

## **Portraying an Organization's Culture through Properties of a Recruitment Website**

Christina M. Kroustalis and Adam W. Meade  
North Carolina State University

Two specific website properties of organizational recruitment websites were examined to determine what effects these properties had on the accurate portrayal of an organization's culture. In addition, we confirmed the results of previous studies that person-organization fit leads applicants to be more attracted to a recruiting organization.

Recruiting high quality applicants for vacant positions is of monumental importance to organizations. Successful recruiting procedures result in applicant attraction which impacts applicant job choices and attitudes, and ultimately increased organizational performance and decreased turnover (Rynes, Heneman, & Schwab, 1980; Wanous, 1980). Increasingly, the Internet is being relied upon for recruitment. However, little is currently known about the role of the Internet in the recruitment process. Specifically, little is known about how different aspects of an organization's recruitment website can affect viewer perceptions of organizational culture. In this study, we examined the effect of two website properties on viewers' perceptions of organizational culture. Additionally, several studies have shown that person-organization (P-O) fit, defined as the extent to which an individual is compatible with an organization (Kristof, 1996), results in higher levels of attraction to an organization (e.g., Cable & Judge, 1996; Dineen, Ash, & Noe, 2002; Judge & Cable, 1997; O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991). Thus, we also examined the extent to which perceptions of P-O fit related to attraction to the organization.

P-O fit plays an important role in the attraction aspect of both the attraction-selection-attrition model (Schneider, 1987) and the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971), suggesting that people are attracted to organizations with values that are congruent with their own. One way that P-O fit can be enhanced is through effective recruiting methods that highlight organizational values and culture. Several prior studies have shown a connection between culture (i.e., an organization's shared set of beliefs and values) and P-O fit during the recruitment process (e.g., Cable & Judge, 1996; Judge & Cable, 1997; Kilmann, Saxton, & Serpa, 1986; Schein, 1985; Wilkins & Ouchi, 1983). Specifically, the accurate portrayal of culture through recruitment material allows individuals to assess

whether their personal characteristics and values match with those of the organization (O'Reilly et al., 1991). Thus, effective communication of organizational culture through recruitment materials should allow prospective applicants to evaluate their fit with the organization and decide not to apply if they perceive poor fit.

Traditionally, recruitment media have included such things as brochures, word-of-mouth accounts, newspaper advertisements, and career fairs. Among these media, organizational brochures (Herriot & Rothwell, 1981), exposure to organizational advertisements (Gatewood, Gowan, & Lautenschlager, 1993), and information about benefits, job characteristics, career advancement, and salaries all increase intentions to apply among job seekers (Rynes & Miller, 1983). Recently, however, the use of the Internet in recruitment has grown exponentially (Cober, Brown, Blumental, Doverspike, & Levy, 2000). A recent survey found that Internet recruitment is being used by over 90% of large U.S. companies (Cober, et al., 2000). In addition, use of the Internet for recruitment purposes is one of the most cost-reducing and time-reducing ways of attracting and hiring employees (Cappelli, 2001; Cober, et al., 2000; Kay, 2000; Marcus, 2001; Millman, 1998). Recent statistics indicate that U.S. companies average between \$1,000 and \$8,000 per applicant in recruiting costs; however, the average cost of attracting applicants with Internet recruiting has been shown to be as low as \$900 per applicant (Greenburg, 1998). Thus, the trend towards use of the Internet in recruitment is expected to grow.

At present, there are two primary ways that the Internet is being used in the recruitment process. The first is the use of job boards (e.g., Monster.com) that post job descriptions and specifications for organizations for a fee. Job boards have the advantage of drawing relatively high traffic from viewers given that applicants can search for multiple

jobs at a centralized website. However, job boards typically have limited information about the vacant position, usually with no indication of what it is like to work for the organization. As such, job seekers have few clues about the organization's culture, its employees, and other relevant information that would lead them to make thoroughly informed choices about applying.

The second use of the Internet in recruitment is via organizations' official websites, including pages dedicated solely to recruiting. These 'careers' sections of organizations' official websites typically include information about the organization's policies, employee testimonials, and information about career development opportunities. Organizations can provide considerable detail about vacant positions, and additional information about the organization such as organizational policies, value statements, and benefits information. Recently, Braddy, Meade, and Kroustalis (2006) found that information on the recruitment website such as value statements (e.g., "We value innovation") and organizational policies (e.g., bonuses for high performance) can effectively convey information about the organization's culture.

