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Initial Attraction to Organizations: The influence of trait inferences

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Organization personality perceptions have been defined as the set of personality characteristics associated with organizations. Previous research supports five distinct factors of organization personality perceptions: *Boy Scout*, *Innovativeness*, *Dominance*, *Thrift*, and *Style*. The purpose of this research was to understand how individuals' initial attraction to firms is influenced by their perceptions of the degree to which firms display these traits. Results of the present investigation indicated that organization personality perceptions accounted for significant variance in initial organizational attraction, after controlling for perceptions of the degree to which the jobs at the organizations offer traditional attributes. In addition, several self-rated Big Five personality characteristics interacted with dimensions of organization personality perceptions to influence attraction. Implications for the use of organization personality in future recruitment research are discussed.

1. Introduction

The primary purpose of recruitment is to fill employment vacancies (Rynes & Barber, 1990). Scholars in this area of research, therefore, traditionally have considered generation of the applicant pool to be the starting point of the recruitment process (Rynes, 1991). Over the last several years, however, recruitment researchers have acknowledged that initial attraction to a firm is necessary for members of the applicant population to be motivated to process company-related information and apply for openings (Turban, 2001). This initial attraction of applicants to organizations tends to be influenced by factors outside of conventional recruitment activities and before formal recruitment (Barber, 1998; Cable & Graham, 2000; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Organizations must understand their targeted applicants' knowledge and beliefs about the organization before recruitment so they can identify the types of recruitment interventions that will provide the greatest return on investment (Cable & Turban, 2001).

In the present investigation, we studied a specific set of beliefs previously found to influence initial attraction to organizations, referred to as *organization personality perceptions*. This construct is analogous to *brand personality* in the marketing literature, defined by Aaker (1997) as the 'set of human characteristics associated with a brand' (p. 347). Cable and Turban (2001) called for further integration of the recruitment and marketing literatures. They proposed that the concept of *brand equity* is directly transportable to the recruitment context. Brand equity refers to consumers' brand knowledge, and the degree of equity held by a brand positively influences the effectiveness of marketing strategies. In similar fashion, *recruitment equity* was defined by Cable and Turban as the value of job seekers' employer knowledge, which positively influences effectiveness of recruitment because of job seekers' previous knowledge about the organization. Just as a favorable brand personality positively impacts brand equity (e.g., Callcott & Phillips, 1996; Strausbaugh, 1999), so too should favorable organization personality perceptions positively impact recruitment equity.

Slaughter, Zickar, Highhouse, and Mohr (2004) developed scales to measure individuals' perceptions of organizations' personality traits. They found that participants' inferences about organizations' personality traits were related to perceived organizational attractiveness, job pursuit intentions, and organizational reputation (i.e., prestige). At the conclusion of their paper, Slaughter and colleagues identified a number of potential avenues for future study. The purpose of the present investigation was to address two of these issues. First, we wanted to determine whether organization personality perceptions predict initial organizational attractiveness over and above traditional job attributes. Because research on applicant attraction is often fragmented, examining a few variables at a time, it is difficult to know which variables uniquely influence attraction (Breugh, 1992). As such, the current study contributes to the extant literature by using a validated measure of organization personality perceptions and investigating its relations to initial organizational attractiveness after controlling for a comprehensive list of job attributes. Second, based on the interactionist perspective (Schneider, 1987; Turban & Keon, 1993), we theorized that dimensions of self-rated applicant personality interact with organization personality characteristics to affect early attraction to organizations.

1.1. Organization personality perceptions

Drawing on the marketing literature on brand personality (Aaker, 1997; Plummer, 1985), Slaughter et al. (2004) investigated individuals' ratings of organization personalities. Organization personality was defined by the authors as 'the set of human personality characteristics perceived to be associated with an organization' (p. 86). Note that this definition implies that organization personality is perhaps best termed *organization personality perceptions*. The meaning of personality as it applies to organizations does not capture organizational cognitions, intentions, or desires, but rather captures its social reputation, or the manner in which it is perceived publicly by individuals external to the organization (Hogan, 1991). Second, this definition also implies that organization personality perceptions emerge in a variety of different ways, through a variety of different sources. Potential sources suggested by the authors included television and radio advertisements, media coverage and press releases, the internet, familiarity with the organizations' physical places of businesses and clientele, and/or information from one's family, friends, and acquaintances. Therefore, organization personality perceptions may be formed by virtually anyone who has had some exposure to information about the organization.

It is also important to establish the fit of these perceptions within an existing nomological network that includes organizational image. Cable and Turban (2001) define image as the content of beliefs held by a job seeker about an employer. Image also refers to a general impression that individuals hold of employing organizations before being exposed to recruitment materials (Barber, 1998). The consensus of many authors is that image is an impression based on a loose combination of facts and feelings (e.g., Belt & Paolillo, 1982; Gatewood, Gowan, & Lautenschlager, 1993; Tom, 1971). Therefore, organization personality perceptions are one source of these feelings about an organization, and can therefore be conceptualized as one component of an organization's image.

Slaughter and colleagues developed a measure of organization personality perceptions in a somewhat exploratory fashion. Based on the items retained after undergraduates rated large, familiar organizations on a number of adjectives, the authors labeled the five factors *Boy Scout* (e.g., honest), *Innovativeness* (e.g., original), *Dominance* (e.g., big), *Thrift* (e.g., low class), and *Style* (e.g., trendy). Slaughter et al. (2004) observed that individuals were more attracted to organizations that were perceived as high on the Boy Scout, Innovativeness, Dominance, and Style dimensions, and were less attracted to organizations that were perceived as high on the Thrift dimension.

1.2. Theoretical perspectives on incremental value of organization personality perceptions

Researchers in marketing have distinguished between two types of brand attributes: Those that serve an *instrumental* function, and those that serve a *symbolic* function. Instrumental attributes are tangible characteristics that have functional value and allow users to realize maximum value from their possessions. For example, an individual may choose to buy a personal computer because of its fast processor and large memory capacity. Symbolic functions are less tangible, but they have expressive value. That is, they allow the users to express their personalities or increase their self-esteem. For example, an individual may purchase a personal computer because of its sleek design and popularity among young professionals – characteristics that are consistent with the individual's self-concept (Shamir, 1991). Increasing the symbolic value of a product allows the product to achieve brand equity, thereby increasing the company's status and allowing the company to charge a premium for those products.

Several authors have drawn important parallels between buying products and joining organizations. These authors have suggested that the process of joining and identifying with a new organization can allow individuals

to accommodate not only instrumental needs (e.g., income), but symbolic needs as well (e.g., increasing self-esteem). Drawing on social identity theory, Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994) proposed that people seek to maintain a positive self-concept by joining organizations that they believe the public views favorably. When individuals work for an organization that has a favorable reputation, they are proposed to 'bask in the reflected glory' of the company's status (e.g., Cialdini, Borden, Walker, Freeman, & Sloan, 1976). Organizations with favorable reputations have recruitment equity, which allows them to attract a larger and higher-quality applicant pool (e.g., Fombrun, 1996).

Lievens and Highhouse (2003) applied the instrumental-symbolic framework to studying organizational attractiveness. These researchers found that individuals' perceptions of banks' personality traits (e.g., Sincerity, Innovativeness) explained variance in organizational attractiveness beyond their perceptions of job characteristics. However, participants in this study described organization personality using Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale, which had not been validated for describing organizations. The authors reported that of Aaker's 42 original items, only 15 could be retained because the remaining items' low factor loadings contributed to poor model fit in confirmatory factor analyses. The applicability of Aaker's brand personality dimensions to the task of describing organizations is therefore somewhat questionable. The sample of organizations in the Lievens and Highhouse study was also limited to five Belgian banks, and the banks differed significantly on only three of Aaker's five personality scales. The authors recommended that research be extended to other cultures and industries. Thus, we sought to extend this research, using a validated measure of organization personality perceptions, with a more diverse set of organizations, in the United States.

