe (2014) a 2-year 'Volontär Public Affairs/Politische Kommunikation'. But such cases are too marginal to call it a general trend.

Working for consultancies

Since 1999, Berlin has become a political consulting bazaar. Polisphere's 2012 *Career Guide Public Affairs* lists over 100 communication agencies, most with a Berlin seat or branch (Busch-Janser, 2012a). They range from global groups to mid-size boutiques to small or solo firms. A few large ones have 30–40 staff but often bid for full-service government PR. Typical boutiques employ five to 15 persons. Pure 'lobby shops' are rare. An MSL Group (2013) survey asked companies and associations about external help: 52 per cent said they hire by project, 15 per cent on retainer, 58 per cent prefer a PR agency with PA ability, 41 per cent a PA consultancy, 34 per cent a law firm, 29 per cent an independent, 15 per cent a business consultancy (multiple responses possible) (p. 21).

Some 30 larger law firms are visible in Berlin. When Germany's legal services market was deregulated in the 1990s and opened for non-local partnerships, it transformed into a field led by UK and US giants. They brought Anglo-American-style law firm lobbying to Berlin. In 2005, major firm Freshfields raised eyebrows by naming a unit 'Public Affairs', housing 'a wealth of combined legal, political and PR knowledge' (FBD, 2014). Most firms are more hushed, even if they hire prominent politicians as of-counsel. Law firm Noerr (2014) insists: 'Advisory in governmental affairs, as we understand it, is not the same as lobbyism'. But it offers client briefs for 'preparing public policy decisions', and 'arranging and structuring conversations between decision makers in business, politics, and public administration'.

Consultancies may lobby for clients but often engage as coach, adviser, technical vendor or in other support roles. As roles are process-driven and adapt to situational demand, they may change on short notice (Fuhrberg, 2014, p. 1035). Short-termism, staff turnover and uncertain careers especially mark communication agency life. Klewes and van der Pütten (2014) explain that new mandates are hard to plan for but need instant staff deployment and hiring. The reverse occurs, too: projects end abruptly as clients switch priorities, resulting in staff overhang. Most firms are 'chronically understaffed' with a few experienced mid-level consultants backed up by a cheaper junior reserve. Few enjoy operational profit cushions which justify a human resources unit or long-term personnel planning (p. 1015). Law firms only hire lawyers, agencies recruit more broadly, favoring

political/social science and business/economics graduates (Stolzenberg, 2005, p. 92; Busch-Janser, 2006, p. 10).

Apprenticeship routes

Post-graduate traineeships have become a normal entry to communication consulting. But there is great variety, even in length (8–24 months). The German Association of Political Consultants (degepol) has not yet discussed a model. National PR bodies, which also offer separate off-the-job PR certificates, only suggest non-binding content to employers. In 2010, the German Public Relations Society and the Federal Association of Press Spokespersons drafted a general 'Volontariat' path with an optional three-month PA post (BdP and DPRG, 2010). Most Berlin PA firms do not even use the label 'Volontariat' but prefer 'traineeship', a 2012 survey found. About half offered a structured plan. 37 per cent placed trainees in multiple stations, 28 per cent also in partner offices, even abroad. Some 81 per cent had internal, and 62 per cent external, seminars. About two-thirds offered a subsequent contract to more than half their alumni (Busch-Janser, 2012b, p. 113). Resources for training are dependent on the firms' size. A PA market leader like KetchumPleon offers a diverse experience and an internal academy. Of seven German locations, Berlin is the PA hub. Since 2000, its 18-month program includes 15 months in Berlin units and 3 months' worth of weeklong seminars at agencies across Germany. But there is only one one-week PA seminar. A mentored final exam project may be to draft a campaign plan and present to a client. Alumni get a certificate claimed to 'enjoy an excellent reputation in the industry' (Winter, 2012, p. 49). Trainees may, for example, write a monitoring report on legislation. In a quality and ethics block, they learn about codes of conduct, including rules on lobbying (Winter, 2012, p. 50).

