THESIS

JOB HUNTING IN THE DIGITAL AGE:

HOW SOCIALIZATION MESSAGES ARE COMMUNICATED

TO INFORMATION SEEKERS THROUGH CORPORATE WEBSITES

Submitted by

Hillary White

Department of Communication Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Fall, 2014

Master's Committee:

     Advisor: Elizabeth Williams

     Eric Aoki
     Yolanda Sarason

ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines organizational socialization. It seeks to understand how socialization messages about performance proficiency, people, organizational politics, language, goals and values, and history are communicated on corporate websites. Specifically, this study uses Chao and colleagues' (1994) typology to explore how messages about job performance, people, politics, language, organizational goals and values, and history are communicated on organization's websites. Through a grounded theory analysis of 10 of the 2013 "Best Corporate Websites" several similarities are identified in the way socialization messages are communicated to potential employees through websites. Organizations use similar language and format in order to present information relevant to job and information seekers.

This research has implications for both individuals who seek information online about organizations and organizations that want to encourage organizational socialization of employees prior to entry into the organization. Using similar strategies may help organizations clearly and convincingly communicate messages to the desired audience.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I clearly remember the day I got the call from my dream job letting me know they wanted an interview. I could hardly believe I was going to meet the people with whom I dreamed of working. In anticipation of the interview, I scrutinized the company's website in order to familiarize myself with their language, goals, and values. I was going to do anything I could to make myself stand out to the interviewers. However, when I arrived, I was surprised to hear that I was not actually interviewing with the company to which I had I applied. Instead, the job was with a subsidiary of that company. Surprised by this disparity, I tried to remember anything on the website that indicated there were other companies in the mix.

Like most people today looking for a job, I relied heavily on the organization's website for information. From filling out my application to preparing for the interview, my knowledge of the company was limited to what I could find online. Indeed, research on organizational socialization, defined by Ashforth, Sluss and Saks (2007) as "the process through which individuals acquire knowledge about and adjust to their work context" (p.448), suggests "organizations should attend to their [organizational socialization] programs and organizational literature, and ensure that information is available, pertinent, and reflects what is actually done rather than providing a false or misleading ideal" (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006, p. 508). In my experience, not only did the parent company's website not mention any subsidiaries, but none of the subsidiaries had websites of their own. Having only the website for information, there was no way for me to have that information prior to applying.

Socialization happens in four stages, beginning before an individual even enters an organization, and lasts until that individual leaves. In the first, pre-entry stage of socialization, employees seek out information in order to reduce their uncertainty about the work context (Miller & Jablin, 1991). To do so, individuals rely on whatever information is available to gain knowledge of the company they are entering. In my case, the information I needed was most accessible on the company's website, but mostly unavailable or misleading, thus not reducing my uncertainty but actually heightening it when I learned that there were subsidiaries. While socialization research has identified many of the ways individuals seek information about a new job (e.g., asking questions and talking to past and present employees; Miller & Jablin, 1991; Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004), little research has focused on how corporate websites are used in that process (Kramer & Miller, 2013; Saks & Ashforth, 1997a). Today, organizations primarily rely on their websites to attract and inform potential employees. In fact, many organizations require applications and resume be submitted through their website, and do not take other submissions. Not only do organizations use their websites for the application and hiring process, but also the information contained in the websites is a reflection of the culture of the organization (Kramer, 2010). If individuals are using websites to inform themselves about the organization, then the website is consequently a socialization tool. Therefore, this thesis framed corporate websites as a socialization tool and as such, analyzed the content.

The current study has both theoretical and practical importance. On the theoretical level, socialization researchers have not fully examined the way organizations use the Internet for providing information during the anticipatory stage of socialization. While much research has been done on the written material provided by the organization (e.g., Davis, 2005; Vaughn, 1997; Pribble, 1990), little to no research has expanded written material to online sources. The

Internet is of course written material, but is different from other written sources because the Internet can be updated immediately and often, and has the ability to include multimedia. Additionally, the Internet reaches anyone with a connection at all times, and companies cannot limit who accesses their websites (as opposed to targeting certain groups of qualified people with paper information). Therefore, access to the Internet changes the dynamics of and accessibility to organizational information.

The implication of this research on the practical level is two-fold. First, on the organizational level, this research can help companies communicate clear messages about the organization to potential employees through the corporate website. Organizations can tailor information provided to improve employee knowledge before entry into the organization. Second, there are implications on the individual level. According to Scott and Myers (2010) the purpose of studying socialization from a communicative perspective is "to identify how people can more actively and knowledgeably participate in the negotiation of organizational membership through specific communication choices" (p. 80). According to a 2013 study by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, nearly one-third of Americans use the Internet for finding a job (Horrigan, 2013). Since the growing trend is toward Internet use for information seeking, it is helpful to understand what kind of information individuals may find on corporate websites.

Therefore, in this thesis I begin by reviewing the literature on organizational socialization in the next chapter and propose one research question that explores company website use for information seeking. Then, in Chapter 3, I describe the method used to address the research question. Chapter 4 describes the results of the study and Chapter 5 reviews the key findings, offers implications of this study as well as provides limitations and directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

A REVIEW OF ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION STRATEGIES

Socialization has been a long-studied phenomenon in organizational literature. Socialization is an organization's "primary means for communicating organizational culture and ensuring stable values" with their employees (Cable & Parsons, 2001, p. 16). Therefore, through socialization, organizations can influence how new members see the organization's culture and function as part of that culture, (Cheney, Christensen, Zorn, & Ganesh, 2011). In fact, studies show that new employees often feel more comfortable with the organization if they are socialized into the company in the first few weeks (Cable & Parsons, 2001). For example, a study by Madlock and Horan (2009) shows that the judgment that new members make about an organization in the first few weeks of work has a great impact on how committed that member will eventually be to the organization.

Scholars who have defined organizational socialization differ in their understanding of when the socialization process starts. Cooper-Thomas and Anderson (2005) define socialization as "the period of newcomer adjustment and learning to meet organizational standards and norms that follows selection and assessment" (p. 116). This definition implies that socialization does not begin until an individual has entered the organization. Indeed, Cooper-Thomas and Anderson (2002, 2005, 2006) focused almost exclusively on outcomes of socialization tactics after a newcomer entered the organization. However, other scholars include the period before entering the organization as socialization as well. Those scholars use definitions of socialization that are more broad such as the "process through which individuals acquire knowledge about and adjust to their work context" (Ashforth, Sluss, & Saks, 2007, p. 448), or more specific: "the

process by which a person secures relevant job skills, acquires a functional level of organizational understanding, attains supportive social interactions with coworkers, and generally accepts the established ways of a particular organization" (Taormina, 1997, p. 30). For the purpose of this thesis, socialization is the process by which an individual acquires knowledge and understanding about a current or potential work context. Therefore, socialization is a learning process that begins before entry into an organization.

Jablin (1984, 1987) identified four stages of socialization, the first of which begins prior to organizational entry. The anticipatory stage occurs before the new member starts work. The anticipatory stage happens in two parts. The first part involves "the interaction of organizations providing information to attract potential members (recruitment) and individuals seeking information as part of their effort to find organizations to join (reconnaissance)" (Kramer, 2010, p. 48). The intersection of these two efforts, recruitment and reconnaissance, occurs "through the various recruitment sources" such as newspapers, job fairs, websites, and networking (Kramer, 2010, p. 50). An individual's experience of the anticipatory stage is made up of prior work experience, and "his or her expectations of the communication system and environment of the new organization" (Jablin, 1984, p. 599).

Next, the encounter stage is when the new member first joins the organization. In this phase, the new member experiences "role shock" and decides if their expectations of the organization match up with the reality (Jablin, 1984, p. 600). Role shock may be lessened if the newcomer acquires enough accurate information prior to entering the organization. Following the encounter stage is the metamorphosis stage in which the individual changes or learns "accepted" behavior in order to no longer feel like a newcomer (Jablin, 1984, p. 601). It is during the first three stages that the new member is most impressionable and will be evaluating

the organization's values and culture for the first time; therefore, these three stages are when the newcomer is most open to the organization's socialization messages. Finally, the exit stage is when the individual begins to break away from the organization. However, Jablin later noted that the stages are fluid and overlapping (Kramer & Miller, 2013). This thesis focuses specifically on the anticipatory stage, because it is when the individual is first exposed to the organization, and before they enter the organization as an official member. In particular, the basis of this research is the organization's messages to potential employees when those individuals are creating expectations for the new organization, the first part of the anticipatory stage.

Socialization Factors

Socialization is a process that can be either initiated by the organization or started by the individual. More organization-driven, formal socialization is known as socialization tactics (Ashforth, Sluss, & Saks, 2007). Socialization on the part of the individual is known as proactive behavior (Ashforth, Sluss, & Saks, 2007).

Socialization Tactics

Socialization tactics are ways an organization can communicate socialization messages to employees. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) and Jones (1986) found organizations use six bi-polar tactics: collective/individual, formal/informal, sequential/random, fixed/variable, serial/disjunctive, and investiture/divestiture.

Collective/individual socialization refers to the size of the socialization group. If the organization socializes a group of individuals together, it would be collective socialization. On the other hand, if the organization socializes individuals in isolation from one another, that constitutes individual socialization. Websites can be classified as individual because people use

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them in isolation from one another. Formal/informal socialization refers to a socialization process in which the newcomer is segregated from experienced organizational members or not. Formal socialization processes are "tailored explicitly for the newcomer" (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 236) while informal socialization processes "do not distinguish the newcomer's role specifically, nor is there an effort made in such programs to rigidly differentiate the recruit from the other more experienced organizational members" (p. 237). Websites are most likely informal because they include a wide variety of information, not tailored toward a specific person's role and responsibilities in the organization.

Sequential/random socialization refers to whether the socialization process has distinct, identifiable steps for completion (sequential) or if the steps for completion are "unknown, ambiguous, or continually changing (random) (p. 241). Fixed/variable socialization refers to "the degree to which the steps involved in a socialization process have a timetable associated with them that is both adhered to by the organization and communicated to the recruit" (p. 244). Fixed socialization provides a specific timetable for completion, while variable provides some clues of a timetable, but nothing specific. Websites would normally be considered random and variable because there are no specific steps or timetables for completion of the socialization process.

Serial/disjunctive socialization refers to whether or not the newcomer has an organizational member as a role model for their position. Serial socialization provides newcomers with a role model for the position they are about to assume, while disjunctive socialization does not. Websites would most often be considered disjunctive because there are no mentors for each specific job available, though the possibility exists. Finally, investiture/divestiture socialization refers to "the degree to which a socialization process is

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constructed to either confirm or disconfirm the entering identity of the recruit" (p. 250).

Investiture socialization does not change the newcomer, and confirms them as they are.

Divestiture socialization, on the other hand, "seeks to deny and strip away certain personal

characteristics of a recruit" (p. 250). Websites can be considered both investiture and

divestiture, because it depends not on the organization, but on how the individual interprets the

information on the websites. Individuals could see a company's desire for specific traits and

either determine the characteristics apply to them or not and move forward (investiture), or

instead try to change themselves into a more desirable applicant (divestiture).

