INNOVATING in HUMAN RESOURCES

STEPHANIE MEUSBURGER

project manager | researcher | strategist | innovator | ideator | communicator | designer | futurist | data analyst | problem solver | creator
Innovating in Human Resources

PROBLEM:
The government is increasing military spending and Northrop Grumman (NG) needs thousands of new employees, but NG is struggling to find qualified candidates.

MY ROLE:
NG’s recruitment problem has become a corporate priority. I was asked to travel to the sites where recruitment was being impacted the greatest and help the company understand the recruitment process, the company’s brand and opportunities to directly appeal to our target audience. I reported to the Director who reported to the Sector President. My role included directing the entire effort instructing teams at each location and frequent stakeholder engagement for consensus and buy-in. I planned the workshops, designed the frameworks, analyzed the data and synthesized insights. I am currently leading NG through the prototyping process. C-Suite Leaders at corporate are considering expanding this research across the enterprise.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

3 Target Audiences: Interns, New College Graduates and Experienced Employees
5 Cities: Los Angeles, Sunnyvale, San Diego, Chicago and Huntsville
3 Main Questions:
1.) Why are candidates dropping out of recruitment?
2.) How is NG perceived compared to other companies?
3.) What opportunities are available to better recruit?

WORKSHOP STRATEGY:

4 Workshop parts
1.) The Recruitment Experience
2.) Accessing Northrop Grumman’s Brand
3.) Discovering New Marketing Opportunities
4.) Reimagining the Recruitment Experience

Each part had a mixture of leveraging qualitative and quantitative research to uncover deep insights and discoveries.

“This was the most engaged I have ever been at Northrop Grumman”

-NORTHROP GRUMMAN EMPLOYEE.
Part 1: Understanding the Recruitment Experience

HOW MIGHT WE UNDERSTAND THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS?

Each participant drew out their personal recruitment journey map. Participants were given emotion and tool icons so they could describe their feelings and the technology they were using at each step in the process. In addition they used a pink post-it to highlight the highest point of their journey and a blue post-it to highlight the lowest point in their journey.

To discover patterns within the target groups and sites, I combined the Journey Maps of similar experiences—such as applying via a career fair versus applying online—into one for each site. This enabled us to compare and contrast different recruitment experiences.
Recruitment Satisfaction, Patterns and Differences

**QUANTITATIVE INSIGHTS & TRENDS**

Applicants feel many emotions while waiting to hear back, the most common emotions were “impatience”, “anxiety”, “worry”, “disinterested” and “dispirited”.

89% of applicants start the recruitment process online. College students are unique since they have alternative opportunities, such as college fairs and scholarships. Applying online has numerous ups and downs, but a shorter overall duration, more recruiter touch points and a high Offer Letter experience.

Applying at a career fair had a sustained waiting period, less touch points a more neutral offer letter experience. Recruiters need to be cautious to not allow too much time to pass between original interaction and follow up.

Recruitment completely outside the traditional process, which included more face-to-face interaction with NG employees and the hiring managers had by far the most positive experiences.
Recruitment is Personal, Needs Vigilance

QUALITATIVE INSIGHTS & TRENDS

Biggest Painpoint – Lack of Communication

“I turned down 2 other job offers before hearing back from Northrop Grumman, it was extremely stressful not knowing if I would hear back”.

“The lack of communication throughout the process makes you feel insignificant and small. It sets the precedent for how the company will treat you as a full time employee”.

Hiring Managers make Big Impressions on Potential Employees

“The frequent check-ins from the hiring manager throughout the process made me more excited about the opportunity. It also made me want the job more”.

HR Knows Little about Military Recruits

“I am a vet and the HR department has no idea how my military skills translate to the private world. They tried to hire me at a much lower skill level and at a much lower salary and it made for a very painful experience”.

“Northrop Grumman and HR need to be more cognizant of how big of a change going from the military to a private citizen is. It is an entire lifestyle change and going from a lifestyle of complete structure to almost a complete lack of structure – it is borderline traumatic”.

OPPORTUNITIES

Frequent communication touch points are critical and communication with the Hiring Manager extremely beneficial. How might we engage recruiters, hiring managers and potential employees on a more frequent basis and in a meaningful way?