Lawyers do not have much room for specialization in their 2-year 'Referendariat'. Court-employed, they serve up to six clerkships and rotate to prosecutors, public administration, and private practice. Associations often offer placements to lawyers. The politically minded can also choose one in corporate PA, a ministry, parliament or an EU body. Lobby-law firms find this touch of political experience attractive (Geiger, 2005, p. 151).

Employer Expectations in Job Advertising

Lobbying employers fill job pipelines in various ways: by unsolicited applications, networking, search agencies, and job advertisements. Want ads for such positions have become common. They are a solid primary source for research on what

lobbyists should learn, assuming that ads are objective indicators of employers' intentions and communicate expectations well.

Method

The principal issue with ads is that they may not adequately portray employers' wants and needs. It would be naïve to assume that all employers formulate ads on a basis of definitive task descriptions, scientifically elaborated competency taxonomies and finely-tuned vocabulary. While there are general international and national classification systems for tasks and competencies, sophisticated application of such approaches cannot be expected for the PA work field, which is not well-profiled and is at best a marginal topic for most human resources departments – if there is any (not all associations or consultancies have one). Thus, ads may be unrealistic, unclear, implicit rather than explicit, mushy or full of plastic words.

German and European studies of communication job ads warn of problems. German ads have been diagnosed of 'certain flabbiness' in describing competencies (Klewes and van der Pütten, 2014, p. 1011). Research shows that communication job ads stress transferable personal, social and meta-level method skills over unique workplace tasks, and describe even craft-type skills (for example, writing) rather unspecifically and haphazardly. Studies point to the communication field's hazy contours and wobbly demarcations of unique skillsets (Huber, 2006; Laska, 2009; Schulte, 2011; Tench, *et al*, 2013). What is bad in PR can hardly be much better in PA. In the world of lobby job ads, problems start with job titles and basic descriptors. But almost no one advertises straight for a 'lobbyist'. The term is used informally but runs into semantic or sensitivity snags. To locate relevant job ads which include lobby activities in Germany or for Germans in Brussels on online portals, a search term list of 20 relevant root words in varied derivative German and English forms was created. Table 1 shows a clear hierarchy of terms for job, unit or organization in the sample.

Table 1: Key search terms in ad sample

Search term	n	%	Search term	n	%
Interest representation	73	39	Advocacy	6	3
Public affairs	64	34	Government(al) affairs/relations	6	3
Lobbying	32	17	Regulatory affairs	5	3
Political communication	29	15	Corporate affairs/relations/functions	4	2
Political/policy advice/consulting	9	5	Political management	2	1
Issue(s) Management	6	3	Political/policy affairs	1	1

Note: Multiple entries possible. Aggregate table without all linguistic variants, including bilingual combinations (for example, 'Lobbyarbeit', literally lobby work). Not all terms have a direct translation.

Table 2: Ad sample

Ad published by	n	%	Employer type	n	%
Employer direct	167	88	Associations	87	45
Headhunter (for anon. or named employer)	22	11	– *Of these:* Trade/business associations	58	29
			– Civic, ideological, single-issue	23	13
			– Other association	6	3
Type of contract					
Full-time	174	95	Business (corporate)	52	27
Part-time	9	5	Consultancies	47	24
			Other (for example, public bodies)	3	2
Length of contract					
Permanent (indefinite term)	139	79	*Economic sectors*		
Temporary: <3 years	34	19	Miscellaneous. business/services incl. consulting	76	40
Temporary: >3 years	2	1	Health	21	11
			Energy, natural resources	17	9
Job region			Communications, electronics	16	8
Berlin	113	62	Misc. manufacturing	11	6
West Germany	57	31	Transportation	11	6
East Germany (excluding Berlin)	3	2	Finance, insurance, real estate	9	5
Brussels	8	4	Other	28	15

