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## Influence of New Work Attributes in Job Advertisements on Perceived Organizational Attractiveness\*\*

### Abstract

Recruiting suitable talent has become increasingly difficult – including the recruitment of university graduates, members of the so-called millennial generation. Consequently, organizations are looking for ways to increase their organizational attractiveness. Many German companies are currently striving to implement the concept of new work with autonomy, meaningfulness, and self-actualization as its core attributes. While this concept has already drawn a lot of attention in the practitioner field, there is still a lack of controlled research on how these efforts affect organizational attractiveness for job seekers. This paper thus empirically investigates how millennials' perception of organizational attractiveness is affected by the implementation of new work attributes in job advertisements.

214 business students participated in this experimental, randomized, preregistered two-group between-subjects design study. The results support the hypotheses that new work attributes in job advertisements significantly improve millennials' appraisal of the perceived organizational attractiveness measured by perceived general attractiveness, intention to pursue and prestige of the organization. As expected, the effect was mediated by perceived person-organization fit. The study's contribution lies in providing first empirical evidence for the positive effects of new work attributes on perceived organizational attractiveness.

Keywords: new work, organizational attractiveness, job postings, person-organization fit, work-design  
(JEL: M50, D23, M12, M51)

### Introduction

It has become increasingly difficult for organizations to attract and recruit suitable talent (Boštjančič & Slana, 2018; Cappelli & Keller, 2014; Deuer & Wild, 2018), including the recruitment of recent university graduates. As a result, organizations are looking for ways to increase their organizational attractiveness and thus position themselves as attractive employers for job seekers (Chapman et al., 2005; Furkel,

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2018; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Waal, 2018). As one way to increase organizational attractiveness, German companies have turned to the concept of new work (Hofmann, 2020; Schmoll & Stieß, 2021). Recent German survey data show that a large percentage of German employees hold favorable attitudes toward new work aspects (Schuster, 2019). However, how new work is understood and put into practice varies widely among companies (Furkel, 2018; Hackl et al., 2017; Schermuly, 2020). It is often used as a way to signal a difference from the "traditional" or "classic" organizational structures and practices with their hierarchical authority structures, management by objectives, pay for performance systems and up or out career advancement which are still wide-spread (Bell & Martin, 2012; Hackl et al., 2017; Laloux, 2015). In its most simplistic form, the new work concept is reduced to implementing open-plan office concepts or introducing flexible working arrangements (Furkel, 2018). Companies that use the concept in a more comprehensive way base it on aspects emphasized by Bergmann (Bergmann, 2005; 2017; Hornung, 2018) as central attributes or principles of new work: meaningfulness, self-actualization, and autonomy. The positive effects of these attributes on employees and organizational success have been widely documented in the work design literature (e.g., Humphrey et al., 2007).

In job advertisements employers can use statements to describe their organization and to thus influence job seekers, that is, potential applicants' perceptions of organizational attractiveness (Bullinger & Treisch, 2015). Organizational attractiveness has been used as another term for employer attractiveness (Berthon et al., 2005; Waal, 2018) and refers to perceptions of the organization as a desirable entity and the expressed general positive effect towards an organization (Aiman-Smith et al., 2001, p. 221; Rynes et al., 1991). It requires a fit between the characteristics of the organization and the expectations, values, and needs of the potential applicants (Chatman, 1989; Kristof, 1996).

Recent graduates are always an important target group for employers. The current graduates have been referred to as members of the "Generation Y" (Johnson & Johnson, 2010) or the "Millennial Generation" (Strauss & Howe, 2000) and many studies have investigated this generation's preferences and work values (Kuron et al., 2015; Parment, 2013; Pfeil, 2017). Results of these studies seem to suggest a high fit between millennials' values and attitudes and the characteristics emphasized in the new work concept (Bergmann, 2005). Studies empirically investigating a presumed fit in a recruitment context, however, are currently still lacking. Using an experimental design, the present study thus aims at empirically investigating how the implementation of new work characteristics in job advertisements in contrast to traditional job advertisements affects millennials' perception of organizational attractiveness.

## Theoretical Background

### New Work

The new work concept was first introduced by the philosopher Fritjhof Bergmann (1977) who proposed a new division of work. Criticizing traditional Taylorism he suggested work to be divided into three parts: one-third gainful employment, one-third high-tech-self-providing and one-third of work that “you really, really want” (Bergmann, 2017, p. 21). As core principles underlying this division of work, he postulated autonomy, meaningfulness, and self-actualization (Bergmann, 2005; Hackl et al., 2017).

