Luis M. Arciniega, Adriana Maldonado
Assessing the Impact of Dispositional Resistance to Change on Organizational Attraction
Universidad Complutense de Madrid
España

Available in: http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=17220620027

The Spanish Journal of Psychology,
ISSN (Printed Version): 1138-7416
psyjour@sis.ucm.es
Universidad Complutense de Madrid
España
Assessing the Impact of Dispositional Resistance to Change on Organizational Attraction

Luis M. Arciniega\(^1\) and Adriana Maldonado\(^2\)

\(^1\)Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México (Mexico)  
\(^2\)University of Sheffield (UK)

In recent years there has been an increasing interest among researchers and practitioners to analyze what makes a firm attractive in the eyes of university students, and if individual differences such as personality traits have an impact on this general affect towards a particular organization. The main goal of the present research is to demonstrate that a recently conceptualized narrow trait of personality named dispositional resistance to change (RTC), that is, the inherent tendency of individuals to avoid and oppose changes (Oreg, 2003), can predict organizational attraction of university students to firms that are perceived as innovative or conservative. Three complementary studies were carried out using a total sample of 443 college students from Mexico. In addition to validating the hypotheses, our findings suggest that as the formation of the images of organizations in students’ minds is done through social cognitions, simple stimuli such as physical artifacts, when used in an isolated manner, do not have a significant impact on organizational attraction.

Keywords: dispositional resistance to change, organizational attraction, college recruitment.
In recent years there has been an increasing interest among researchers and practitioners to analyze what makes a firm attractive in the eyes of university students, and if individual differences such as personality traits (e.g., Lievens, Decaestecker, Coetsier, & Geirnaert, 2001; Slaughter & Greguras, 2009) or values (e.g., Arciniega & González, 2002; Cable & Judge, 1994; Rentsch & McEwen, 2002), have an impact on this general affect towards a particular organization. The early attraction to a firm, that is not a consequence of formal recruitment practices, is a key driver for potential candidates to approach a company, and apply for a job.

The main goal of the present research is to demonstrate that a recently conceptualized narrow trait of personality named dispositional resistance to change (RTC), that is, the inherent tendency of individuals to avoid and oppose changes (Oreg, 2003), can predict organizational attraction of university students to firms that are perceived as innovative or conservative. The value of investigating such variable rests on the need for enriching the body of knowledge related to the nomological network around this construct that is being built among researchers in different countries (Arciniega & González, 2009; Oreg et al., 2008; Oreg, Nevo, Metzer, Leder, & Castro, 2009). We believe that investigations about this variable are particularly relevant in the current context of organizations, where change is both an element of reality and a demand for it. This study is also an attempt to contribute to research on the relationship between specific personality traits and early organizational attraction.

Organizational personality perceptions

Over the last two decades an important amount of studies investigating the impact of some job and organizational characteristics on applicants’ attraction to organizations have been conducted. Some of the most widely studied characteristics have been: work environment, compensation, opportunities for development, and type of work. According to a recent meta analysis (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005), this set of variables has a robust relationship with organizational attraction experienced by individuals who have initiated a formal process of recruitment with an organization, and as a consequence, have had some contact with the companies’ processes or systems. Even when these findings are consistent, they can’t be transferred to potential candidates because most of them have not had these interactions.

Commonly, members of a target population that is considered a source of candidates for a particular organization, only have scarce information about the firm, and based on these pieces of information they develop a personal image about that specific organization. It has been proposed that these perceptions are developed prior to any formal recruitment activity (Cable & Turban, 2001), and are importantly related to early organizational attraction (Cable & Yu, 2006; Turban, Forret, & Hendrickson, 1998).

These observed and non observed facts, feelings, and pieces of information that create a general impression of an organization in the minds of potential candidates before being exposed to formal recruitment activities is conceptualized as organizational image in the recruiting literature (Cable & Turban, 2001; Slaughter & Greguras, 2009). A particular element of this puzzle has attracted the attention of researchers, namely organization personality perceptions.

