© Academy of Management Journal
2000, Vol. 43, No. 6, 1076–1085.

THE SOURCES AND ACCURACY OF JOB APPLICANTS' BELIEFS ABOUT ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

DANIEL M. CABLE
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

LYNDA AIMAN-SMITH
PAUL W. MULVEY
North Carolina State University

JEFFREY R. EDWARDS
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

We focus on the beliefs that applicants develop about organizational culture during the anticipatory stage of socialization. Data from 240 job applicants suggested that an organization used product and company information to encourage applicants to hold favorable, rather than accurate, culture beliefs. For example, the organization appeared to overstate the degree to which its culture was risk-oriented. Information that is less susceptible to image management attempts (for instance, word of mouth) was unrelated to applicants' culture beliefs.

A primary goal of the socialization process is developing new organizational members' understanding of a company's culture, defined as a system of shared values (Bauer, Morrison, & Callister, 1998; Chatman, 1991). Although the socialization research literature has revealed much about how newcomers learn about a culture after they enter an organization, newcomers clearly do not arrive as "blank slates" with no prior conceptions or expectations about organizational culture. Thus, the messages that organizations send to applicants during recruitment may serve to presocialize newcomers before they even accept positions.

Organizations face a conflict when describing their cultures to applicants. On the one hand, organizations should communicate accurate information about their cultures because when newcomers enter a firm with accurate culture beliefs, their behavior is guided in ways that transcend the objectives of a particular job (Schein, 1990). Moreover, when applicants join organizations on the basis of inaccurate beliefs about organizational culture and find their expectations to be unmet, they experience dissatisfaction and are likely to quit (Cable & Judge, 1996; Wanous & Colella, 1989).

On the other hand, firms have more immediate incentives to provide applicants with positive, rather than accurate, beliefs about organizational culture. Openly discussing unfavorable cultural attributes can turn applicants away, thereby limiting firms' selection ratios and their ability to hire new employees, particularly in light of shortages in the labor force (Johnston, 1992). To make their organization more attractive to applicants, managers are motivated to communicate a desirable image to applicants rather than the cultural values that actually operate in the organization (Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984). This perspective suggests firms will overstate the their positive cultural attributes and understate unfavorable attributes.

Finally, organizations are not solely responsible for transferring information about organizational culture to applicants. Individuals also play an active role in gathering information about culture (Ashford & Black, 1996; Cable & Judge, 1996). Applicants may gather information about culture from sources that are not part of a firm's recruitment efforts, and therefore they should be less susceptible to image management. For example, applicants may base their beliefs about a firm's culture on firsthand experience with the company or on discussions with peers, career office directors, and professors (Fisher, Ilgen, & Hoyer, 1979).

In this study, we examined how different sources of information accessed during anticipatory socialization lead applicants to overestimate, underestimate, or accurately perceive a company's cultural values. We conceptualized accuracy as the correspondence between job seekers' and company executives' beliefs about company culture, because executives have the perspective and experience necessary to report general, companywide core values, and because the "values of top management guide and direct perceptions and interpretations of the organization" (Enz, 1988: 287). To summarize, we developed the socialization and recruitment lit-

eratures by examining two overarching questions: (1) What information sources shape applicants' beliefs about a company's values? and (2) Are different information sources likely to be associated with applicants' underestimating, overestimating, or holding accurate beliefs about different values?

HYPOTHESES

We focused on the cultural values that were most relevant to the specific organization under investigation because firms should be most concerned about communicating core values to applicants. Moreover, survey questions tailored to a specific culture are more likely to be applicable to respondents, improving the quality of the results. As described in the Methods section, the dimensions of culture most relevant to the focal organization (called Company X here) were rules orientation, results orientation, and risk-taking orientation.

In addition to being relevant in this study, these cultural value dimensions are particularly interesting in the context of the contemporary business environment. Many well-known organizations, including Hewlett-Packard, International Business Machines, Xerox, and Motorola, are actively attempting to change their public images, to shift from being seen as rules-driven, bureaucratic, and conservative to being seen as experimental, risk-taking, and results-driven (Burrows, 1998; Cook, 1996). Motorola is investing over $100 million to change its image from "sturdy" to "dynamic," and Xerox wants to be perceived as an innovator (Beatty, 1998; Grimes, 1998).

