Recruiting Transformational Leaders

The Link Between Recruitment Messages and Applicant Transformational Leadership Qualities

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Background

Firms are moving toward flattened leadership structures (Wulf, 2012), allowing broader subordinate responsibilities and leadership opportunities (Powell, 2002). This creates a need for organizations to recruit individuals capable of leading at all levels of the organization (Trosten-Bloom, 2014). While these business models are important, scholarship still focuses on vertical structures, and it is possible that organizations are also lagging behind. Person-Organization fit research suggests that job seekers who desire leadership opportunities will look for evidence that leadership is valued within firms’ rhetoric. Considering 70% of organizations use websites for recruitment (Rowh, 2005), it is likely that applicants will look to websites for information about what the company values in employees. Because transformational leadership (TL) has been linked with employee productivity through motivation (Middleton, 2005), alignment with company values (Piccolo, 2006), goals (Jiang & Men, 2015), and desire to excel (Shamir et al., 1993), it is possible that applicants will look to websites for evidence of TL values. Organizations could communicate more holistic transformational leadership messages through job descriptions, which is more innovative and service-oriented (Instagram and Google) communicate more Individualized Consideration and Idealized Influence. Organizations which are more product-oriented (Squarespace) communicate more Inspirational Motivation and Intellectual Stimulation. According to our data TL values are more frequently expressed in job descriptions taken from: Google, Instagram and Squarespace. Organizations that are more innovative and service-oriented (Instagram) and more product-oriented (Squarespace) communicate more Individualized Consideration and Idealized Influence.

Methods

- Quantitative content analysis to analyze job description rhetoric
  - Communication job descriptions taken from: Google, Instagram and Squarespace
- Reviewed and deconstructed three job descriptions into individual thought units
  - Each thought unit was placed under one of four TL tenets
- TL descriptions were based on the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), which was used to code thought units
- Four TL tenets with sample questions: Idealized Influence: "I work with others in a satisfactory way" Inspirational Motivation: "I get others to do more than they expected to do" Intellectual Stimulation: "I suggest new ways of looking at how to complete assignments" Individualized Consideration: "I spend time teaching and coaching"
- Researchers initially worked as a group to assign thought units within each job description, then researchers individually coded each of the thought units to assign them to a TL tenet
- When the researchers disagreed on a thought unit’s tenet assignment, its placement was discussed and consensus was found

Literature Review

P-O Fit

- Person-Organization (P-O) Fit research suggests that a good organizational fit is associated with low attrition, high job satisfaction, and high organizational commitment (Sekiguchi & Huber, 2011)
- Jobs seekers apply for positions with companies which reflect their own desires, needs and values (Chapman et al., 2005)
- Literature on message design suggests that recruitment messages are most effective when they are written with concrete and vivid language (Backhaus, 2004)
- Job seekers look for organizational messages that communicate values which are similar to their own (Backhaus, 2004)

Transformational Leadership

- Bass and Avolio’s transformational leadership (TL), has been linked to subordinate alignment with company values and vision toward goals (Jiang and Men, 2015; Piccolo, 2006; Middleton, 2015)
- TL employees’ values align with organization mission statements (Leong and Fischer, 2011)
- Transformational Leaders can adapt in a fast paced, flattened business structure (Leong and Fischer 2011)
- TL studies focus on managers, ignoring employees with leadership qualities, leading to a gap in research (Wang et. al., 2011)

Research Questions and Results

RQ: Do flattened firms use transformational leadership messages in their job descriptions?

Our data shows that the three firms do show TL messages in their job descriptions. One significant finding was that tenets emerged in different amounts for each job description. Idealized Influence was displayed most frequently in our data, comprising 31% of our results. Following closely behind is the tenet Individualized Consideration at 27%. Inspirational Motivation and Idealized Influence were communicated much less frequently at 22% and 18% respectively.

RQ: To what extent do flattened firms use transformational leadership qualities in their job descriptions?

Flattened firms vary in their expression of each tenet. Squarespace ranked low in Idealized Influence (33%) and Individual Consideration (33%). Instagram ranked high in Idealized Influence (99%) and low in Intellectual Stimulation (33%). Google ranked high in Idealized Influence (99%) and Individualized Consideration (99%), but ranked low in Inspirational Motivation (33%) and Intellectual Stimulation (33%).

Analysis

- Companies who would benefit from recruiting TL leaders are those in constant flux
- Companies in the web-based industry, known for their consistent development of new ideas displayed a heavy amount of Idealized Influence and Individualized Consideration
- Organizations that are more innovative and service-oriented (Instagram and Google) communicate more Individualized Consideration and Idealized Influence
- Organizations which are more product-oriented (Squarespace) communicate more Inspirational Motivation and Intellectual Stimulation
- According to our data TL values are communicated by market-orientation (product based or service based)

Implications

- Product oriented firms could communicate more Individualized Consideration and Idealized Influence to represent a more holistic “transformational” appeal to potential applicants
- Service oriented firms could communicate more Inspirational Motivation and Intellectual Stimulation to represent a more holistic “transformational” appeal to potential applicants
- Our research could result in a better P-O Fit for job applicants
- With more accurate message design, companies may experience lower attrition, higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment

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