A group of authors has adopted some ideas from the Marketing literature, specifically from brand personality (Aaker, 1997) to analyze how individuals ascribe personality traits to organizations and feel attracted to them (e.g., Cable & Turban, 2001; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). In this study, we also adopted this framework.

Brand personality refers to the set of human characteristics associated with a brand (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). The core idea behind this definition, is that beyond the tangible, instrumental or functional attributes of a brand, there is also a set of symbolic meanings associated with it, that allow consumers to differentiate that particular brand among other products or services with equivalent, or even identical, functional characteristics (e.g., Pepsi vs. Coca-Cola). Under the same rationale, it has been proposed that potential candidates ascribe human characteristics to organizations (e.g., Slaughter, Zickar, Highhouse, & Mohr, 2004).

Paraphrasing Aaker’s definition of brand personality, Slaughter et al., (2004) conceptualized organization personality perceptions as the set of human personality characteristics that is perceived from individuals and associated with a company. One interesting issue around the concept of organization perceived personality deals with the question: how do college students ascribe characteristics such as innovativeness or dominance towards a specific organization? A plausible explanation for this process can be based on signaling theory.

Spence (1973) proposed that many of the things we would like to know about an entity are not directly observable, that is why we must rely on signals to develop an image about it. Signals are perceivable indicators of those not directly observable qualities of the entity. Whereas some signals are reliable, some others are not. Hence, the observer needs to discriminate among a set of signals to form an image of the entity.

Based on these seminal ideas, it could be said that many of the things a potential candidate would like to know about a potential employer, are not directly perceivable by him or her. That is why, potential candidates rely upon signals to develop an image about the firm, and ascribe personality traits to that image. Informal conversations with family members, comments in the media, and brief notes in text books, are examples of signals that allow college students to ascribe personality traits to organizations’ images.
**Organizational attraction**

Considering the existence of different conceptualizations for the construct of organizational attraction, we decided to adopt Aiman-Smith and collaborators’ definition (Aiman-Smith, Bauer, & Cable, 2001, p. 21). This conceptualization sees the construct as the general positive affect toward an organization, toward viewing the organization as a desirable entity with which to initiate some relationship.

Expectations regarding how the alignment of self-rated and organization perceived-personality impact organizational attraction stem from the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971; Tziner, 1985) and social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978). Social attraction theory posits that similarity in values, personalities, and attitudes increases interpersonal attraction, and when individuals like each other, their values, personalities, and attitudes become more aligned. Together, attraction and similarity build reciprocally on one another, facilitating a pull toward symmetry and an avoidance of the strain produced by dissimilarity (Rosenbaum, 1986).

Byrne’s (1971) early attraction-similarity research supports the perspective that individuals are drawn toward others who they think share similar attitudes to themselves and report that these individuals are smarter and better adjusted than others. These propositions also underlie Schneider’s (1987) attraction, selection, attrition (ASA) theory, which supports the notion that this similarity-attraction process naturally produces increasingly homogenous work environments. In general, these theories suggest that individuals will feel more attracted to social entities they perceive similar to them.

**Dispositional resistance to change**

Among the few studies that have assessed the influence of personality traits of potential recruits on organizational attraction, most of them have used the Big Five personality factors as their framework (e.g. Lievens et al., 2001; Slaughter & Greguras, 2009). This framework has been vastly criticized in the last few years. The range of the criticisms is wide; whereas on one extreme Schneider and collaborators (Schneider, Hough, & Dunnette, 1996) say that the Big Five will sink science, on the other, in a more moderate perspective, Rothstein and Goffin (2006) suggest that narrow traits do as good a job as the Big Five in predicting behavior. In general, two of the main criticisms pointed out that they are so broad and heterogeneous, that their accuracy of prediction is low, and also, that they combine constructs that are better left separate (Hough & Oswald, 2008). For instance, in a recent publication, Slaughter and Greguras (2009) could not demonstrate that individuals high in openness to experience would feel attracted to organizations seen as innovative or trendy. Hough and Oswald (2008) have noted the potential diluting prediction of openness to experience as a consequence of its broadness. Following this perspective, the present study deals with one specific construct (i.e. RTC), instead of the broad Big Five, therefore, contributing to the research on the predictive power of narrow personality traits on organizational attraction.