Against this backdrop, we next offer hypotheses about the accuracy of applicants' culture beliefs, defined here as "mental representations of human understanding [that are] produced by active cognitive processing" (Sproull, 1981: 204), as a function of what information sources they used. Specifically, we examine company information and product information as the sources that are most susceptible to firms' impression management attempts, and we examine prior work experience with the company and word of mouth as the sources that are less susceptible to firms' influence attempts.

Company Information

Most companies disseminate electronic and written information to applicants, including Web pages, annual reports, and recruitment brochures. Organizations also dispatch representatives to meet with applicants during class presentations, recruitment fairs, and information sessions. Research suggests that applicants attend to company materials and representatives. Herriot and Rothwell (1981) found that recruitment brochures increased students' intentions to apply, and research shows that company representatives affect applicants' attraction to organizations (Barber, 1998).

In the present study, we propose that company information affects applicants' beliefs about company culture. However, the impression management literature suggests that managers will communicate positive rather than *accurate* information about their cultures to applicants, despite the long-term benefits of providing realistic information. Research demonstrates that companies only reveal the most positive information in their recruitment materials (Gatewood, Gowan, & Lautenschlager, 1993) and that organizational representatives generally describe unrealistically positive working environments (Wanous & Colella, 1989). Apparently, the immediacy of attracting newcomers to fill positions is a more powerful motivator than the long-term benefits of allowing applicants to self-select on the basis of accurate beliefs. Thus, we predict that organizations communicate culture information that applicants will find favorable.

Consistent with trends in the general business environment, applicants favor firms that value experimentation and results over rules orientation (*Small Business Reports,* 1994: 19). Thus, Simons (1996) noted that a "contempt for bureaucracy" is a hallmark of educated job applicants who are searching for places to try out their ideas, seeking firms where results are more important than rules (Poplar, 1996). We therefore would expect company information to overstate the degree to which firms are risk-taking and results-oriented while understating the degree to which they are rules-oriented. Accordingly, job seekers who rely a company's information for their culture beliefs should overestimate the company's risk-taking and results orientations and underestimate its rules orientation.

Hypothesis 1a. Reliance on company information as a basis for beliefs about a company's culture is related to overestimating its risk taking.

Hypothesis 1b. Reliance on company information as a basis for beliefs about a company's culture is related to underestimating its rules orientation.

Hypothesis 1c. Reliance on company information as a basis for beliefs about a company's culture is related to overestimating its results orientation.

Product Information

The recruitment literature chiefly addresses interview characteristics and shows little consideration of the "broader context in which recruitment occurs" (Rynes, 1991: 399). Product information is an important component of this context because applicants have likely been exposed to an organization's products prior to thinking of the organization as an employer. Advertising may offer considerable information because many of people's earliest perceptions of organizations are obtained through advertising. Like recruitment brochures, advertising is used by organizations to project a positive image to the public (Kotler, 1997). Applicants may use firms' advertisements as signals about organizational culture (Rynes, 1991), and a firm's products and services may affect their culture beliefs because an organization's societal image is affected by its products and services (Solomon, 1983).

Given that many organizations are attempting to change their public images—to be viewed as risk-taking and results-oriented rather than as rules-driven and bureaucratic—we expected firms' product information to communicate this desired image. Product information should also emphasize firms' results orientation because advertisements and products are produced for consumers who are attracted by results (with regard to customer service, product and quality, and so on). Thus, we expected job seekers who rely on product information as a source of information about a company's culture, to overestimate the degree to which the organization is risk-taking and results-oriented and to underestimate the degree to which the company is rules-oriented.

Hypothesis 2a. Reliance on product information as a basis for beliefs about a company's culture is related to overestimating its risk taking.

Hypothesis 2b. Reliance on product information as a basis for beliefs about a company's culture is related to underestimating its rules orientation.

Hypothesis 2c. Reliance on product information as a basis for beliefs about a company's culture is related to overestimating its results orientation.

Prior Experience

Perhaps the most accurate and salient preview of a company's values can be gained by actually working in the organization, as an intern, for example. Internships represent anticipatory socialization because individuals are using past experiences to anticipate current organizational practices. Unlike information that is generated by a company for an external audience, first-hand experience should offer realistic beliefs about values (Bauer et al., 1998). Moreover, beliefs are likely to be stronger when they are obtained from direct experience, in large part because skepticism about firsthand information is lower (Fazio & Zanna, 1981). Thus, applicants' beliefs about a company's risk taking, rules orientation, and results orientation should be more accurate when the applicants have prior work experience with the organization.