Hypothesis 1: Organization personality perceptions will explain significant variance in organizational attractiveness, controlling for perceptions of job and organizational characteristics.

1.3. Person–organization (P–O) fit

Research on P–O fit has increased dramatically over the last 20 years. This is especially true in the time that has passed since Kristof's (1996) review paper, which sought to integrate and clarify previous literature on the topic. Given the proliferation of P–O fit research, it is somewhat surprising that little research has actually examined the value of P–O fit to initial applicant attraction. Much of the previous research on the effects of P–O fit in recruitment has tested the interaction

between self-reported characteristics and preferences for hypothetical firms that differ on experimentally manipulated characteristics (e.g., Bretz, Ash, & Dreher, 1989; Lievens, Decaestecker, Coetsier, & Geirnaert, 2001; Turban & Keon, 1993).

Judge and Cable (1997) conducted an important study linking P–O fit to job seekers' attraction to actual recruiting organizations. Using a sample of job seekers who had entered the university recruitment cycle, these researchers investigated the link between Big Five personality characteristics and personal preferences for various types of organizational cultures. The researchers also investigated the relationships between objective P–O fit (the relation between their own personal preferences for culture types and others' perceptions of the organizations' culture profiles) and attraction, and found that objective fit explained significant incremental variance in attraction beyond a number of control variables. Although this study provided important evidence for the relation between P–O fit and attraction, the present investigation differs from the Judge and Cable study in two important ways. First, in the present investigation we studied the initial attraction to an organization based on perceptions that likely were formed outside the job search process. Second, because of the ipsative nature of the Organizational Culture Profile, which Judge and Cable used to measure culture and culture preferences, an overall measure of P–O fit was used in their study. In the present investigation, we were interested in more specific forms of P–O fit, in that particular organizational personality characteristics were proposed to be more important to particular types of potential applicants. In the section that follows, we discuss each of the organization personality characteristics, and the human personality traits (i.e., Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience) that we expected to moderate the relations between organization personality perceptions and attraction.

1.4. Hypothesized self-rated personality × organization personality interactions

When investigating the influence of P–O fit, one needs to specify which type of fit is being conceptualized (Kristof, 1996). We argue that the interactions between individual personality and organization personality perceptions will occur in some cases because of *complementary fit*. Complementary fit occurs when organizations provide resources that are valued by the individual, and vice versa (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987). Individuals with certain Big Five characteristics will be more attuned to certain organization personality

characteristics because those characteristics will provide them with opportunities they value.

In other cases, we will argue that these interactions occur because of *supplementary fit*. Supplementary fit occurs when a person 'supplements, embellishes, or possesses characteristics which are similar to other individuals' in an environment (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987, p. 269). Although the Big Five framework and the organization personality framework are comprised of different dimensions, some characteristics are similar enough such that high levels of a Big Five characteristic may lead to perceptions of similarity to an organization perceived to have high levels of an organization personality characteristic. Although it may seem ambiguous to argue for the influence of both supplementary and complementary fit when proposing hypotheses, Kristof (1996) has suggested that the two types are not contradictory. In fact, Kristof claimed that 'the *optimum P-O fit* may be achieved when each entity's needs are fulfilled by the other *and they share similar fundamental characteristics*' (p. 6, italics in original).¹

1.4.1. The Boy Scout dimension

Companies that are perceived as strong on the Boy Scout dimension are perceived to possess such traits as being friendly, attentive to people, pleasant, family oriented, cooperative, and helpful. Organizations perceived to be strong on the Boy Scout dimension are Target, Disney, and Johnson & Johnson (Slaughter et al., 2004). Individuals who are likely to perceive High Boy Scout organizations as attractive places to work are likely either to possess traits that are similar to their perceptions of the organization's traits or to have preferences that lead them to favor environments that have these specific characteristics.

Individuals who are highly agreeable tend to be more cheerful and talkative (Fiske, 1949), good-natured (Norman, 1963; Smith, 1967; Tupes & Christal, 1961), friendly, cooperative (Costa & McCrae, 1985), and generally more flexible, caring, and courteous (Mount & Barrick, 1995). Agreeableness has also been linked to a motivation to maintain positive relations with others, which can involve a willingness to suspend one's own interests for the good of the group (Buss, 1992; Koole, Jager, Vlek, van den Berg & Hofstee, 2001). Therefore, because they are likely to see themselves as having traits that are similar to the Boy Scout traits, we expect highly agreeable individuals to be more attuned to the Boy Scout dimension.

Individuals high on Conscientiousness may also prefer being in a friendly and cooperative environment. LePine and Van Dyne (2001) argued that Conscientiousness is positively related to cooperative behaviors because conscientious people recognize that by being cooperative, they are able to accomplish more. As the authors noted, '... because highly conscientious people

are hardworking, achievement-oriented, and perseverant, they tend to do what needs to be done to accomplish work' (p. 327). Highly conscientious individuals may therefore be more attracted to organizations that are perceived as being family oriented, helpful, and honest because these would be consistent with their personal values and sense of duty, responsibility, and integrity.

Hypothesis 2(a-b): Agreeableness and Conscientiousness will moderate the relation between Boy Scout perceptions and attraction to the organization. The positive relation between Boy Scout and organizational attraction will be stronger for individuals who (a) are more agreeable and (b) are more conscientious.

1.4.2. The Innovativeness dimension

Companies higher on the Innovativeness dimension are perceived to be more interesting, exciting, unique, creative, and original. Organizations previously found to be perceived as highly innovative are IBM, PepsiCo, and Microsoft (Slaughter et al., 2004). Certain types of individuals will be more attracted to companies they perceive to be innovative because the company's Innovativeness matches their self-concept or enhances their self-esteem (Dutton et al., 1994; Shamir, 1991). For example, conscientious individuals are careful, thorough, hard working, and ambitious (Costa & McCrae, 1985). Conscientious persons tend to thrive in environments where the work is difficult, as they tend to set more difficult goals for themselves (Barrick, Mount, & Strauss, 1993; Gellatly, 1996; Judge & Ilies, 2002). Companies are perceived to be innovative because of pioneering ideas for products or services that ultimately help them to be successful. Moreover, these ideas are often the products of long hours of hard work by industrious employees (Hayes, 2003; King, 1998). Therefore, for a conscientious individual, the possibility of joining a company perceived as innovative matches the person's tendency toward and desire for hard work.

Traits associated with Openness to Experience are being imaginative, cultured, curious, and intellectual (Borgatta, 1964; Hakel, 1974; Costa & McCrae, 1985). Likely because this trait reflects positive attitudes toward learning, Openness to Experience is related to training proficiency (Barrick & Mount, 1991), performance in multi-stage training programs (Herold, Davis, Fedor, & Parsons, 2002), and wisdom-related performance (Staudinger, Maciel, Smith & Baltes, 1998). Because companies perceived as innovative are likely to present constant opportunities for learning – new products, new markets, new job tasks, and new jobs – we expected the relation between perceived Innovativeness and attraction to be stronger for individuals who are more open to experience.

Hypothesis 3(a–b): Conscientiousness and Openness to Experience will moderate the relation between Innovativeness perceptions and attraction to the organization. The relation between Innovativeness and organizational attraction will be stronger for individuals who (a) are more conscientious and (b) are more open to experience.