Drawing from the large body of research on resistance to change, Oreg (2003) proposed the existence of a multidimensional construct that he called dispositional resistance to change. The concept taps individuals’ inherent tendency to resist changes: while some people openly accept and adapt to changes, others show an inclination to avoid and oppose them. According to Oreg (2003), those who are dispositionally resistant to changes are less likely to voluntarily initiate changes in their lives, and are more likely to form negative attitudes towards specific changes they encounter.

Dispositional resistance to change comprises four oblique dimensions: routine seeking, emotional reaction, short-term focus, and cognitive rigidity. Routine seeking involves the extent to which individuals prefer conventional and highly predictable tasks, procedures, and environments. Emotional reaction is focused on the extent to which individuals experience discomfort, lack of enthusiasm, and anxiety when changes are imposed upon them. Short-term focus addresses the degree to which individuals worry about all inconveniences and discomfort that change brings about, instead of focusing on the potential benefits and comfort that it could bring in the long term. Finally, cognitive rigidity involves individuals’ inflexibility in thinking and difficulty in accepting alternative ideas, perspectives, and methods.

A series of studies (Oreg, 2003) suggests that even when the construct is related to other personality traits such as openness to experience (Digman, 1990) or intolerance for ambiguity (Budner, 1962), RTC is distinct from them, and is a good predictor of behaviors associated with change situations in the context of organizations. The cross-cultural validity of the construct has been demonstrated recently using a sample of 4,201 university students from 17 different countries (Oreg et al., 2008), from almost every corner of the planet (e.g. Australia, China, Turkey).

The influence of dispositional resistance to change is not context specific and is expected to exert influence on individuals’ reactions to change across contexts and over time (Oreg, 2003). It has been shown that RTC not only impacts on specific behaviors related to change, such as new technology adoption (Oreg, 2003: Study 6), it also affects more general variables such as occupational interest and choice (Oreg et al., 2009). Based on these ideas, and on the similarity-attraction paradigm and the social identity theory, described earlier, we propose that this narrow personality trait could influence the attraction experienced by potential candidates towards an organization that is perceived as conservative or innovative. In specific, we propose that:

**Hypothesis 1:** Individuals scoring higher on dispositional resistance to change will feel more attracted towards a firm that is perceived as conservative.
Hypothesis 2: Individuals scoring lower on dispositional resistance to change will feel more attracted towards a firm that is perceived as innovative.

Study 1

The main goal of this study was to identify the name of two organizations operating in Mexico that were associated as innovative and conservative by potential candidates that would be initiating a formal process of job search in the short term.

Method

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 65 undergraduate students from a private university in Mexico City. The Business Administration undergraduate program of this institution has been a preferred target of multinational organizations to recruit candidates. All students were enrolled in intermediate courses on Management related majors. The mean age of the sample was of 21.8, 54% were female.

Measures

Scenarios used in other studies (e.g., Arciniega & González, 2002) served as the models to develop two questions requesting participants to write the names of four organizations operating in Mexico that would be representative of two different organization perceived personalities: innovative and conservative. These were the scenario and the two descriptions used:

Based on the global information received through the different means of communication (written as well as electronic, chats with friends and family, comments made by professors in class), write the names of four established organizations that operate in Mexico and whose philosophies fit the following descriptions:

It is an avant-gardist, always leading its field. It is innovative and the one who imposes change. It is very dynamic and is always changing.

It is a traditionalist and does not normally take risks. It cares about maintaining the status quo. It responds to the actions of its competitors but never leads change in its field.

Results and Discussion

Once all the names of the organizations given by the participants of this study were obtained, the total number of mentions, as well as the amount of specific mentions for each category was counted for each of them. Despite the fact that there was enough space to write down the names of four organizations under each category, there were a few cases in which the subjects gave fewer names for one or both of the categories. Consequently, from the 520 possible global mentions, there were 65 omissions and 455 effective mentions. From these (455 mentions), 249 were made for the innovative category and 206 for the conservative. However, the total amount of different names (organizations) mentioned for the innovative category was 61; compared to 71 for the conservative category. Out of the total number of organizations mentioned by the participants, a group of 25 was mentioned under both categories with different frequencies. The five organizations with the highest frequency of mentions in each category are shown in table 1.

