

Attractive work for generation Y: comparing young job seekers' preferences with job and organizational characteristics of companies in healthcare, tech industry and the public sector

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the attractiveness of jobs and organizations for young job seekers. Recruitment research identifies which job and organizational characteristics are related to job and organizational attractiveness, but there is a lack of agreement about how to measure and operationalize these characteristics for young, non-college graduates with limited or no work experience. Therefore, we first developed and validated an instrument that adequately captures young job seekers' specific preferences for job and organizational characteristics and used that instrument to gather data from a sample of 1765 undergraduate students. Second, we used this instrument to compare young job seekers' preferences with the job and organizational characteristics of a wide array of companies in the eastern part of the Netherlands. Our study reveals significant differences between young job seekers' preferences for job and organizational characteristics and the job and organizational characteristics of the companies. We found large effect-size differences in characteristics related to developmental opportunities, flexibility in work place (opportunities to work from home), clarity in the job and the physical workplace (availability of digital tools). The results suggests that companies can increase the attractiveness of jobs and organizations for young job seekers by interventions in work design, mainly in the work environment.

Keywords: job and organizational attractiveness; young job seekers; preferences for job and organizational characteristics.

## Attractive work for generation Y

One of the biggest challenges for many organizations today is the upcoming retirement of a large number of baby boomers and the arrival of young job seekers in the workplace (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). In recent years, marketing and recruitment research suggested that these young job seekers (“generation Y”, people born during the 1980s and early 1990s) have unique and new preferences for job and organizational characteristics due to generation effects, age-effects or life-span effects (e.g. Cugin, 2012, Parry & Urwin, 2011). To attract these job seekers it is important to know their preferences more precisely, because job and organizational characteristics are one of the most important predictors of organizational attractiveness and job acceptance intentions (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, Jones, 2005).

Job and organizational attractiveness can be defined as the degree to which a job seeker believes that his preferences for certain characteristics, for example challenge and autonomy, can be attained in the job and organization (Vroom 1964). Thus, to determine the attractiveness, we have to define job seekers’ preferences for characteristics and compare these preferences with the characteristics of a specific job and organization.

Here we identify a gap in the literature. For although recruitment research is focusing on determining which job and organizational characteristics are related to the job and organizational attractiveness, less attention is paid to the operationalization and measurement of job seekers’ preferences for these characteristics. Preferences for job and organizational characteristics are assessed with a diverse array of attributes and there is little agreement on which are the most salient (Carless & Imber, 2007). How these attributes should be measured is problematic as well (Barber, 1998). In fact, quite often measures from the Job-Design literature are used that were developed to measure the work experience of workers, not job seekers (e.g. Hackman & Oldham,

1975; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Furthermore, research is focusing heavily on populations of higher educated college graduates in the United States (Chapman et al., 2005).

Recruitment research identifies four types of characteristics that have strong correlations with job and organizational attraction: objective job and organizational characteristics, subjective job and organizational characteristics, the person-organization fit, and the recruiter / recruitment process. Behling, Labovitz and Gainer (1968) proposed three theoretical perspectives to explain the importance of these characteristics. They labeled these (1) the ‘objective factor’ theory; (2) the ‘subjective factor’ theory, and (3) the ‘critical contact’ theory. The objective factor theory suggests that job choice is the result of the weighing of advantages and disadvantages of job offers in terms of objectively measurable factors such as salary and location. The subjective factor theory suggests that job choice is the result of the perceived ability of the firm to provide satisfaction for deep-seated and often unrecognized emotional needs of the job seeker. This theory emphasizes the fit between personal needs and the “image” of the firm. The critical contact theory states that a job seeker, especially a (young) college graduate, is unable to make meaningful differentiations between job offers in terms of either objective or subjective bases, because the amount and depth of contact they have with the recruiting firm is too limited. Because the job seeker has to make a choice, he is forced to rely on differences in treatment during the recruitment process.