1.4.3. The Dominance dimension

Companies perceived as being strong on this dimension are described as successful, popular, dominant, busy, and active. Organizations found to be perceived as highly dominant include Coca-Cola, General Motors, Disney, and AT&T (Slaughter et al., 2004). This personality characteristic captures perceived success and strong revenues, and generally refers to organizations that are relatively stable and well established.

Individuals who are highly neurotic tend to be rigid and unadaptable (Wiggins, 1996). As a result, they tend to be fearful of novel situations (Judge & Cable, 1997). Research shows that individuals who are highly neurotic are likely to have difficulty with decision-making tasks (Chartrand, Rose, Elliott Marmosh, & Caldwell, 1993; Milgram & Tenne, 2000) as well as short-term and long-term changes (Terry, Callan, & Sartori, 1996; Watson & Casillas, 2003). Because of these characteristics, highly neurotic individuals should be more attracted to organizations that are more dominant – organizations that are likely to have centralized decision making, that are more stable and well established, and that are unlikely to be constantly changing. Because of their increased ability to cope with change, individuals who are less neurotic (i.e., more emotionally stable), on the other hand, are less likely to be influenced by the degree to which they perceive organizations as dominant.

Individuals who are extraverted tend to be more talkative, gregarious, outgoing, sociable, and assertive (Borgatta, 1964; Costa & McCrae, 1985). Because extraverts are assertive, active, and bold, they should perceive themselves to be more similar to organizations that are higher on the Dominance factor. Moreover, introverts would seem to be at somewhat of a disadvantage in highly dominant organizations where employees are forced to compete with many other employees for recognition, resources, and rewards.

Hypothesis 4 (a–b): Neuroticism and Extraversion will moderate the relation between Dominance perceptions and attraction to the organization. The relation between Dominance and organizational attraction will be stronger for individuals who (a) are more neurotic and (b) are more extraverted.

1.4.4. The Thrift dimension

Companies perceived as more thrifty are described as being low budget, low class, simple, reduced, sloppy,

poor, undersized, and deprived. Slaughter et al. (2004) found that K-Mart, Kroger, Wal-Mart, Subway, Bob Evans, Meijer, and J. C. Penney were all rated highly on this dimension. Because Thrift tends to be negatively related to organizational attractiveness, it is fruitful to consider the kinds of job seekers that would be most likely to be repelled by organizations high on this dimension, and to whom these characteristics matter less. We should note that these hypotheses are somewhat speculative because previous research has established only that Thrift perceptions are negatively related to organizational attractiveness, and has not determined exactly why this is the case.

Because they tend to be ambitious (Costa & McCrae, 1985), individuals who are highly conscientious may be less likely to be attracted to high-Thrift organizations. It is possible that individuals who are highly ambitious prefer not to be associated with organizations that have a negative image. Moreover, highly conscientious persons may anticipate that they will differ sharply from other people with whom they will have contact with in high-Thrift organizations.

It is also possible to predict different relations between Thrift perceptions and attractiveness depending upon respondents' levels of self-rated Extraversion. Because extraverts are outgoing and sociable (Barrick & Mount, 1991), it is likely that they derive a considerable portion of their job satisfaction from interaction with others (Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002). However, because they may perceive that individuals who work for high-Thrift organizations may be simple and low class, such organizations would not be an attractive option for them because they would not enjoy socializing with coworkers who have those qualities. Likewise, because extraverts are adventurous, bold, and enterprising (Barrick, Mount, & Gupta, 2003), they may find working for an organization that is simple and low class to be particularly unattractive.

As discussed above, Agreeableness refers to traits such as helpfulness, tolerance, flexibility, and cooperativeness (Digman, 1990). Therefore, it seems reasonable to suggest that for individuals who are more agreeable, the negative relation between Thrift perceptions and attraction would be stronger, because flexible and cooperative individuals likely prefer to interact with others who are similarly cheerful and cooperative.

Hypothesis 5 (a–c): Conscientiousness, Extraversion, and Agreeableness will moderate the relation between Thrift perceptions and attraction. The negative relation between Thrift perceptions and organizational attraction will be stronger among individuals who (a) are more conscientious, (b), are more extraverted, and (c) are more agreeable.

1.4.5. The Style dimension

Organizations that are perceived to be strong on Style are described as being relatively more stylish, fashionable, hip, and trendy. Organizations perceived to be strong on the Style dimension in past research included Nike, Reebok, Pepsi, and Motorola (Slaughter et al., 2004). Therefore, it seems appropriate to predict that Openness to Experience will interact with Style perceptions. Openness to Experience reflects one's tendency toward being intellectual, philosophical, deep, snobbish, and unconventional (McCrae, 1987, 1994). Openness is also related to creativity and reflects a genuine 'interest in varied experiences for their own sake' (McCrae, 1987, p. 1258). Thus, for individuals who see themselves as being high on Openness, Style perceptions should have greater influence in determining their attraction to the organization, because these individuals are likely to be concerned with the degree to which the organization is progressive and unusual.

Hypothesis 6: Openness to Experience will moderate the relation between Style perceptions and attraction to the organization. The relation between Style perceptions and attraction will be stronger among individuals who are more open to experience.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were undergraduate students enrolled in a large, introductory psychology course at a large university in the southern United States. Participants were rewarded with course credit. All data collection took place during regular class time.

Data were collected at three time periods. Surveys were matched across time periods using student identification numbers. Participants completed a measure of the Big Five personality traits at Time 1; data were collected from 828 participants. At Time 2, exactly 2 weeks later, 777 participants returned (93.8% of the original 828) to rate a randomly assigned organization on perceptions of available job opportunities at the organization, perceptions of job attributes,² and organization personality characteristics. At Time 3, exactly 2 weeks after Time 2, 752 participants returned (96.7% of the previous 777, 90.8% of the original 828) and rated the organization on measures of organizational attraction. Individuals who returned for Time 3 did not differ from those who did not return on age, gender, GPA, number of jobs held, or whether they were currently employed (all $p > .05$). The final sample of 752 participants was 67% female and ranged in age from 18 to 50 ($M = 19.2$, $SD = 2.09$). On average, they had held one full-time job and two part-time jobs. Students majored

in 64 different fields of study, with the largest concentrations in biological sciences, psychology, nursing, kinesiology, and business.

In recruitment research, there is a good argument against surveying participants who are not involved in the job search process. Such individuals likely have been exposed to little factual information about these organizations, and therefore, they likely do not have well-formed ideas about what it is like to work at these firms. However, this is precisely why these individuals were recruited as participants – we were interested in initial attraction based on their opinions and perceptions about organizations before becoming involved in a formal job search process. We return to this issue below in the 'Discussion.'

2.2. Time 1 measures

2.2.1. Big Five personality characteristics

The Big Five Personality Traits were measured with Saucier's (1994) 40-item measure. Individuals indicated the degree to which each of 40 adjectives described their personalities (1 = *highly inaccurate*; 5 = *highly accurate*). Example adjectives were *kind* (Agreeableness), *organized* (Conscientiousness), *talkative* (Extraversion), *relaxed* (Neuroticism, reverse-scored), and *philosophical* (Openness to Experience).

2.3. Time 2 measures

At Time 2, participants were randomly assigned to one of 23 *Fortune* 100 organizations. These organizations were determined to be highly recognizable and familiar to students in a pilot study (Slaughter et al., 2004). Because we were surveying a similarly diverse audience, we used the same 23 organizations as had been used previously. Participants were instructed to pay close attention to their Time 2 organization, because they would be asked to recall that organization during Time 3 data collection. However, 16 of the 752 participants that returned for Time 3 (2.2%) did not recall the correct company. Data for those individuals were removed from analyses. The number of participants assigned to rate each organization ranged from 28 to 35.