As observed in the table, the two organizations obtaining the largest number of mentions under each category, Bimbo and Coca Cola, are also located among the top five organizations most frequently mentioned under the opposite category. It was due to this, that the two organizations taking the second place regarding the amount of mentions for each profile were determined as the ones most clearly associated by the participants as innovative or conservative: Cemex for the conservative profile and Televisa for the innovative profile.

Taking these findings into consideration, it was concluded that the chosen organizations represented a clear distinction among the participants with respect to the perception of the organization’s personality profile as innovative or conservative.

It is relevant to say that even when the sample size could be considered small, the main purpose of this study was to identify the names of two organizations that were perceived

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company name</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Innovative</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apple</td>
<td>Computing</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bimbo</td>
<td>Food</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cemex</td>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coca Cola</td>
<td>Food &amp; Beverage</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pascual Boing</td>
<td>Food &amp; Beverage</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procter &amp; Gamble</td>
<td>Personal care</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telcel</td>
<td>Telecommunication</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Televisa</td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
as innovative or conservative by the target of this investigation. At the same time, it is worth remarking that the amount of mentions collected from participants (i.e. 455), was the key figure taken into consideration when analyzing the data.

Study 2

Once we had the names of the two organizations perceived as innovative (Televisa) and conservative (Cemex) we proceeded to assess our hypotheses using the names of each organization as the triggering stimulus.

Participants

The sample group was 245 college students from Business-related majors from two universities in Mexico. All students were enrolled in intermediate courses. The mean age of the sample was of 22.9 (SD = 1.84), 53% were female.

Measures

To assess organizational attraction for each of two companies we used a single item measure based on previous studies (e.g. Rentsch & McEwen, 2002). The items were preceded by the following scenario: Suppose that the two organizations listed below, were offering you an opportunity to work for them through a long term contract and with an equivalent compensation package. In both companies you will have the chance to perform activities according to your academic concentration, and to advance in your career. As stated before, previous research in organizational attraction has shown that factors such as compensation, promotional opportunities and type of job have an important influence on this attitude (e.g. Chapman et al., 2005), which is why we decided to control for these key variables by fixing them in the described scenario. This allowed us to measure organizational attraction in the purest possible way.

Once respondents read the scenario, they had to answer the following questions: To what extend would you feel attracted to work for Cemex?, item 1, and for Televisa?, item 2, using in both cases a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (very low interested) to 7 (highly interested).

To measure dispositional resistance to change we used the Spanish version of Oreg’s scale (2003). This version has been previously used in samples of undergraduate students in Mexico and in Spain, reporting adequate psychometric properties (Arciniega & González, 2009). The RTC scale consists of 17 items. Respondents are asked to rate the extent to which they agree with each of the items using a six-point, Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The Cronbach’s alpha for the full scale was of .77, and the alphas for the subscales were .71 for routine seeking, .70 for emotional reaction, .73 for short-term-focus, and .78 for cognitive rigidity.

Based on the fact that Cronbach’s alpha could provide an inaccurate measure of reliability when a multidimensional construct is analyzed, as the case of RTC, we decided to produce an additional assessment of construct reliability. We computed the composite reliability index for each of the four dimensions (i.e. subscales), and the full RTC scale. To calculate the composite reliability, a CFA was computed assessing the fit of a four oblique factor model to the data of the sample. The results suggested an adequate fit ($\chi^2 = 211, df = 108, CFI = .912, NNFI = .914$ and RMSEA = .063. Based on the non standardized coefficients of the solution, we computed the Rho reliability index for each subscale and the full scale, using the Raykov and Shrout (2002) formula. A coefficient of .72 was obtained for routine seeking, .71 for emotional reaction, .74 for short-term focus, .79 for cognitive rigidity and .79 for the full scale, all figures being above the recommended value of .60 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988).