Over the years, many scholars took one or more of these assumptions to structure their empirical research and hence most of the factors related to the three positions have been identified and empirically tested. A meta-analysis of 71 recruitment studies (Chapman et al., 2005) showed support for different propositions in 74 independent samples. Our study focuses on objective and subjective job and organizational characteristics: (1) type of work, (2) work

environment and (3) organizational image, because the meta-analyses reveals that these characteristics have the strongest relationship with job and organizational attractiveness (Chapman et al, 2005) and also because we want to study the factors that are salient before actual contact with the organization (the recruitment process) has started.

Type of work is one of the most important predictors for job and organizational attractiveness (Chapman et al, 2005). In recruitment research, type of work is a multidimensional construct with three underlying characteristics: 1. challenging work, 2. task variety and 3. autonomy (e.g. Powell & Goulett, 1996 and Harris & Fink, 1987).

Not only the type of work, but also the work environment is a very important predictor for job and organizational attractiveness (Chapman et al., 2005). In recruitment research, work environment is a multidimensional construct with three underlying characteristics: 1. the manager, 2. colleagues and 3. opportunities for training and development (e.g. Powell & Goulett, 1996 and Harris & Fink, 1987). We add two extra characteristics to the work environment which might be important for young job seekers: 4. flexibility in working time and work place and 5. the physical work place. Flexibility options respond to the family-oriented needs, which are expected to become increasingly important for young job seekers (Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997). The physical workplace responds to discussions in the popular press about “new ways of working” such as flexible work places and non-traditional workplace furnishing.

Organizational image is the third predictor for job and organizational attractiveness. Image is loosely defined in recruitment research and measured in numerous ways. Image consists of subjective, abstract, and intangible traits such as the degree to which job seekers identify an organization as “intelligent”, “technical” and “successful” (Van Hove & Saks, 2010).

The lack of agreement about the measurement of job and organizational characteristics makes it difficult to get a more precise insight into the types of jobs that are attractive for young job seekers. Therefore, the aim of this study is to develop a new research instrument to measure young job seekers' preferences for job and organizational characteristics related to job and organizational attractiveness and use this instrument to compare young job seekers' preferences with characteristics of jobs and organizations. With this comparison, we can evaluate the attractiveness of jobs and organizations for young job seekers.

This research was conducted in three studies. First, we asked four hundred thirty-three students to describe their preferences for job and organizational characteristics in focus group sessions. The result was an initial list of 114 items for measuring young job seekers' preferences for job and organizational characteristics. In our second study we used the initial measurement instrument to collect data under a large group of students and performed an explorative factor analysis on the half of the sample to examine the data and purify the measurement instrument. Furthermore, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to confirm the derived factor model on the other half of the sample. This resulted in a 86 items measurement instrument which adequately captures preferences for job and organizational characteristics for both lower and higher educated young job seekers. In the third study, we used the instrument to evaluate the job and organizational characteristics of 42 companies in the eastern part of the Netherlands. We asked employees to evaluate the characteristics with a revised version of the measurement instrument that we used for students. By comparing students' preferences for job and organizational characteristics with employee's perceptions about these job and organizational characteristics of a wide array of companies, we determined which type of jobs and organizations are attractive for young job seekers.

## Study 1

### Method

Sample Four hundred thirty-three students from the Netherlands participated in thirty-seven focus group sessions. The average age of the students was 19 years ( $SD=2.3$ ) and forty five percent of the students were female. All respondents were full time students in undergraduate education in the Netherlands: 32% in lower vocational education, 40% in medium vocational education and 29% in higher vocational education from schools and universities of applied science in the Eastern part of the Netherlands. We asked teachers to allow the focus groups during their classroom sessions, about 62% of the teachers agreed to participate.

Procedure We organized focus group sessions with eight to twenty people each. In the first nine focus group we asked students to describe and discuss the job and organizational characteristics which they perceived as important for the attractiveness of a job and organization. With these discussions we were able to determine if the theoretically grounded job and organizational characteristics are related to job and organizational attractiveness for this specific group of respondents. In the next round of focus groups we asked students to specify their preferences for the job and organizational characteristics. With these discussions we were able to determine their preferences for these job and organizational characteristics, and the language in which the respondents communicate about these preferences.