Hypothesis 3a. Reliance on prior experience with a company will be related to more accuracy regarding its risk taking.

Hypothesis 3b. Reliance on prior experience with a company will be related to more accuracy regarding its rules orientation.

Hypothesis 3c. Reliance on prior experience with a company will be related to more accuracy regarding its results orientation.

Word of Mouth

Many job applicants gather information about an organization's values through informal social networks of individuals who are not affiliated with the company, such as friends, family, and professors; this information is referred to as word of mouth. Word of mouth exerts a strong influence on consumers' product judgments when extensive information about a product is difficult to obtain (Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991); similarly, we expected word of mouth to affect applicants' culture beliefs because objective information about organizational culture is difficult for applicants to acquire (Rynes, 1991). Moreover, information collected from word-of-mouth sources is likely to be salient and credible to applicants because it is communicated by a friend or an expert (Fisher et al., 1979; Popovich & Wanous, 1982). Finally, word-of-mouth sources have little incentive to cause applicants to overestimate or underestimate a company's values.

Hypothesis 4a. Reliance on word-of-mouth sources will be related to more accuracy regarding a company's risk taking.

Hypothesis 4b. Reliance on word-of-mouth sources will be related to more accuracy regarding a company's rules orientation.

Hypothesis 4c. Reliance on word-of-mouth sources will be related to more accuracy regarding a company's results orientation.

METHODS

This study examines the recruiting efforts of a large international company that offers products and services to individual consumers and businesses. In fall 1997, 84 interviewers from Company X interviewed 539 job applicants at 11 southeastern universities. We collected data from applicants and company executives, as described below.

Applicants received a voluntary survey assessing their beliefs about the company's values and the sources of those beliefs. Of the 539 job applicants, 240 (45%) completed surveys. The average respondent was 24 years old and had 2.2 years of work experience. To examine whether differences existed between respondents and nonrespondents, we obtained 217 résumés of the 240 respondents and 250 résumés of nonrespondents. Using *t*-tests, we compared the two groups in terms of sex, grade point average, major, and work experience specific to the company, finding no significant differences on these variables.

We e-mailed the 63 executives that the company featured on its Web page, and 11 executives (18%) from diverse functional areas reported their beliefs about the company's values. After coding information from the Web site regarding sex, race, position, education, and tenure, we used *t*-tests to compare the executives who responded with those who did not. We found no significant differences.

Measures

Beliefs about culture. We began our investigation by giving the Organizational Culture Profile (OCP; Chatman, 1991) to 13 upper-level managers in diverse areas of the company (none of them subsequently participated in the study). The culture dimensions on which there was the greatest agreement were rules orientation, results orientation, and low risk taking. We used the OCP phrases that were chosen by the managers to create a pilot survey, developing 5 items to tap each of the three culture dimensions. We distributed this pilot survey to 198 individuals who approximated the characteristics of the population sample (job seekers from two major southeastern universities) but were not part of the sample for the primary study. For each scale, we retained the 4 items with the highest factor loadings and obtained the 12-item, three-dimension measure of company culture that was later used in the primary study. These scales are available from the authors.

The culture scales exhibited high reliabilities: the internal consistency estimates (alphas) were .89 for risk orientation, .92 for rules orientation, and .92 for results orientation. We also conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the three-factor, 12-item measurement model using EQS. This model fitted the data well, as indicated by a comparative fit index (Bentler, 1990) of .93.

Accuracy. We conceptualized accuracy as the correspondence between applicants' beliefs about culture and the mean ratings of culture dimensions across the 11 executives. For each culture dimension, we estimated interrater agreement among the 11 executives' culture perceptions using James, Demaree, and Wolf's (1993) interrater agreement coefficient (r_{wg}). The r_{wg} was .82 for risk orientation, .72 for rules orientation, and .92 for results orientation, thereby justifying aggregation.

Information sources. Respondents were asked to indicate how much they used each source of information to learn about Company X's company culture. The five items used to assess the degree to which job seekers relied on company information (described, for instance, as "brochures/videos that Company X sent to the career office") yielded a reliability estimate (α) of .62. Two items used to assess the degree to which job seekers relied on company advertisements and products (for instance, "Company X's product advertisements and marketing") yielded a reliability estimate of .72. Five items used to assess the degree to which job seekers relied on word of mouth (for instance, "What I've heard about Company X from faculty members") yielded a reliability estimate of .75. Finally, one item was used to assess job seekers' reliance on prior work experience with the company ("internships/former jobs that I have held with Company X"). Response choices ranged from 1, "did not use at all," to 7, "used very much," and responses to the items for each information source were averaged into a composite score.