Furthermore, different combinations of the tactics produce different types of

socialization. Collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial, and investiture tactics form

institutionalized socialization, and result in employees reproducing the status quo (Saks &

Ashforth, 1997b). Individual, informal, random, variable, disjunctive, and divestiture tactics

comprise individualized socialization, and cause employees to be more creative in their roles. If

socialization were on a continuum, individualized socialization would be on one end, and

institutionalized socialization would be on the other end. Based on the way these tactics are

described, organizational websites can most likely be classified as individual, informal, random,

variable, and disjunctive; websites can be both investiture and divestiture, making it fall on the

individualized socialization end of the continuum. Knowing that websites are individualized

much more than institutionalized means organizations are giving employees control over their

own socialization and understanding of the organization. However, because organizations

control their own websites, they are still asserting control over the messages those individuals are

getting. This balance of power means that websites are a unique opportunity for organizations

and individuals to self-select if the organization and the potential employee are the right fit (Kramer, 2010).

Research into the effects of different socialization tactics suggests that institutionalized socialization is "related to lower role ambiguity, role conflict, and intentions to quit, higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Saks & Ashforth, 1997b; Saeed, Mansor, Naha, Siddique, Anis-ul-Haq, & Muhammad Ishaq, 2012; Klein & Weaver, 2000). On the other side, individualized socialization tactics are related to creativity and innovation (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Saks & Ashforth, 1997b; Ashford & Black, 1996). Therefore, organizations can combine socialization tactics in different ways in order to achieve their desired outcome.

Proactive Behaviors

Socialization on the part of the individual, however, is known as proactive behavior (Ashforth, Sluss, & Saks, 2007). This approach gives individuals agency over their socialization by actively seeking to reduce uncertainty rather than relying on the organization to provide information in a formalized setting. By reducing their uncertainty, individuals can become more comfortable with their new work context, and adjust more quickly. Proactive behaviors include networking, general socializing, building relationships with one's boss, negotiating job changes, positive framing of work context, information seeking, and feedback seeking (Ashford and Black, 1996; Saks, Gruman, & Cooper-Thomas, 2011). Basically, proactive behaviors include any way of gaining more insight into the organization and individual role of the new employee, most notably by interacting with members of the organization. Benefits of proactive behaviors include social integration, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, role clarity, task mastery, and intention to remain (Ashforth, Sluss, & Saks, 2007; Saks, Gruman, & Cooper-Thomas,

2011). Proactive behaviors result in employees being more satisfied and productive in their new job, which benefits both the individual and the organization.

Organizational websites exist at the intersection of socialization tactics and proactive behavior. Kramer (2010) identified this intersection as being between organizational recruitment efforts and individual job seeking, and noted the lack of research on this particular aspect of the anticipatory stage. Individuals seek information on websites, and organizations can strategically communicate socialization tactics to potential employees on these websites; websites are the juncture between proactive behavior and socialization tactics in the anticipatory stage of socialization. Therefore, this thesis focuses on what socialization messages are found on corporate websites when job seekers engage in proactive information seeking behavior.

Information Seeking

More specific research has been conducted on information seeking as the primary method of proactive behavior (Saks & Ashforth, 1997a). Because individuals entering a job experience a higher degree of uncertainty, information seeking is used to reduce that uncertainty. When the newcomer feels more comfortable with the organization, they adjust more quickly.

Information seeking occurs in a variety of ways. Miller and Jablin (1991) found that most information seeking occurs through overt questions, indirect questions, third parties, testing limits, disguising conversations, observing, and surveillance. By talking to and watching others, new members can look for the information they need to feel more comfortable. These tactics are the most used by new members in order to gain more information about the organization once they have joined. Sources of this information are usually other organizational members such as top management, supervisors, coworkers, and subordinates, but can also include mentors,

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customers/clients, friends or family members, the task itself, observation, and an organizational

manual (Jablin, 1987; Ostroff & Kozlowksi, 1992; Kramer & Miller, 2013; Hart, 2012).

Technology for Information Seeking

Often those one-on-one, direct avenues for information seeking are not available to

potential employees unless they have a previous connection to the organization. When they are

unavailable, employees may use the Internet as one form of information seeking to find out more

about the organization; however, Internet use and company websites have not been considered in

past research (Berkelaar, 2013). While this source is implied as a form of written material,

Kramer and Miller (2013) identified electronic sources as an "increasingly important information

source to consider in future studies" (p. 534). Additionally, Kramer (2010) noted,

"organizations of almost every size maintain websites that provide general organizational

information" as well as provide specific information about job and career opportunities, even the

ability to apply online (p. 50). Indeed, websites have been identified as a source of information

seeking by other scholars as well. Flanagin and Waldeck (2004) are the only scholars to make

the case for organizational websites as a legitimate source of information for both the individual

and the organization. They state:

> During the interview (anticipatory socialization) phase, online information provides the
> prospective hire the convenience of avoiding long-distance telephone calls and needless
> travel for an interview if it appears that the organization is not compatible with his or her
> needs and skills. This technology provides time and cost savings for the organization as
> well (pp. 142-143).

Clearly corporate websites are beneficial to both the individual and organizations. Prospective

employees can discern if the organization is a good fit before applying for a position, and

organizations can reduce wasted time interviewing candidates that are not compatible with the

organization. By providing information on their websites that illuminates the organization's

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culture, employers can provide the information necessary for individuals to decide whether or not they would fit in with the organization. If not, the individual can stop their job search and move on to other organizations that might be a better fit.

Message Content

Message content is another area of information seeking that has been widely studied by socialization scholars. Vaughn (1997) stated, "the corporate discourse produced to socialize individuals creates, nurtures, and maintains organizational identification through the espousal of shared value" (Vaughn, 1997, p. 133). Because socialization has so many benefits to both the individual and the organization it is important to understand what messages are most effective in socialization. Furthermore, Berkelaar (2013) noted that future organizational socialization research should focus on the communicative aspects of socialization, specifically the influence of messages.

Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, and Gardner (1994) identified the most widely used typology of socialization content. The authors identified six content areas for an effective socialization message: performance proficiency (job tasks), people (work relationships), politics (power structures of the organization), language (specific to the job and organization), organizational goals and values, and the organization's history. Chao and colleagues developed these six content areas by evaluating and synthesizing content areas described by other scholars (Feldman, 1981; Fisher, 1986; Schein, 1968). Some areas were consistent through each scholar's typology, and others were mentioned only in the typology of one scholar. For Chao and colleagues, the six that were chosen were "judged to be under an organization's direct or legitimate influence" (Chao et al., 1994, p. 731). This typology has since been used in a variety of organizational socialization research (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Cooper-Thomas & Anderson,

2002, 2005, 2006; Klein & Weaver, 2000). Specifically, the typology is intended and has been

used to assess the outcomes of being socialized in each content area. This typology, then, is

specifically helpful to determine benefits of socialization. However, the authors did not

elaborate on what constitutes a message in each content area. The typology only recognizes that

each content area is important to the overall socialization of an individual employee. The

authors also included a survey to test if an individual is proficient in each content area.

Nevertheless, the questions are vague, such as "I am familiar with the history of my

organization" (history), and "I believe most of my coworkers like me" (people) (p. 735) and do

not lend to specific words or phrases that would constitute a socialization message in each

content area. It is important to understand *how* organizations communicate messages about each

content area to potential employees.   And furthermore, with the increased use of websites as a

tool of socialization, it is important to understand *how* these messages are communicated on the

organization's website.   Thus, this study asked:

RQ: How are socialization messages about performance proficiency, people,

organizational politics, language, goals and values, and history communicated on corporate

websites?

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Analyzing organizational rhetoric is a way to understand how organizations produce persuasive messages. Cheney (1983) used a Burkean analysis to understand how organizations induce identification through internal messages such as newsletters. This analysis was the foundation for a rich history in organizational rhetoric analysis. In 1990, Cheney and McMillan laid out a framework for conducting analysis of organizational rhetoric. The authors described the critical assessment of organizational rhetoric, the components of organizational rhetoric, and gave two case studies of criticism of organizational rhetoric. By describing the different facets of organizational rhetoric, Cheney and McMillan (1990) gave organizational rhetoric scholars the foundation needed to choose texts and conduct analysis of organizational rhetoric. Specifically, the authors detail just how difficult it can be to analyze organizational rhetoric. Those messages become more complex than traditional rhetorical sources because the nature of the source, message, audience, and goals of the message are not as clearly identifiable (Cheney & McMillan, 1990). As organizations take on a life of their own, authorship is not by an individual but by the organization, and the audience is a mixture of employees, consumers, competitors, and more. Furthermore, the goals of those messages are consistently to praise and sell the organization and its product (Cheney & McMillan, 1990). Therefore, the analysis of organizational rhetoric should keep in mind that the messages are often generic and one-sided. Analysis of corporate websites is no different; in fact, perhaps this phenomenon is amplified due to the organization's ability to control the message for a global audience.

More recently, scholars as such as Davis (2005), Vaughn (1997), and Pribble (1990) have used rhetorical analysis to understand the organizational socialization process, specifically new hire orientations. Each scholar analyzed different ways organizations communicate their goals and values to new organizational members. Hoffman and Cowan (2008) identified corporate websites as "key elements in the influence process" (p. 232) when they analyzed how organizations communicate messages of work-life balance to employees through corporate websites. Hoffman and Cowan (2008) were not specifically interested in the socialization process, but their research contends that organizations use their websites in order to produce messages about the goals and values of the organization. This current thesis was particularly interested in how organizations communicate socialization messages to potential organizational members through their corporate websites.

Text Selection

Bowen Craggs & Co., an "expert in global online corporate communication," released the seventh annual index of corporate web effectiveness on May 22, 2013. The index analyzed websites of 84 companies worldwide. According to Forbes.com, the index considered companies with:

> The world's greatest market capitalizations, with roughly a third coming from the U.S., a third from Europe and the rest from the other parts of the world. Then it rated them on a points system in eight categories that cover how well companies serve investors, the media, job seekers, customers, and society. It looked at the effectiveness of a website's construction, the clarity of the message conveyed, and how easy it is to contact people inside the company and get questions answered (Adams, 2013).

The top 10 websites based on the category of serving job seekers were: Google, Goldman Sachs, Microsoft, Unilever, Wells Fargo, AstraZeneca, Barclays, BG Group, BNP Paribas, and BP. All of the top 10 companies in this category were in the top 60 websites overall. The companies fall into one of five categories: Technology (Google and Microsoft), Banking (Wells

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Fargo and BNP Paribas), Finance (Goldman Sachs and Barclays), Energy (BP and BG Group), and Consumer Goods (AstraZeneca and Unilever). Each website is available in English. Given the variety and praise of the websites, these 10 corporate websites were used for analysis in the current study. Specifically, the "About" pages and "Careers" pages of each website were analyzed, along with any relevant pages linked to those sections (for instance, the "About" page may link to other pages with information about the company's history and values). All relevant pages from each website were printed on the same date. Analysis for each website was done on a computer, so each printed page was compared to the website's current (at the time of analysis) information in order to account for any changes to the websites, which could have interrupted analysis. No changes to the websites were detected. The text and multi-media of those pages were analyzed (visual rhetoric such as font and color were not analyzed in the current project).

Bowen Craggs & Co. identified three goals of the index. "First, to help organizations know where to look for ideas. Second, to pick out trends in online communications. Third, to allow the companies in the Index … to see how [they] are performing against [their] peers and why." The spirit of the Bowen Craggs & Co. index is the same spirit in which this study was approached: to find out how organizations use their websites to communicate socialization messages to potential employees.