The final sample had 189 ads from online job portals, with live ads up to February 2014 and retired ads back to July 2012, for a 20-month total. Some 94 per cent of ads were in German, the rest in English. Part-time and trainee jobs were included, not internships. A key source (49 per cent of ads) was Politjobs.eu. The search used job sites of the trade journal *Politik & Kommunikation*, the political consultants' association degepol, Verbaende.com, and 20 general job portals (for example, Monster, StepStone, Jobleads or FAZjob). Major PR and law job sites surprisingly yielded almost no results. Full ad copy was screened for relevance before coding. Certain ads were filtered out. Media relations positions were discarded unless an ad had political keys. Second, most ads for 'regulatory affairs' did not fit. They may, for example, seek specialized lawyers or scientists to work with regulatory agencies, for example, in drug authorization. They may work with political colleagues in a firm's 'market access' team, but keep a separate profile. This is similar in energy, telecoms or transport. Third, most ads for business-to-government sales, procurement, tenders and grants acquisition were discarded. Most such ads sought technical, product, legal or process experts without political references. Fundraising and project acquisition jobs in civic groups also tended to have few overlaps with advocacy jobs.

Table 2 conveys a sample profile. Most ads were placed by employers directly and offered full-time jobs with indefinite contract length. Regionally, Berlin dominated. Almost half the ads were placed by associations supporting the hypothesis that the

bulk of lobbying jobs is provided by them. A quarter of ads each came from corporations and consultancies; unfortunately, almost no law firms were among them. This indicates that the sampling method may not have captured all relevant postings. Employers were coded by industry sectors using a simplified version of the US Center for Responsive Politics' OpenSecrets database (CRS, 2014). Where more than one sector fit, the dominant one was assigned. The largest and most heterogeneous category, 'miscellaneous business/services', includes all consulting firms.

Job titles varied greatly, but not a single ad wanted a 'lobbyist'. Titles were 51 per cent German, 26 per cent English (for example, 'Head of Public Affairs'), and 23 per cent were a German-English mix (for example, 'Referent Public Affairs'). Most frequent (32 per cent) was 'Referent', for entry- to mid-level staff. Only consultancies did not use it. Adviser/consultant was used by 15 per cent, typically consultancies. Some 12 per cent of ads sought a manager, 8 per cent a head/director, and 6 per cent a managing director. Among the dozen core titles were analyst, expert, counsel, assistant, associate, lead, account or project executive/manager, or simply employee ('Mitarbeiter'). Only 5 per cent of ads sought a trainee.

Because literature and professional bodies offer no satisfactory job prescriptions, a coding scheme was built inductively rather than from a pre-defined catalog. After data collection, ads were screened to draw out recurring patterns, keywords, phrases and attributes. This pilot content analysis generated an item list used for coding. Automated analysis software was not used, because non-standard copy demands context experience and a sense of one's finger tips. Admittedly, there are robustness issues, but the main aim was to produce a starting point for further exploration. Results were categorized into summative areas. A priority lay in not narrowing them too much so that the range and nuances of ads can be fully appreciated.

Experience, academics, knowledge

Almost all ads explicitly requested prior experience. A plurality were unspecific or spoke of 'several years relevant'. Generally, ads for more junior positions were more specific on years. Consultancies had most junior jobs, and their ads included years most often. Associations included them least often. Only 4 per cent of ads requested a prior formal traineeship. (Table 3)

Some ads specified a type of prior experience. About a quarter requested in-sector practice (for example, transport). Others wanted prior experience with an employer type: associations, business, consulting, or politics/government were each named in about a quarter of all ads. By functional area, a third wanted prior exposure to political work. A quarter explicitly sought lobby-related experience, and the same share of ads asked for an existing contact network. The latter two occurred mostly in ads for mid- to senior-level positions. (Table 4)

Table 3: Experience

Experience level	Total		Associations		Business		Consulting	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Several years relevant	40	22	14	29	12	27	7	16
Unspecified	67	37	16	33	10	22	6	14
Senior level:>8 years	3	2	0	0	2	4	1	2
Senior level:>5 years	13	7	2	4	6	13	6	14
Mid level:<5 years	25	14	10	21	10	22	13	30
Junior level:<3 years	20	11	5	10	4	9	8	18
Entry level:<1 year	14	8	1	2	1	2	3	7
	182	100	48	100	45	100	44	100