2.3.1. Organization personality perceptions

Participants were asked to rate their agreement (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*) with the degree to which the 33 traits described their randomly assigned organization. This was the measure developed by Slaughter et al. (2004).

2.3.2. Perceptions of job attributes

Participants indicated their perceptions of how favorably their assigned company compared with other

organizations in general on 14 job attributes, using a five-point scale (1 = *considerably below average*; 5 = *considerably above average*). To ensure that we were including all possible job attributes that might influence participants' perceptions of the organizations, we used a two-step process to assemble such a list. First, we inspected the recruitment literature for job attributes. The most complete categorization we found was a list of 12 attributes from Konrad, Ritchie, Lieb, and Corrigan (2000) that included income, challenging work, opportunity, work hours, power and authority, easy commute, opportunities for promotion, geographic location, freedom and autonomy, coworkers, prestige and recognition, and supervisor. We also conducted a pilot study to determine whether there were attributes not mentioned in the Konrad and colleagues paper that could influence job choice. Undergraduates ($N = 244$, 68% female, 84% White) at a large university in the southern United States were asked to indicate up to seven job attributes they felt would be important when seeking a full-time job. Phrases mentioned often that did not overlap with the previous list could be subsumed under the categories 'interesting work' and 'dress code.' We added these to the previous list, for a total of 14 attributes.

2.3.3. Perceptions of job opportunities at the organization
We expected individuals' early attraction to a particular organization to be influenced heavily by the degree to which they perceived that there were job opportunities for them at the company. Therefore, we measured participants' perceptions of job opportunities at the assigned organization with a three-item scale. This scale was later used as a condition for inclusion in the analyses for hypothesis testing. The items were: 'People with degrees in my area could be employed by this organization,' 'There are job opportunities for me at this organization,' and 'This organization hires people with training similar to my own training.'

2.4. Time 3 measures

2.4.1. Attraction, intentions, and company prestige

Participants completed three scales adapted from a validity study by Highhouse, Lievens, and Sinar (2003). Each scale consisted of three items. With respect to the company to which they were randomly assigned, participants rated their attraction to the company as a place to work (e.g., 'This company is attractive to me as a place for employment'), their future intentions toward the company (e.g., 'I would make this company one of my first choices as an employer'), and their perceptions of the company's prestige as a place to work (e.g., 'This is a reputable company to work for'). All responses

were made on a five-point scale of agreement (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*).

Highhouse et al. (2003) reported that a three-factor model (attraction, intentions, prestige) provided the best fit to the data for these nine items. However, we performed an exploratory principal components analysis on the nine items comprising these three scales and observed a two-component solution, where all of the attraction and intentions items loaded on the first component, and all of the prestige items loaded on the second component. Thus, we combined the attraction and intention items into one scale.

2.4.2. Likelihood of accepting a job offer

Participants also indicated the likelihood that they would accept an offer of employment at the organization, if one were made. This variable was measured on an 11-point scale, from 0% to 100%, with anchors at each 10% interval.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive statistics and other preliminary analyses

Means, standard deviations, intercorrelations, and estimated reliability coefficients of all study variables are presented in Table 1. Inspection of Table 1 reveals that organization personality perceptions were intercorrelated, but the correlations were not high enough to warrant concerns about discriminant validity. Moreover, a confirmatory factor analysis revealed that the five-factor model of organization personality perceptions fit the data well and better than several alternative models, CFI = .93, IFI = .93, TLI = .92, SRMR = .045, RMSEA = .053 (complete results are available from the first author). All correlations between organization personality perceptions and organizational attraction variables were significant.

3.2. Incremental variance explained by organization personality perceptions

For the remainder of the analyses reported in this paper, we included only those individuals who had marked at least a '3' on each of the items that inquired about perceived opportunities at the organization. For groups of individuals who perceived weak opportunities for employment at an organization, it would not be appropriate to attempt to explain variance in their attraction to the organization. It also appears unlikely that an individual's personality would interact with organization personality perceptions, if sufficient opportunities for jobs at the organization are not perceived. This process left a total of 371 participants. Of

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of major study variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Demographics																				
1. Sex	.33	.47																		
2. Age	19.20	2.09		.15																
3. GPA	3.02	.56		-.17	-.01															
4. Full time	.96	1.21		.24	.37	-.12														
5. Part time	2.33	1.44		.01	.21	-.06	.07													
Big Five																				
6. Conscientious	3.68	.65		-.23	-.03	.32	.02	-.02												
7. Agreeableness	4.12	.52		-.21	-.09	.09	-.08	.00	.81											
8. Extraversion	3.49	.69		-.17	-.00	.08	.02	.10	.79	.83										
9. Openness	3.74	.56		.13	.03	.07	.06	-.00	.06	.00	.75									
10. Neuroticism	2.76	.59		-.13	-.00	.02	-.04	.03	-.17	-.09	.03	.73								
Job attributes																				
11. Opportunity	3.14	1.06		.09	.00	-.05	.03	.04	.02	.04	-.01	.03								
12. Income	3.36	.68		-.01	-.02	.04	-.03	.01	.01	.09	.02	.03	.02							
13. Leadership	3.43	.72		-.07	-.01	.04	-.01	-.04	.08	.07	.06	.01	.08							
14. Power	.85	.85		-.11	-.05	.06	.01	-.01	.08	.06	.02	.01	.01	.59						
15. Promotion	3.47	.77		-.04	-.02	.05	-.03	.01	.07	.05	.08	.01	.12	.44						
16. Autonomy	3.10	.76		-.13	-.04	-.01	-.02	-.01	.08	.02	.10	.05	.10	.30						
17. Prestige	3.51	1.02		-.06	-.05	.01	.02	.02	.06	.04	.06	.01	.05	.48						
18. Challenge	3.11	1.01		.04	-.02	-.03	-.01	-.02	.02	.05	.03	.01	.03	.45						
19. Hours	3.06	.75		-.10	-.04	.00	-.04	.00	.12	.07	.02	-.05	.11	.10						
20. Commute	3.20	.74		-.11	-.04	-.03	-.07	.04	.04	.05	.09	-.05	.14	.03						
21. Location	3.45	.80		-.05	-.01	-.04	-.01	.00	.03	.03	.06	-.03	.14	.10						
22. Interesting work	3.10	1.09		.03	.01	.02	-.01	-.07	.05	.05	.03	-.02	.11	.43						
23. Dress code	2.81	.88		-.02	.03	-.04	-.04	-.06	-.01	-.04	.00	-.10	-.03	.03						
24. Coworker	3.33	.70		-.11	-.05	.02	-.13	-.04	.13	.08	.05	-.07	.15	.21						
25. Supervisor	3.40	.76		-.17	-.08	.00	-.14	-.06	.15	.16	.07	-.10	.14	.22						
Organization personality																				
26. Boy Scout	3.61	.61		-.14	-.13	.02	-.06	-.03	.16	.19	.08	-.07	.16	.27						
27. Innovativeness	3.37	.74		-.12	-.01	.08	-.01	-.03	.13	.14	.10	-.09	.09	.35						
28. Dominance	3.99	.65		-.08	-.02	.11	-.02	.13	.12	.10	.03	-.05	.11	.33						
29. Thrift	1.84	.72		.07	.03	-.12	-.04	-.04	-.11	-.15	-.10	-.06	-.03	-.39						
30. Style	3.19	.97		-.03	-.01	.06	.00	-.00	.07	.05	.05	-.07	.13	.18						
Attraction																				
31. Attraction	2.87	.94		.17	-.05	-.13	-.01	-.00	-.03	.01	.03	-.03	.29	.31						
32. Prestige	3.70	.77		.01	-.02	.06	-.00	-.01	-.09	.12	.09	.03	.07	.42						
33. Accept likelihood	48.74	28.22		.16	-.03	-.16	.02	-.02	-.10	-.04	.02	.02	.25	.27						

Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations of Major Study Variables

Variable	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33
Job attributes															
19. Hours															
20. Commute	.35														
21. Geographic location	.25	.51													
22. Interesting work	.04	-.04	.09												

Table 1. (Contd.)