Analysis

Building off of Cheney (1983) and Hoffman and Cowan's (2008) analysis of organizational rhetoric, I used grounded theory to analyze the rhetoric of corporate webpages. In an article by Sonenshein, DeCelles, and Dutton (2014) the authors used existing theory when constructing codes in the grounded theory process. This approach allowed them to "develop a set of constructs grounded in [their] data but elaborated on with the help of existing theoretical

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concepts" (p. 14). Similarly, using Chao and colleagues (1994) typology of socialization messages, I looked for messages related to the six content areas: performance proficiency (job tasks), people (work relationships), politics (power structures of the organization), language (specific to the job and organization), organizational goals and values, and the organization's history. These content areas relate directly to my research question because they are the different aspects of the organizational message that I was looking to further understand. However, since Chao and colleagues (1994) did not determine specifically what constitutes messages in each content area, I used grounded theory to develop codes for each content area (Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Creswell, 2013). Coding using grounded theory happened in three phases: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. According to Strauss and Corbin (1994):

> In open coding, the analyst is concerned with generating categories and their properties and then seeks to determine how categories vary dimensionally. In axial coding, the categories are systematically developed and linked with subcategories. . . . Selective coding is the process of integrating and refining categories (pp. 143).

During the process of open coding, or initial coding, a word-by-word coding forced me to "attend to the structure and flow of words, and how both affect the sense you make of them, as well as their specific content" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 50). In the open coding process I coded each page on each website for words and phrases related to each of the six content areas.

During the process of selective coding, or focused coding, the research findings began to answer the research question asked in this study. At this point, I used "the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize" the data (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). Focused codes were developed comparing data to data, and then the data was compared to those codes. The selective coding process created codes corresponding to each of Chao's (1994) six contentment areas. The axial coding process compared those codes to each of the content areas, "converting text into concepts" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 61).

Figure 1 shows the process of coding used. Messages were taken verbatim from each website, then classified as one or more of Chao and colleagues' (1994) content areas. Then, each message was read for implications and meaning based on those content areas. For example, the following statement from Goldman Sachs was identified:

My specific responsibilities revolve around supporting our operational processes. I am currently working on a project which partners with our Technology support team. Over the past few months, my day-to-day activities have included meetings with Technology to design a new system, identify enhancements and create test plans to ensure that it is functioning properly.

Next, that statement was identified as referring to the content area of Performance Proficiency because it talks about "day-to-day activities" and "specific responsibilities" of a job. Finally, the implications of that statement were identified. In this case, the implications include personal testimony, employee connection, role model, and daily routine. These implications bring forward more classification than just the content area, and were used to identify additional themes throughout the research.

It is also important to note that my position in the coding process was as a potential job seeker. Therefore, my interpretation and classification of texts was done through that lens. Consequently, the results of this study are specifically from the position of a potential job seeker, and not simply a third-party scholar.

In order to answer my research question, I compared and analyzed the codes to determine how organizations use their websites to communicate socialization messages to potential employees. The results, discussed in the next section, indicated how organizations communicate socialization messages and what language is used to do so.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

After coding the corporate websites for ten global companies (Google, BP, Goldman

Sachs, Barclays, Wells Fargo, Microsoft, BNP Paribas, BG Group, Unilever, and AstraZenica),

themes emerged which begin to answer this study's research question: How are socialization

messages about performance proficiency, people, organizational politics, language, goals and

values, and history communicated on corporate websites? In this section, the results for each

content area will be described and explained.

Content Areas

Evidence of each of the content areas presented by Chao and colleagues (1994) were

found on the corporate websites, though some content areas were more prominent than others.

Additionally, some content areas were presented in similar ways on all websites, while others

have little to no similarity. The results of the analysis and themes that emerged are below.

Examples provided are the most representative.

Performance Proficiency

According to Chao and colleagues (1994) messages about performance proficiency

describe individual job tasks, roles, and responsibilities. This content area appeared at least once

on all ten websites, but was not a prominent message on any of the ten websites (AstraZeneca

had the most statements corresponding to this content area at three statements, while BP, BG

Group, Wells Fargo, BNP Paribas, and Barclays all only had one statement corresponding to this

content area). Performance proficiency messages were presented in three ways: roles and

responsibilities specific to departments and teams, individual employee growth opportunities while in their role, and more broad organizational responsibilities.

Roles and responsibilities. First, some organizations did provide department-specific information. BP, Google, and Goldman Sachs all provided descriptions of each of the departments in the organization and descriptions of the functions of the different roles within that department. For example, Goldman Sachs offers viewers the opportunity to "explore the divisions of our firm" with links to each of the fifteen departments in the company. Further, clicking on the links to the departments sends the viewer to a page about that division. For example, the "Finance" page begins with "The finance teams manage the firm's liquidity, capital and risk, and provide the overall financial control and reporting function" followed by a more in-depth description of the department functions. Further down the page is a description of "who we look for" and "how we are organized" (followed by the seven sub-departments and teams in the Finance division). Finally, the bottom of the page includes a brief paragraph titled "what you would be doing" with more links to bios from employees in the finance department. These personal testimonies from employees in various positions in the organization were present in employee statements, blogs, and videos. By providing information specific to department and role function, the organizations painted a picture of a "typical day" for potential employees, and help those individuals determine if the job is right for them.

BP's website functions similarly to Goldman Sachs. BP includes a list of six departments in the organization. Then, each department lists the functions housed under that group. For instance, Business Infrastructure includes business support, communications & external affairs, compliance & ethics, economics, finance, group audit, human resources, legal, mergers & acquisitions, procurement & supply chain management, tax, and treasury. Following the link to

each sub-department, you can see which locations have that particular team, a description of the type of people and different roles in each department (called "who do we need?"), as well as ways the company supports individual learning and development within those roles. However, neither website included specific descriptions or lists of daily job tasks for any position. Both website therefore includes role-specific information down to the sub-department and team level, without providing specific tasks and responsibilities associated with each job.

Growth opportunities. The second way performance proficiency messages manifested on the websites were focused on employee growth and development. Instead of providing role or department specific information, websites such as Microsoft, BG Group, Barclays, and Unilever all highlight the development opportunities available to employees. Microsoft's website notes:

> Whether you choose a management role, dive deep into a technology, or explore multiple professions, you'll find everything you need to drive your career at Microsoft. It goes beyond training—although with over 2,000 courses available globally in classrooms or online, you'll have plenty of opportunities for that. We make sure you and your manager dedicate time each year to discussing your career development, and you can access our online career resources anytime. Plus, to give each other a hand in getting ahead, we are all encouraged to choose—or to be—a mentor.

This message, and others similar to it, focuses on the ways employees can develop in their role and grow within the company, ultimately to become more effective at achieving their role responsibilities and growing into new roles within the company. Another example from Unilever specifically points out the ways the company encourages growth opportunities. The website states:

> Performance and Development Planning (PDP) helps you make the most of your working life at Unilever. The process supports you in identifying and delivering against challenging goals that impact the organization. It helps you plan how you'll develop skills and leadership behaviours for your current position and for the years ahead.

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Again, Unilever's message focuses on employee development within the company, and highlights the organization's commitment to that growth.

Overall, there was a focus on employee development and growth through training, which highlights the need for individuals to achieve company and business goals.

Organizational responsibilities. Finally, websites such as Barclays, AstraZeneca, and Wells Fargo included performance proficiency messages that were less focused on individual roles and responsibilities, and more focused on performance within the broader organization. This means that instead of describing day-to-day tasks and functions of specific jobs, the websites included more general information about what constitutes success in the organization. This information provides potential employees, regardless of department or function, more general tasks to succeed not in their role but in the organization as a whole. For instance, AstraZeneca's website claims "Our Code of Conduct describes the standards we require and provides high level guidance on how these are to be translated into consistent actions worldwide. Compliance with our Code is mandatory" and "We provide annual refresher training in the Code which is mandatory for all employees and is monitored by Global Compliance. New starters are required to complete on-line training within 30 days of the first day of employment." These claims are accompanied by a downloadable version of their Code of Conduct.

Barclays' website includes similar messages. The website states:

> We know that only a business driven by strong values can deliver strong, sustainable returns. Our Purpose is to help people achieve their ambitions – in the right way. We'll measure and reward our people not just on commercial results, but on how they live our Values.

Statements such as this point out the how individual employees can succeed within the organization and fulfill their organizational responsibilities beyond their specific role responsibilities.

Messages like this one highlight the ways individual employees can and must be successful within the organization, regardless of role within the organization.

To summarize, performance proficiency was accounted for in three ways. First, through employee testimony and department function, organizations provided potential employees with information needed to understand role responsibility and a "typical day" in each department. Additionally, the job search and application function on each website provides more specific performance proficiency information but only for open positions within the organization. Second, performance proficiency messages focused on development within that role, highlighting the ways employees can grow within the organization. Finally, performance proficiency was included in a more general sense, providing potential employees with information about success within the organization rather than specific roles. This information can help potential employees determine if the organization is the right fit.

People

The people content area includes messages about the types of people who work in and the type of work relationships in the organization (Chao et al., 1994). This content area appeared multiple times across all ten websites and was talked about in two ways: the traits of desired employees, and employee role in the organization's success.

Desired traits. First, while each company has organization-specific qualities they look for in employees (such as particular skills, knowledge, experience, and the ability to be innovative) there are traits that are consistent across the analyzed organizations, despite the use of different words to describe those qualities. Specifically, all of the organizations valued traits associated with community, diversity, and growth in their workforce. To begin, the employees' connection to the community, both locally and globally, was consistent across the websites. For

example, leadership and volunteering were commonly used to describe employees dedicated to the local and global community. When discussing people, the organizations often referred to the way their employees can impact the community and are spread across the globe, impacting communities worldwide. Microsoft and Barclays specifically discuss the worldwide volunteer opportunities available to employees. Barclays' website states:

> Take the chance to do good. Our success depends on each and every one of us making citizenship part of everything we do. It is evident in a lot of our activity. Nowhere more so than in the many opportunities there are for colleagues to volunteer their time and skills in local communities around the world. Our community programmes focus on developing the skills of the next generation so they can achieve economic security.

This paragraph highlights Barcalys' dedication to the global community, and its desire for employees to share in that commitment. In fact, Barclays offers Volunteer Time Off (VTO) to employees, which is paid time off that must be used to volunteer. Programs like VTO underscore Barclays' dedication to the community, as well as provide opportunities for employees to do the same. By allowing employees to participate in this program, Barclays also seems to expect its employees to be interested in using the program, thus possibly expressing the organization's desire for a philanthropic spirit in potential employees.

> Another example of community impact comes from Unilever's website. They state:

> We believe that as a business we have a responsibility to our consumers and to the communities in which we have a presence. Around the world we invest in local economies and develop people's skills inside and outside of Unilever. And through our business and brands, we run a range of programmes to promote hygiene, nutrition, empowerment and environmental awareness.

At Unilever, community growth and outreach is a responsibility of the organization, and employees should share the same level of care and concern. While Unilever does not explicitly offer the same VTO programs as other organizations, they make a point to include community outreach as a list of top priorities on their website and to potential employees.

Similarly, diversity was a constant theme across all organizations. All websites had a specific page dedicated to describing the organizations' commitment to diversity in the workforce. For example, Wells Fargo includes a chart (Figure 2) highlighting the diversity in its workforce specifically pointing to gender and race diversity. Wells Fargo's "Diversity" page, and those of other company's websites, focuses specifically on race and gender diversity such as Figure 2. On a similar page, Wells Fargo also states:

> Wells Fargo is proud of the national diversity awards and recognition we have received, but we realize that achieving diversity is a journey we all take together — all Team Members are responsible for helping to make Wells Fargo a truly inclusive environment.