Table 4: Specific experience

Prior employer experience with	*n*	*%*	Prior functional experience in	*n*	*%*
Associations	48	25	Political arena (generic)	63	33
Business	45	24	Lobbying-related	44	23
Consulting	44	23	Administrative	11	6
Government, public institution, or political	43	23	Communication and media	32	17
Media	0	0	Management, supervisory function	22	12
Other (specific)	6	3		—	—

A university degree was required by 87 per cent of ads. Only 12 per cent specified levels (10 per cent post-graduate, 2 per cent baccalaureate). This is surprising, given that the Bologna Process which reformed Germany's one-cycle degrees into a two-cycle bachelor-master structure has been underway for more than a decade. Either employers are ignorant, which is unlikely, or they are open for both, discounting advanced degrees, or they simply assume most applicants will have an advanced degree, either as old system graduates or because they belong to the three-quarters of Bachelors who transfer to Master's programs (HIS, 2012). One-cycle studies with a (post-graduate level) Diploma or state exam are still alive and dominate, for example, in law.

Employers were flexible on academics. Of 123 ads concerned with fields of study, 13 per cent named a single exclusive field (often law or business/economics), 19 per cent named one field but added 'or something similar' or 'relevant', and 68 per cent listed alternatives – typically two or three academic fields. But a quarter of multiple-option ads listed four to six alternatives. Such lists were often strangely eclectic, without obvious logic.

The first-named field likely indicates a strong preference. Politics, law and business were equally represented, named by about a quarter each. All others kept

under 10 per cent. A complex of politics, social sciences and humanities came to 40 per cent. Remarkably, corporate ads named business/economics first much less often than did associations. Consultancies rarely sought economic and legal minds. Aggregate data, disregarding rank order, generally confirms the 'first-named' tabulation. Recruiting patterns seem to favor graduates of non-technical disciplines that focus on public institutions and behavior. This data mostly matches prior findings on corporate PA and consulting (Stolzenberg, 2005; Busch-Janser, 2006; Siedentopp, 2007; Olfe-Kräutlein, 2012). Ads rarely advertised for engineers or natural scientists. For associations, this finding runs counter to Kienbaum (2011). An explanation might be that groups hire such graduates, but less for political work (not Kienbaum's focus). (Table 5)

Ads primarily describe tasks or competencies but also mention domain knowledge, that is, applicants should 'know' rather than 'be able to do'. Whether it was required or desired was left uncoded because of frequently nebulous ad copy. Employers highly value knowledge of their own environment and of the political system. The latter was usually put in general terms; it may be self-evident that this means German politics. EU politics was named explicitly by 15 per cent. Knowledge

Table 5: Academic disciplines

First-named academic field	Total		Associations		Business		Consulting	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Political and social sciences, humanities	48	40	14	22	20	50	14	82
Law	30	25	18	29	11	28	1	6
Business, economics	26	22	22	35	4	10	0	0
Health and natural sciences	11	9	5	8	4	10	2	12
Engineering, engineering management	5	4	4	6	1	3	0	0
	120	100	63	100	40	100	17	100
Subfields: Political and social sciences, humanities								
– Political science, public administration	33	28	10	16	13	33	10	59
– Journalism, media, communications	11	9	1	2	7	18	3	18
Cumulative frequency of academic field								
Political and social sciences, humanities	127	46	38	29	45	50	44	81
Law	59	21	28	21	26	29	5	9
Business, economics	53	19	45	34	8	9	0	0
Health and natural sciences	23	8	8	6	10	11	5	9
Engineering, engineering management	15	5	14	11	1	1	0	0
	277	100	133	100	90	100	54	100

Note: Cumulative frequency means the field was named in the ad, regardless of rank order if alternatives were listed.