Analyses

Overestimation and underestimation. To examine the extent to which information sources led applicants to overestimate or underestimate specific values, we performed two types of analyses. First, for each cultural value, we subtracted executives' beliefs from applicants' beliefs, so that positive scores indicated overestimation and negative scores suggested underestimation. We regressed these difference scores on the five information sources. Although a difference score approach to

examining overestimation and underestimation is commonplace in the literature, it may lead to misinterpretation. For example, a positive coefficient linking an information source to the difference score may suggest that as applicants increasingly rely on a recruitment source, they (1) move from underestimation to agreement or (2) move from agreement to overestimation. To clarify the difference score results, we conducted a second analysis in which we regressed applicants' culture beliefs on the information sources. We used the resulting slopes and intercepts to determine whether our findings indicated overestimation or underestimation and to test whether applicants' and executives' culture beliefs were significantly different at low versus high levels of information source use.

Accuracy. We also performed two types of analyses to examine the accuracy of applicants' culture beliefs. First, for each value, we computed the absolute difference between executives' beliefs and applicants' beliefs, and we regressed these absolute difference scores on the five information sources. Despite the prevalence of this approach, it also can obscure the true nature of the relationships under study, leading to misinterpretation. For instance, a negative relationship between an information source and the absolute difference score would imply increased accuracy. Fundamentally, increased accuracy means that, as use of an information source increases, the culture belief scores of applicants whose scores fell below executives' scores increase, and the scores of applicants that were above the executives' decrease. An absolute difference score cannot reveal whether both of these effects, in fact, exist. Therefore, we also used a regression procedure in which a dummy variable distinguished two subgroups of applicants, one whose culture belief scores fell below those of the executives, and another whose culture belief scores were above those of the executives (Edwards, 1995). The dummy variable was used as a moderator to determine whether the slopes differed for the two groups of applicants in a way that is consistent with the meaning of accuracy, so that the scores of applicants whose beliefs fell below executives' increased and the scores of applicants whose beliefs were above the executives' decreased. If these moderator analyses indicated that slopes did not differ for the two subgroups of applicants, we combined the subgroups to estimate a single relationship between information sources and applicants' culture beliefs. For this combined group, accuracy was represented by the distance between the executives' beliefs and the regression line relating an information source to applicants' beliefs. If this distance decreased significantly as use of the information source increased, then evidence for accuracy was obtained. Note that a decrease in distance is evidenced by either: (1) a negative slope, with an intercept above executives' beliefs, or (2) a positive slope, with an intercept below executives' beliefs.

RESULTS

Table 1 lists the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables. Table 2 shows the results from using both the algebraic difference score approach and the regression approach to predict whether applicants' beliefs represented overestimation or underestimation of Company X's culture relative to the executives' beliefs. Note that the coefficients between the difference score and regression approaches are identical, and that only the intercepts are different. Finally, Table 3 shows the accuracy results from using either the absolute difference score approach or the moderated regression approach. In Tables 2 and 3, we have highlighted the particular results that correspond to each of our hypotheses.

Company information. Hypothesis 1a suggests that applicants would overestimate the degree to which Company X valued risk taking when they relied on company information sources. As shown

TABLE 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations between Variables[a]

Variable	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Applicants' risk perceptions	4.65	1.13						
2. Applicants' rules perceptions	4.35	1.11	−.22					
3. Applicants' results perceptions	5.65	1.00	.37	−.10				
4. Company information	3.43	1.28	.26	−.09	.30			
5. Product ads/products	4.88	1.44	.20	.01	.21	.31		
6. Company experience	1.79	1.96	−.05	.14	−.03	.09	.09	
7. Word of mouth	3.01	1.43	.05	.13	.13	.45	.32	.21

[a] $n = 240$; correlations greater than .12 are significant at the .05 level, under two-tailed tests.

