SHAPING HARMONIOUS MARKETING DEPARTMENTS

Catharine M. Curran, New Mexico State University, Dept. of Marketing, Las Cruces, NM 88003
Michael R. Hyman, New Mexico State University, Dept. of Marketing, Las Cruces, NM 88003
Kevin J. Shanahan, New Mexico State University, Dept. of Marketing, Las Cruces, NM 88003

ABSTRACT

Given a pool of technically competent applicants, marketing faculty often hire the applicant who seemingly offers the best fit. We posit that this best fit is not an elusive concept; rather it concerns the identifiable core value of the extant faculty. Once identified, these values can inform a customized survey for estimating the value congruence of potential hires.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most difficult decisions facing any marketing department is selecting the job applicant to fill a teaching vacancy. Department faculty hope that new hires will stay for many years and become productive. In this era of modest academic budgets, universities often cannot afford to replace departing faculty. The costs associated with faculty turnover are well-known and include direct costs, such as the increased salaries paid to a new faculty member when market rates exceed current pay levels. Indirect costs, which are at best difficult to quantify, include the loss of institutional memory and alumni loyalty. Each faculty’s goal is to hire applicants who will be long-term assets to their university, thereby reducing the probability of repeatedly incurring such turnover costs.

If organizations are composed of similar people because such people are more productive and adapt more quickly to their work environment (Ostroff and Rothauser 1997), and if people seek organizations with congruent characteristics, then formal assessments of organizations’ values should promote good employee-organization fits. Our goal is to offer one way for academic departments to make such assessments and to develop value-congruence surveys for new hires. After a brief overview of the relevant psychology and management literatures, we (1) posit the universe of core work-related values within academic departments in universities/colleges, (2) trace how a subset of those values came to characterize the culture of one department, and (3) show how this department might develop a formal fit-assessment survey grounded in these core values.

PERSONALITY AND WORK SUCCESS

By socializing new employees, organizations further align the values and personalities of their employees (Chatman 1991). Through their legends and myths, organizations indoctrinate their new members; through personality is a complex mix of inherent characteristics and environmental influences (Rosenzweig and Fisher 1997). In the business-related literature, the most commonly used classification scheme for classifying personality is Eysenck’s model, first published in 1947 (Paunonen 1998). This model has been expanded from the original three factors and is now referred to as the ‘Big Five’ factors of personality model (Paunonen 1998). Each factor defines a distinct personality type. Management and industrial psychologists have found that these five factors relate to the fit between employees and their work environment (Thomas, Moore and Scott 1996).

Because workplace success depends on the interplay between employees and their work environment, personality tests alone are poor predictors of work behavior and thus are poor predictors of employment success (Furnham 1997). Clearly, assessments of each employee’s personality cannot capture the complex relationship between a set of employees and their work environment. To best predict organizational fit, organizations should assess both employee personalities and organizational culture.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Organizational culture is defined by the shared values and shared practices that affect organizational members (Hofstede et al. 1990; Schein 1990). Once institutionalized, these values become a crucial component of organizational personality; organizations use these shared values to justify their practices (George 1992). Organizational practices—organizational “values, rituals, heroes, and symbols” (Hofstede et al. 1990)—are meaningful to employees and direct their behaviors.

Each organization has a unique culture that is formed by the employees and environment of its past and present—indeed, a unique culture. Organizations reveal their core values to new members (Hofstede et al. 1990). The more vigorously organizations try to influence their members—especially their new members—the more similarly
between their values and their members’ values (Chatman 1991). Ultimately, the longest-tenured employees share many personal characteristics and are the most value congruent (Kristof 1996; Meir, Melamed, and Dinur 1995). Job satisfaction, job tenure, and intentions to stay with a job are related to value congruence (Chatman 1991; Furnham 1997). Because the subtle components of organizational culture are not self-evident, the method used to define organizational culture should be sensitive to deeply ingrained, but not always conscious, values and beliefs. Our proposed method, grounded in the holistic perspective, should satisfy this constraint.

ORGANIZATIONAL FIT

Organizational fit was first conceived as the match between job requirements and employees’ knowledge, skills, and abilities (Caston and Briato 1985). Recently, organizational fit was re-conceived as the match between the norms and beliefs of organizations and their employees’ values, beliefs, and personality traits (Saks and Ashforth 1997). Both conceptualizations suggest that employees fit an organization when their job-related attributes match their work environment (Ostrow and Rothausen 1997). Although the fit between employees and their organizations is never perfect, successful employees typically share the dominant characteristics of their organizations (Cable and Judge 1996).

Psychologists and management experts contend that organizations dominated by good-fitting employees are highly effective because such employees are more satisfied, more committed, and more productive, than other employees (Saks and Ashforth 1997). Incongruent employees are often absent, frustrated, stressed, anxious, burned out, and physically ill (Furnham and Walsh 1990; Meir, Melamed, and Dinur 1995), all of which inhibit personal and organizational productivity.

Employee-organization fit is achieved through an attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) cycle (Kristof 1996). In the attraction phase, people seek organizations with congruent characteristics; in the selection phase, organizations hire people with needed competencies and congruent attributes (Cable and Judge 1996); in the attrition phase, the initial heterogeneity of the hiring process yields to attrition (i.e., employees who fail to achieve organizational congruence resign). Thus, “the people in one organization will be more similar to each other than to people in another organization” (Ostrow and Rothausen 1997, p.175), even in industries with similar firm structures, such as accounting (Chatman 1991; Miner, Crane, and Vandenberg 1994).