In the light of current technological, economic, and societal changes, the concept of new work has received a surge of interest, specifically in Germany (Rump & Eilers, 2017a; Werther, 2018). Digitalization, increasing market volatility, individualization, demographic changes, and the resulting labor shortage, as well as changing values of new generations entering the labor market, have led to a new understanding of work (Kuron et al., 2015; Rump & Eilers, 2017b; Vollmer & Poppenborg, 2018; Wörwag & Cloots, 2018). To put this new idea of work into practice, many organizations are looking for new forms of collaboration and work design. Although many of them label these approaches as new work in reference to Bergman’s concept, they often lack a reflection of Bergmann’s core principles and only refer to very narrow concepts, such as flexibility in working time or new office concepts (Fischer & Häusling, 2018; Furkel, 2018, S. 21; Schuster, 2019; Werther, 2018). A more holistic understanding and implementation of Bergmann’s new work concept can be found in those organizations that aim at fundamentally redesigning their organizations towards flatter hierarchies or network structures, foster a new organizational culture of trust, and focus on participation and collaboration (Furkel, 2018; Weckmüller, 2018; Laloux, 2015; Rump & Eilers, 2017a, b; Schermuly, 2016). This holistic understanding of the new work concept thus allows for the redesign of work in accordance with the principles emphasized by Bergmann (Bergmann, 2005; Hackl et al., 2017). Bergman himself did not develop a consistent measurable theory and operationalization of these principles (Schermuly, 2020). However, the principles he emphasized overlap with well researched psychological constructs. In a very recent paper, Schermuly (2020), for example, analyzed the overlaps between the principles postulated by Bergman and the theory of psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 2008). In the subsequent paragraphs, we will therefore briefly review the literature on the respective psychological constructs to show their relevance for work design and provide a basis for their operationalization in this study.

### Autonomy

Autonomy is one of five work design characteristics included in the job characteristics model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). The job characteristics model defines

autonomy as the freedom an individual has in carrying out work. In self-determination theory, autonomy refers to the individual's perception of choice in initiating and continuing work-related actions (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In their meta-analysis, Humphrey et al. (2007) showed that autonomy is the characteristic of the job characteristics model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) that with a correlation of  $r = .48$  has the highest influence on job satisfaction. It is additionally linked to further positive behavioral and attitudinal outcomes (Humphrey et al., 2007). Distinguishing between various kinds of autonomy, decision-making authority ( $r = .58$ ) and autonomy with regard to working methods ( $r = .34$ ) have the largest effect on job satisfaction whereas the effect of autonomy regarding working hours ( $r = .11$ ) is much smaller (Weckmüller, 2018).

### Meaningfulness

Perceived meaningfulness of work has been identified as a relevant variable in the job characteristics model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) as well as in the psychological empowerment literature (Spreitzer, 1995, 2008; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Schermuly (2020) concludes that there is a large overlap between Bergmann's concept of meaningfulness and the meaning dimension of psychological empowerment. According to Rosso et al. (2010, p. 95), meaningful work refers to "work [that is] experienced as particularly significant". Meaningfulness has furthermore been defined as "the value of a work goal or purpose, judged in relation to an individual's own ideals or standards" (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990, p. 672). Meaningfulness thus necessitates a fit between the requirements of a work role and the individual's beliefs, values, and behaviors (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Spreitzer, 2008). The perception of meaningfulness – amongst other determinants – results from perceived authenticity, helping the individual to become her authentic self (Rosso et al., 2010). In a systematic literature review, Lepisto and Pratt (2017, p. 103) analyzed different conceptualizations of meaningfulness and found the common denominator in meaningfulness as "positivity associated with an individual's work". In their eyes, two major sources of positivity from work have to be stressed, i.e. "realizing one's self through work" and "being able to account for worth of one's work" (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017, p. 116). Humphrey et al. (2007) empirically showed that experienced meaningfulness mediates the effects of autonomy, skill variety, task identity, task significance, and feedback. Other psychological research shows that experienced meaningfulness promotes wellbeing and happiness (King & Napa, 1998; Zika & Chamberlin, 1992).

### Self-actualization

The concept of self-actualization, as realizing one's full, unique potential, stems from motivational theory (Maslow, 1987). Maclagan (2003) notes that this term is sometimes also used interchangeably with self-realization and self-fulfillment. Maslow (1968) defined self-actualization as the need for "ongoing actualization

of potentials, capacities, and talents, as fulfilment of mission” (p. 25). Self-actualization has also been operationalized in ways of academic achievement and success in specific fields (Kerr, 1985; Reis & Callahan, 1989; Walker et al., 1992). It has been related to the expression of one’s personality, skills, and competence at work (Hackl et al., 2017). In relation to competence, it can furthermore be linked to theories of empowerment (Spreitzer, 2008; Schermuly, 2020).

These elaborations show that the characteristics central to the new work concept can be linked to well-researched work design variables (Humphrey et al., 2007; Weckmüller, 2018). However, empirical investigations of the effects of these new work principles on graduates’ perceptions of organizational attractiveness are still lacking.

### Organizational Attractiveness

Organizational attractiveness has been widely researched and defined in a number of ways (Aiman-Smith et al., 2001; Jiang & Iles, 2011; Lievens et al., 2007; Newbury et al., 2006). Specifically suitable for a recruitment context is Rynes et al.’s (1991) definition of perceived organizational attractiveness as the degree to which an individual perceives a specific organization as a desirable place of employment. Different dimensions of organizational attractiveness have been distinguished (Chapman et al., 2005; Highhouse et al., 2003) and organizational attractiveness can thus be viewed as a multidimensional construct that consists of distinct but interrelated dimensions (Altmann & Suess, 2015; Highhouse et al., 2003). The theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) can be used as a theoretical underpinning for investigating organizational attractiveness (Highhouse et al., 2003). According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen & Madden, 1986), an enhancement of the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), a behavior is directly influenced by the intention to perform the behavior which in return is determined by three factors: a person’s attitude, her subjective norms and her perceived behavioral control. Attitudes result from the individuals’ evaluations of an object and the perceived probability or belief strengths of the individual that the behavior will result in a certain consequence (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Subjective norms are determined by the perceived expectations of significant others as partners, family or friends and a person’s motivation to satisfy these expectations (Ajzen & Madden, 1986). The perceived behavioral control describes an individual’s perception that she possesses the required abilities and resources to show a certain behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Based on these findings, Highhouse et al. (2003) differentiate between three dimensions of organizational attractiveness. The first dimension of perceived general attractiveness refers to a person’s more general attitudinal thoughts towards the company as a potential employer. It reflects affective reactions but does not imply that the individual will take any active steps toward the company. Since these general attitudinal thoughts are passive in nature, individuals can be attracted to a large number of organizations