Analyses and Results

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations and intercorrelations for Study 2 variables. All correlations between the four dimensions of RTC and organizational attraction to the firm perceived as conservative were positive and significant, and the mean of the coefficients was .37. On the contrary, the coefficients between these dimensions and organizational attraction towards the firm perceived as innovative were negative, as three out of four correlations were significant with a mean of – .31. Concerning the correlations among the four dimensions of RTC, these ranged from – .03 to .55. In line with previous studies, including a cross-cultural validation of the RTC scale in 17 countries (Oreg et al., 2008), the highest correlation among the four dimensions was between short-term-focus and emotional reaction, the two affective dimensions of the construct.

In order to validate hypotheses 1 and 2, two regression models were computed. One having organizational attraction towards the firm perceived as conservative as the dependent variable, and the other having the organization perceived as innovative as the dependent variable.

The regression model for the company perceived as conservative (i.e. Cemex) explained 33% of the variance in the data. As can be seen in table 3, the four standardized betas were significant, with a minimum variation in the weights of the coefficients, ranging only from .18 to .27.

On the other hand, the variance explained for the model having the firm perceived as innovative as the dependent variable was 27%. Despite the fact that the four standardized betas for the model were negative, as expected, only two of them were significant with weights being almost identical: – .29 for routine seeking and – .28 for short-term-focus.
Discussion

Consistent with hypotheses 1 and 2, dispositional resistance to change showed a considerable impact on organizational attraction in the group of participants. Thus, the impact of the perceptions formed by the individuals regarding the personality of a specific firm is not only significant, but has proved to be worth investigating, especially when it comes to organizational attractiveness.

The inferences formed by the signals that the applicants receive from the companies can be the key to identifying and understanding the possible differences (perceived by the applicants) in the attractiveness of organizations in the same industry. These perceived differences may persist even when the direct competitors of these companies offer very similar positions to applicants, with job characteristics that are almost the same (e.g., type of job, compensation, potential for promotion). This becomes particularly important in the case of high skilled applicants, who are expected to have more alternatives to choose from when looking for a position. It is likely that when they look for a job, they will target companies that are very similar in terms of recognition, size and economic benefits offered to their employees.

This study adds to the empirical evidence of the nomological network of the dispositional resistance to change construct. It also demonstrates that this personality trait has an impact on general attitudes, as shown in the case of organizational attraction. While Slaughter and Greguras (2009) were unable to demonstrate some intuitive relations between the broad Big Five and organizational attraction to firms perceived as conservative, this study did it, but using a narrow trait as the independent variable. In our opinion, one of the main reasons why they could not validate these hypotheses is because of the use of broad personality traits instead of narrow ones. It is important to recall that for instance, openness to experience covers a wide range of traits including being imaginative, cultured, curious, original, broad-minded, intelligent, and artistically sensitive. It is hard to believe that a curious, an imaginative, and an artistically sensitive student, will not feel attracted to work for an organization perceived as innovative (e.g., Pepsico, 3M).

It is common sense to think that a dispositional based concept such as RTC will be linked to other attitudes or behaviors related to early organizational attraction, such as “feeling attracted to” the trendiness of its corporate image. In line with this, we decided to analyze if similar results would have been obtained through the usage of other prompts (e.g. visual signals) instead of the names of the organizations employed in Study 2. We chose to work with physical stimuli presented to the students, will not feel attracted to work for an organization perceived as innovative (e.g., Pepsico, 3M).

Study 3

Participants

The sample consisted of 133 college students from Business-related majors from two different universities in central Mexico. It is important to say, that this sample was
totally independent from the ones utilized in study 1 and study 2. Sixty six percent of the participants were women. The mean age was 21.13 (SD = 2.05).

Measures and Procedure

As has been previously described, research evidence shows that the display of physical markers, such as pictures of top executives or the design of corporate buildings, are means commonly used for communicating organizations' personalities.