At Wells Fargo, employees are expected to uphold the diverse environment the organization has created, specifically, the organization's diversity in race and gender. However, websites such as Google go further to include other forms of diversity. Google begins with the following general statement about diversity:

> We've always wanted Google to be a place that brought together smart, talented people from a diversity of backgrounds, and where you could bring your whole self to work. Lots has been written about our great perks, but read on to find out what our culture is really all about.

Following this statement are links to information about women at Google, minorities at Google, and LGBT[Q] employees at Google. The LGBT[Q] page shares a story of two Google employees (both men) meeting and getting engaged all at the Google office. At the end, the story notes:

> Google is incredibly supportive of the LGBT community. Seeing Google sign on to the amicus brief to support the repeal the Defense of Marriage Act and California's Proposition 8, and support the passing of the Uniting American Families Act to extend immigration rights to LGBT families, it all makes me proud to be a Googler. These issues affect Michael and me directly and I don't feel like we are fighting alone. I've received support from every level of the company. I can't say this wouldn't happen at another company but I'm so thankful that I know it happens at Google.

This message highlights Google's commitment to diversity in all aspects of employee life, from gender, to race, to sexual orientation. All ten websites analyzed, not just Google and Wells Fargo, showed a dedication to diversity among employees, though few expanded beyond race and gender.

Finally, employee growth was also a consistent trait across organizational websites. All of the organizations were clear about their dedication to employee learning, development, and growth within the organization, as well as promoting extensive employee programs. These organizations seem to desire employees who are also interested in their own growth and development, and willing to take an active role in pursuing that development. For instance, Unilever's website states "At Unilever we offer you more ways to take advantage of development opportunities, more room to succeed and grow, attractive reward and benefits packages and numerous directions in which to pursue a career, made by you." Unilever, along with the nine other companies, provide opportunities for employees to engage in their own future and development within the organization, and subsequently desire people who are interested in doing so.

BNP Paribas' website also includes messages about employee growth. Similar to Unilever, BNP Paribas states: "Along with these advantages, our strong commitments to mobility and training will allow you to constantly take on new and challenging responsibilities so that we can grow together!" BNP Paribas even includes the phrase "allow you to constantly take on new and challenging responsibilities" which further puts the employee's growth and development in the hands of the employee. While BNP Paribas provides the opportunity to grow, the employee is responsible for his or her own development. Therefore, BNP Paribas, as well as

Unilever and other organizations examined in this study, are attempting to attract individuals who are interested in maximizing development opportunities.

Employees' role. The second way the people content area was presented on the websites was by highlighting the way employees contribute to the organization's success. Each website took a more organizational focus to the people content area. These messages focus on how people/employees help the business become more successful and the individual role people play in in the overall growth and success of the company. For instance, Goldman Sachs highlights the way their employees are necessary for the company to succeed. The website states "Our people are our greatest asset – we say it often and with good reason. It is only with the determination and dedication of our people that we can serve our clients, generate long-term value for our shareholders and contribute to the broader public." The employees at Goldman Sachs are a means to achieving broader business goals, and the organization desires employees who can help them achieve those goals. Another example is from BP's website. BP specifically highlights the need for innovative employees to help the company achieve its business goals. The website states:

> For a start, our extraordinarily complex business depends upon continuous innovation. This means you can expect to work on some of the most technically and commercially challenging projects within the energy sector. Take, for instance, the way we're using the latest technology to manage risk and enhance our safety levels – our new wireless probes provide state-of-the-art corrosion monitoring and management in all our refineries. Or, there's our advanced biofuels business, which converts sustainable feedstock to energy.

BP is clear that their employees are the reason for their business success, and the work done in each of the different departments contributes to the company's overall success. Goldman Sachs and BP, as well as all of the other websites, link the type of people needed in the organization to the overall success of the company.

Overall, the people content area was consistent across all websites, promoting the organizations' dedication to the community, diversity, and employee growth as well as the need for employees who can help the organization succeed. Other traits (such as teamwork and passion) that an organization may want from its employees will vary from organization to organization. However, the three traits of community, diversity, and growth, along with contribution to over-arching business success, were important to all ten organizations studied.

Presentation of these messages can occur in a variety of ways. Often, testimonies in videos and blogs are the most common way to present this information. BP, BG Group, Google, Barclays, Goldman Sachs, and Astra Zeneca all included testimonies with messages about growth opportunities and employee satisfaction comes from employees and executive. These testimonies are presented in videos, graphics, blogs, and social media. Through such mediums, these messages about people come directly from people, creating a connection to potential colleagues and the organization, and authenticity to the messages. These testimonies seem to corroborate the information provided by the organization on its website.

Organizational Politics

The organizational politics content area covers the power structures in the organization (Chao et al., 1994). This content area was present in all ten websites, and each website included similar information. There was little deviation in the information provided in the messages, and the way in which those messages were communicated on the websites. Overall, the organizational politics messages were limited to the board of directors and executive team. Power structures below those levels were rarely identified. Messages about the board of directors and executive team were portrayed on nine of the ten websites (Unilever being the

exception) through pictures and biographies of each individual, and a statement about the function and responsibilities for the board, for instance from BG Group:

> The Group is subject to corporate governance requirements in the UK. The Board and the Company Secretary constantly keep the Group's corporate governance arrangements under review. Compliance with these requirements is detailed within the corporate governance section of our latest Annual Report and Accounts. It is the Group's practice to comply, where practicable, with the highest level of these codes, and respond to developments appropriately.

The biographies were limited to professional experience, providing proof for the members' qualification for inclusion on the board. These statements highlight the specific functions and duties of the board of directors, and what legal obligations they hold. BNP Paribas' website includes a similar statement. Their board of directors is "a collegial body that collectively represents all shareholders and acts at all times in the corporate interests of the Bank." Again, this statement and others show the responsibility of the board of directors and what power they hold within the organization.

In the case of BG Group and BP the websites also included graphic organizational charts, showing the structure of the organization (Figures 3 and 4). However, without including names and titles of key individuals in each area, the charts were of little help in understanding the power and decision-making structure behind the charts.

Language

The content area of language refers to messages that use words and phrases that are specific or unique to the organization or a specific role (Chao et al., 1994). Organizational language can refer to any aspect of the organization, including departments, building names, processes, and more. Consequently, this content area was the most difficult to detect because the messages were often vague and non-specific. In fact, BNP Paribas and Barclays did not have any detectable examples of language messages. When language was detectable, it was either a

clearly specific and distinct word or phrase (such as Google's Googlers and Doodlers), or other words and phrases unique to the organization but common overall (such as Goldman Sachs calling their departments divisions, and Unilever calling their employees makers). The most common representation of language was repetition of key words and phrases in context, which made clear they were part of the organization's language (such as Goldman Sachs' "divisions," and Unilever's "makers"). None of the websites defined their organizationally specific words or phrases, but instead left it up to the reader to determine meaning. As a result, there may be other innocuous phrases that are specific to the organization but are difficult to detect without actually entering the organization. Additionally, organizational language may be so personal to the organization and constantly evolving that it is not used on the website. Regardless, potential employees seeking information on the organization's website would find it difficult to speak the organization's language based solely on the information provided.

Goals and Values

The messages relating to the goals and values of the organization occurred across all company websites and more than 200 goals and values were mentioned across all ten websites. However, despite the wide range of goals and values held by the organizations, there were few goals and values shared by the organizations. A focus on business success, the environment, and people are the only values at least half of the companies had in common. Take, for example, Unilever whose website states:

> We believe that as a business we have a responsibility to our consumers and to the communities in which we have a presence. Around the world we invest in local economies and develop people's skills inside and outside of Unilever. And through our business and brands, we run a range of programmes to promote hygiene, nutrition, empowerment and environmental awareness.

Unilever clearly values people both inside and outside of the organization, as well as considers

the environmental impact their business has on the world. The website also says:

> For us, sustainability is integral to how we do business. With 7 billion people on our planet, the earth's resources can be strained. This means sustainable growth is the only acceptable model of growth for our business. The Unilever Sustainable Living Plan sets out to decouple our growth from our environmental impact, while at the same time increasing our positive social impact.

This statement further exemplifies Unilever's dedication to the environment as well as highlights

how the business profits and succeeds from that environmental awareness. These values are

echoed again not only the Unilever website, but on half of the other websites as well. Wells

Fargo's websites states:

> At Wells Fargo, our vision is to satisfy all our customers' financial needs and help them succeed financially. We also are committed to conducting our business ethically and with integrity. Consistent with our Vision and Values, Wells Fargo recognizes that governments have the duty to protect human rights, and our company has a responsibility to respect human rights. To that end, we strive to respect human rights throughout our operations, products and services, including consistent treatment among people, employee well-being and security, economic and social freedom, and environmental stewardship. We seek tangible ways to apply these principles through our actions and relationships with our team members, customers, suppliers and communities in which we do business.

Again, this statement highlights Wells Fargo's commitment to people both inside and outside of

the company, the environment, and the success of the business.

Another common thread among nine out of ten of the organizations was the presentation

of the goals and values of the organization (BG Group is the exception). The most common way

to present organizational goals and values is through a Core Values or Top Five list. Most

organizations listed three to five values and explained their importance and use in the

organization. The values previously mentioned (success in business, environmentalism, and

people-oriented) were on at least half the websites in some form. These three values highlight

the high standards these organizations have both inside and outside of the organization.

The other common way of presenting goals and values was through a code of conduct or code of ethics. Nine out of the ten websites (BNP Paribas is the exception) feature a code of conduct, and five include downloadable versions, which more thoroughly describe and define the organizations' values and way in which those values are enacted in the organization. Employees in the organizations are expected to comply with these codes of conduct, and in some cases the code is accompanied by information about the legal implications. This demonstrates the organizations' commitment to their values and the way those values are enacted by and within the organization on a daily basis.

History

The history of the organization is the sixth content area Chao and colleagues (1994) identified for successful socialization messages. A description of the founding date, people, and location are all potential aspects of the founding of the organization that can be included in the history of the organization. Further history includes milestones such as mergers and acquisitions, product or service launches, and financial milestones. All ten websites included history messages, and all ten covered the founding and major milestones. For example, Google highlights the date founded as well as the milestone of the first investment:

> Founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin met at Stanford University in 1995. By 1996, they had built a search engine (initially called BackRub) that used links to determine the importance of individual webpages. Larry and Sergey named the search engine they built "Google," a play on the word "googol," the mathematical term for a 1 followed by 100 zeros. Google Inc. was born in 1998, when Sun co-founder Andy Bechtolsheim wrote a check for $100,000 to that entity—which until then didn't exist.

Google's story highlights a major milestone in the founding of Google Inc. Without that check, the organization would not exist. Likewise, BNP Paribas tells a similar tale about the merger of two organizations creating the company as we know it today. The website states:

The BNP Paribas Group was created in 2000 from the merger of BNP and Paribas. The new group thus inherited two major banking traditions: that of BNP, the first French bank, whose origins date back to 1848, and that of Paribas, an investment bank founded in 1872.

Without this milestone of two organizations coming together, BNP Paribas would not exist. Such stories of the founding and major milestones are common among organizational websites.

