



Examining Generation Y: How individual values effect undergraduate job seekers' perceptions of an organization's reputation.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine whether an individual's values effect their perceptions of an organization's reputation. An online survey was developed and conducted to collect data from 120 Generation Y university undergraduate students, or recent graduates from a university program. Both genders were welcome to complete the study and they were all recruited to do so via online social media platforms, e-mail, and word of mouth. The results presented no conclusive correlation to our original hypotheses; however the results did show that additional research should be conduct surrounding this subject. This, ultimately, could provide valuable information to company's seeking to recruit and attract Generation Y individuals.

Introduction & Literature Review

As Generation Y begins entering the business world, companies are taking a much greater interest in determining how to attract and recruit top quality undergraduate students. Using four factors of reputation along with twelve individual values, we attempted to conclude if a correlation exists that ultimately determines the likelihood that a Generation Y individual will seek employment at a specific firm.

Agentic values are associated with self-advancement and social hierarchies while communal values are associated with the maintenance of positive relationships (Trapnell & Paulhus, 2012). Past studies have indicated that males tend to exhibit more agentic values, while females tend to exhibit more communal values (Dio, Saragovi, Koestner & Aube, 1996).

Reputation

Various research studies have analyzed organizational reputation and the variables that contribute to it. Researchers have struggled to come to a consensus on a definitive definition for reputation as different organization stakeholders (including job applicants) take into consideration different factors when assessing an organization's reputation (Shanley, 1990). Although it is difficult to define it has been proven that firms' reputation can allow organizations to attract a bigger and more qualified applicant pool (Cable & Turban, 2003). A meta analysis was completed of the literature and four specific reputation variables were chosen:

1. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): The social initiatives that organizations partake in are a contributor to the overall reputation. This is especially important for job applicants who view the organization's social policies as signals of what the working conditions within the organization will be like (Turban & Greening, 1997).
2. Company Size: The size of a company, which includes; different levels of management, global versus local, and amount of employees, contribute to the overall perception of reputation. Through analysis, a positive correlation can be found between company size and perceptions of organization (Roberts & Dowling, 2002).
3. Compensation: Compensation packages offered to employees impact the perception of organizational reputation, and ultimately on the likelihood that that an individual will apply for a position within that company. According to current

research, "...compensation is strongly related to how long it takes a firm to fill a position and applicant likeliness to apply" (Williams & Dreher, 1992).

4. Organization Financial Performance: The financial position of an organization has been viewed as a strong indicator of reputation in multiple research studies (Turban & Greening, 1997) (Caruana, 1997). One study also highlighted that financial performance does not only affect reputation, but reputation also affects financial performance creating interdependence (Roberts & Dowling, 2002).

Hypothesis

Given the literature reviewed above, we offer the follow hypotheses regarding individual values and perceptions of organizational reputation:

H.1a: Males will display more agentic values.

H.1b: Females will display more communal values.

H. 2a: Respondents with more communal values will favour CSR.

H. 2b: Respondents with more communal values will favour company size.

H. 3a: Respondents with more agentic values will favour compensation.

H. 3b: Respondents with more agentic values will favour company financial performance.

Methodology

Participants

The sampling frame consisted of undergraduate university students and recent graduates from university. Given the target population of interest, we controlled for the undergraduate year of study variable. This allowed us to omit the participants who indicated they are not currently in an undergraduate program. Participants that indicated they were not currently enrolled in an undergraduate program were prompted to continue the rest of the survey, but their data was omitted from the final results.

Analytic Procedure

Our recruitment process was conducted from November 5th, 2014 until approximately November 12th, 2014. We utilized the Qualtrics Survey Software to collect our results. Our survey consisted of ten questions (excluding the initial consent question) with one question analyzing the respondent's values based off of twelve values, and four questions in regards to the reputation variables we selected. Respondents were recruited through social media, e-mail, and word of mouth.

Measures

The independent variable measured, individual values, was adapted from the Agentic and Communal Values Scale (ACV) used in Trapnell and Paulhus' research (2012). This original scale compiles a list of twelve agentic values and twelve communal values that have been supported by joint construct validity (Trapnell & Paulhus, 2012). For sake of time and simplicity we choose to adapt to the twelve-item scale that lists six agentic and

six communal values. Participants were asked to rank each value on a five-point likert scale in regards to level of importance (1 being Not Important and 5 being Extremely Important).