At present, little is known about how the design features of a recruitment website affect viewers' perceptions of organizational culture. In the only study we could locate on the subject, Braddy et al. (2006) found that things such as website design features (e.g., pictures and employee testimonials), organizational policy statements, specific comments related to the dimensions of culture (e.g., "We are an innovative company"), and other miscellaneous/general descriptions (e.g., size of the organization) affected individuals' perceptions of culture. However, the study was exploratory in nature and used an open-ended response format which precludes firm conclusions.

In the present study, we thoroughly examine two website design features in relation to three organizational culture dimensions using an experimental design in order to draw firm conclusions with respect to which website design features lead to organizational culture perceptions. Previous studies have shown that pictures strongly enhance and reinforce information about an organization's values (Cober et al., 2000) and can impact memories more effectively than text (Childers & Houston, 1984; Miniard, Bhatla, Lord, Dickson, & Unnava, 1991). Moreover, the use of pictures in addition to text increases the viewer's cognitive awareness, leading to an increase in attention to the information provided (Edell & Stalein, 1983). Therefore, we expect:

*Hypothesis 1:* The inclusion of culture-specific cues in an organization's website pictures will strengthen viewers' perceptions of corresponding culture dimensions.

Employee testimonials are another way organizations can use website design features to portray culture on recruitment websites. Fazio and Zanna (1981) found that individuals like testimonials because they are first-hand personal accounts of the organizational culture and anecdotal evidence indicates that testimonials are highly persuasive in recruitment contexts (Highhouse, Hoffman, Greve, & Collins, 2002). Cober et al. (2000) argue that employee testimonials provide a human touch, enhancing feelings of identification with the hiring organization. Therefore, we expect:

*Hypothesis 2:* The inclusion of culture-specific cues in an organization's website employee testimonials will strengthen viewers' perceptions of corresponding culture dimensions.

#### *Culture Dimensions and P-O Fit*

Cober et al. (2000) indicate that today's top organizations are moving away from bureaucratic, conservative cultures and moving towards innovative cultures. In addition, workforce diversity has become an important trend as diversity increases in the overall population (Spataro, 2005), providing more perspectives to workplace development and ideas. Lastly, teams are continuing to play prominent roles in organizations as the interdependence of work groups helps to establish high quality relationships among employees (Erdogan, Liden, & Kraimer, 2006). We chose the three culture dimensions of innovation, team-orientation, and diversity for this study given the importance of these three culture dimensions in the workforce.

If individuals can gain an accurate sense of an organization's culture from viewing cultural cues embedded in pictures and employee testimonials on a recruitment website, then they can more easily self-select in or out of an organization based on their perceived fit with the organization. Global P-O fit has been shown to be an antecedent to organizational attraction (e.g., Cable & Judge, 1996; Dineen et al., 2002; Judge & Cable, 1997) and job seekers who perceive a global P-O fit are more likely to apply for vacant positions with the hiring organization. Therefore, job seekers who have higher global P-O fit with a hiring organization after viewing the organization's recruitment website should be more attracted to the organization. We propose:

*Hypothesis 3:* As individuals' global P-O fit with an organization increases, their attraction to the organization will increase.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants were 278 undergraduate students at a large southeastern university. The sample was 51% female, with a mean age of 19.2. Seventy-two percent of participants were Caucasian, 16% were African-American, 5% were Asian, and 1% were Hispanic. Five percent of participants did not indicate their race. The breakdown of class standing was as follows: 64.9% freshman, 20.8% sophomores, 6.8% juniors, and 6.8% seniors. Thirty-three percent of respondents indicated that they had previously applied for a job online; and participants indicated that they spent an average of 16.5 hours on the Internet per week.

### *Design and Procedure*

As we were investigating the effects of aspects of organizations' websites on three culture dimensions, we treated our investigation as three independent studies. The first study examined the effects of website properties on the innovation culture dimension, the second the team-orientation dimension, and the third the valuing diversity dimension.

Each website was designed to emulate the "careers" portion of Fortune 500 company websites. Each website that the participant viewed consisted of a manipulation of the pictures and employee testimonials on the website that portrayed the specific organization's culture, where the pictures and testimonials on the website were either null (i.e., not representing the organization's culture) or strongly depicting the organization's culture. As an example, for the team-orientation investigation, a null picture showed the exterior of a building while the culture-loaded picture showed a group of people interacting with one another. As stated previously, we treated our investigations of each culture dimension as an independent study (i.e., three separate 2 x 2 between-subjects studies).

Data collection took place in a computer laboratory in the university's psychology building. Participants were asked to assume that they were job seekers who had just graduated from college while reviewing the "careers" sections of three organizational websites that were created by the authors of the study and a research assistant. Each participant viewed a website related to each culture dimension (i.e., each participant viewed a total of 3 websites); however, the order of viewing the three

websites was randomly determined. The participants were asked to assume that all of the jobs being offered by the organizations were equally attractive in location and pay, were openings in their occupations of interest, and that they were qualified for the jobs. Essentially, participants were asked to base all responses on what was seen on the organizations' websites only.