There is little deviation from this pattern except in the case of Wells Fargo. Wells Fargo values its rich history connected to the old west, and includes additional information about the time period in which the company started as well as a "this date in history" page also corresponding to the 19th century. Most often, however, the presentation of the organization's history ranges from a statement about its founding (AstraZeneca, BG Group, and Goldman Sachs) to a history timeline (Google, Microsoft, BP, Wells Fargo, Barclays, and Unilever). In other cases there is also a history video showing pictures and commentary about the organization at that time (BP, BNP Paribas, Barclays, and Unilever). Examples of history timelines from Google, Unilever, and BP can be found in Figures 5, 6, and 7.

Message Presentation Strategies

Through the analysis some themes emerged beyond the six content areas. The websites often used audience centered strategies and employee testimony to present the messages of the six content areas. This section explains these specific findings.

Audience Centered Strategies

One unique finding that does not directly correspond to the content areas is the audience-centered nature of some of the websites. Given the universality of a website, it is impossible to only show an individual information that is directly related to their interests. Therefore, half of the organizations (Microsoft, BG Group, BNP Paribas, Barclays, and Unilever) have created two separate "careers" pages, which distinguish between recent graduates and students, and

experienced professionals. These pages contain the same content areas, but the messages differ

due to the intended audience. In the case of Microsoft, the recent graduates page and the

experienced professionals page had almost identical statements about why an individual should

join the organization. However, the statements highlighted very different values that Microsoft

believes differentiate the two groups. Experienced professionals were shown this message:

> When smart, creative, passionate people get together, the results can be astounding and
> the opportunities limitless.   We're a global company in over 100 countries, but we often
> act like a startup. We do software—but we also do hardware, services, research, and
> community outreach. We work hard, but we value work/life balance, and each of us
> defines what that means to us. So why not explore what we do, where we do it, and what
> life is really like at Microsoft? You just might be surprised.

This message highlights work/life balance, opportunities within the organization, the type of

"smart, creative, passionate" people who work there, and the many locations available, as well as

hard work and the different product areas the company offers. Clearly, Microsoft thinks these

points are of particular interest to experienced professionals. On the other hand, students and

recent graduates were shown this message:

> When smart people who are excited about technology get together, what they create can
> change the world. Microsoft spans the globe, but campuses have cool features that feel
> like a start-up, like foosball tables, soccer fields, basketball courts and other ways to blow
> off steam, plus places to eat and just hang out. Get around town free and easy with
> Connector shuttles and go from campus to campus or building to building in a
> chauffeured Prius ride. This isn't your parents' Microsoft.

This message, though mentioning the same aspects of the company, uses different language.

Instead of work/life balance, the message highlights the fun activities that can be enjoyed while

at work. Also, instead of global opportunities, the large campus is mentioned with ways to get

around. Finally, the message ends with "this isn't your parents' Microsoft," further highlighting

the ways the company is changing for the younger generation. These messages are both intended

to engage the audience enough to make them want to work at the organization. To do so, the

messages are specifically tailored to different generations with different needs and desires.

This audience-centered strategy manifested as a way to present almost all six content

areas. BG Group and Barclays each had performance proficiency messages geared toward

students and recent graduates. BG Group's internship program was described on their website:

> Typically you'll have three placements of eight months or four placements of six months
> and you'll gain hands-on skills and work experience in addition to invaluable on-the-job
> training. Just as importantly, you'll learn to be accountable for the work you deliver, all
> the while benefiting from the support of the industry-leading experts in your team and
> around the globe.

Clearly this message was not intended for experienced professionals, who would most likely not

be attracted to this type of role. Similarly, Barclays speaks to students with little job experience

stating: "Your opportunities stretch far and wide. This is where it all begins: explore the

opportunities throughout the different areas of business to see where you could take your career."

Again, this message highlights the opportunities available to inexperienced students rather than

appealing to experienced professionals.

Other content areas were also used to target recent graduates instead of experienced

professionals. History and language were the only two message types that did not produce

multiple messages specifically tailored to different audiences. This strategy highlights each

organization's need to attract experienced professionals while not discouraging the next

generation of employees. Because these generational groups most likely have different needs

and desires for a workplace, it seems organizations have compensated by creating almost

completely different messages and websites to suit each group. However, it is important to note

that the organizations are not using conflicting messages, but highlighting different aspects of the

organization and culture that would most appeal to the different groups.

Employee Testimony

Another strategy the organizations use is employee testimony. Microsoft, Wells Fargo, and BNP Paribas were the only websites that did not include written or video testimony from employees. These testimonies give viewers a more personal connection to the information presented, and show the employee experience directly from employees. Likewise, on the Goldman Sachs website, there is an entire "Our People" page with information about employees in various positions and levels within the organization. Each page includes a video, a quote, and information about the employee's background, interview process, and future goals. For instance, one employee states:

> I did fear that I would not meet expectations given the high caliber of the people I work with. However, everyone was more than happy to help me get up to speed and more. The challenge is there but I don't feel entirely on my own.

Goldman Sachs highlights a broad range of individuals on different levels and within different departments of the organization to show a well-rounded view of employees at the organization. Despite the variety in role, the employees are all positive and happy about their choice to work at Goldman Sachs. Again, these testimonies give the audience a more personal connection to the organization and the information contained in the websites.

Google used this strategy to talk about diversity, and BG Group, Unilever, and AstraZeneca used it to talk about the type of people in the organization. For example, an employee at BG Group states "I've been lucky that I have been able to work with people who are so enthusiastic about their work." The claim is simple, but it is a powerfully truthful testimony when coming from a current employee. Also, as mentioned above in performance proficiency, employee testimony is also used to give viewers an idea of what the responsibilities are of different roles and departments in the organization. Overall, employee testimony describes the

organization, and rarely uses statements such as "we." Instead, statements often mention the

organization by name, calling attention to individuals and their roles within the company, and

focusing less on the relationships people have inside the organization. Furthermore, the

statements highlight the positive aspects of the organization, reinforcing the messages produced

by the organization.

Through analysis of ten of the top websites for job seekers (Google, Microsoft, BP, BNP

Paribas, Unilever, AstraZeneca, Goldman Sachs, Wells Fargo, BG Group, and Barclays)

similarities emerged in the way socialization messages about performance proficiency, people,

politics, language, goals and values, and history are communicated on corporate websites. These

themes included a focus on the content area's contribution to the business' success and how

individuals in the organization are described based on each content area. Additionally, themes

emerged in the way those messages are presented, including employee testimony and audience-

specific pages. Furthermore, there was little to no deviation from those themes across all

websites (including industry) reinforcing the belief that websites are a powerful tool for

information seekers because they tend to communicate similar information, making comparison

of those messages easier. The results of this analysis suggest the organizations in this study

communicate similar messages in similar ways to potential employees.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This thesis looked at how socialization messages relating to Chao and colleagues' (1994) content areas (performance proficiency, people, organizational politics, language, goals and values, and history) are communicated on ten of the top corporate websites according to Bowen Craggs & Co (specifically Google, Microsoft, BP, BNP Paribas, Unilever, AstraZeneca, Goldman Sachs, Wells Fargo, BG Group, and Barclays). This chapter summarizes the key findings of the research question including themes from each content area and other presentation strategies (see Table 1 for abbreviated example messages related to each of the six content areas). After addressing the key findings from the research question, this section discusses the practical and theoretical contributions, limitations, and implications for future research.

Key Findings

As stated at the beginning of chapter 2, socialization is an organization's "primary means for communicating organizational culture and ensuring stable values" with their employees (Cable & Parsons, 2001, p. 16). Through socialization, organizations can influence how new members see the organization's culture and function as part of that culture, (Cheney, Christensen, Zorn, & Ganesh, 2011). The results of this study show several ways organizations can and do present socialization messages on their websites in order to achieve these goals. Organizational socialization messages presented on corporate websites can produce different socialization outcomes, can connect individuals to the organizational experience, and can communicate the unique aspects of the organizational culture without sharing organizational secrets.

Socialization Outcomes

Depending on the goals of the socialization process for the organization, websites can communicate messages to achieve desired outcomes. Organizational socialization tactics can range from institutionalized to individualized, each with different results. The six bi-polar tactics include collective/individual (group size), formal/informal (new members separated from experience members), sequential/random (steps for completion), fixed/variable (timetable for completion), serial/disjunctive (role model), and investiture/divestiture (asked to change). Institutionalized socialization is classified as collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial, and investiture tactics, and result in employees reproducing the status quo (Saks & Ashforth, 1997b). Individualized socialization is comprised of individual, informal, random, variable, disjunctive, and divestiture tactics, and cause employees to be more creative in their roles. In chapter 2 of this thesis, websites were classified as individual, informal, random, variable, disjunctive, and divestiture/investiture, placing it almost all the way on the individualized side of the socialization continuum. However, the results of this study indicate that websites can produce more institutionalized socialization messages than previously thought. Websites in the analysis demonstrated that three of the tactics can be either of the dyads.

First, the classification of formal and informal is determined when the newcomer is segregated from experienced organizational members (formal) or not (informal). Given the constraints of websites being universally accessed, informal socialization seemed most likely. However, the results indicate that formal socialization also occurs. When websites separate their pages based on "experience professionals" and "recent graduates" (such as Microsoft, BG Group, BNP Paribas, Barclays, and Unilever) they are producing a formal socialization message

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more than an informal message. These websites separate the experienced professionals from the true newcomer.

Second, the dyad of serial and disjunctive refers to whether or not the newcomer has an organizational member as a role model for their position. Serial socialization provides newcomers with a role model for the position they are about to assume, while disjunctive socialization does not. The results of the study indicate that many organizations do, in a way, provide role models for different positions. Through employee testimony, websites can provide a sort of role model for employees. As mentioned in the results chapter, employee testimony was a common way to present information about all six content areas, but specifically performance proficiency. By providing a statement by a current employee about their role and experience in the organization, websites are essentially providing a role model for those different positions. Therefore, websites can be either serial or disjunctive depending on the messages provided.

Finally, websites can be considered both investiture and divestiture, because it depends not on the organization, but on how the individual interprets the information on the websites. Individuals could see a company's desire for specific traits and either determine the characteristics apply to them or not and move forward (investiture), or instead try to change themselves into a more desirable applicant (divestiture). By providing specific traits the organization is looking for, individuals could determine if they are a good fit or if changes need to be made, and consequently determine if they should continue to pursue a job in the organization.

Therefore, websites can be considered classified as individual, informal or formal, random, variable, serial or disjunctive, and investiture or divestiture. Websites, then, fall on the

individualized side of the continuum, but closer to the middle than previously stated in chapter 2.

The ability of a website to communicate messages with such a variety of tactics means

organizations have the ability to choose what type of messages are presented on their websites.

Organizations can choose to communicate completely individualized socialization messages (by

choosing informal, disjunctive, and divestiture tactics) or a mix of individualized and

institutionalized messages (by choosing formal, serial, and investiture tactics) depending on

which outcome they desire more (individualized producing creativity, and institutionalized

producing a status quo). Organizations should carefully consider what result they want from

their socialization tactics (institutionalized or individualized results) and carefully craft messages

that produce those results.

Public v. Private Culture

Another key finding of this study was that websites communicate a public culture and

withhold a private culture. All of the websites communicated the unique aspects of the

organizational culture without sharing organizational secrets. Organizational websites have

potentially conflicting audiences and goals (Cheney & McMillan, 1990). The audience for the

organizational website is a combination of employees, consumers, competitors, potential

employees, and more. Furthermore, the goals of those messages are consistently to praise and

sell the organization and its product (Cheney & McMillan, 1990). Therefore, the analysis of

organizational rhetoric should keep in mind that the messages are often generic and one-sided.