Based on the measures used in other studies (Ornstein, 1986; 1992), we developed a letter-size printed display, showing a set of visual elements of the corporate images of the two organizations that were identified as innovative and conservative in study 1. Those elements were: pictures of the top executive teams wearing formal clothing, pictures of the designs of the corporate buildings, and a set of charts extracted from the annual reports of both companies, showing the kind of graphic design utilized in their reports. All images were edited in order to remove any type of clues that could be used to recognize the organizations. For instance, in both cases, the pictures of the Chief Executive Officers were not shown because of their visibility in the national media. The set of visual markers associated to the conservative firm, Cemex, were shown on the side of the letter size printed display codified as “Company A”, while on the opposite side, all the markers associated to the innovative firm were displayed (i.e. Company B; Televisa).

Once participants observed, individually, each of the two sides of the handout for a 3- minute lapse, we assessed organizational attraction to each company using the same approach as in study 1. Firstly, we presented the same scenario concerning the similarities in the compensation packages, type of contract, and opportunities for development, followed by the questions: To what extent would you feel attracted to work for company A, and in the second item for company B. Likert-type scales with seven points ranging from very low interested (1) to highly interested (7) were employed to obtain their preferences. It is important to highlight, that the name of the companies was never revealed to the participants, and they were only exposed to the described images.

In this study we also utilized the Spanish version of Oreg’s RTC scale (Arciniega & González, 2009). The Cronbach’s alpha for routine seeking was .64, while being .72 for emotional reaction, .71 for short-term focus, and .72 for cognitive rigidity. The internal consistency index for the full scale was .72.

As in study 2, the composite reliability for each of the four subscales and the full RTC scale was calculated. Firstly we computed a CFA to assess the internal validity for a model with four oblique factors, obtaining adequate goodness of fit indices ($\chi^2 = 120.58, df = 98, CFI = .959, NNF1 = .949$ and RMSEA .039). Based on the non standardized coefficients of the solution, we computed the Rho reliability indices. A coefficient of .60 was obtained for routine seeking, .72 for emotional reaction, .72 for short-term focus, .73 for cognitive rigidity and .78 for the full scale, all these figures being above the recommended value of .60 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988).

Analyses and Results

Table 4 shows the correlations, means and standard deviations between all variables measured in study 3. As can be seen in table 4, none of the correlations between the four dimensions of RTC and the attraction to the physical markers associated to the conservative firm, were significant. Three of them were almost zero, suggesting the nonexistence of relationships between the construct of dispositional resistance to change and the attraction to the physical markers. Even when the correlation coefficients between the four dimensions of RTC and the attraction to the physical markers of the company associated as innovative, were slightly higher when compared with the ones of the conservative organization, none of the coefficients were significant, and all of them were lower than .14, ranging from -.13 to .05, confirming the nonexistence of relationships between RTC and organizational attraction, using the attraction to physical markers as the triggering stimuli. The correlations between

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Attraction to conservative firm</th>
<th>Attraction to innovative firm</th>
<th>Routine seeking</th>
<th>Emotional reaction</th>
<th>Short-term focus</th>
<th>Cognitive rigidity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attraction to conservative firm</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attraction to innovative firm</td>
<td>6.02</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine Seeking</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>(.64)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional reaction</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>(.72)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term focus</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.31*</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>(.71)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive rigidity</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>(.72)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. Conservative firm = Cemex, innovative firm = Televisa. ** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed). The Cronbach’s alphas for the four scales measured are reported on the diagonal.
the four dimensions of RTC were consistent with the results of study 2. In this case, they ranged from –.02 to .48, three out of six being significant. In line with the international findings when using the RTC scale (Oreg et al., 2008), the highest correlation was found between emotional reaction and short-term focus.

To confirm these results, we computed two regression models both having the four dimensions of the RTC construct as the independent variables, and the attraction to the physical markers of the conservative firm as the dependent variable in one of the models, and the attraction to the innovative firm in the other. In both cases the explained variance was lower than 1%, all of the regression coefficients being non significant.