Variable	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33
23. Dress code	11	01	04	02	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
24. Coworkers	15	18	14	29	05	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
25. Supervisor	15	14	09	29	—06	65	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Organization personality															
26. Boy Scout	17	10	13	29	03	31	28	87	87	—	—	—	—	—	—
27. Innovativeness	10	—01	08	45	—00	32	26	50	43	77	—	—	—	—	—
28. Dominance	10	02	12	28	00	25	20	38	43	—	—	—	—	—	—
29. Thrift	—02	00	—07	—29	03	—17	—16	—37	—44	—56	91	—	—	—	—
30. Style	07	07	10	26	04	24	17	33	52	28	—30	94	—	—	—
Attraction															
31. Attraction/intentions	06	—04	02	43	04	21	17	30	32	18	—25	25	93	—	—
32. Prestige	06	—06	05	45	01	22	19	43	41	36	—40	25	54	87	—
33. Accept likelihood	04	—05	01	34	04	16	12	18	21	14	—20	15	78	80	87

Note: Table includes data only from participants who were present at all three data collection sessions. Because of missing data, *n* for correlations ranges from 698 to 732. Reliabilities for scales presented on diagonal. Correlations > |.07| are significant at $p < .05$; correlations > |.10| are significant at $p < .01$. Decimals omitted from correlations for clarity.

these participants, the number of participants rating each organization ranged from 8 to 23.

To test Hypothesis 1, we conducted hierarchical regression analyses for the attraction variables (attraction/intentions, prestige, and likelihood of accepting a job offer). The results of these analyses are presented in Table 2. Personality perceptions (step 2) explained a significant proportion of variance in attraction/intentions and prestige, and showed a strong trend when predicting likelihood of accepting a job offer ($p < .10$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was partially supported. It is interesting to note that, after controlling for the variables entered in steps 1–2, the coefficient for Dominance is negative in two of the analyses (in contrast to the zero-order correlations, which suggest positive relationships between Dominance and attraction variables). It is also important to note that the regression coefficients were significant only for a portion of the personality variables. The coefficients for Style and Innovativeness did not achieve traditional levels of significance ($p < .05$), and Thrift showed only a strong trend ($p < .10$) when predicting attraction/intentions and likelihood of accepting a job offer.

3.3. P–O fit analyses

Next, we tested Hypotheses 2–6, which predicted self-rated personality \times organization personality perception interactions on attractiveness. In these analyses, we used only two of the three original criterion variables – Attraction/Intentions, and Likelihood of Accepting an Offer. An individual's personality should only influence that person's perception of the organization as a place to work. Personal characteristics would not be expected to influence individuals' perceptions of what others think about the organization as a place to work (i.e., its prestige). Below, we first discuss the results of the moderated regression analyses. Following that, for analyses with significant interaction terms, we also discuss the follow-up subgroup correlation analyses we used to determine support for each hypothesis. For each subgroup analysis, we split the sample at the Big Five variable median (e.g., creating low- and high-Conscientiousness groups), and inspected the correlations between the organization personality perceptions variable and attraction for each group.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the relations between Boy Scout and attractiveness variables would be moderated by self-rated (a) Agreeableness and (b) Conscientiousness. Inspection of Table 3 reveals that the Boy Scout \times Agreeableness interaction did not explain significant incremental variance in either of the attraction measures. Therefore, Hypothesis 2a was not supported. Table 3 also shows, however, that the Boy

Table 2. Hierarchical regression analyses predicting attraction/intentions, prestige, and likelihood of accepting a job offer

Variables entered	Attraction/intentions		Prestige		Likelihood of offer acceptance	
	β	ΔR^2 step	β	ΔR^2 step	β	ΔR^2 step
Step 1						
Full-time jobs	-.09†		-.04		-.04	
Part-time jobs	.03		.06		-.02	
Sex	.14***		.07		.10†	
Age	-.05		.01		-.03	
GPA	-.13***		-.02		-.13*	
		.04*		.01		.04*
Step 2						
Salary	.16*		.14*		.17*	
Leadership	-.02		-.02		-.07	
Power	.01		-.02		-.07	
Promotion	.04		.01		.06	
Freedom	-.05		-.03		-.07	
Prestige	-.01		.07		.08	
Challenge	.15*		.13*		.19***	
Hours	.04		.03		.03	
Commute	-.14*		-.11†		-.15*	
Location	.08		.07		.08	
Interesting work	.18***		-.13*		.12†	
Dress	.02		-.04		.06	
Coworker	-.03		-.03		.06	
Supervisor	.06		.05		-.01	
		.26***		.27***		.20***
Step 3						
Boy Scout	.13*		.22***		.03	
Dominance	-.21***		.03		-.17***	
Innovativeness	.10		.11†		.03	
Thrift	-.14*		-.07		-.12†	
Style	.06		-.04		.04	
		.06**		.07***		.02†
Model R^2		.36***		.35***		.26***

Notes: $N = 347$ for attraction/intentions and for likelihood of accepting a job offer; $N = 348$ for prestige. Standardized coefficients presented. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.

Scout \times Conscientiousness interaction explained significant incremental variance in both attraction/intentions and acceptance likelihood. Results of the subgroup analysis, presented in Table 4, show that for individuals high in Conscientiousness, there were stronger relations between Boy Scout perceptions and attraction and ratings of acceptance likelihood. Thus, Hypothesis 2b was supported.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that the relations between Innovativeness and attraction would be moderated by (a) Conscientiousness and (b) Openness to Experience. Table 3 shows that the Innovativeness \times Conscientiousness interaction explained significant incremental variance in acceptance likelihood, and that this interaction suggests a strong trend explaining attraction/intentions ($p = .092$). Table 3 also shows that the Innovativeness \times Openness to Experience interaction also suggests a strong trend in the explanation of attraction/intentions. Subgroup correlation analyses, shown in Table 4, show the relations between Innovativeness and attraction variables are stronger for

those who are higher on self-reported Conscientiousness, but that the relation between Innovativeness and attraction/intentions was actually weaker for those more open to experience. Therefore, Hypothesis 3a received modest support, while Hypothesis 3b was not supported.