Table 6: Knowledge areas

Knowledge domain requested (N = 189)	Total		Associations		Business		Consulting	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Employer's sector, policy field, market, competition	80	42	40	21	24	13	13	7
Political system, process (general and/or Germany)	74	39	28	15	16	8	28	15
Economic system, general economics	29	15	17	9	10	5	2	1
EU political system, process	29	15	14	7	6	3	8	4
Sector-specific political, legislative, regulatory process	27	14	8	4	12	6	6	3
Technology issues/context	21	11	9	5	12	6	0	0
Media, communication system	16	8	3	2	3	2	10	5
Legal system	8	4	3	2	5	3	0	0

of media and communications systems was named by 8 per cent, underscoring that this was not the focus of this job family. Only consultancies asked for it frequently. (Table 6)

Generic competencies

Personal, social and method competency descriptors were placed in 42 summative categories. Some 30 had double-digit shares, but only one-third were found in more than a quarter of ads. Personal or social occurred more often than method skills. Many are related or overlap. General communication and presentation ability was top-ranked (74 per cent), and 71 per cent required English skills. All others were included in less than 50 per cent of ads. Among personal/social items, the top two look contradictory: 47 per cent of ads wanted team players and 41 per cent autonomy, that is, self-reliant, independent, self-starting candidates. The twin set is still plausible. Lobbyists succeed when they collaborate, yet PA units tend to be small: a few hands do a lot of work, discretion is high. This calls for people who do not wait to be prompted and can work on their own. (Table 7)

One-third of ads listed demeanor, poise, confident appearance, self-assurance or similar. This reflects on the nature of representative jobs. Lobbyists cannot be shy. They must get recognition and rapport, stand their ground on slippery parquets, need to keep diplomatic posture and avoid gaffes. About one-third wanted enthusiastic, motivated, or committed workers. It may be boilerplate, but eager people likely make better lobbyists. A quarter of ads listed stress resilience or tenacity. A quarter named flexibility, which carries multiple meanings. It probably includes time flexibility (set by 7 per cent specifically, some noting evening or weekend event attendance) and mobility. Indeed, 21 per cent of ads required travel.

Table 7: Generic competencies

Competency (N = 189)	n	%	Competency	n	%
Personal, interpersonal, social			*Method*		
Communication and presentation (generic)	140	74	Analytical thinking	74	39
Teamplayer	90	47	Project management	64	34
Autonomous, self-starter, self-reliant and so on	77	41	Organizing talent, planning, administration	59	31
Demeanor, bearing, confident, self-assured	68	36	Conceptual	54	28
Committed, enthusiastic, passionate and so on	58	31	Quick study, immersing in new problems	36	19
Tenacious, resilient, stress-resistant	48	25	Researching	36	19
Flexible	46	24	Complexity reduction	33	17
Proactive, initiating, dynamic	40	21	Strategic thinking	33	17
Supervise staff, leadership	38	20	Budgeting, accounts, finance, evaluation	32	17
Multidisciplinary, cross-functional work	32	17	Write/edit professionally	32	17
Networking, contact/relationship building	31	16	Commercial development, marketing, (client/contract) acquisition	24	13
Innovative, creative	30	16	Problem solving	22	12
Sensitive, diligent, careful, attent to detail	28	15	*IT / Computing*		
Persuasiveness/sales ability	28	15	Computing skills (any named, miscellaneous)	70	37
Entrepreneurial	24	13	Microsoft Office suite	42	22
Time managing, priority setting, multi-task	24	13	Social media	17	9
Social competence (generic)	24	13	*Foreign Language*		
Persevering, assertive	22	12	English required	135	71
Goal/result orientated	21	11	– Excellent level	82	61
Negotiation skills	21	11	– Good level	39	29
Customer / service orientated	20	11	– English+other language	8	4
Diplomacy, tact	19	10	Foreign study/work experience	14	7

Note: Ad language greatly varies in specificity. This makes it difficult to perfectly separate personal/social and method competencies. For example, communication and presentation can be interpreted as a generic personal/social competency; but it may also be seen as a method or craft-type skill. Many ads only include a generic description of communication skills, but some ads asked for specifics. In such cases, the generic variant was also counted, resulting in a double entry.

The top method competency was analytical thinking. The ability to structure situations and ideas is a prime asset in lobby labyrinths. About one-third of ads listed project managing, organizational, planning or administrative skills. Slightly fewer ads requested conceptual ability to draw up ideas, solutions and action plans. Computer skills were mentioned in 37 per cent of ads. Some named brand-name suites or applications (for example, Microsoft Office, Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Access, SAP, Lotus Notes, Cobra Address) or software types (for example, word

processing, database, spreadsheet). Most ads were vague. Empty phrases like 'computer affinity' or 'using standard applications', 'the Internet' or 'social media' appeared often. Ads almost never stated precisely what computers would be used for. German lobbyists must be bilingual, it seems. English abilities were required by nearly three-quarters of ads; 64 per cent of these indicated a proficiency level but never named an assessment standard like the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages with its A1–C2 scale.