This inter-employee homogeneity extends to demographic variables. People who are “demographically similar to other organizational members enjoy important benefits that less similar individuals are less likely to receive” (Cable and Judge 1996, p.295). Demographic similarity to one’s co-workers is a strong predictor of work experiences and work outcomes (Kirchmeyer 1995) because of the similar-attraction effect (i.e., high attraction to similar others encourages frequent communication, high social integration, and a desire to maintain affiliation (Kirchmeyer 1995)). Here, demographic similarity is defined not necessarily in terms of race, ethnicity and gender, but more in terms of education, training, and experience.

To hire the best replacement faculty, many psychologists and management experts might argue that faculty members should consider employee-organization fit. As in all businesses, there is a strong relationship between personality and organizational fit in academic departments. Such departments now rely on informal fit-assessment procedures; the proposed method offers departments a way to develop a formal value-congruence assessment procedure.

THE DEPARTMENT-HISTORY METHOD

Qualitative research methods provide one way to uncover an organization’s evolving set of rituals, heroes, and symbols (Hofstede, et al. 1990). Such research is often used to uncover veiled information about consumers (Stern, Thompson, and Arnold 1988). We posit that the effect of a department’s history on its current practices is not self-evident. By tracing its history, a department may reveal the core values that motivate its current practices. Once these values are delineated, a department can use them to create a formal fit-assessment survey.

Suggested Research Technology

To trace a department’s history, we propose a method that employs a textual analysis tool like NUD*IST (Richards and Richards 1994). NUD*IST (Non-Numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theory Building) is a software package used by qualitative researchers to identify patterns in responses to open-ended questions, or in focus groups (i.e., to locate the interrelationships in different peoples’ answers) (Fleenor 1998). Researchers can use NUD*IST from either the theory down to the data or from the data up to the theory (Richards and Richards 1994); if the former, then researchers use the coding tools in NUD*IST to search the text for theory-supporting data.
As the proposed method takes a theory down to the data approach, the first step is to identify a department's core values. As with all organizations, we posit that successful academic hires must share their departments' core values. To suggest the current core work-related values of university faculty, we consulted the recent literature; we located only one recent study conducted in a secondary school setting (Ostrost and Rothausen 1997). This study suggests nine core values for educators: growth, innovation, autonomy, achievement, participation, cooperation, warmth, hierarchy, and structure.

Although universities are educational institutions, they are generally viewed as more similar to professional organizations than to secondary schools. Relative to other organizations, professional organizations: (1) have less bureaucratic management; (2) derive leadership from professional competence; (3) rely on personal motivation to fuel production; (4) assume its members are socialized—indoctrinated about professional values, norms, ethical precepts, and codes—during their professional training; (5) condone professional loyalty over organizational loyalty; (5) assume work-related satisfaction derives from professional achievement; and (7) assume its members excel when their role requirements match their motivational levels (Miner, Crane, and Vandenberg 1994).

Research on professional organizations suggests that five role prescriptions combine with individual motivations to produce successful workers and work environments. These prescriptions are (1) the desire to learn and to acquire knowledge, (2) the desire for independence, (3) the desire to acquire status, (4) the desire to help others, and (5) value-based identification with the profession (Miner, Crane, and Vandenberg 1994).

Absent current research on the intra-departmental work values of university/college faculty, we assumed that this value set is the intersection of value sets for both secondary schools and professional organizations. As neither hierarchy (i.e., locus of authority in supervisory personnel) nor structure (i.e., intra-organizational formality and constraint) characterize either secondary schools or professional organizations, both values were dropped as possible core values; thus, we assumed that the possible core values are growth, autonomy, innovation, achievement, cooperation, participation, and warmth. We posit that the department under study will have held these values throughout its history and that these values were held in a consistent order of importance.

SAMPLE APPLICATION

We interviewed all members of the marketing faculty at one major state university in the southwestern U.S. and asked them to discuss the history of their department. Two doctoral students in marketing, trained in qualitative research methodologies and questioning, conducted informal interviews that lasted up to one hour. Faculty were told that the interviews were part of a class project meant to record the history of the department.

Once all the interviews were conducted, the tapes were transcribed into text files that were then transferred to NUD*IST. Next, the text search tool in NUD*IST was used to search for references to growth, autonomy, innovation, achievement, cooperation, participation, and warmth. Once located within the text, the surrounding text was examined to ensure that the notion was used as per our framework. The text was then coded for one of the seven values. Next, each value was ranked by the number of times it appeared in the text and the number of separate individuals who discussed that value. We concluded that the most-often mentioned values were the most salient for this department and should be held by any new hires to maximize intra-departmental value congruence.

Faculty Profile

At the time of the interviews, all the previous chairmen remained on staff. The tenures of the marketing faculty ranged from five to seventeen years; all nine faculty—three chairmen and six other faculty—were tenured. The oldest member of the marketing department, who was the first chairman of the joint marketing-and-business-law department, joined the faculty in 1985. We considered the first chairman to be the founder of the department and used his text as the founding story of the department.

All faculty are Caucasian; one is female. With one exception, all faculty are married; none have young children and five have adult children. The three chairmen hold doctorates from the same state university in the northwestern U.S.; the other faculty hold doctorates from major state universities. Other than Ph.D.-granting university, no other background questions were asked.

Results

The text search and re-interviews of several historically key faculty revealed a distinct ordering of the aforementioned seven dimensions. We found that this faculty most valued collegiality or warmth. Collegiality was a stated goal of each department head. The text search revealed many references to the “good feeling” that permeates this department. Each faculty member mentioned this “good feeling” and the importance of “getting along” with everyone; the latter was especially important for new hires (i.e., no “boat rockers”). Many warmth-related comments concerned the department's
departments, a departmental history may not be appropriate if the influence of the founder is no longer a factor. (6) If the existing department culture should not be perpetuated, then hiring those who are congruent with that value set would be inappropriate. Identification of the value set of a dysfunctional department is useful for other purposes but not for hiring people who fit that value set.

References and figures available upon request.