TABLE 2
Relationships between Information Sources and Overestimation/Underestimation of Applicants' Culture Beliefs[a]

Predictor	Constant	Company Information	Products/ Ads	Company Experience	Word of Mouth	Model R^2
Algebraic difference score approach						
Risk orientation	−0.63	**H1a: .23****	**H2a: .12****	−.04	−.08	.10**
Rules orientation	0.08	**H1b: −.16****	**H2b: .00**	.07	.14**	.06**
Results orientation	−1.54	**H1c: .21****	**H2c: .10***	−.03	−.02	.11**
Regression approach						
Risk orientation	3.57	**H1a: .23****	**H2a: .12****	−.04	−.08	.10**
Rules orientation	4.33	**H1b: −.16****	**H2b: .00**	.07	.14**	.06**
Results orientation	4.55	**H1c: .21****	**H2c: .10***	−.03	−.02	.11**

Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients; $n = 240$. Executives' score for risk was 4.2; for rules, 4.25; and for results, 6.09.
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

TABLE 3
Relationships between Information Sources and Applicants' Accuracy about Culture Beliefs[a]

Predictor	Constant	Company Information	Products/ Ads	Company Experience	Word of Mouth	Model R^2
Absolute difference score approach						
Risk orientation	0.65	.01	.05	**H3a: .00**	**H4a: .01**	.02
Rules orientation	0.87	.02	−.06	**H3b: .04**	**H4b: .04**	.03
Results orientation	1.28	−.10*	−.08*	**H3c: .06***	**H4c: .03**	.07**
Moderated regression approach[b]						
Risk orientation						
Group A	3.05	.05	.04	**H3a: −.06**	**H4a: −.05**	.63**
Group B	4.60	.03	.06*	**H3a: −.03**	**H4a: −.01**	.63**
Rules orientation						
Group A	3.59	−.11	.04	**H3b: −.05****	**H4b: −.01**	.60**
Group B	5.35	−.06	−.02	**H3b: .02**	**H4b: .06**	.60**
Results orientation						
Group A	4.58	.11*	.06**	**H3c: −.13****	**H4c: −.02**	.48**
Group B	6.41	.05	.00	**H3c: −.00**	**H4c: .01**	.48**

[a] Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients; $n = 240$.
[b] Group A refers to applicants whose scores on culture beliefs fell below the executives', and group B refers to applicants whose culture belief scores were above executives'. Executives' score for risk was 4.2; for rules, 4.25; and for results, 6.09.

in Table 2, Hypothesis 1a received strong support. First, it was supported by the algebraic difference score approach ($p < .01$), suggesting that applicants rated risk taking higher than executives did when the applicants relied heavily on company information. Moreover, when we regressed applicants' risk beliefs on the information sources and graphed the slope and the intercept relative to executives' risk beliefs, results revealed that applicants who did not use company information *underestimated* the organization's risk-taking orientation ($p < .03$) and that applicants who relied on company information a great deal *overestimated* the organization's risk-taking orientation ($p < .001$). Hypothesis 1b, predicting that applicants would underestimate the degree to which Company X was rules-oriented when they relied on company information sources, was also supported. As the algebraic difference score approach indicates, applicants rated rules orientation lower than executives when they relied heavily on company information ($p < .01$). Moreover, when we regressed applicants' beliefs about rules orientation on the information sources and graphed the slope and the intercept relative to executives' rules beliefs, results revealed that applicants who did not use company information overestimated rules orientation ($p < .01$) and that applicants who relied on company information a great deal underestimated rules orientation ($p < .09$). Finally, results offered some support for Hypothesis 1c, stating that applicants would overestimate the company's results orientation when they relied on company information sources. The algebraic difference score approach indicated that ap-

plicants rated results orientation higher than executives when they relied heavily on company information ($p < .01$). However, when we regressed applicants' beliefs about results orientation on the information sources and graphed the slope and the intercept relative to executives' results beliefs, we found a different trend than implied by the difference score approach. Specifically, applicants who did not use company information underestimated the organization's results orientation ($p < .01$), and those who relied on company information a great deal were *accurate* regarding the organization's results orientation. Thus, results generally supported Hypothesis 1c, in that company information was positively related to beliefs about results orientation, but we did *not* find applicants to be more likely to overestimate results orientation when they relied on company information, as implied by the difference scores.