simultaneously. The second dimension, however, refers to a more active facet of attraction to the company. It refers to intentions to take further steps toward the respective company, such as the intention to actively pursue a job. Intentions as a behavioural component thus go beyond the passive effect towards organizations and will be held towards a smaller number of organizations (Highhouse et al., 2003). Whereas the dimensions of general attractiveness and intention to pursue focus on the individual perception, the prestige dimension focuses on the normative level (Carmeli et al., 2006; Mael & Ashforth 1992; Radović-Marković et al., 2014; Smidts et al. 2001). It captures the social consensus about the degree to which the company's characteristics are viewed positively or negatively. Organizational prestige with the key constructs of corporate reputation, organizational identity and perceived external prestige affect employees' identification with an organization (Carmeli et al., 2006). The perceived external prestige reflects what employees suppose that others think about their company (Smidts et al., 2001) and positively affects organizational identification (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). The individual identifies with a company in part to increase her self-esteem (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). The first two dimensions have been more widely researched (Chapman et al., 2005; Gully et al. 2013; Highhouse et al., 2003) than the third dimension and perceived prestige as the third dimension often shows only moderate correlations with the first and second dimensions (Altmann & Sues, 2015). Overall, studies show a strong relationship between applicant perceptions of organizational attractiveness and job choice decisions (Cable & Turban, 2001; Turban, 2001). Organizational attractiveness influences potential applicants' general attitudes towards the organization (Smith et al., 2004) and has been shown to have direct (Chapman et al., 2005) as well as indirect effects (Roberson et al., 2005) on job acceptance and job pursuit intentions.

## Job Advertisements

Job advertisements are often the first point of contact of an organization with a job seeker or potential applicant (Bullinger & Treisch, 2015). They are used by job seekers to gather information about the organization and the position and have been shown to influence the formation of organizational attitudes (Walker & Hinojosa, 2013). Job advertisements are of special importance during the recruitment process as job seekers will not turn into applicants if they do not develop positive attitudes in this first phase of the recruitment process (Barber & Roehling, 1993; Rynes, 1991). In job advertisements, employers thus aim at communicating information that positively influences the perceptions and actions of the reader (Cable & Turban, 2001). The organizational attributes or characteristics communicated in the job advertisements have been shown to have a large effect on the perceived organizational attractiveness (Bullinger & Treisch, 2015; Lohaus & Rietz, 2015; Rafaeli & Oliver, 1998). Different frameworks have been used as a theoretical

rationale for the importance and effects of job advertisements (Behling et al., 1968; Walker & Hinojosa, 2013).

A framework stemming from the economics literature is signaling theory (Spence, 1973). Applied to the realm of recruitment (Rynes, 1991) it proposes that job seekers need to make decisions under high levels of uncertainty because they only possess incomplete information about the potential employer. Viewed through the theoretical lens of signaling theory, the attributes contained in job advertisements thus serve as signals for unknown organizational characteristics, such as company philosophy, culture, work climate, or in general, how the organization treats its employees (Backes-Gellner & Tuor Sartore, 2010; García et al., 2010; Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000; Reeve & Schultz, 2004; Verwaeren et al., 2017). Job seekers thus use the attributes to make inferences about values, and these inferences influence the perceived person-organization fit (Celani & Singh, 2011; Saks & Ashforth, 1997). Previous studies have demonstrated, for example, that information on a company's reward system is used to make inferences about the company's culture (Kuhn, 2009).

The attributes contained in job advertisements have been categorized in different ways (e.g., Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Chapman et al., 2005). A widely used classification (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003) draws on the instrumental-symbolic framework from marketing literature. It differentiates between instrumental and symbolic attributes. Instrumental attributes are those that do not exist as an end in themselves but are more tangible and thus tools for achieving goals (e.g., pay, benefits, flexible working time, advancement opportunities). Instrumental attributes are those that an organization or job does or does not have. They refer for example to the tasks, duties, and responsibilities required by the job. Symbolic attributes in contrast, are highly valued for themselves by the job-seeker and others (e.g., innovativeness, dominance). They convey symbolic company information and refer to less tangible aspects such as the company culture or prestige. Job seekers are attracted to these attributes to express their values (Highhouse et al., 2007). Symbolic attributes have also been conceptualized as organization personality trait inferences. In this vein, applicants might refer to organizations as trendy or prestigious (Slaughter et al., 2004). Previous research showed that while instrumental attributes explain most of the variance in organizational attractiveness, symbolic organizational personality inferences explain incremental variance and are more generalizable (e.g., Lievens & Highhouse, 2003).

## Hypotheses

In the following paragraphs, we will specify our hypotheses with regard to the three dimensions of perceived organizational attractiveness: perceived general attractiveness, intention to pursue and prestige (Highhouse et al., 2003).