The dependent variable measured organizational reputation. We further broke organization reputation down into four measurable variables: CSR, company size, compensation and organization financial performance. We developed this list of reputation variables through a meta analysis of past research and determined variables which reoccurred in multiple studies. Due to our limited time and resources, we narrowed down our list of variables, as some were not feasible in accurately measuring through the survey method we were required to use. For example, one variable that we found to contribute to corporate reputation was media presence (Lange, Lee & Dai, 2011). Although we felt this was a contributing variable to overall organization reputation, the methods to collect this data were unfeasible in time frame and the resources we had available to us.

In order to accurately measure each of the four dependent variables, we asked situational questions about the respondent's willingness to work for a company in three different ways. We mixed up the order and phrasing of the questions asked.

For example, for CSR we asked: "I would not apply for a job at a company that does not give paid time off to employees for participating in charity initiatives". For financial performance we asked: "I would be interested in working for a company with a positive

return on assets”. For company size we asked: “the size of a company is a factor I consider very important when deciding to apply for a position”. For compensation we asked: “I would be interested in working for a company that offer an extensive compensation package. Examples bonuses, flex time and medical coverage”.

Results

Hypothesis 1a and Hypothesis 1b

The analysis generated showed several results based upon the data collected from the surveys. In regards to hypothesis 1a and 1b, we found that 72.7% of males showed agentic values and 62.7% of females showed communal values. This data however could be prone to interpretation as more females than males filled out the survey and our population size was fairly small (120 respondents). There was also a small population that possessed equally agentic and communal values. As a result of these factors, it is difficult to determine if males and females differ when it comes to agentic and communal values possessed. Also, our results revealed that there were no significant correlations between gender and communal or agentic values. Therefore, hypothesis 1a and 1b have been disproven. We cannot accurately conclude whether or not males show more agentic values or females show more communal values.

Hypothesis 2a

In regards to hypothesis 2a, the results showed many interesting correlations that we did not expect. Our first two questions pertaining to CSR showed a significant correlation with communal values. The first question showed a result of 0.330**, and the second

showed a correlation of 0.239**. Both of these correlations were accurate the 99th percentile. However, both correlations are fairly weak with none exceeding 0.5 correlation. We can conclude that respondents here value CSR but since the correlations are weak, it is difficult to speculate to what importance respondents actually place on CSR when making employment application decisions. Therefore, hypotheses 2a is disproven as it is uncertain whether respondents with communal values favour CSR initiatives.

Hypothesis 2b

We found many results pertaining to hypothesis 2a that contradicted our hypothesis. We were shocked to find that all three questions pertaining to company size showed no significant correlation with communal values. It is clear that hypothesis 2b has been disproven as well.

Hypothesis 3a

All questions pertaining to compensation showed no significant correlation with agentic values. This may be because compensation scored highly among all users whether they portrayed communal or agentic values. This would skew the data, as the correlations would not be accurate since compensation proved to be important for all users. Since it is unclear whether people with agentic values place more importance on compensation more than those with communal values, hypothesis 3a has been disproven.

Hypothesis 3b

The first two questions asked pertaining to financial performance showed significant correlations with agentic values. The first question showed a correlation of 0.250** and the second question showed a correlation of 0.270**. Even though these correlations are not random and are accurate to the 99th percentile, the correlations are weak with none exceeding 0.5. This makes it hard to determine whether or not people with agentic values also favour financial performance. The last question we asked about financial performance showed no significant correlation, however this can be dismissed, as return on assets is something applicants rarely look at when making employment decisions. This may be the reason most people placed a low score on this question. Hypothesis 3b has also been disproven, as it is hard to speculate the importance people with agentic values place on financial performance.