Discussion

The results of Study 3 can initially lead to controversy as they suggest a direct rejection towards the hypotheses of the investigation. It could be prematurely concluded that they do not support the results found in Study 2. However, a deeper interpretation of these findings can actually lead thought in the opposite direction. The fact that there was no relation found between the level of RTC in the individuals, and their attraction to the physical markers used is strongly aligned with both the ideas of Aaker (1997) and Spence (1973) mentioned previously in our study. That is to say, students do not form the images of organizations based on simple physical images of their top executives or buildings. Instead, the process is much more complex and is derived of social cognitions that help students create images based on various non tangible symbols. It is understood that this cognitive process is what helps candidates make inferences to fill in the gaps created by the lack of available information about their potential employers (Spence, 1973). In order to make an inference, candidates will use all information available through signals and will ascribe certain characteristics to the organizations. In Study 2, the names of the companies used as triggering stimuli very probably activated previously made inferences in students’ minds. The pictures used in study 3, however, did not present students with enough information (prompt) for the same inferences to be activated; suggesting that other type of information would be needed for this type of assumptions to be made or recalled.

Moreover, if we are to accept that organizations as employers can be understood in a similar way as brands in general, we can then follow Aaker’s perspective, that the attributions made by consumers, which in this case would be students or future applicants, to the brand personality (organizational personality in this case) can only be made based on actual behaviors of the organization as if it were “alive” (Aaker & Fournier, 1995) which would logically require much more than the presentation of a picture showing the corporate building. Being that the case, it is easy to deduce that a stimulus such as the name of a well-known organization would be powerful enough to bring to “the surface” all or some of the attributions made by the students about it as an employer brand.

General Discussion

The objective of this research was to demonstrate that dispositional resistance to change (RTC) can predict organizational attraction of university students to firms that are perceived as innovative or conservative. Our results show that this personality trait does have a strong impact on the organizational attraction phenomenon. We also learned that some visual signals, such as the design of the corporate buildings, the image of members of the Executive team, and graphs shown in the Annual Report; even when they might be used in the formation of people’s perception of organizations do not play a significant role in organizational attraction; or at least not when they are isolated from other stimuli (e.g. the name of the company)

Contributions of the findings of this study can be summarized in three strands: the results strengthen the body of research on the effectiveness of narrow personality traits (such as RTC) as predictors of specific attitudes; the investigation adds to the nomological network of the RTC construct; it also enriches the knowledge of the process of construction of the organization’s image based on social cognitions. The final ideas derived from this investigation can be summarized using two perspectives. On the one hand, these results are relevant for practitioners, and on the other these findings have important value to researchers.

Based on studies on organizational attractiveness, the one course of action that should be considered by organizations is to send consistent signals that convey the image they want to transmit, when making direct or indirect contacts with potential recruitment candidates. A first suggested step for many organizations would be investigating the organizational personality traits with which their target recruitment candidates associate the firm most frequently. This type of knowledge can be of great help to the Board when designing growth strategies that transmit the image of the organization.

For every company that wants to attract a specific undergraduate candidate profile (e.g. the most talented, the most creative, etc.) there are some questions worth asking: What is the image that college students have about our company? What are the traits that they associate it with? Is this image congruent with what the company wants to convey? If not, what actions can we take to change or improve our current image?

Organizations should not underestimate the power of their firm’s perceived personality. This study focuses on organizational attractiveness prior to a recruitment process, and the impact of a narrowed psychological variable in
the applicants. However, just as brand personality has an impact on consumer behavior, the firm’s personality might have an impact on employee behavior (e.g. loyalty), which is another argument for the relevance of the findings of an investigation like this in everyday business management.

For researchers, the findings of this study highlight the relevance of carrying out future investigations that evaluate the impact of the product brands and services of a company on its image and perceived personality. For example, there may be an independent effect of the image – personality of the company on the image-personality of its brands.

Even when all signals transmitted by the company to the general public have an impact on both consumers and potential employees it is reasonable to think that some signals are more important than others in different moments of the relationship of the individual with the organization. A logical research path could be identifying a set of “signals” that college students pay attention to when it comes to forming an organizational image, and associating individuals’ personality traits to that image formation process. Individual psychological variables could have an impact on the processes that differentiate among and choose between the signals used to model the perception of organizational personality.

References


Received October 20, 2009
Revision received August 10, 2010
Accepted September 29, 2010