Hypotheses 4a and 4b, which predicted a Dominance \times Neuroticism interaction and a Dominance \times Extraversion interaction, were not supported. Hypothesis 5 concerned the interaction between (a) Thrift and Conscientiousness, (b) Thrift and Extraversion, and (c) Thrift and Agreeableness. Table 3 shows that all of the interaction terms explained significant variance in reported likelihood of accepting a job offer. For attraction/intentions, the Thrift \times Conscientiousness interaction and the Thrift \times Extraversion interactions were significant, but the Thrift \times Agreeableness interaction was not significant. Subgroup correlations, shown in Table 4, showed that the negative correlations between Thrift and attraction variables were stronger for those higher on Conscientiousness, Extraversion, and Agree-

Table 3. Summary of predicted interactions between self-rated personality and organization personality predicting attraction/intentions and prestige

Hypothesis and step	Variable entered	Attraction/intentions		Prestige	
		β	ΔR^2 step	β	ΔR^2 step
H2a Step 1	Boy Scout (BS)	.13		-.13	
	Agreeableness (A)	-.17	.08**	-.29	.03*
Step 2	BS \times A	.21	.00	.37	.00
Model R^2			.08**		.03*
H2b Step 1	Boy Scout (BS)	-.23		-.34	
	Conscientiousness (C)	-.68**	.09**	-.70**	.05**
Step 2	BS \times C	.85*	.01*	.81*	.01*
Model R^2			.10**		.06**
H3a Step 1	Innovativeness (IN)	-.13		-.53†	
	Conscientiousness (C)	-.47*	.12**	-.73**	.06**
Step 2	IN \times C	.64†	.01†	.99**	.02*
Model R^2			.13**		.08**
H3b Step 1	Innovativeness (IN)	1.02**		.74*	
	Openness (O)	.42†	.11**	.35	.03**
Step 2	IN \times O	-.80†	.01†	-.64	.00
Model R^2			.12**		.03**
H4a Step 1	Extraversion (E)	-.24		-.02	
	Dominance (D)	.28	.01†	.09	.01
Step 2	E \times D	.04	.00	-.06	.00
Model R^2			.01		.01
H4b Step 1	Neuroticism (N)	-.23		-.12	
	Dominance (D)	-.12	.02†	-.06	.00
Step 2	N \times D	.37	.00	.17	.00
Model R^2			.02†		.00
H5a Step 1	Conscientiousness (C)	.20		.26†	
	Thrift (T)	.37	.08†	.75*	.06**
Step 2	C \times T	-.70*	.01*	-1.02**	.03**
Model R^2			.09**		.09**
H5b Step 1	Extraversion (E)	.27†		.21	
	Thrift (T)	.38	.08**	.36	.04**
Step 2	E \times T	-.72*	.02*	-.62*	.01*
Model R^2			.10**		.05**
H5c Step 1	Agreeableness (A)	.10		.20	
	Thrift (T)	.18	.08**	.65†	.04**
Step 2	A \times T	-.47	.00	-.86*	.01*
Model R^2			.08**		.05**
H6 Step 1	Openness (O)	.96**		.81*	
	Style (S)	.33†	.04**	.32†	.01
Step 2	O \times S	-.84*	.01*	-.78†	.01†
Model R^2			.05**		.02†

Notes: For H2a, $N = 364$; for H2b, $N = 364$; for H3a, $N = 363$; for H3b, $N = 364$; for H4a, $N = 364$; for H4b, $N = 363$; for H5a, $N = 364$; for H5b, $N = 362$; for H5c, $N = 364$; for H6, $N = 366$. Standardized coefficients presented; those presented are weights in final model. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

ableness. Thus, Hypotheses 5a and 5b were supported and Hypothesis 5c was partially supported.

Hypothesis 6 predicted that the relation between Style and attraction variables would be moderated by Openness to Experience. Inspection of Table 3 reveals that the Style \times Openness interaction was significant for predicting Attraction/Intentions, and suggested a strong trend for predicting Acceptance Likelihood. However, inspection of Table 4 suggests that relations between Style and attraction variables were stronger for those lower on Openness. Thus, Hypothesis 6 was not supported.

We further examined support for Hypotheses 2–6 by graphing the significant and strong-trend interactions, following the procedures outline by Aiken and West (1991). We plotted the regression lines at -1 SD and $+1$ SD for each organization personality variable for the low- and high- self-rated personality groups (also at -1 SD and $+1$ SD). Figure 1 shows the Conscientiousness \times Boy Scout interaction predicting intentions to join the organization. Figure 1 shows that, when individuals perceive the organization to be low on Boy Scout-related traits, individuals who are highly conscientious report lower intentions ($M = 2.65$) than

Table 4. Correlations between personality perceptions and attraction for observed interactions

Hypothesis	Personality variable	Attraction variable	Personality group	
			Low conscientiousness	High conscientiousness
H2b	Boy Scout	Attraction	.24	.35
H2b	Boy Scout	Acceptance	.14	.24
H3a	Innovativeness	Attraction	.29	.38
H3a	Innovativeness	Acceptance	.08	.27
H5a	Thrift	Attraction	-.22	-.35
H5a	Thrift	Acceptance	-.08	-.28
			Low extraversion	High extraversion
H5b	Thrift	Attraction	-.11	-.39
H5b	Thrift	Acceptance	-.03	-.31
			Low agreeableness	High agreeableness
H5c	Thrift	Acceptance	-.06	-.31
			Low openness	High openness
H3b	Innovativeness	Attraction	.37	.28
H6	Style	Attraction	.27	.12
H6	Style	Acceptance	.13	.03

Note: For H2b, $N = 364$; for H3a, $N = 363$; for H3b, $N = 364$; for H5a, $N = 364$; for H5b, $N = 362$; for H5c, $N = 364$; for H6, $N = 366$.

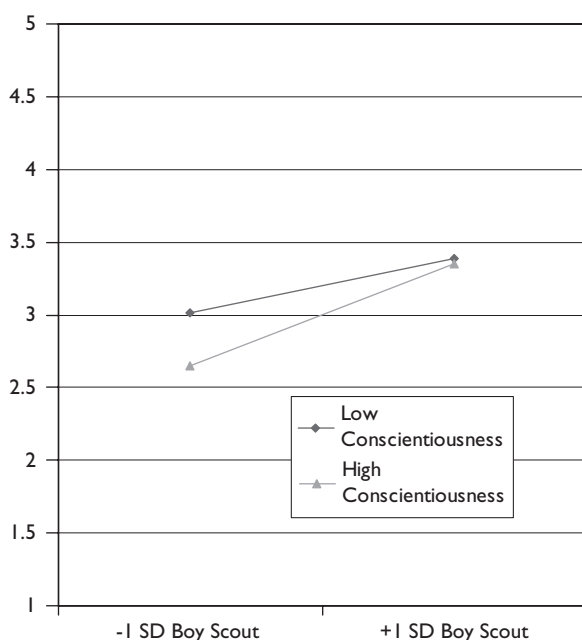


Figure 1. Boy Scout × Conscientiousness interaction predicting intentions.

those who are less conscientious ($M = 3.01$). However, because those who are more conscientious are more attuned to Boy Scout traits, the slope for the highly conscientious group is steeper than for the less conscientious group. Thus, when individuals perceive the organization to be high on Boy Scout-related traits, there is no difference between reported intentions of the low-Conscientiousness ($M = 3.39$) and high-Conscientiousness ($M = 3.35$) groups. Because of space limitations, we do not present all of the graphed interactions, but they tended to follow this same trend: The lowest level of attraction was generally found

among those who reported high levels of Big Five characteristics (e.g., Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness) and those who perceived low levels of a positive organization personality characteristic (e.g., Innovativeness) or high levels of a negative organization personality characteristic (Thrift). However, the relation between organization personality perceptions and organizational attraction tended to be stronger for individuals with high levels of Big Five characteristics (e.g., Conscientiousness).

4. Discussion

In a call for new research directions in the area of employee recruitment, Cable and Turban (2001) observed that:

... the majority of recruitment research that has discussed the antecedents of job choice decisions has focused on job attributes, with a minority of attention devoted to job seekers' knowledge about organizations ... a job-based approach to recruitment is analogous to emphasizing product attributes (which other firms can replicate) over brand image, and therefore appears to be incomplete from a marketing perspective (p. 148).

The present investigation was designed to heed this call for more research on what potential job seekers think about organizations before formal recruitment, and how these beliefs affect their initial attraction to organizations.