Product information. Hypothesis 2a, predicting that applicants would overestimate the company's risk-taking orientation when they relied on advertisements and products, was supported by the algebraic difference score analysis ($p < .01$). Moreover, the regression approach revealed that applicants who did not use product information were accurate regarding Company X's risk-taking orientation and that applicants who relied on ads and products a great deal overestimated the risk taking ($p < .01$). Thus, Hypothesis 2a was supported. Hypothesis 2b, predicting that applicants would underestimate the degree to which the company was rules-oriented when they relied on product information, received no support from either the algebraic difference score analysis or the regression approach. Hypothesis 2c, stating that applicants would be more likely to overestimate results orientation when they relied on product information, received some support, from the algebraic difference score analysis. However, graphing results from the regression approach revealed that applicants who did not use product information underestimated results orientation to a greater extent than applicants who relied on product information a great deal. Although the trend of these results is consistent with Hypothesis 2c, note that even applicants who relied heavily on product information were not more likely to overestimate results orientation.

Company experience. Hypothesis 3a was not supported. Neither the absolute difference score nor the regression approach revealed a relationship between executives' and applicants' risk orientation beliefs as a function of reliance on previous work experience with the company. Hypothesis 3b also received no support. The absolute difference between executives' and applicants' beliefs about rules orientation was unrelated to applicants' use of previous work experience with the company as an information source. The moderated regression approach revealed that, among applicants whose scores on rules orientation fell below executives', the difference was greater (further from the executives' scores) when the applicants relied on company experience a great deal. For the group of applicants whose scores on beliefs about rules orientation fell above executives', beliefs about rules were unrelated to how much the applicants relied on company experience. Finally, Hypothesis 3c was not supported: applicants were not more accurate about the company's results orientation when they relied on previous work experience with the company. In fact, the absolute difference analysis suggested that applicants were *less* accurate about results orientation when their culture beliefs emerged from previous work experience with the company ($p < .05$). The moderated regression approach confirmed that, for applicants whose scores on beliefs about results fell below executives', previous work experience with the company led to less accurate beliefs about results orientation. For the group of applicants whose beliefs about results fell above executives' beliefs, previous work experience with the company was unrelated to results orientation.

Word of mouth. Hypothesis 4a was not supported. Neither the absolute difference nor the moderated regression approach revealed a relationship between executives' and applicants' beliefs about risk orientation occurring as a function of applicants' reliance on word of mouth. Hypothesis 4b also was not supported. The absolute difference between executives' and applicants' beliefs about rules orientation was unrelated to word of mouth. The moderated regression approach likewise revealed no relationships between applicants' and executives' beliefs about rules orientation occurring as a function of applicants' reliance on word of mouth. Moreover, when we dropped the moderator, we found that applicants were accurate about rules when they did not rely on word of mouth but significantly overestimated rules when they relied heavily on it ($p < .05$). Finally, Hypothesis 4c was not supported. Neither the absolute difference nor the regression approach revealed a relationship between executives' and applicants' beliefs about results orientation occurring as a function of applicants' reliance on word of mouth.

DISCUSSION

Job applicants' beliefs about organizations' cultures are critical because they trigger anticipatory coping mechanisms (Bauer et al., 1998), affect the

validity of applicants' self-selection decisions and subsequent turnover rates (Cable & Judge, 1996), and affect postentry performance (Schein, 1990). Results from this study suggested that firms can manage job applicants' beliefs about company culture during the anticipatory stage of socialization. Specifically, we found that company information and product information were related in predicted ways to applicants' culture beliefs. These results extend the recruitment literature, which has largely focused on the role of interviews, by suggesting that anticipatory socialization begins before interviews take place. These results also extend research focusing on applicants' organizational attraction (Barber, 1998; Gatewood et al., 1993) by suggesting that company information affects applicants' organizational beliefs.

Focusing on applicants' beliefs is important, because applicants' attraction to firms does not always lead to positive outcomes if the beliefs are misguided, and because firms have a high incentive to communicate positive rather than accurate information. This study suggested that firms may try to overstate desired values to applicants, such as risk taking, while understating undesired values, such as rules orientation. In several cases, the relationship between company information and applicants' culture beliefs was dramatic. For example, applicants who did not use company information significantly *underestimated* risk taking, and applicants who relied heavily on company information significantly *overestimated* it. This type of crossover effect was also found for rules orientation. Likewise, applicants who did not rely on product information were *accurate* about risk taking, but applicants who relied a great deal on product information significantly *overestimated* it. This pattern of results extends research suggesting that firms often communicate unrealistically positive information about job attributes by showing similar processes occur in their presentation of culture information.