Millennials value flexible working conditions (time, place) as well as a good work-life balance (Deuer & Wild, 2018; Pfeil, 2017; Ruthus, 2014). Furthermore, current studies indicate that millennials value continuous learning (Ruthus, 2014) and seek meaningful and fun or interesting working experiences. While these characteristics can be classified as instrumental attributes, studies indicate that millennials might also highly value the symbolic attributes of an organization. They want to be able to express their individual personality at work and use their abilities (Deuer & Wild, 2018; Kuron et al., 2015; Parment, 2013; Pfeil, 2017). Meaningful and fulfilling work is considered more important than career advancement (Shell Jugendstudie, 2015). Studies furthermore found high values for individualization and independence (Parment, 2013) and reported that graduates are looking for high levels of participation and autonomy, specifically in decision making (Ruthus, 2014). Organizations that focus on holistic tasks and self-determined work rather than on results-oriented work should therefore be perceived as more attractive by millennial graduates.

The results of these studies seem to suggest a high congruence with the characteristics or attributes contained in the new work concept (Rump & Eilers, 2017a). We, therefore, assume that job advertisements containing new work attributes will be rated higher on perceived general attractiveness than job advertisements containing attributes of traditional work design concepts, e.g., individual bonus, hierarchies, and career progression (Laloux, 2015) as job seekers use these attributes as signals to infer company values.

*Hypothesis 1: New work attributes in job advertisements will positively influence perceived general attractiveness.*

According to the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen & Madden, 1986), a person's intention to perform a behavior is influenced by her attitude and subjective norms. Attitudes can also be influenced by people's beliefs about the social acceptability of a specific company; people might only intend to pursue their job search if the company is also seen as attractive by others (Highhouse et al., 2003). Both, individual attitudes, i.e. an increased perceived general attractiveness as well as subjective norms, should thus positively influence the planned behavior, i.e. the intention to pursue the job search for organizations that implement new work attributes.

*Hypothesis 2: New work attributes in job advertisements will positively influence intention to pursue.*

Seeing a potential employer as prestigious will have positive effects on self-esteem. We thus hypothesize that companies with new work job advertisements will be judged higher on prestige as a result of students' intention to pursue their application and their resulting wish for the company to be judged positively by significant others. However, overall, millennials value the prestige of companies less than e.g.,

the generation of their parents (Radović-Marković et al., 2014). We thus assume a smaller effect of the new work characteristics on the dimension of prestige than on the first two dimensions.

*Hypothesis 3: New work attributes in job advertisements will positively influence organizational prestige. The effect on organizational prestige will be smaller than the effects postulated in Hypotheses 1 and 2.*

Perceptions of organizational attractiveness have furthermore been shown to be influenced by person-organization fit (Schneider, 1987). *Person-organization fit* refers to the fit between the values of a person and the norms and values of an organization (Chatman, 1989; Kristof, 1996). The perceived person-organization fit has been shown to influence job choice intentions after controlling for the attractiveness of job attributes (Cable & Judge, 1996). Applicants specifically rate those organizational traits as more attractive that are similar to their own traits (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Slaughter et al., 2004). We consequently assume that the positive effects of new work attributes on organizational attractiveness (Hypotheses 1-3) will be partially mediated by the perceived person-organization fit.

*Hypothesis 4 a, b, c: The effects postulated in H1-H3 will be partially mediated by the perceived person-organization fit.*

## Research Design and Method

### Design

The experimental online study was conducted using a between-subjects design with two conditions (1 = traditional job advertisement; 2 = new work job advertisement). Business students of a German University of Applied Sciences served as participants and were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions. Perceived general attractiveness, intention to pursue and prestige served as the dependent variable. The study was conducted in German, using Unipark for the online data collection.

### Preregistration

Prior to data collection the design, hypotheses, planned analyses, and sample size needed for a statistical power of .80 were preregistered on the platform AsPredicted (<https://aspredicted.org/>).

### Independent Variables

Two fictitious job advertisement vignettes were developed for the job of “project manager”, one including new work aspects, the other one being formulated in a traditional manner. The vignettes were developed by the authors based on the

new work literature and the characteristics of traditional organizations (Laloux, 2015). In the job advertisements, no further details were given on the specific job function (e.g., Accounting, Human Resource Management) to assure that all of the participating business students have the same basic qualification for the job based on the courses they took during their curriculum and thus independent of their major. To ensure that the traditional attributes are still used by organizations, a document analysis of job advertisements from traditional (= non-new work) organizations was performed as a cross-check by the third author. The vignettes of the study were modeled after the structure of current job advertisements. Table 1 shows the translated attributes that were used in the vignettes to operationalize the independent variable. The vignettes were equally long and contained the same amount of information.

**Table 1: Operationalization of the Independent Variable in the Job Advertisement Vignettes**

New work-oriented organization	Traditional organization
■ Holistic tasks that allow for self-actualization	■ Challenging tasks that allow for success
■ An environment in which you can pursue your own ideas	■ An environment that rewards success-oriented work
■ Self-determined work	■ Results-oriented work
■ Opportunity to show your creativity	■ Opportunity to show your achievement-motivation
■ Employees who have the courage to pursue new paths	■ Employees who show dedication to the work
■ Opportunity to develop your personality	■ Opportunity to develop your career
■ Flat hierarchies with high levels of participation and the opportunity to gain diverse experiences	■ Clearly defined leadership structure and processes and the opportunity for fast advancement
■ Continuous feedback	■ Annual goal setting with respective bonus

A pretest was conducted ( $N = 39$ ) to ensure that participants could differentiate between the traditional and new work job advertisements. Table A1 in the appendix provides the items of the pretest. The results in Table A2 show that the manipulation worked.