Analysis of corporate websites is no different; in fact, perhaps this phenomenon is amplified due

to the organization's ability to control the message for a global audience. This means that

organizations have to be careful what information they present on their website because it is

available to anybody at any time. Information such as language specific to the organization, the

organizational politics, and parts of the organization's history were not obviously available on the website because they are part of the organization's private culture, and are not shared publicly. This information may be proprietary to organizations, and is not presented to people before entry into the organization.

First, organizations may not want to share organizational-specific language until an individual is an official member of the organization. Learning the language of the organization may be a key step in moving from the encounter stage of socialization to the metamorphosis stage. In the metamorphosis stage, the individual changes or learns "accepted" behavior in order to no longer feel like a newcomer (Jablin, 1984, p. 601). Learning the organization's language could indeed be considered an "accepted behavior" that would make the individual feel like part of the organization. Therefore, organizations may withhold most of this information until the individual has entered the encounter stage. Doing so might reduce the organization's risk of sharing private aspects of the organization's culture with non-members, as well as give new hires a feeling of legitimacy in the organization because they now have access to information previously withheld.

Similarly, the websites did not include much information regarding the organizational politics of the company. What information was provided outlined the general structure of the organization, usually stopping at the most upper levels. The websites did not, however, include the decision-making power behind the formal structures of the organization. Looking at French and Raven's (1959) "Bases of Social Power," five types of power were identified: referent power, expert power, reward power, coercive power, and legitimate power. Given the formal power structures provided on the organizations' websites, it seems those websites mainly provided information about the legitimate power structures in the organization, and provide other

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information for viewers to assign referent power. French and Raven (1959) defined legitimate power as "that power which stems from internalized values" and note the bases of legitimate power can be through acceptance of the social structure (p. 265). By providing simple organizational charts, these organizations are only providing legitimate power structures that potential employees are expected to accept.

Another type of power exhibited on the websites was referent power. This type of power occurs when an individual identifies with another person or group, giving that person or group power over the individual (French & Raven, 1959). For instance, if the potential employee wants to identify with the organization, he/she will begin acting like the members of the organization in order to belong.   By posting employee testimonials, especially videos, on the website, organizations give potential employees a sort of role model to mimic in order to fit in. If an individual does want to join the organization and act as though they belong, the potential employee may begin to act like the organizational members they have seen on the website. This inaction of referent power occurs on the part of the individual, but organizations can induce referent power by providing opportunities for this type of power to occur.

The other three types of power are not identified on the websites, but have potential to exist within the organization. Expert power, reward power, and coercive power were not identified on the websites, but most likely exist privately within the organization. Reward power and coercive power rely on the ability of one individual to reward or punish another individual for their actions. For instance, coercive power may occur when a boss or manager has the ability to fire an employee for mistakes (or reward power if the manager promotes an employee for doing a good job). Finally, expert power occurs when someone views another person as an

expert, and thus gives them power because of that expert knowledge. This could occur in an organization where the executives are given power because they are experts in the organization.

These three types of power most likely exist in all organization, but are not part of the public culture. Individuals probably would not experience these three types of power until they entered the organization, possibly because communicating these types of power through the website may be difficult. In the encounter stage, new members can experience "role shock" and decides if their expectations of the organization match up with the reality (Jablin, 1984, p. 600). If those new members are unaware of these additional forms of power in the organization, they could experience an organizational shock because their expectations for the power structure of the organization were not confirmed. This shock could be positive if the individual likes the additional types of power in play. For example, the new employee enjoys the reward system that they did not know existed. On the other hand, the shock could be negative if the employee is disappointed in the way power is distributed throughout the organization. For example, a new employee may not like that they are expected to accept decisions made by employees with a longer tenure simply because that more experience employee has expert power. Without understanding those small caveats to the organization's power structure, the new employee may be shocked by the way the organization functions and makes decisions

Finally, the history of the organization can be communicated differently inside and outside the organization. The results indicate that the websites communicate the history of the organization by highlighting positive moments such as the founding of the organization and mergers and acquisitions. However, the websites do not mention major failures in the organization's history, including lost lawsuits, failed products, and disastrous recalls. For example, BP's history timeline does nothing to call attention to the massive oil spill in the Gulf

of Mexico in 2010 (CNN, 2011; Dell'Amore, 2010). This type of information is removed from the public culture (or at least as far as the organization has power to remove it) but stories about these events probably still exist within the private culture of the organization.

Therefore, through this analysis, it seems as if organizations are being mindful of what information they present to the public about their culture, leaving some private culture out. These organizations reserve certain aspects of the culture for employees once they enter the organization in the encounter phase. The organizations need to persuade good candidates for potential employees to apply, while not dissuading anyone from the organization. Those qualified potential candidates may eventually enter the organization and get a glimpse of the private culture, while organization's want non-qualified candidates to continue to look favorably on the organization. This difference between persuading and dissuading highlights the tight rope organizations must walk in the creation of website content. However, the possibility of role and organization shock exists if the public culture and private culture are so different that the employee's expectations for the organization do not match the reality of the private culture.

Theoretical Contributions

The implications for this study on theoretical level are that this study helps to better understand how websites figure into the socialization process. Classifying websites as both an individualized and institutionalized socialization tactic furthers our understanding of the socialization process, especially during the anticipatory stage when much of the socialization occurs online and at the will of the individual. Furthermore, this study affirms websites as a tool for proactive behavior and information seeking which had previously been unexplored. This is the first study to focus on websites as a socialization tool to provide information during the anticipatory stage. Kramer and Miller (2013) identified electronic sources as an "increasingly

important information source to consider in future studies" (p. 534), and this thesis begins to answer that call. Flanagin and Waldeck (2004) described how websites could help individuals and organizations avoid time and money wasting interviews by providing information upfront. This study furthers the notion that websites are able to provide basic information to employees upfront prior to the interview process, as well as provides ways organizations can include messages with this specific purpose.

Finally, this study furthers our understanding of Chao and colleagues' (1994) socialization content areas by providing more understanding of what constitutes messages about each content area. Until this study, the typology was used to determine effects of socialization messages, and this study begins to move the typology into message production. Using the results and exemplary quotes in this study, organizations can produce messages specific to each content area.

Practical Contributions

The implication of this research on the practical level is two-fold. First, on the organizational level, this research can help companies communicate clear messages about the organization to potential employees through the corporate website. The results of this study can serve as sort of checklist for organizations to produce similar messages as the websites analyzed in this study. Paying attention to using similar content on their web pages can help other organizations craft more effective socialization messages to potential employees.

Second, there are implications on the individual level. Even though this research may help companies create clearer messages about their organization, the information on websites today is clear and specific to organizations, if only individuals would take the time to read it. For instance, AstraZeneca's website states "in addition, our Code of Conduct outlines the procedures

for employees to raise any integrity concerns, including a confidential helpline." According to this website, the company clearly values ethical behavior, and has put in place channels for individuals to report other employees for not behaving accordingly. On another page of the website, AstraZeneca states they are "a performance culture in which diversity is valued and individual success depends solely on personal merit and performance." Overall, AstraZeneca values anonymous reporting of unethical behavior, and individual success is valued and rewarded over group or team achievements. These values are in the minority (the other 9 companies valued teamwork and open communication) and clearly speak to a culture that is different from the other companies. Potential employees can thus learn a great deal about the culture of each individual organization as long as the websites are read thoroughly and carefully. This thesis speaks to the variety of differences and similarities that exist between organizations, and highlights for potential employees some areas they might find most helpful in order to distinguish one organization for another, and ultimately select the right organization for them.

Furthermore, according to Scott and Myers (2010) the purpose of studying socialization from a communicative perspective is "to identify how people can more actively and knowledgeably participate in the negotiation of organizational membership through specific communication choices" (p. 80). Individuals using websites for information seeking are actively engaging in the process, and are able to make decisions based on the information provided. For instance, the act of choosing "experienced professional" or "recent graduate" (or both) gives the individual a sort of subversive power over the organization even though all of the messages are produced by the organization. If the organization wants the viewer to be honest and choose the page that applies most closely to their experience level, the viewer could subvert that expectation and choose the other website. That ability to see the other page's information and messages is an

uncontrollable side effect of giving individuals the choice. Clearly, the organization is attempting to drive viewers to pages where the most relevant information is housed, yet the individual must ultimately make that decision for him or herself. This decision allows for the possibility of choosing against the organization's intentions. Individuals are therefore negotiating their organizational membership on their own and determining fit potentially before ever meeting an individual at the organization. This ability is a powerful tool for individuals practicing information seeking.

Limitations and Future Research

The first limitation of this study is the position from which the websites were analyzed. As an individual researcher reading from the position of a job seeker, the results of this analysis are as objective as possible. However, they are still the results based solely on one individual's interpretation. Analyzing individual reactions to websites from a variety of individuals could identify race, gender, economic, and educational gaps in the messages on organizational websites as well as provide more insight about the effectiveness of certain messages.

Another limitation of this study is the number of websites analyzed. Though the results were consistent across the websites, a broader sample of organizations could add validity to the results of this study. Additionally, these ten companies were chosen because Bowen Craggs & Co identified them as the best websites for job seekers. Expanding the sample to the top websites overall could yield different results. Furthermore, future researchers could also conduct the same study on the same websites in ten years to see how the messages have changed over time in order to identify potential changes in what socialization messages organizations think are important enough to include on their website.

Finally, other areas of future research include looking at intent as well as including graphic and visual analysis. This study did not attempt to understand the intent of the organizations' messages, and future research could seek to further understand that process. Contacting each organization to understand why certain messages were included could help understand the perspective of the organization in the socialization process, and see beyond the job seeker/audience perspective. Also, a graphic and visual analysis would include more than just the written text of each website. Results of that study could help organizations craft more appealing websites, or even websites that portray a consistent message through both written and visual messages.

In conclusion, organizational socialization begins before an individual enters an organization, and can be driven by the organization or by the individual. Corporate websites exist at the intersection of these two processes because organizations produce the material and individuals actively seek out the information. This study helps to better understand the socialization messages presented on organizational websites, specifically in regard to people, performance proficiency, politics, language, goals and values, and history of the organization. The results create a sort of checklist for organizations that want to improve these messages, as well as affirm websites as a legitimate socialization tool. Ultimately, this thesis brings forward the idea that as websites continue to evolve, presenting more and more information to a wider audience of potential employees, the stages of socialization become more blurred. The shift from anticipatory, to encounter, to metamorphosis, and even to exit are happening in a shorter, more compressed amount of time. An individual may begin moving into the metamorphosis stage prior to entering the organization (by learning some of the organization's private culture), and may even begin the exit stage by looking on other company's websites for a cultural fit well before

actually choosing to leave the organization. Websites are and will continue to become a catalyst for each stage in the socialization process. As Jablin noted, the stages are fluid and overlapping, and this thesis points out that as individuals utilize websites, and organizations present more clear information, that fluidity is even more present and magnified (Kramer & Miller, 2013).