The results described above suggest that firms fall prey to a "prisoner's dilemma," trying to attract as many applicants from competitors as possible rather than allowing applicants to self-select on the basis of accurate culture information. However, two possible outcomes may result from managing culture beliefs during recruitment. On the one hand, the short-term benefits of beguiling applicants may be offset by consequent turnover, poor fit, and lower commitment. On the other hand, perhaps firms can strategically manage their organizational cultures by changing their public images during recruitment. Thus, to the extent that a firm seeks to change its culture, one approach is to overrepresent the desired cultural attributes in order to attract employees whose values are consistent with those cultural attributes and who in turn can help change the organizational culture. Although research is needed to determine whether newcomers stay long enough to change an organization when they do not fit, it may be possible to transform organizational culture by projecting an image that attracts "new blood."

Another general finding is that applicants were not more accurate about culture when they based their beliefs on prior work experience with the organization studied here. We expected organization-specific experience to lead to accurate beliefs because personally experiencing an organization presumably provides salient, realistic information about company culture. However, results suggested that beliefs based on previous experience were either unrelated or negatively related to accuracy. These results may imply that the nature of applicants' prior experiences and relatively low levels of power as interns were not challenging enough or did not sufficiently expose them to the values of the company. It appears that, contrary to common thinking on the issue, internships may not always be beneficial for presocializing applicants, at least in terms of beliefs about company culture. Of course, it also is possible that the culture in lower levels of an organization is in fact different from that articulated by executives.

Applicants who relied on word of mouth from their social networks were also not more accurate about culture. Again, these results are somewhat surprising, given that word of mouth should be salient and credible to applicants. However, it is possible that word-of-mouth sources offer applicants salient, but incorrect, information. For example, results suggested that applicants who did not use word of mouth were accurate regarding Company X's rules orientation but that applicants who relied heavily on this source overestimated its rules orientation. It is also likely that different interpersonal sources (for instance, peers and professors) offer unreliable information, making accuracy difficult to obtain from these sources.

Limitations

This study is limited in that applicants reported the sources they used to gather information about the company's culture, but we could not verify that applicants actually used the information sources they reported. Likewise, reliabilities were low for some information source scales, revealing a need for further refinement our measures. This study is also limited because we investigated a single organization. Although this approach had advantages,

such as enabling us to control for industry effects and to design a culture survey specific to the organization, it is unclear whether our results generalize to other organizations or industries.

Next, we conceptualized accuracy as the similarity between applicants' and executives' beliefs; however, subcultures exist in organizations, and other types of respondents may have offered different perspectives. Future research may benefit from comparing applicants' beliefs to those of groups of employees other than executives, including potential peers and supervisors. Finally, future research could use ethnographic data to compare applicants' culture beliefs to those expressed in company artifacts.

Conclusion

Applicants' culture beliefs were related to several preinterview information sources that recruiters can manage, but they were less related to information sources that firms cannot control. Given that the accuracy of applicants' culture beliefs have implications for recruitment success and for postentry performance and turnover, recruitment managers should carefully calibrate the preinterview information that they disseminate to applicants. Principles of marketing management suggest recruiters would benefit from (1) assessing the prevailing beliefs of their target markets, (2) conducting a gap analysis to ascertain how these beliefs diverge from the image they wish to promote, and (3) developing written and verbal messages specifically constructed to reduce gaps.

REFERENCES

Ashford, S. J., & Black, J. S. 1996. Proactivity during organizational entry: The role of desire for control. ***Journal of Applied Psychology,*** 81: 199–214.

Barber, A. E. 1998. ***Recruiting employees: Individual and organizational perspectives.*** Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bauer, T. N., Morrison, E. W., & Callister, R. R. 1998. Organizational socialization: A review and directions for future research. In G. R. Ferris (Ed.), ***Research in personnel and human resource management,*** vol. 16: 149–214. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Beatty, S. G. 1998. Motorola's new image campaign set to take flight with "Wings." ***Wall Street Journal,*** April 16: B14.

Bentler, P. M. 1990. Comparative fit indexes in structural models. ***Psychological Bulletin,*** 107: 238–246.

Burrows, P. J. 1998. Lew Platt's fix-it plan for Hewlett-Packard. ***Business Week,*** July 13: 128.

Cable, D., & Judge, T. A. 1996. Person-organization fit, job choice decisions, and organizational entry. ***Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes,*** 67: 294–311.

Chatman, J. 1991. Matching people and organizations: Selection and socialization in public accounting firms. ***Administrative Science Quarterly,*** 36: 459–484.

Cook, W. J. 1996. The turnaround artist: Lou Gerstner is creating a hard-driving new corporate culture at IBM. ***U.S. News & World Report,*** June 17: 55.