## Dependent Variables

### Organizational Attractiveness

Dependent variables were measured using the organizational attraction scale (Highhouse et al., 2003, p. 991). The scale measures the dimensions of general attractiveness, intention to pursue and prestige with five items each. We are aware that the three dimensions have previously been found to highly correlate (Chapman et al., 2005) and have therefore been aggregated in different studies (Uggerslev et

al., 2012). However, Highhouse et al. (2003) stated that “company attractiveness, intentions toward the company, and company prestige are distinct, albeit interrelated, constructs” (p. 998). We therefore aimed at analyzing the three dimensions separately to gain more detailed insights. This approach has also been chosen in other current research (Altmann & Suess, 2015; Fatfouta, 2021; Liu, 2020; Walker et al., 2008). Participants rated their agreement with the items on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *fully agree* to 5 = *do not agree at all*). Reliabilities measured with Cronbach’s Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) resulted in  $\alpha = .91$  for perceived general attractiveness,  $\alpha = .88$  for intention to pursue and  $\alpha = .82$  for prestige. Additionally, participants answered the following question: “Are you interested in receiving further information about this employer?”. This item was used as an operationalization of organizational pursuit behavior (Highhouse et al., 2003) without asking the participants to share personal information like their names.

### Mediator Variable

Person-organization fit was included as a mediator variable. It was measured using the four items formulated by Saks and Ashforth (1997), to indicate the perceived person-organization fit, i.e., to what extent “... are the values of the organization similar to your own values?”, “... does your personality match the personality or image of the organization”, “... does the organization fulfil your needs?” and “... is the organization a good match for you?”. The same five-point Likert scale was used as above (1 = *fully agree* to 5 = *do not agree at all*).

### Control Variables

As described above, no further details were given in the job advertisement regarding the specific job function. It was only stated that the position of a project manager was to be filled. To check whether the job title mentioned had an effect on the perception of organizational attractiveness, we measured the person-job fit as a control variable, assessed by the following item: “The project manager position is a suitable position for me”. The item was again rated on the above scale.

Based on the job search experience literature, we also included current job search as a control variable. Previous research indicates that there may be differences in the reactions to job advertisements based on participants’ previous job search experience (Walker et al., 2008). Participants with previous search experience might be able to better identify important job and organizational information to determine their fit with the organization (Kristof, 1996).

We included knowledge of the new work concept as a third control variable to determine if there are differences in the reactions to the advertisements based on participants’ knowledge of the concept.

## Procedure

The study was conducted at a German University of Applied Sciences from December 2018 to June 2019. Data were collected by the authors at the beginning of different lectures for students in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year who had already completed an internship semester and thus possessed initial working experience. Since data was collected in different lectures, students attending multiple of these lectures were presented with the opportunity to participate at multiple times. The person collecting the data verbally stated that participants who had previously participated should not participate again. Additionally, a control item was included in the questionnaire asking participants if they had previously participated in the study. Participation in the study was voluntary. Participants were presented with a link to the online survey. Students used their smartphones to participate. The system (Unipark) randomly assigned one of the vignettes to the participants. After reading the vignettes, the participants replied to the questionnaire. Previously conducted power analyses indicated a required sample size of  $N = 278$  for the desired power level of .80. Data collection was stopped once the sample size of  $N = 278$  had been exceeded.

## Sample

Overall, 290 students participated in the study. 66 participants had to be excluded because they indicated at the control question that they had previously participated in the study. Additionally, according to the exclusion criteria defined in the preregistration, those participants were excluded who had an answering time for the questionnaire lower than half of the median ( $n = 5$ ) or who took longer to answer than the average time plus two standard deviations ( $n = 3$ ). One participant was excluded for closing the browser, another for indicating her age as “222.222”. This led to a final sample size of 214 participants, 67.3% ( $n = 144$ ) of which were female. The mean age was 23.71 ( $SD = 2.26$ ), all of the participants could be classified as millennials. 65.9% ( $n = 141$ ) were bachelor students, 34.1% ( $n = 73$ ) master students. The median work experience was 15 months ( $M = 24.36$ ,  $SD = 23.05$ ). 35.5% ( $n = 76$ ) of the participants indicated that they were currently looking for a job.

## Results

### Descriptive and Preliminary Analyses

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for the dependent variables for each of the conditions. There were no significant differences between the experimental groups with regards to gender,  $\chi^2(2) = 2.1$ ,  $p = .35$ , age,  $t(212) = .13$ ,  $p = .90$ , current job search,  $\chi^2(1) = 2.8$ ,  $p = .10$ , and knowledge of the new work concept,  $\chi^2(1) = .26$ ,  $p = .61$ . However, there was a significant difference between the conditions concerning the bachelor and master level:  $\chi^2(1) = 4.8$ ,  $p = .028$ . 27.6% ( $n = 32$ )

of participants in the new work condition, were master students. In the traditional condition, 41.8% ( $n = 41$ ) were master students. All of the following analyses were consequently controlled for level of study (bachelor vs. master).