Message on website

Content Area

Implication

| A verbatim statement taken directly rom the source. These messages include any written material on a website. |

- Performance Proficiency
- People
- Organizational Politics
- Language
- Goals and Values
- History

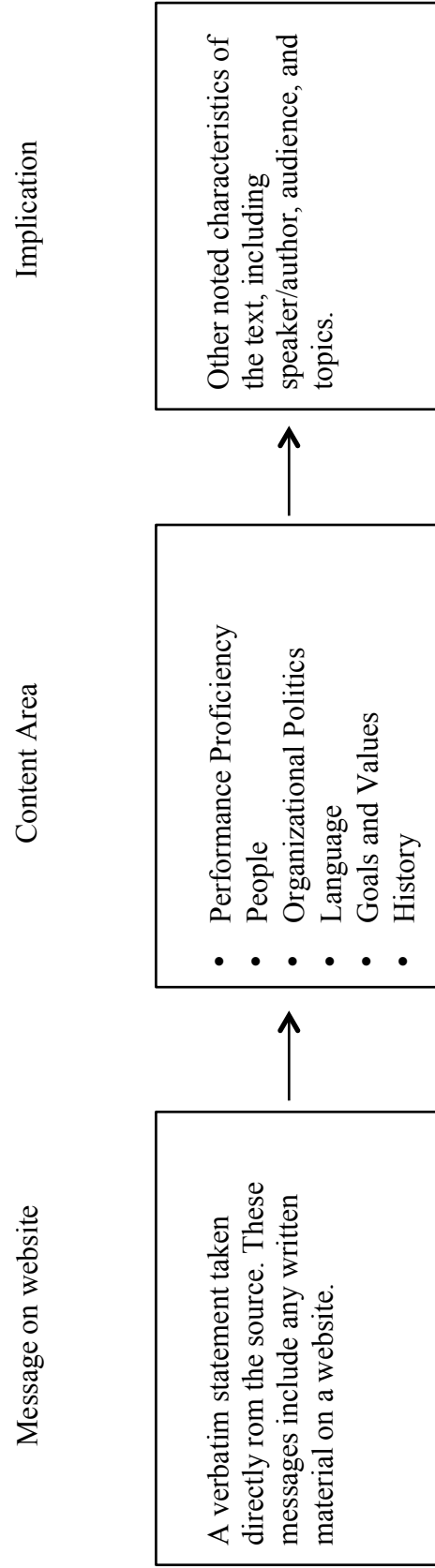Other noted characteristics of the text, including speaker/author, audience, and topics.
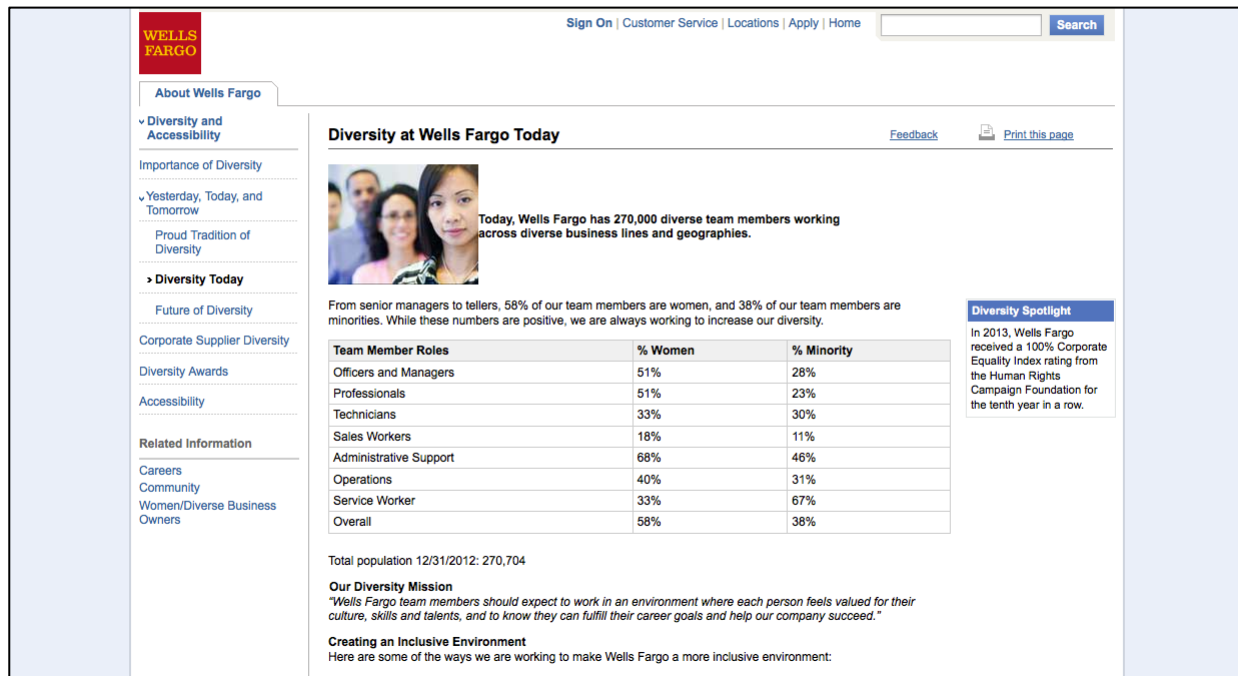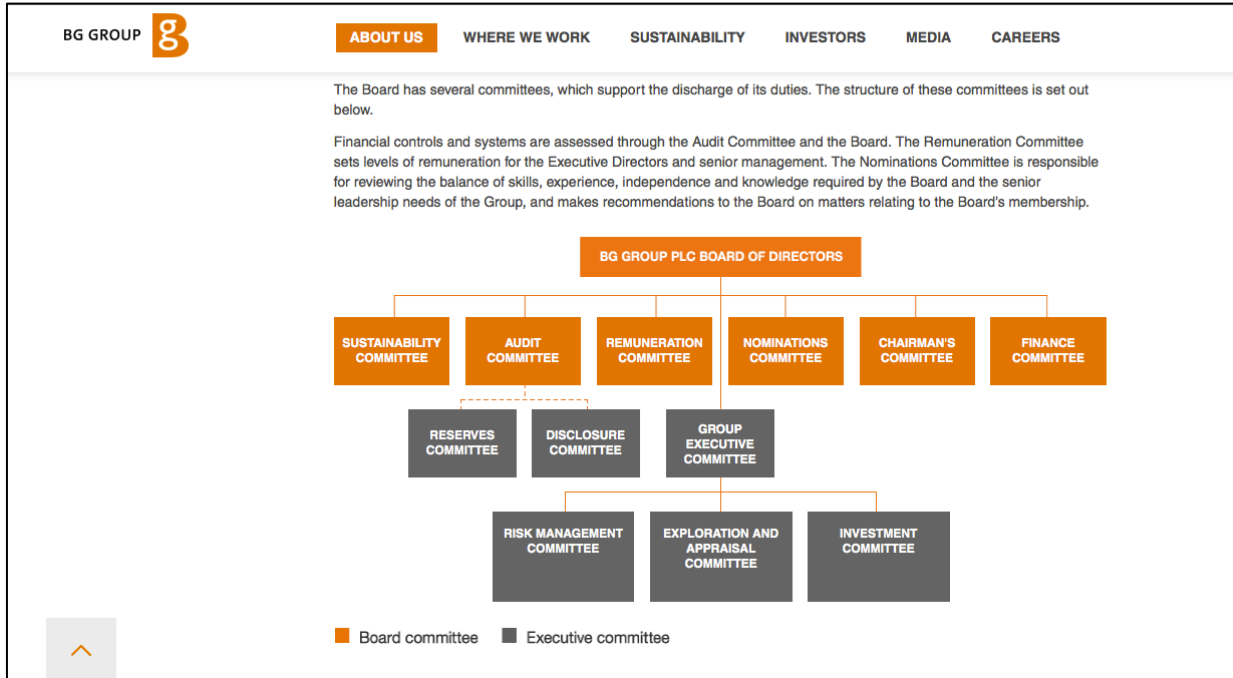
FIGURE 1

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FIGURE 2: Wells Fargo Employee Diversity
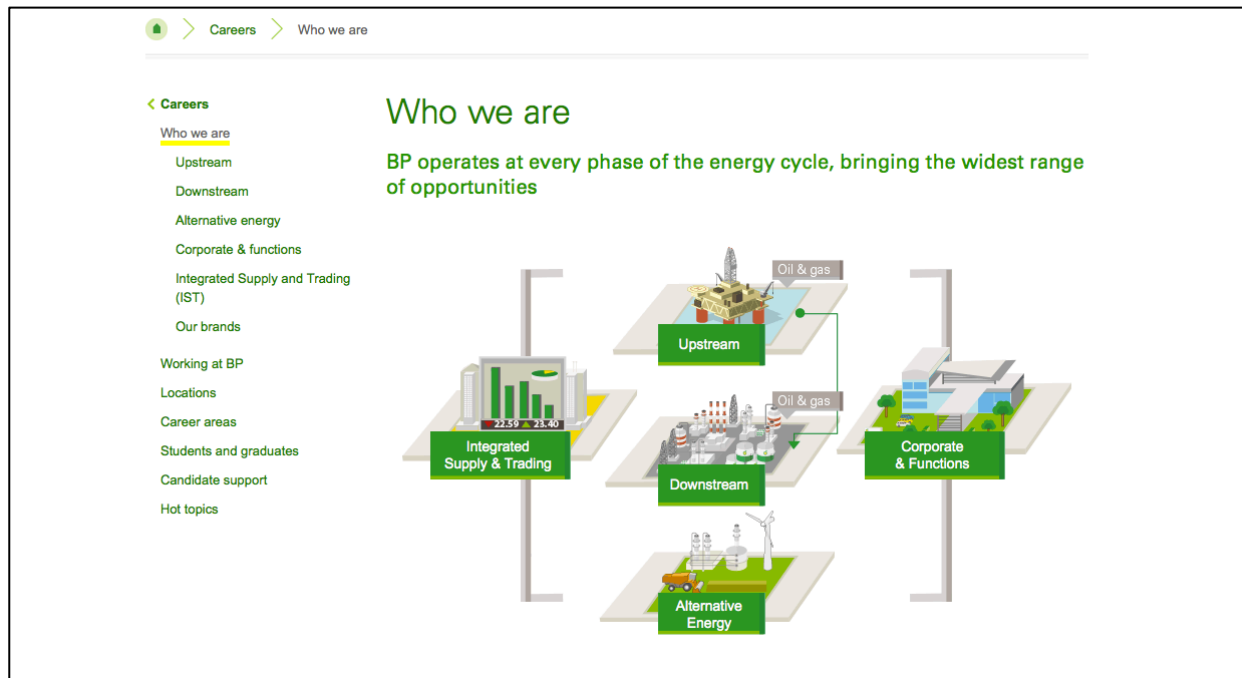
FIGURE 3: BG Group Organizational Chart