Edwards, J. R. 1995. Alternatives to difference scores as dependent variables in the study of congruence in organizational research. ***Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes,*** 64: 307–324.

Enz, C. A. 1988. The role of value congruity in interorganizational power. ***Administrative Science Quarterly,*** 33: 284–304.

Fazio, R. H., & Zanna, M. P. 1981. Direct experience and attitude-behavior consistency. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), ***Advances in experimental social psychology,*** vol. 14: 161–202. San Diego: Academic Press.

Fisher, C. D., Ilgen, D. R., & Hoyer, W. D. 1979. Source credibility, information favorability, and job offer acceptance. ***Academy of Management Journal,*** 22: 94–103.

Gatewood, R. D., Gowan, M. A., & Lautenschlager, D. J. 1993. Corporate image, recruitment image, and initial job choice decisions. ***Academy of Management Journal,*** 36: 414–427.

Grimes, C. 1998. Xerox hoping to shift image at trade show—Plans big push at Comdex to project that it is an innovative company. ***Wall Street Journal,*** November 16: B7G.

Herr, P. M., Kardes, F. R., & Kim, J. 1991. Effects of word-of-mouth and product-attribute information on persuasion: An accessibility-diagnostic perspective. ***Journal of Consumer Research,*** 17: 454–462.

Herriot, P., & Rothwell, C. 1981. Organizational choice and decision theory: Effects of employers' literature and selection interview. ***Journal of Occupational Behavior,*** 54: 17–31.

James, L. R., Demaree, R. G., & Wolf, G. 1993. r_{wg}: An assessment of within-group interrater agreement. ***Journal of Applied Psychology,*** 78: 306–309.

Johnston, W. B. 1992. The coming labor shortage. ***Journal of Labor Research,*** 13: 5–10.

Poplar, O. 1996. Managing the MTV generation. ***Incentive,*** 170: 57.

Popovich, P., & Wanous, J. P. 1982. The realistic job preview as persuasive communication. ***Academy of Management Review,*** 7: 570–578.

Rynes, S. L. 1991. Recruitment, job choice, and post-hire consequences: A call for new research directions. In M. Dunnette & L. Hough (Eds.), ***Handbook of indus-***

trial/organizational psychology, vol. 2: 399–444. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.

Schein, E. H. 1990. Organizational culture. ***American Psychologist,*** 45: 109–119.

Simons, J. 1996. The youth movement. ***U.S. News and World Report,*** September 23: 65.

Small Business Reports. 1994. Generation "X" thinks small. September: 19.

Solomon, M. R. 1983. The role of products as social stimuli: A symbolic interactionism perspective. ***Journal of Consumer Research,*** 10: 319–329.

Sproull, L. 1981. Beliefs in organizations. In P. Nystrom & W. Starbuck (Eds.), ***Handbook of organizational design,*** vol. 2: 203–224. London: Oxford University Press.

Tedeschi, J. T., & Melburg, V. 1984. Impression management and influence in the organization. In S. B. Bacharach & E. J. Lawler (Eds.), ***Research in the sociology of organizations,*** vol. 3: 31–58. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Wanous, J. P., & Colella, A. 1989. Organizational entry research: Current status and future directions. In G. R. Ferris & K. M. Rowland (Eds.), ***Research in personnel and human resource management,*** vol. 7: 59–120. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Daniel M. Cable (Ph.D., Cornell University) is an associate professor of human resource management at the Kenan-Flagler Business School at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His current research interests include talent acquisition and retention, person-organization fit, the organizational entry process, organizational selection systems, job choice decisions, and career success.

Lynda Aiman-Smith is an assistant professor at North Carolina State University. She received her Ph.D. in organizational behavior and technology management from Purdue University. Her research specialties include implementation issues, especially implementing new technology or implementing teams in organizations. She is currently conducting research on organizational culture in high-tech companies.

Paul W. Mulvey is an associate professor in the College of Management at North Carolina State University. He earned a Ph.D. in labor and human resources from the Ohio State University. His current research interests include employee reward practices, work team performance, and high-tech recruiting.

Jeffrey R. Edwards is the Belk Distinguished Professor of Management at the Kenan-Flagler Business School at the University of North Carolina. He received his Ph.D. in organizational psychology and theory from Carnegie Mellon University. His research interests include person-environment fit; stress, coping, and well-being in organizations; work and family issues; and research methods.