Political expert competencies

Separate from all-purpose skills are unique job skills, here called political expert competencies. Most are not fully unique to lobbying but useful elsewhere in politics. Often ambiguous, items were coded in 35 categories. Of these, 23 received more than 10 per cent of mentions, and 10 had more than 30 per cent. Almost half of ads wanted applicants to deal with strategy. Strikingly, two-thirds of consulting and business ads named it but less than one-third of associations. About one-third of ads named tasks related to policy preparation. This was less prevalent in consultant ads. Monitoring was relatively prominent, as was political analysis. Few ads specified this further in terms of techniques, for example, only 2 per cent named stakeholder mapping. Explicit referrals to advising and decision support were most frequent with consultancies. (Table 8)

Organizations have internal stakeholders to tend to. Some 40 per cent of ads asked to support, coordinate or manage committees, bodies, working parties and internal networks. A quarter placed similar demands in respect to external partners. A quarter also wanted applicants to themselves participate in organizational bodies, and a quarter spoke of representing the employer externally in bodies. These items were a domain of associations and business. Yet associations named such functions about twice as often as corporations, which are more hierarchical than member-based groups with their volunteer committees. All ads naming member support, association management, or work with volunteers and honorary officers were placed by associations exclusively.

Regarding lobbyists' liaison skills, 42 per cent explicitly expected applicants to build and maintain contacts and relationships in political arenas. About the same share wanted candidates to be representatives to government, political and other target groups, or put them to advocate for the employer. Interestingly, these two latter functions were mentioned rarely by consultancies, indicating that they do less direct lobbying than is commonly assumed, or they prefer to conceptualize this as client support.

Various communication items featured prominently. Some 41 per cent of ads asked applicants to write or edit policy material. Ads often named tools, such as position papers or briefings. A quarter expected applicants to arrange or prepare

Table 8: Political expert competencies

Competency	Total (N = 189)		Associations (85)		Business (51)		Consulting (47)	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Develop, recommend (political) strategy, concepts	90	48	25	29	32	63	33	70
Build, maintain relationships, contacts	80	42	33	39	26	51	18	38
Write, edit policy material	77	41	36	42	19	37	19	40
Support, coordinate, manage committees, bodies	76	40	48	56	26	51	0	0
Represent externally to government, politics, other	75	40	46	54	26	51	3	6
Monitor/report issues, politics, legislation and so on	74	39	26	31	24	47	22	47
Analyze, assess legislation, political initiatives and so on	74	39	38	45	24	47	11	23
Advocate positions	69	37	39	46	22	43	7	15
Coordinate, develop, recommend policy	67	35	34	40	28	55	3	6
Event planning, management	57	30	30	35	16	31	10	21
Support PR, media/external communications	56	30	33	39	12	24	11	23
Write/edit media materials	51	27	27	32	10	20	14	30
Represent externally in associations, committees…	50	26	31	36	19	37	0	0
Coordinate externally: coalitions, associations and so on	48	25	33	39	12	24	1	2
Participate in committees, bodies, working parties	45	24	31	36	14	27	0	0
Schedule, arrange, prepare top-level meetings	44	23	18	21	16	31	7	15
Advise, support decision-making	39	21	8	9	9	18	22	47
Support, service membership	32	17	32	38	0	0	0	0
Prepare, produce presentations	29	15	8	9	10	20	11	23
Represent externally to media, public	26	14	18	21	8	16	0	0
Stakeholder dialog/outreach/engagement	23	12	7	8	10	20	6	13
Campaigns – develop, implement, manage	23	12	9	11	2	4	12	26
Anticipate, identify emerging issues, risks	23	12	6	7	12	24	4	9

superiors' internal and external meetings. Almost one-third involved applicants in events. A similar share identified media and PR support. While a quarter asked to write/edit media materials (that is, news releases, newsletters, journals or website), only 14 per cent described a direct role *vis-à-vis* media and public. Few corporations asked for campaign management, but 11 per cent of associations and 26 per cent of consultancies did.