After participants viewed each of the organizational websites, they answered a series of questions regarding the perceived ratings of the organizational cultures their global P-O fit with the organizations' cultures, how attracted they were to the organizations, and demographic variables.

### *Measures*

**Perceived Culture Ratings.** In order to assess participants' perceived culture ratings of the organizational websites that they viewed, an adaptation of O'Reilly et al.'s (1991) Organizational Culture Profile (OCP) was used. The OCP assesses the degree to which respondents think various items describe an organization's culture. OCP Innovation and Team Orientation factors were included, in addition to a Diversity measure developed by the authors of the present study. Participants responded to the question: "To what extent does each of the following describe the organization's culture" on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = not at all to 7 = great extent for each of the culture items. The coefficient alpha estimate of internal consistency for the scale was calculated for each culture dimension: diversity ( $\alpha = .80$ ), innovation ( $\alpha = .87$ ), and team-orientation ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

**Global P-O Fit.** Global P-O fit was measured with a three item questionnaire taken from Cable and Judge (1996;  $\alpha = .87$ ). The response scale ranged from 1 = not at all to 7 = completely.

**Organization Attraction.** In order to assess participants' attraction to the organization, a five-item measure with a 5-point response scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) was taken from Highhouse, Lievens, and Sinar (2003). The coefficient alpha estimate of internal consistency of the scale in this sample for the culture dimensions of diversity, team-orientation, and innovation were .83, .94, and .95, respectively.

## Results

For the first culture dimension of innovation, Hypothesis 1 was supported. A significant (though small) main effect was found when innovation-specific pictures were included in the design of the recruitment website for an innovative organization  $F[1, 272] = 4.91, p = .03$ ,

$\eta^2 = .02$ . That is, participants who viewed the innovative website that contained either innovative pictures and innovative testimonials ( $M = 5.11$ ,  $SD = .71$ ) or innovative pictures and null testimonials ( $M = 5.03$ ,  $SD = .78$ ) perceived that the recruiting organization's culture was more innovative than participants who viewed websites with either null pictures and null testimonials ( $M = 4.77$ ,  $SD = .90$ ) or null pictures and innovative testimonials ( $M = 4.95$ ,  $SD = .83$ ). However, within the same culture dimension of innovation, Hypothesis 2 examining culture-specific testimonials, was not supported  $F[1, 272] = 1.81$ ,  $p = .18$ . No significant interaction between innovation-specific pictures and testimonials was found  $F[1, 272] = .25$ ,  $p = .62$ .

For the second culture dimension of team-orientation, Hypothesis 1 was not supported  $F[1, 272] = 1.94$ ,  $p = .16$ . In addition, no significant main effect was found for Hypothesis 2, which looked at the effect of culture-specific employee testimonials for team-oriented cultures,  $F[1, 272] = 3.04$ ,  $p = .08$ . Moreover, no significant interaction between team-oriented pictures and testimonials was found for this culture dimension  $F[1, 272] = .51$ ,  $p = .48$ .

For the third culture dimension of diversity, a small but significant main effect was found when diversity-specific pictures were included in the design of the recruitment website,  $F[1, 272] = 4.05$ ,  $p = .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .02$ . That is, those participants who viewed the diversity website with either diversity-specific pictures and diversity-specific testimonials ( $M = 5.24$ ,  $SD = .78$ ) or diversity-specific pictures and null testimonials ( $M = 5.02$ ,  $SD = .64$ ) perceived that the recruiting organization's culture valued diversity more than participants who viewed websites that portrayed either null pictures and null testimonials ( $M = 4.90$ ,  $SD = .88$ ) or null pictures and diversity-specific testimonials ( $M = 4.96$ ,  $SD = .87$ ). As with the innovation culture dimension, this effect was statistically significant, but had a small effect size. When testing culture-specific employee testimonials in Hypothesis 2, however, no significant effect was found,  $F[1, 272] = 2.08$ ,  $p = .15$ . Additionally, no significant interaction between diversity-specific pictures and testimonials was found  $F[1, 272] = .57$ ,  $p = .45$ .