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Dependent Variables**

	New Work	Traditional
% of participants ( $N$ )	54.2% (116)	45.8% (98)
Organizational attractiveness	2.37 (.78)	3.02 (.97)
Intention to pursue	2.61 (.76)	3.00 (.87)
Prestige	2.60 (.66)	2.68 (.68)
Interest in further information	69.0% (80)	40.8% (40)

Note:  $N = 214$ , percentages (absolute values); means ( $SD$ )

Shapiro-Wilk tests showed that in the new work condition, perceived general attractiveness,  $W(116) = .95$ ,  $p < .001$ , and prestige,  $W(116) = .97$ ,  $p = .014$ , differed significantly from normal distribution. The same was true for the distribution of perceived general attractiveness,  $W(98) = .96$ ,  $p = .003$ , in the traditional condition. Person-organization fit also differed significantly from normal distribution in the new work condition,  $W(116) = .97$ ,  $p = .005$ .

Levene's test for equality of variances of the experimental groups showed that the assumption of variance homogeneity did not have to be rejected for intention to pursue,  $F(1,212) = 2.25$ ,  $p = .14$ , and prestige,  $F(1,212) = 0.94$ ,  $p = .33$ . For perceived general attractiveness,  $F(1,212) = 9.35$ ,  $p = .003$ , and person-organization fit,  $F(1,212) = 9.44$ ,  $p = .002$ , the assumption of equality of variances needed to be rejected.

Based on these results, the main analyses were conducted using non-parametric tests. For explorative purposes, additional parametric tests were used.

## Main Analysis

The conducted non-parametric Mann-Whitney-U-Test without control variables showed that there were highly significant differences between the conditions in the ratings for perceived general attractiveness ( $M_{\text{ranks, new work}} = 88.1$ ;  $M_{\text{ranks, traditional}} = 130.4$ ),  $Z = -4.99$ ,  $p < .001$  and the intention to pursue ( $M_{\text{ranks, new work}} = 94.6$ ;  $M_{\text{ranks, traditional}} = 122.8$ ),  $Z = -3.33$ ,  $p = .001$ . This results in transformed Cohen's  $d$  values of .72 for perceived general attractiveness and .47 for intention to pursue. Hypotheses 1 and 2 could thus be confirmed.

Prestige was also rated more favorably in the new work condition, but there was no significant difference between the groups ( $M_{\text{ranks, new work}} = 104.3$ ;  $M_{\text{ranks, traditional}} = 111.3$ ),  $Z = -0.83$ ,  $p = .41$  with a Cohen's  $d$  of .11. The results are in line with hypothesis 3.

“Interest in further information” was significantly higher in the new work group ( $M_{\text{new work}} = 0.69$ ,  $SD = 0.47$ ;  $M_{\text{traditional}} = 0.41$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ),  $t(201.3) = 4.27$ ,  $p < .001$ .

### Group Analysis

For the separate group analyses of the bachelor and master students, the overall results pattern remained the same. Analyses of the master student group showed significant positive effects for the new work condition for perceived general attractiveness ( $M_{\text{ranks, new work}} = 26.6$ ;  $M_{\text{ranks, traditional}} = 45.1$ ),  $Z = -3.70$ ,  $p < .001$  and the intention to pursue ( $M_{\text{ranks, new work}} = 29.3$ ;  $M_{\text{ranks, traditional}} = 43.0$ ),  $Z = -2.75$ ,  $p = .006$ , as well as a positive, but non-significant effect for prestige ( $M_{\text{ranks, new work}} = 35.9$ ;  $M_{\text{ranks, traditional}} = 37.8$ ),  $Z = -0.38$ ,  $p = .70$ . Analyses of the bachelor student group also showed a significant positive effect for the new work condition in respect to the ratings for perceived general attractiveness ( $M_{\text{ranks, new work}} = 62.0$ ;  $M_{\text{ranks, traditional}} = 84.3$ ),  $Z = -3.18$ ,  $p = .001$ , as well as a non-significant, yet, also positive difference for the prestige ( $M_{\text{ranks, new work}} = 68.7$ ;  $M_{\text{ranks, traditional}} = 74.4$ ),  $Z = -0.82$ ,  $p = .42$ . Contrary to the findings for the complete group, the bachelor student group’s positive effect for intention to pursue did not reach significance ( $M_{\text{ranks, new work}} = 68.7$ ;  $M_{\text{ranks, traditional}} = 74.4$ ),  $Z = -1.86$ ,  $p = .06$ .

### Mediation Analysis

We performed the mediation analysis procedure proposed by Reuben & Kenny (1986). The conducted one-way ANOVA indicated a significant positive effect for the condition (“new work” vs. “traditional”) on the perceived person-organization fit  $F(212) = 41.82$ ,  $p < .001$ . When the person-organization fit was used as an additional independent variable in a two-way ANOVA, the results indicated a significant effect for person-organization fit on perceived general attractiveness,  $F(212) = 14.72$ ,  $p < .001$ , rendering the effect of the condition „new work“ vs. „traditional“ nonsignificant,  $F(212) = .10$ ,  $p = .75$ . Additionally, the two-way ANOVA yielded a significant effect for the person-organization fit on the intention to pursue,  $F(212) = 11.66$ ,  $p < .001$ . Again, the effect for condition turned nonsignificant,  $F(212) = 1.97$ ,  $p = .16$ . Thus, the perceived person-organization fit mediates the perceived general attractiveness as well as the intention to pursue. This confirms Hypotheses 4 a and b.