4.1. Test of hypotheses

The first major purpose of this investigation was to determine whether personality trait inferences about

organizations explain variance in attraction, over and above perceptions of job and organizational attributes. Partial support for Hypothesis 1 was observed, because incremental variance was explained in attraction and prestige, and showed a strong trend in explaining variance in likelihood of accepting a job offer. It is worth noting that the largest proportion of incremental variance explained was for prestige (e.g., 'This is a reputable company to work for.'). This is consistent with Slaughter et al.'s (2004) definition of the organization personality construct that specified its meaning as something that is public, verifiable, and indicative of the amount of esteem afforded by outsiders. Moreover, our results provide further evidence that a distinction needs to be made among organizational attraction variables. As Highhouse et al. (2003, p. 998) pointed out: 'The generic "organizational attraction" concept in recruitment research may need to be supplanted with a more multivariate conception of dependent variables.' However, it should be noted that we did not find evidence for three factors of organizational attraction, as reported in the Highhouse and colleagues' study, as the attraction and intention items loaded on the same factor. It is possible that attractiveness and intentions are not distinguishable by individuals who are only considering early attraction to organizations.

The current study focused on early attraction to organizations. This attraction is critical because if an individual does not take an initial interest in the organization, it is impossible for the organization to increase its attractiveness to that applicant via recruitment (Rynes, 1991). By focusing on initial attraction to organizations, the current study meaningfully extends previous research by investigating how organizational perceptions influence early attraction, which may predict the utility of subsequent recruitment strategies. Cable and Turban (2001) proposed that existing beliefs about an employer may also have a direct influence on a job seeker's interpretation of recruitment or selection activities. For example, a recruiter who asks tough questions and represents an organization with a positive reputation may be perceived as 'selective,' whereas the same questions may be perceived as 'pushy' if the recruiter represents an organization with a negative reputation.

The proportion of variance in attraction explained by trait inferences beyond that of perceptions of organizational and job attributes ranged from 2% to 7%. These results highlight the importance of considering organization personality perceptions in addition to organizational and job attributes as such perceptions accounted for a substantial amount of incremental variance in attraction. It should also be noted that these results were conservative tests because all possible job attributes were controlled for in the regression analyses.

We also observed that, for two of the three analyses, the sign for the Dominance dimension reversed from a positive bivariate correlation to a negative regression weight when entered on the final step with the other personality perceptions variables. This situation, in which a predictor is positively correlated with a criterion, yet receives a negative beta weight in a multiple regression equation, is referred to as negative suppression (Darlington, 1968; Tzelgov & Henik, 1991). Our results indicate that when a number of other influences on organizational attractiveness are controlled for, seemingly more dominant organizations actually become less attractive in the eyes of job seekers. Inclusion of suppressor variables (e.g., Dominance) in multiple regression models is important because they can reveal intricacies between a set of predictors and criteria and can contribute to our understanding of the nature of complex relationships (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003; Pedhazur, 1982; Tzelgov & Henik, 1991). Because some have suggested that it is particularly important to replicate suppressor variables (e.g., Tzelgov & Henik, 1991), it is worth noting that the pattern observed in the present study is similar to the one observed by Slaughter et al. (2004).

The second major purpose of this investigation was to study the influence of personality-based P-O fit on initial organizational attraction. The remainder of the hypotheses concerned the moderating effects of self-rated personality on the relation between organization personality perceptions and attraction variables. As predicted, we found that Conscientiousness moderated the relation between several different organization personality perceptions (Boy Scout, Innovativeness, and Thrift) and attraction variables. As we had also predicted, the negative Thrift-attraction relationship was stronger among individuals who were more extraverted and more agreeable. This suggests that organizations would do well to portray images of their organization as being highly innovative, helpful, and trustworthy, and to do what is possible to prevent job seekers from viewing the organization as low budget or low class.

Not all of the P-O fit hypotheses were supported, however. Agreeableness did not moderate the relation between Boy Scout perceptions and attraction. Boy Scout had a significant main effect in predicting attraction, suggesting that organizations perceived to be higher on Boy Scout are more attractive regardless of one's level of Agreeableness. It may very well be that individuals at all levels of Agreeableness prefer to work in organizations that provide friendly and cooperative environments (i.e., high on Boy Scout). Our hypotheses that the Dominance-Attraction relationship would be moderated by Neuroticism and Extraversion were also not supported. Recall that Dominance was the only organization personality perception that consistently

predicted attraction and likelihood of accepting a job offer after controlling for organizational and job attributes. Our results suggest that Dominance only has this direct effect in predicting attraction. Specifically, the more dominant an organization is perceived, the less one is attracted to it regardless of one's level of Neuroticism or Extraversion.

Interestingly, results investigating the interactions between Innovativeness and Openness to Experience and between Style and Openness to Experience were in the direction opposite of what we had predicted. We had predicted the relations between Innovativeness and attraction and Style and attraction would be stronger among those who are more open to experience, when in fact, the opposite was observed. One possible explanation for the interaction effect between Style and Openness is that, as suggested by conventional wisdom, on average, highly intellectual persons are less stylish, and highly stylish individuals are less intellectual. Individuals who would find stylish organizations more attractive may be those who are more impressed by 'surface' characteristics than characteristics that are more deeply rooted. For individuals who are highly open to experience, therefore, it is possible that the degree to which an organization is perceived as stylish has little bearing on organizational attractiveness. It is more difficult to generate explanations for the interaction effects of Innovativeness and Openness to Experience. It is possible that individuals who are more philosophical and creative value their free time, and that they associate innovative companies with having to work too many hours and at a pace that is faster than what they would enjoy.

Although several of the P-O fit hypotheses were supported, the forms of the interactions were also somewhat different from what we expected. That is, we hypothesized self-rated personality \times organization personality perceptions interactions because we expected that, for individuals who have certain personality characteristics (e.g., Conscientiousness), there would be stronger relationships between certain organization personality characteristics (e.g., Boy Scout) and attraction. As a result, we also expected that, for individuals whose personality characteristics 'fit' with their perceptions of the personality characteristic of the organization, we would observe especially strong attraction. Although we did observe the expected differences in relationships across different levels of self-rated personality (see Table 4), we did not observe stronger attraction as a result of stronger fit. Rather, we observed much weaker attraction as a result of weaker fit: The weakest attraction was observed when individuals had high levels of certain personality characteristics, and they perceived that the organization had low levels of similar personality characteristics. This suggests that, in determining initial attraction to the

organization, lack of fit may be more damaging than strong fit is helpful.

We see the Thrift dimension as particularly interesting for future study. At the risk of appearing elitist, we suggested earlier that job seekers may be repelled from highly thrifty organizations because they perceive that others have a low opinion of the organization, and because they anticipate having to deal with unpleasant or difficult coworkers, supervisors, and customers. This is speculative, of course; future research, perhaps using verbal protocol analysis, is needed to determine exactly why the Thrift dimension is associated with lower attraction. Such qualitative research would also be helpful for understanding why the other personality perception dimensions are positively related to organizational attractiveness.

The goal of research on initial attraction to organizations is to understand job seekers' attitudes toward recruiting organizations, which are based on knowledge gained before recruitment. If attitudes about thrifty organizations can be made more positive before formal recruitment, these firms may have less of an uphill battle in attracting applicants. Moreover, it would seem that understanding which individuals are most likely to be influenced by perceptions of Thrift traits deserves some priority. It may be that there are other individual differences outside of the Big Five that may provide more explanatory power. For example, some job seekers may differ in terms of their concern for organizations' 'impressiveness' and may pay more attention to characteristics such as Thrift-related attributes (e.g., Highhouse, Thornbury, & Little, 2007).