Recruiting within the current structure is formal, rigid and stressful. Recruitment outside the typical process is more organic and more genuine. How might we recruit potential employees in a more natural and personal way?

Military vets have unique skill sets and unique situations. Human Resources and Hiring Managers need to be aware. How might we add additional communication that fills the gaps when recruiting vets?

Recruits want more opportunities to experience the company before they become employees. Ideas such as Company Tours, Meet the Team, Military Tours were brought up frequently. How might Northrop Grumman be more transparent and enable interactions between the company and recruits?
Part 2: Understanding NG’s Brand Perception

HOW MIGHT WE GAUGE NORTHROP GRUMMAN’S BRAND APPEAL?

13 logos of companies who NG considers direct competitors for talent were selected for the brand matrix. Participants were asked to chart each company based on how well each company treats their employees - the x-axis, and how innovative the company is - the y-axis.

I also asked participants to judge Northrop Grumman twice, the first time to judge NG’s brand as a current employee, the second time to judge NG’s brand before becoming an employee - the red dot. This enabled us to explore any discrepancies between what the NG brand promises and what employment is actually like.
Brand Patterns across Target Audiences

QUANTITATIVE INSIGHTS & TRENDS

Defense Contractors are largely perceived similarly in innovation & employee appreciation, trailing Google, Apple, Facebook and Microsoft. This enables employee poaching with a better salary offer.

Space X is perceived as the most innovative space company, GE and Raytheon seen as the least innovative and the lowest employee perks.

College graduates have highest opinion of NG’s brand due to flextime and culture, whereas experienced employees have the lowest opinion of NG’s brand due to frustration with bureaucracy and lack of new ideas.

Opportunity areas all target audiences agree are desirable are more openness to innovation and experimentation as well as too tied to legacy processes and technology.

Top Compiled College Graduates’ Brand Matrix:
Left: Cleared Employees’ Brand Matrix
Right: Interns’ Brand Matrix
**NG Brand: Amazing Products + Employee Appreciation**

**QUALITATIVE INSIGHTS & TRENDS**

Knowledge around what information can be shared hinders word-of-mouth

“I hate that I cannot talk about what I do outside of Northrop Grumman. I want to brag to my friends about the cool stuff we work on, but I’m not sure what I can and cannot share”.

NG does not Promote Products or Technology Locally or Nationally

“No one knows about the amazing products we are working on, even if they live in the area. We are building the James Webb Telescope in LA, and no one even knows we have an office here! Everyone only thinks of Boeing and Lockheed”.

“Everyone knows about Google, Apple and Facebook because they are in the news all the time. Northrop Grumman never publicizes anything and the only time we are in the news the media is smearing us”.

Founder’s Reputation Reflect on their Companies

“Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg are highly public figures and their actions reflect on their brands. No one knows who Wes Bush, the NG CEO, is unless you are a NG employee”.

**OPPORTUNITIES**

Employees prefer not to talk about their job for fear of leaking classified information. How might we provide other communication tools to enable NG employees to talk about their work?

Working on high-tech projects is one of the biggest draws and biggest retention factors for NG employees. How might we better broadcast the awesome technology NG employees get to work on?

NG avoids media attention because of the backlash against the perception of feeding the “war machine”. How might NG tell the story of their products and employees more effectively without media interference, or how might NG better prepare for media backlash?
Part 3: An Individual’s Tech & Community Engagement in a Day, Week & Month

HOW MIGHT NORTHROP GRUMAN TARGET SPECIALIZED TALENT IN SPECIFIC AREAS?

Northrop Grumman needs employees with very specific skill sets, knowledge and strengths. It can be hard to target this group with mass communication mediums because they are a niche market. How can we better understand their daily, weekly and monthly technology habits so NG can appeal to them directly?

To elicit patterns and communication opportunities, radar maps were compiled by target audience group and site as shown on the following page.
Technology Use Varies with Geography

QUANTITATIVE INSIGHTS & TRENDS

Technology consumption - devices, activities, frequency and duration - differs based on location. Midwest employees engage with tech in a more traditional, siloed way. East coast employees use a wide range of tech and consuming media more frequently.