Hierarchical regression of perceived general attractiveness was conducted to test alternative models. When person-organization fit was entered as the sole predictor, it yielded an  $R^2 = .61$ , thus explaining 61% of the variance in perceived general attractiveness,  $\beta = 0.78$ ,  $t(212) = 18.13$ ,  $p < .001$ . When the “new work” vs. “traditional” condition, gender, bachelor/master, current job search and job experience were entered as additional predictors, the hierarchical regression yielded an  $R^2 = .64$ , that is a delta of  $\Delta = 0.03$ . For the intention to pursue, the model with

person-organization fit as the only predictor yielded an  $R^2 = 0.52$ ,  $\beta = 0.72$ ,  $t(212) = 15.08$ ,  $p < .001$ . Adding the other variables as predictors yielded a  $\Delta R^2 = 0.01$ .

## Discussion

This study investigated the influence of new work attributes contained in job advertisements on millennials' employer attractiveness perceptions. We used job advertisement vignettes that contained organizational attributes as signals for either traditional organizational practices and values or new work oriented practices and values. To our knowledge, this study was the first to operationalize the currently widely discussed new work concept in an experimental way by including them in job advertisements and empirically testing their effects on perceived organizational attractiveness against job advertisements including attributes of traditional organizations. Based on the findings of the millennial generations' values and preferences, we hypothesized that the new work attributes would lead to higher ratings of organizational attractiveness than attributes of traditional working conditions and practices. The results of the study supported all of the hypotheses. The variation between traditional job attributes and new work attributes significantly influenced millennials' perceived general attractiveness of the organization (Hypothesis 1) and their intention to pursue the application (Hypothesis 2). In both cases, the new work attributes led to more favorable ratings by the participants. As an initial experimental investigation relating new work attributes to well-researched work-design attributes, this study adds to existing findings of the positive effects of work-design characteristics on employee and organizational outcomes (Humphrey et al., 2007) by showing that operationalizing these attributes in job advertisements in a new work framework affects perceived organizational attractiveness. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen & Madden, 1986), the perceived organizational attractiveness can, together with the intention to pursue the job application, i.e. is the intention to perform a behavior, influence an applicants' actual behavior. The study thus adds to the existing research by applying the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen & Madden, 1986) to the job application process for the millennial generation.

The findings of our study are in accordance with the recent findings of de Waal (2018) who showed that high-performance organizations (HPO) are perceived as more attractive. The HPO construct shows some overlap with the attributes investigated in this study, e.g., participation and the opportunity to contribute to the best of one's ability (see Waal, 2018, p. 129).

New work attributes also led to a positive effect on the rated prestige of the organization. As expected (Hypothesis 3), this effect was smaller than the effects for the other two dimensions of organizational attractiveness. The importance of prestige might be understood through the concept of organizational identification and social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This theory states that employ-

ees use the company's image to assess how outsiders judge them. A small effect of new work attributes on the prestige variable might indicate that millennials perceive new work attributes as more attractive based on their own values, but do not expect a social consensus on these values. This is consistent with the findings of Radović-Marković et al. (2014) indicating that millennials value the prestige of companies less than e.g., the generation of their parents. The study furthermore goes beyond existing research in showing that the millennials' values of individualization and independence (Parment, 2013) are expressed in their application behavior and the employers they choose.

Also, as expected (Hypothesis 4), the perceived person-organization fit mediated the effect of the new work vs. traditional attributes on the perceived general attractiveness and the intention to pursue the application. This mediation effect was even stronger than expected. The conducted hierarchical regression analysis revealed that the perceived fit was able to explain a large amount of variance in the ratings of perceived general attractiveness as well as the intention to pursue. These findings are in line with research on the role of the person-organization fit (Cable & Judge, 1996, Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Slaughter et al., 2004). In particular, these results suggest that the concept of fit is a useful perspective for investigating the effects of new work attributes on organizational attractiveness. They highlight that the use of new work attributes in job advertisements does not increase organizations' attractiveness in the perception of all possible applicants. Rather, it will encourage those potential applicants to further pursue their application who perceive these attributes as a good fit to their own values. This is in line with Schermuly (2020) who postulates that the effect of new work actions on psychological empowerment is moderated by variables related to the individual. In the case of a successful application and a resulting job in the organization, this might reduce the danger of disappointment or unmet expectations and increase the likelihood of higher job satisfaction as well as lower turnover intentions (Verwaeren et al., 2017).

Referring back to signaling theory and the instrumental-symbolic framework including new work attributes in job advertisements that signal meaningful work, autonomy and self-actualization might be specifically suited to increase organizational attractiveness because they convey symbolic company information and thus allow job seekers to express their values (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). From a practitioner's perspective, this implies that employers need to also emphasize symbolic attributes of the new work concept in job advertisements and should not only portray tangible attributes such as flexible working conditions, time off programs, or location.

The results also have a number of further practical implications. Overall, the results of this study indicate that the implementation of new work attributes positively affect the perceived organizational attractiveness and generally increases the likelihood of potential millennial job seekers to continue the application process. Both effects

are relevant in the current era of labor shortage (Waal, 2018). The results thus give a first indication that the inclusion of new work attributes in job advertisements can serve to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the recruitment process. Those organizations that already implement new work elements that go beyond flexible working hours should emphasize their specific new work practices in their job advertisements as they increase potential applicants' intentions to apply to the company. Based on applicant self-selection processes this will specifically attract those applicants whose individual values match those of the organization and will reduce the number of applicants who do not share the same values. This has several positive effects for practitioners. First of all, it increases the base rate of applicants in the applicant pool with matching values, thus leading to a lesser likelihood of selecting a candidate with a non-matching value set. This is specifically relevant because companies are required to base their selection decision on job-relevant qualifications (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Secondly, it increases the likelihood for positive long-term effects: Person-organization fit has been shown to be a relevant predictor for performance as well as contextual performance and decreases the likelihood of turnover (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Recruiting employees who are willing to contribute to the organization beyond role requirements (i.e., contextual performance) can provide organizations with the competitive advantage needed in a volatile and complex business environment.