Although the proposed interaction effects were based on existing personality theory, and they are useful for understanding why beliefs about organizational traits are more important to some individuals, these effects could also be characterized as rather small. The majority of the interaction effects accounted for about 1% of the incremental variance. However, McClelland and Judd (1993) suggested that the odds are stacked against field research and the detection of interaction effects in moderated multiple regression. Incremental variance explained by interaction effects in field studies is typically in the 1–3% range (Champoux & Peters, 1987; Evans, 1985). It is also important to note that these interactions constitute an indirect method of measuring subjective fit.³ In the future, researchers interested in P-O fit based on organization personality perceptions would probably be wise to measure participants' subjective fit perceptions more directly. Kristof (1996) noted that the perception of congruence is a more proximal influence on actual decision making. Judge and Cable (1997) found that subjective perceptions of fit mediated the relation between objective fit and organizational attraction. It is interesting that one of Judge and Cable's fit items was, 'Do you think

the values and “personality” of this organization reflect your own values and personality?” (p. 374). This suggests that job seekers’ perceptions of P–O fit may be based in part on perceptions of similarity of personality.

4.2. Additional limitations and suggestions for future research

One limitation of the present investigation is that individuals’ rating of the attraction variables was a relatively costless exercise. Placing participants in a relatively weak situation may have caused organization personality perceptions to have a stronger effect on attraction when individuals also have objective information about attributes for specific jobs in specific organizations. However, it is important to note that our interest in this study was in fact individuals’ initial attraction to the company to which they were assigned, without exposure to other information about that company. Although experiencing initial attraction to a company is without cost, if individuals are not at least initially attracted, the possibility of increasing their levels of attraction further is quite weak.

In terms of studying initial organizational attraction, Cable and Turban (2001) essentially have argued for understanding the beliefs of individuals who are not currently seeking jobs. A sample of individuals who are adults, and who are currently working full time, would be less appropriate than a sample of 18–20-year-old college students because currently employed individuals are less likely to be considering future prospects for full-time work. They are currently employed and they have already identified their career field. Thus, the range of organizations at which they might consider working is narrower. In addition, because of their limited mobility as a result of already being employed, organizational decision makers may be less likely to be interested in the degree to which these individuals are attracted to their organizations as a place to work. A sample of students who are participating in university recruitment would be less appropriate than the sample used in the present investigation, because individuals who have entered the university recruitment cycle (a) have already been exposed to specific information from various organizations and (b) are specifically considering a small number of organizations, which will clearly influence their responses to an organization to which they might be randomly assigned. Each of these samples is less appropriate than the freshmen/sophomore sample because studies utilizing these samples simply are not studies of initial organizational attraction. We believe that all of these samples will be important for future study of organization personality perceptions. For a study of initial organizational attraction, however,

we believe the sample used in the present investigation is the most appropriate sample.

We do believe that, for studies of initial organizational attraction, it will be important in future research to attempt to determine the specific point(s) during undergraduate or graduate education when assessments of initial organizational attraction are best assessed. Although it is clearly important to collect such assessments before the job search process (Cable & Turban, 2001), if data are collected too early, the motivation of respondents may differ too much from the motivation of job seekers.⁴ That is, while assessing organizational attraction and its antecedents during the second semester of the junior year may be too late (e.g., because students have already begun to collect information about organizations as part of their career search, and thus, the information collected is no longer initial organizational attraction), assessing initial organizational attraction and its antecedents during the first semester of the freshman year may be too early (e.g., because students have not yet seriously considered their choice of career field or what job and organizational characteristics are important to them). Structured interviews with college students and other populations (e.g., MBA students) likely would be useful for determining the point during the educational experience that such assessments would be most meaningful.

Moreover, it is important that future recruitment research consider the appropriateness of the sample in light of the specific stage of recruitment one is interested in studying. Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, and Jones (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of the relationships between various predictors (e.g., organizational characteristics) with applicant attraction and job choice, and found that the majority of studies used nonapplicant samples. Results from this analysis also indicated that the relationships between organizational characteristics and several outcomes (e.g., job pursuit intentions) did not differ between applicants and nonapplicants. In their discussion, the authors specifically argue for the value of laboratory studies in studying the early stages of recruitment: ‘In summary, we feel strongly that laboratory-based research has a substantial role to play in examining recruitment processes, particularly for earlier stages of employee attraction’ (p. 939). Thus, it is important to understand that the results of the present investigation can only be used to generalize to initial organizational attraction, and not to the stages of interviews, job site visits, or final offer acceptance.

Slaughter et al. (2004) argued that organization personality perceptions may be formed with little or no formal contact with the company, and might be formed on the basis of advertising or social information (e.g., word-of-mouth information from individuals who

have had formal contact with the company). Although we agree with this position, we suspect that the relation between personality perceptions and attraction may be moderated by familiarity with the organization. For example, using Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale, Lievens and Highhouse (2003) found that organization personality accounted for twice as much incremental variance (over and above perceptions of job attributes) in an employed-persons sample as in a student sample ($\Delta R^2 = .18$ vs $.09$). This underscores the need for research on organization personality perceptions with individuals who have work experience. Individuals who have more work experience are also more likely to have legitimate information about the job attributes that they might be rating. In the present investigation, ratings of organizations' job attributes may have been based on relatively little factual information.

A final potential limitation of the present investigation is that this study was conducted only in the United States and with only US-based firms. As such, the results of the present investigation may be limited to individuals and firms in the United States. As one reviewer noted, these results may be less generalizable to countries in which government-owned firms have high levels of prestige and are perceived as attractive places to work. Therefore, in the future, it will be important to determine whether these findings apply to individuals and organizations outside of the United States.

Cable and Turban (2001) noted that it is difficult to understand what applicant attraction is rooted in or based upon. The results of our research suggest that initial organizational attractiveness is based on job attributes and perceptions of the firm's personality. This study also showed that the relations between specific organizational characteristics and attraction are moderated by job seekers' characteristics. An important next step in this line of research is to create a model of job seekers' initial attraction to firms that brings together all of these pieces, and attempts to understand how these perceptions are initially formed. For example, in this study we observed relations among personality perceptions, job attribute perceptions, and organizational attractiveness. It would be interesting to study whether perceptions of job attributes mediate the organization personality–organizational attraction relationship. Future work that addresses these issues, while overcoming some of the current study's limitations, will increase our knowledge of the factors that influence initial organizational attraction.

Notes

1. It should be noted that Kristof and others (e.g., Caplan, 1987; Edwards, 1991) have recommended commensurate

measurement (i.e., measurement on the same dimensions) when investigating supplementary fit. However, this is not possible when measuring the personalities of individuals and organizations. Slaughter, Zickar, Highhouse, Mohr, Steinbrenner, and O'Connor (2001) showed that the factor structure for organization personality perceptions did not fit for self-ratings of personality. Thus, supplementary fit can be argued on the basis of having similar characteristics, as opposed to having the same characteristics.

2. It is reasonable to suggest that the set of job attributes is really a mixture of job and organizational attributes. We recognize that, for some of the attributes (e.g., geographic location), whether they are attributes of a job or an organization is open to question. However, in order to simplify the language in this paper, we simply refer to these attributes throughout the remainder of this paper as 'job attributes.'
3. We also conducted the P–O fit analyses using objective fit. In these analyses, personality perceptions were defined for each participant as the mean of all other individuals who rated the personality of a given organization *without* the focal individual's ratings included. The results of these analyses were similar to the results of the indirectly measured subjective fit analyses presented in this paper. Complete results are available from the first author.
4. We thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out to us.

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