FIGURE 4: BP Organizational Chart

FIGURE 5: Google History Timeline

TIMELINE

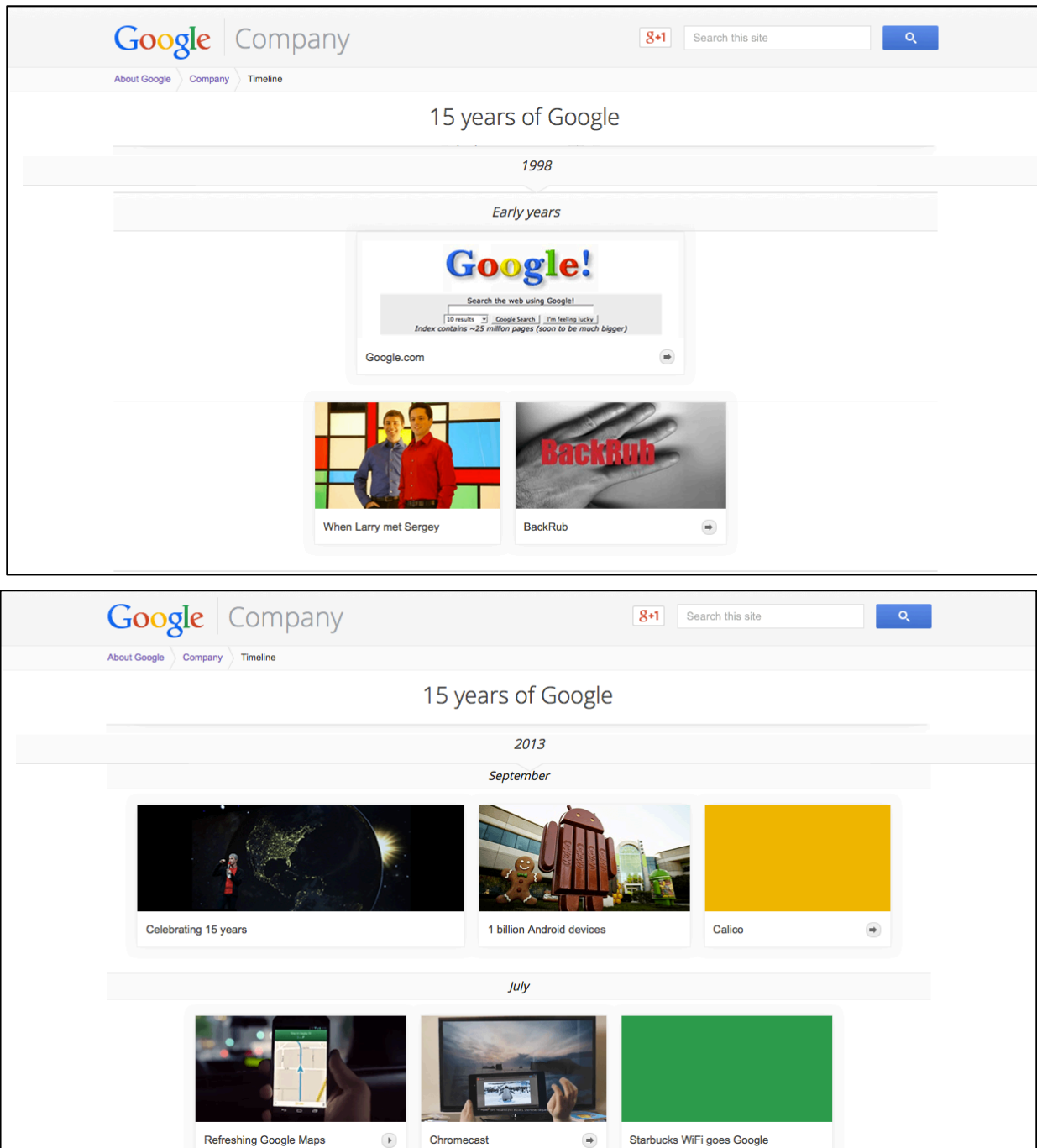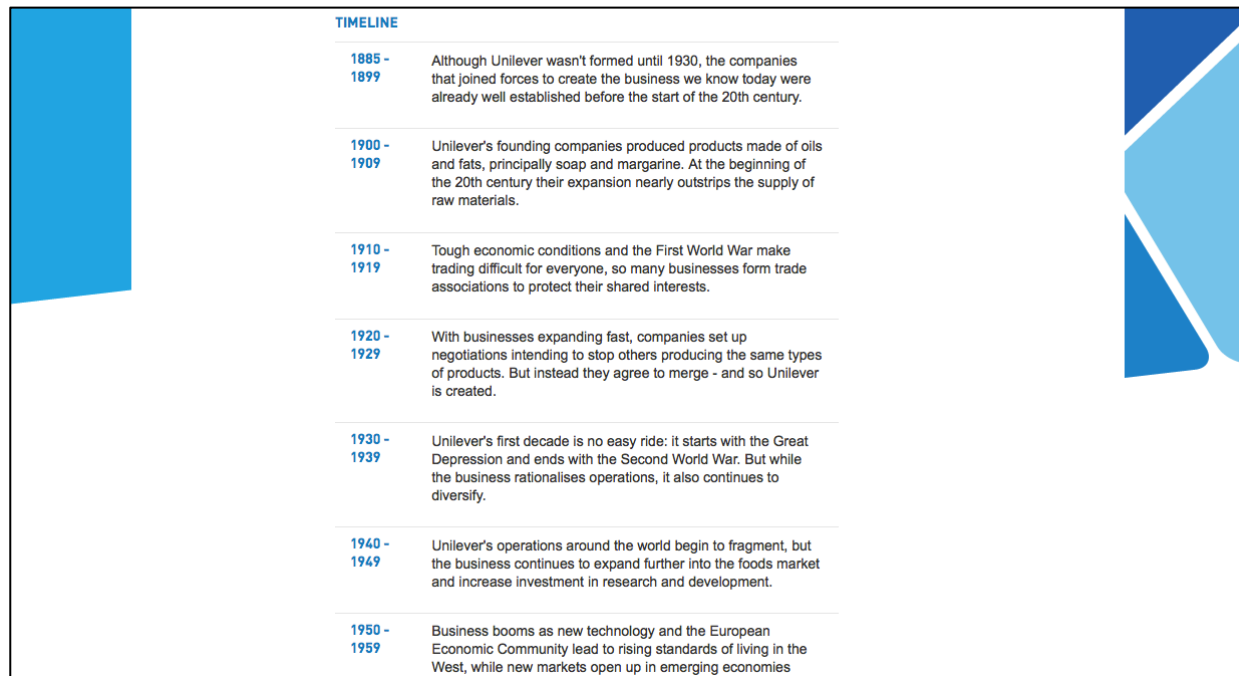|	
1885 – 1899	Although Unilever wasn't formed until 1930, the companies that joined forces to create the business we know today were already well established before the start of the 20th century.
1900 – 1909	Unilever's founding companies produced products made of oils and fats, principally soap and margarine. At the beginning of the 20th century their expansion nearly outstrips the supply of raw materials.
1910 – 1919	Tough economic conditions and the First World War make trading difficult for everyone, so many businesses form trade associations to protect their shared interests.
1920 – 1929	With businesses expanding fast, companies set up negotiations intending to stop others producing the same types of products. But instead they agree to merge - and so Unilever is created.
1930 – 1939	Unilever's first decade is no easy ride: it starts with the Great Depression and ends with the Second World War. But while the business rationalises operations, it also continues to diversify.
1940 – 1949	Unilever's operations around the world begin to fragment, but the business continues to expand further into the foods market and increase investment in research and development.
1950 – 1959	Business booms as new technology and the European Economic Community lead to rising standards of living in the West, while new markets open up in emerging economies

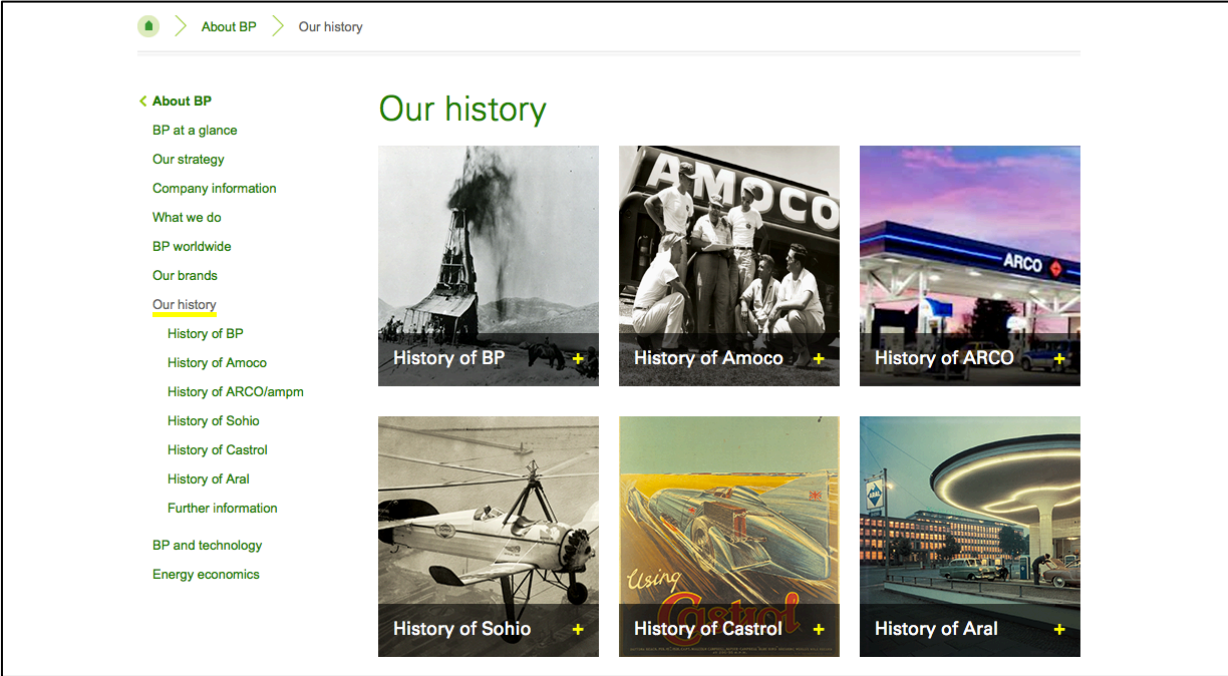FIGURE 6: Unilever History Timeline

FIGURE 7: BP History Timeline

Table 1

Definitions and examples of each of the six content areas

Content Area	Definition	Example of Typical Message
Performance Proficiency	An individual's role, tasks, and responsibilities (Chao, et al. 1994).	
Roles and responsibilities	Department and role specific proficiencies.	"The finance teams manage the firm's liquidity, capital and risk, and provide the overall financial control and reporting function" (Goldman Sachs, 2014).
Growth opportunities	Employee growth and development in their role.	"We make sure you and your manager dedicate time each year to discussing your career development, and you can access our online career resources anytime" (Microsoft, 2014).
Broad organizational responsibilities	Defining success and responsibilities within the larger organization.	"Our Code of Conduct describes the standards we require and provides high level guidance on how these are to be translated into consistent actions worldwide. Compliance with our Code is mandatory" (AstraZeneca, 2014).
People	The type of people and work relationships in the organization (Chao, et al. 1994).	
Desired Traits	Preferred employee qualities.	"We've always wanted Google to be a place that brought together smart, talented people from a diversity of backgrounds, and where you could bring your whole self to work" (Google, 2014).

Table 1 Cont.

Employee's Role	Employee contribution to business success.	"It is only with the determination and dedication of our people that we can serve our clients, generate long-term value for our shareholders and contribute to the broader public" (Goldman Sachs, 2014).
Politics	The power structures of the organization (Chao, et al. 1994).	"The Board and the Company Secretary constantly keep the Group's corporate governance arrangements under review" (BG Group, 2014).
Language	Language specific the job and/or organization (Chao, et al. 1994).	"Googlers" (Google, 2014).
Goals and Values	The goals and values of the organization and its members (Chao, et al. 1994).	"Consistent with our Vision and Values, Wells Fargo recognizes that governments have the duty to protect human rights, and our company has a responsibility to respect human rights. To that end, we strive to respect human rights throughout our operations, products and services, including consistent treatment among people, employee well-being and security, economic and social freedom, and environmental stewardship" (Wells Fargo, 2014).
History	The history of the organization (Chao, et al. 1994).	"Founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin met at Stanford University in 1995" (Google, 2014).

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