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Huge Opportunity to Engage in Person & via Technology

QUALITATIVE INSIGHTS & TRENDS

Leverage NG Employees to Assist with Recruiting
“Northrop Grumman should let current employees know who we are hiring for. We could help promote the job openings to our friends”.
“Military vets have very tight relationships and networks. Northrop Grumman should reach out to us and ask for help”.

Invest in Community or Employee Clubs
“Other companies have clubs or employee groups that reach out to schools or professional clubs. It’s a comfortable, more natural way to engage with people. Why doesn’t Northrop Grumman do that?”

Swag is a Big Deal to College Students
“Swag! College students are all about promoting our internship opportunities and other companies have swag all over the place... Swag generate conversations at the gym, in the library, because other students want to know what the company is like, but I don’t have that opportunity because Northrop Grumman doesn’t give anything away!”

Sponsor Large Events in Nearby Cities
“Chicago has the country’s largest air show and Northrop Grumman is nowhere to be found. Why is Boeing sponsoring events all over the city and we’re not?”

OPPORTUNITIES

Northrop Grumman’s employee network is a great way to reach individuals in a more organic way. How might NG provide employees with stronger digital tools to refer friends?

Northrop Grumman has sites in highly visible areas, such as Los Angeles, San Diego, Chicago. How might NG take advantage of the events happening in those cities to then advertise job openings?

Many companies are engaging with potential employees at young ages and in differing ways. What makes sense for NG and how might NG start grooming future recruits?

LEGEND

Strength
Weakness
Opportunity for Improvement

Affinity Diagrams around how NG’s online and community presence. This topic has more yellow post-its than any other color meaning lots of opportunities.
Part 4: Imagining the Ideal Recruitment Experience

HOW MIGHT NORTHROP GRUMMAN BETTER ENGAGE WITH POTENTIAL RECRUITS AND THE COMMUNITY?

Participants were divided into teams and given 10 minutes to ideate around a Creative Matrix. Using green and red stickers, they would identify their top ideas and they made a Concept Poster to communicate their idea. Next, each team presented to the entire room. Finally, participants voted again on the best overall ideas and features using red and green stickers. These stickers indicate the most popular ideas and features for consideration in the future.
Results??? Coming Soon ...

I am guiding Northrop Grumman through the prototyping process while I am getting my Masters from the Institute of Design’s Masters of Design Methods program.

**FURTHER INVESTIGATION ON RECRUITMENT EXPERIENCE**
Before reinventing the recruitment experience, I need to know what is happening internally with Talent Acquisition Recruiters and Hiring Managers. This will enable us to find a solution that satisfies the needs of all stakeholders.

**PROTOTYPING A NEW BRAND MESSAGE: Quality Company Values that Appreciates Employees with Generous Benefits**
In order for NG to pivot its brand to a more employee-oriented company, meaningful internal changes need to happen. Additional benefits are being discussed, but they recently added 10 weeks paid leave for new parents as well as an annual bonus.

Externally, Northrop Grumman needs to create tailored messages that articulate how employee-friendly they are. A videographer and branding company has been hired to create several short videos interviewing NG employees with various messages. We will be conducting Market Research on the videos to find out if our message is resonating.

**PROTOTYPING MESSAGES ACROSS DIGITAL MEDIUMS**
Top strategies for how to appeal to each target audience at each site have been identified. The Digital Communication team and the Talent Acquisition department are partnering up to compare metrics and see if more from qualified applicants are applying. Once the most successful brand videos are selected, we will deploy them across digital mediums and continue to track metrics to see if our messaging is making a difference.

**FUTURE ALTERNATIVES FOR RECRUITMENT**
Part 4 of the workshops focused on reframing the recruitment experience. Interestingly, most of the ideas focused on more normal, everyday interactions, completely removed from the recruitment experience we have now. Visual the Vote stickers elicited the ideas and features our target audience members found most compelling. In the future, we may experiment with new recruitment engagements and this data will be vital to guide on what experiences we will prototype.
LET’S START A CONVERSATION

e-mail: SMeusburger@id.iit.edu | web site: www.StephanieMeusburger.com