Discussion

Based on our results, it is evident that there is no correlation of individual values affecting undergraduate job seeker's perceptions of an organization's reputation. There were a number of surveys built on different hypotheses that resulted in no correlation from five different tests. Although some tests represented a slight correlation between an organization's reputation and individual values, none were strong enough to conclude the relationship. This means that when individuals are searching for jobs, the organization's reputation and gender is irrelevant to their values. Though we have disproven the hypotheses, it is possible our results may differ with a larger sample size and more detailed surveys or different evaluation methods.

After conducting Hypothesis 1, we reject the correlation between gender and communal or agentic values. This shows that neither males nor females possess these values, since the survey conducted was a combination of both genders (however, majority female). One reason that this hypothesis was rejected is due to the small sample size. If more individuals completed the survey, the results may have differed from what we concluded based on 120 participants.

Hypothesis 2a was also rejected since there was no clear correlation between CSR and communal values. This is because the correlation was very weak and some of the questions asked on the survey showed no correlation whatsoever. It is possible that hypothesis 2a would have been accepted if further questions were asked on the survey that showed a stronger correlation.

Hypothesis 2b was again rejected since there was unquestionably no correlation between company size and communal values. This is interesting because it would have been expected that a smaller company would have stronger communal values than a larger company due to the tight-knit environment of employees. Even if a larger sample size was conducted, we feel like the conclusion would not change.

Hypothesis 3a was additionally disproven since no correlation was determined with compensation between agentic or communal values. Since compensation scored high on the vast majority of surveys, whether respondents showed more favourable towards

agentic or communal values, we were unable to draw a definitive conclusion. Therefore, we cannot determine if people with agentic values assessment of compensation is stronger than those with communal values.

Hypothesis 3b was based on organization financial performance. This was rejected because the correlation between financial performance and agentic values was less than 0.5. This means we cannot conclude that financial performance has any effect on individual values. Based on our results alone, we were unable to draw any conclusions.

Limitations & Future Research

With such a short period of time in which to conduct our study, there were many limitations. Sample size was one of the biggest limitations that we faced. Since we only polled 120 participants, our study ended up being underpowered and therefore we were unable to reach statistical significance. Furthermore, since our participant pool was mostly made up of friends and family, we had homogeneity problems, meaning that many of our participants likely shared the same point of view on many of our topics and questions. Both of these factors lead to a profound lack of generalizability to the greater population of job seeking undergraduate students.

We also believe that our question set may have affected our findings. We found that almost all students answered in a fashion that reflected the desire to take a job. Any question that began in a negative context, i.e.: “I would not accept a job at a company that...” was met with high numbers of disagree and strongly disagree answers. At the

same time, any question that began with “I would prefer to work at...” or some variation of positive context received high numbers of “agree” and “strongly agree” answers.

Because of these two limitations in particular, it is probable that we have experienced a type II error. A type II error means that we have accepted a false null hypothesis, or in other words, we accepted that our hypothesis was proven wrong in a situation where it actually may be correct. In order to correct these errors the first step would be to re-evaluate our flawed question set. Having noticed the trend of answers, we feel that if there was an opportunity to poll new participants we could have significantly increased the success of our hypotheses. Once we have done this, increasing the sample size would be the next step in order to increase generalization and decrease homogeneity.

Based on the assumption that our results are true, there are a couple of directions that future research should explore. The first of which being that if values do not effect a person’s perception of a company’s reputation, what does effect that perception? This would be valuable information to companies looking to improve their reputation to increase the number of Generation Y job applicants.

The second path that we suggest future research takes is one that asks what specifically causes a “person-organization fit”. In other words, what makes a person “mesh” well with one organization versus another? If a person’s perception of organizational reputation does not cause them to feel that they would fit well, what does?

Conclusion

As previously mentioned, the results of this type of study are extremely important research findings for companies of all sizes within all industries. After conducting our analysis and reflecting on our methodology, we have concluded that we are unable to draw a definitive conclusion as to whether individual values have any correlation with factors of a company's reputation.

Our small sample size of 120 participants along with the type of questions asked in the survey may have contributed to skewed and inaccurate results. In addition, our group was limited to using the Qualtrics Survey Software in order to conduct primary research, which restricted us in the types of questions and variables used. Although this particular research could not draw conclusions, it can definitely be built upon in future research analyses.

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