Conclusions

This article has mapped a workplace topography for German lobbyists. Its findings provide insights into emerging requirements for a qualified workforce in an evolving job market. They can help stimulate discussion on explicating employers' competency-based human capital management and recruiting practices. The results may

help guide apprenticeship schemes, continuing education, efforts of professional bodies and university curricula.

The first part profiled a broad range of career options in different employer settings – some stable and conservative, some fluid and precarious, but normally in small units which are likely to look for flexible generalists. For junior entrants, options include an emerging yet still limited set of apprenticeship-style training schemes. Their existence points to substantial employer interest in formally developing a talent base and professional practice. However, the 'traineeship' model has proliferated most widely among PA consultancies, while associations and corporate employers seem to be more selective. Consultancies tend to recruit more young personnel and offer less stable employment situations. They have more limited in-house resources and are under strong cost pressure. This raises some questions about potential abuse of trainees as a cheap-labor reservoir. On the other hand, the apprenticeship idea comes to bloom where employers seriously commit to building a comprehensive learning experience.

The second part offered a job market snapshot based on 2012–2014 advertisements. It showed what employers look for in a quality pool of applicants. A complex interplay of qualifications and requirements emerged. Their demarcation appears blurred, however, as ambiguity in ads was high. There is not yet a stable common classification vocabulary.

Lobbyists perform tasks in different organizational settings, so employers show different preferences. There are commonalities, of course. It is generally expected of the applicant to have a university degree in a non-technical field, broad political knowledge, English proficiency, certain personal, interpersonal and social competencies, information analysis and communication skills. Highly specific method or technical skills are seldom emphasized overall. But attention needs to be paid to diverging employer needs. For example, association and business emphasize policy work, organizational participation, coordination, administration and direct representation more than consultancies do, while the latter stress advising and strategizing. Corporations get less involved in campaign advocacy. Associations focus on members. Lobbyists should learn about these differences and adjust their skill sets.

This study has limitations. The workplace overview drew on multiple sources but, for want of reliable statistics, could only be a sketch. While the problem of job market statistics is unlikely to be solved in the near future, emerging apprenticeship routes appear to be a promising subject for cross-sector, in-depth comparative studies of learning in this more structured environment. Future job ad studies should build a larger sample of industries and close the gap on law firms; they should also extend to a longer period of time. They may then be able to trace changes in the job market and better highlight differences across employer types. Job ad exegesis needs to be more robust. Only reading ad copy may not be enough. Perhaps a dictionary of most-frequent key terms can be developed to allow computerized content analysis. Future research should also employ focus groups and in-depth interviews with employers to

understand of what thinking is behind ads, and with applicants about how they read and respond to ads. Demand side analysis must be augmented by supply studies. In addition, it would be fruitful to study competency development on practitioners' vocational trajectories across employer types.

Notes

1 All cited German sources have been translated by the author.
2 In the Federal Employment Agency's classification, lobbyist was not a coded occupation until 2010. Before 2010, public databases linked lobbyist queries to a class, defined in the 1970s, of 'functionaries, association secretaries' (managing employees of interest organizations, labor unions and parties), combined in a group of elected officials and top administrators (BA, 2005; BA, 2014b). Then the lobbyist was moved to media and marketing jobs, subgroup 'public relations, complex specialist function', joined by campaigners and fundraisers (BA, 2011, p. 1472). Databases now redirect a lobbyist query to a new entry 'political adviser'. Its profile, lacking lobby words, states it is to 'support political and societal actors in communication of interests'. The profile sees work in associations and 'Interessenvertretungen', and in law firms and PR agencies. Corporations go unmentioned (BA, 2014a). The functionary is alive in its old category, except that the profile now explicitly says an association manager/head is *not* to be named a lobbyist; even though she is to 'represent interests of the organization and its members to the lawmaker, the government or the general public, and negotiate in the organization's name' (BA, 2011, p. 1065).

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