## Limitations and Further Research

Several limitations to this study need to be acknowledged. The central limitation lies in the exclusion of a high number of records ( $n = 66$ ) because participants indicated that they had previously participated in the study. Due to this, only 214 records could be included instead of the pre-calculated 278. The a-priori-power was thereby reduced to 68.6% for a power calculation with the Mann-Whitney test using the pre-estimated effect size of the study. However, the post-hoc power analysis showed a power near 1 for the effect size of  $d = 0.72$  found for the perceived general attractiveness and a power of 95% for the effect size  $d = 0.47$  of the intention to pursue.

We had planned the conduction of a moderator analysis, investigating the perceived person-job fit for the project manager position by using the item "the position of a project manager is a good fit for me". Since the item was presented after the participants read the job advertisement, they seemed to interpret the question with regard to the position of a project manager in the specific presented company. This was indicated by the highly significant differences between the different conditions. We could therefore not conduct the intended moderator analysis. Future studies should alter the position of the person-job fit item and the job advertisement.

Although we conducted an experimental study in which the independent variable was manipulated by the researchers and thus not obtained from the participants

at the same time as the other variables, dependent and mediator variables were obtained from the same persons at the same time and thus form a source of common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003) between the dependent and the mediator variables. The independent variable “new work” vs. “traditional” scenario in job advertisements was influenced by the researcher beforehand such that its evidence was not affected. Further research could, however, try to control for the common method variance between dependent variables and the mediating person-organization fit by obtaining both at different points in time.

We did not further specify our control variable of the current job search. Future studies should differentiate between time-based (e.g., previous work tenure) and amount-based (e.g., number of positions applied to) measures of experience (Quiñones et al., 1995; Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998).

In the present study, we used fictitious job advertisements that included very limited information about the job of the project manager and the required skills and competencies. This was done to suggest that every participant could apply for the job. However, resulting material effects cannot be ruled out. Future studies should seek to replicate the present findings with the use of image advertisements.

Future studies should also seek further clarification of the underlying theoretical constructs, as this was one of the first empirical studies to exploratively link the new work concept (Bergmann, 2005; 2017; Hackl et al., 2017) to existing psychological constructs, such as work-design theory. Further construct validation studies are thus necessary. They could include a more extensive literature review and construct conceptualization to determine discriminant validity from other concepts (Flake et al., 2017).

From a theoretical perspective, future studies could further differentiate between instrumental and symbolic new work attributes, using the instrumental-symbolic framework developed by Lievens and Highhouse (2003) to investigate possible differential effects for instrumental and symbolic inferences (Ganesan et al., 2018).

The study focused on the target group of millennials. Our results highlight that an increase in perceived attractiveness depends on the perceived person-organization fit. Whereas this perception of fit seems more likely to arise in the case of the millennial generation, it might have detrimental effects on recruiting members of different generations. Further studies are needed to investigate generational effects of the perceived person-organization fit when implementing new work attributes.

## Conclusion

In spite of the listed limitations, this study shows that millennials tend to rate the attractiveness of organizations featuring new work attributes (e.g., meaningful and self-determined work, high levels of participation, continuous feedback) in job advertisements generally more favorably than organizations featuring more

traditional attributes (e.g., challenging tasks, hierarchical career orientation). While the effect was highly significant for the intention to pursue an application and the perceived general attractiveness of the organization, it was less strong for the perceived prestige of the presented organization. The effect of the new work vs. traditional job advertisement on the intention to pursue and the perceived general attractiveness was mediated by the perceived person-organization fit. Integrating new work attributes in job advertisements can thus serve as a useful practice for recruiting millennials.

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## Appendix

**Table A1: Pretest Items**

In this company ...

- people work what they passionately and deeply desire (NW1)
- people work to succeed and produce performance (T1)
- employees are free, self-determined beings (NW2)
- employees are driven by success and career advancement (T2)
- work contributes to earning one's own living (NW3)
- the work contributes to earning more than is needed for oneself (T3)
- the work serves the own personal development of the employees (NW4)
- the work serves the further development of one's own career (T4)

**Table A2: Results of the Pretest**

	$t^a$	$p$	New Work <sup>b</sup>	Traditional <sup>b</sup>
NW1	2.74	.009	3.67 (0.92)	2.87 (0.83)
NW2	6.42	<.001	4.33 (0.57)	2.53 (0.99)
NW3	-.40	.693	3.82 (0.73)	3.93 (1.03)
NW4	2.28	.028	4.29 (1.12)	3.47 (1.06)
T1	-5.66	<.001	3.33 (1.01)	4.87 (0.35)
T2	-6.95	<.001	3.04 (1.04)	4.73 (0.46)
T3	-2.91	.006	2.63 (0.92)	3.53 (0.26)
T4	-4.44	<.001	3.38 (1.06)	4.67 (0.49)

Note: <sup>a</sup>  $df=37$  except for NW3:  $df=35$ . <sup>b</sup> means (SD).