For Hypothesis 3, individuals who perceived a global P-O fit with innovative cultures reported more attraction to the innovative organization than individuals who did not perceive a global fit with innovative cultures,  $F[1, 275] = 171.68$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $R^2 = .38$ ,  $b = 1.29$ ,  $\eta^2 = .62$ . The overall omnibus test for team-oriented cultures was also significant  $F[1, 275] = 142.87$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $R^2 = .34$ , with individuals who perceived a global P-O fit with team-oriented cultures reporting more attraction to the team-oriented

organization than individuals who did not perceive a global fit,  $b = 1.08$ ,  $\eta^2 = .59$ . Lastly, individuals who perceived a global P-O fit to the organization reported more attraction than individuals who did not perceive a global fit with an organizational culture that values diversity,  $F[1, 275] = 87.63$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $R^2 = .24$ ,  $b = .92$ ,  $\eta^2 = .49$ .

## Discussion

The use of the Internet for employee recruitment has increasingly become the norm for most large organizations; however, there has been a lack of research on what website properties affect viewers' perceptions of organizational culture. This study sought to extend Braddy et al.'s (2006) exploratory study, which examined which features of a recruitment website affect viewers' culture perceptions. This study also sought to confirm the results of previous studies which have found that perceived P-O fit is associated with attraction to the hiring organization (e.g., Cable & Judge, 1996; Dineen et al., 2002; Judge & Cable, 1997).

When the pictures on a recruitment website strongly depict that organization's culture viewers generally perceive the culture of that organization more saliently than recruitment websites that do not include culture-specific pictures. This effect was found for organizations displaying innovative and diverse cultures, but not for team-oriented cultures. These results suggest that the use of pictures on a recruitment website is likely to give job seekers an indication of that organization's culture, but only for some culture dimensions. However, our effect sizes were quite small, thus most pictures may not have a large impact on viewers' culture perceptions.

Surprisingly, employee testimonials did not influence viewers' perceptions of the organization's culture. However, this finding may be due to the viewers failing to cognitively process this feature on the website because they were not actively seeking employment with the fictitious organization. Viewers may not have concentrated on written material on the organizations' websites, and may have put little trust in what company employees were saying in their testimonials. As Miniard et al. (1991) and Childers and Houston (1984) point out, pictures tend to impact memory more effectively than text. Therefore, if viewers failed to read the information presented on the website and only focused their attention on the visual aspects of the website, it is likely that the employee testimonials would have little effect on culture perceptions. Additionally, if individuals' memories are impacted by pictures more than written information, then testimonials may have

less of an effect on culture perceptions than the pictorial features of the website.

Previous research has shown that when job seekers fit well with an organization, they are more likely to be attracted to the organization (e.g., Cable & Judge, 1996; Judge & Cable, 1997; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). The findings from the current study supported the P-O fit-attraction linkage found in other studies (e.g., Dineen et al., 2002; Judge & Cable, 1997; Tom, 1971). When individuals perceived a global fit with the organization whose recruitment website they were viewing, they were, in fact, more attracted to the organization.

#### *Limitations and Future Research*

While the results of this study provide promising avenues for organizations to better their recruitment websites, some limitations should be noted. First, the sample of this study was undergraduates enrolled in an introductory Psychology course, the majority of which were freshmen and sophomores. Thus, the participants may not have taken the task as seriously as an actual job seeker exploring the recruitment websites of various organizations might. Lack of experience of the participants in this study could also lead to individuals having less knowledge about what they might actually prefer in the workplace, as many of the participants in the study may have had too little work experience to know their cultural preferences. It should be noted, however, that although the participants in the study may have lacked experience in the workplace, they were very familiar with the Internet, as the participants indicated they spent an average of 16.5 hours on the Internet per week. In addition, approximately one-third of the participants had previously applied for jobs online.

Future research should investigate additional website features that could influence perceptions of an organization's culture, as well as additional culture dimensions. The use of actual job seekers would also strengthen future research in this area. Follow-up studies might concentrate on other outcomes than just P-O fit and attraction to the company, such as website search behavior, affective reactions to the design of the recruitment websites, and by determining if individuals decided to apply and/or accept a job offer with the organization of interest.

With exponential growth in the use of technology in the workplace comes the need to understand the best ways to enhance existing procedures through technology. Being able to enhance the recruitment process through the use of recruitment websites provides beneficial outcomes

for the organization and the job seeker alike. However, additional research is needed to fully understand how recruitment websites can most effectively benefit the organization.

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**Author Contact Info:**

**Christina M. Kroustalis**  
Department of Psychology  
North Carolina State University  
Campus Box 7650  
Raleigh, NC 27695-7650  
Phone: 919-515-2251  
Fax: 919-515-1716  
E-mail: [cmkroust@ncsu.edu](mailto:cmkroust@ncsu.edu)

**Adam W. Meade**  
Department of Psychology  
North Carolina State University  
Campus Box 7650  
Raleigh, NC 27695-7650  
Phone: 919-513-4857  
Fax: 919-515-1716  
E-mail: [awmeade@ncsu.edu](mailto:awmeade@ncsu.edu)