We analyzed the transcripts of the focus groups and clustered the preferences for characteristics in dimensions and translated each dimension into 3-6 items. This resulted in an initial 114-item measurement. We pretested the instrument in an expert panel of six experts who are trained to critically evaluate questionnaires. Each expert reviewed one third of the items using the 'question appraisal system simplified coding form' of Willis (2009), which assesses

quality aspects such as clarity, wording and ordering. Two experts reviewed each question in the questionnaire. Furthermore, we conducted cognitive interviews with five students to test if the students understood the language in the items. We also presented a paper form of the survey to 43 students (lower and higher vocational education) in the classroom and tested if these students could fill in the questionnaire within the time and without any help. We used the outcomes of the pretest study to clarify our items by rephrasing some of the items into simpler words.

### Results

Our analyses revealed that young job seekers associate job and organizational characteristics with different aspects than are measured with existing scales commonly used in this line of research. Furthermore, young job seekers appear to use another language to express their preferences for these job and organizational characteristics. We developed an instrument that adequately captures their specific preferences for job and organizational characteristics in a language that is understandable for both lower and higher educated young job seekers and that connects well to how they perceive these characteristics. We summarized the content of the initial measurement instrument in Table 1. For a more detailed description, see our Dutch article (Corporaal, Van Riemsdijk, Kluijtmans & Van Vuuren, 2012).

Table 1

Overview of preferences for job and organizational characteristics from young job seekers

Characteristic	Young job seekers preferences
Challenge	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Doing tasks that are related with existing knowledge or education</li> <li>2. Learning new things</li> <li>3. Tasks with a clear impact: improving customer satisfaction or improving business results</li> </ol>



Characteristic	Young job seekers preferences
Variety	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Variety in workplace: working in different rooms and departments of the company</li> <li>2. Variety in social contacts</li> <li>3. Variety in type of tasks</li> </ol>
Autonomy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Clarity about how to perform the job</li> <li>2. Freedom in method of work</li> <li>3. Receiving trust to perform a job independently</li> </ol>
Colleagues	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Work atmosphere: humour, no slander, openness, honesty</li> <li>2. Opportunities to develop friendships</li> <li>3. Social support from colleagues: help with problems and execution of work</li> </ol>
Management style	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Respect: dignity, openness, honesty</li> <li>2. Participative style: involvement in decision making process</li> <li>3. Attention for personnel life</li> </ol>
Training/Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Opportunities for development</li> <li>2. Opportunities for training</li> </ol>
Physical workplace	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. a clean, safe, tidy and well ventilated workplace</li> <li>2. availability of materials and digital tools at work</li> </ol>
Flexibility	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Flexibility in place of work: opportunities to work from home</li> <li>2. Timely and fixed work schedules</li> <li>3. Flexibility in working days</li> <li>4. Flexibility in working times</li> </ol>
Image	Responds associate image with the same aspects as mentioned under work environment and type of work: flexibility, work atmosphere and variety.

## Study 2

### Method

**Sample** We used the initial instrument to gather data from a sample of 1765 last year, undergraduate students in technical, economical and healthcare studies (58% lower educated, 42% higher educated) from colleges and universities of applied sciences in the eastern part of the Netherlands. The sample consisted of 980 women (55%) and 785 men (45%). The average age of applicants was 20.4 years (SD = 1.6 years). We asked the students to respond to the survey in the classroom, so the response rate was almost 100%.

Procedure We split the sample in two random subsamples. In order to identify the factor structure of the job and organizational characteristics, we performed an exploratory factor analyses for the first subsample. We used the principal components analysis with varimax rotation. Factors are retained with Eigenvalues greater than one (Hinkin, 1995). We deleted items when they loaded on more than one factor (cross loadings above 0.40; Devellis, 2003) or when their loadings were smaller than 0.40. We assess the internal consistency reliability of the scales using Cronbach's Alpha. The minimum acceptable standard for demonstrating internal consistency is a suggested alpha of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978) .

Hinkin (1995) recommends to also use a confirmatory factor analysis to assess the quality of the factor structure. We used AMOS 21.0 to perform a confirmatory factor analyses for the second subsample to assess the quality of the factor structure. We evaluated the goodness of fit of the models with the goodness of fit index (GFI, acceptable if  $> .90$ ), but also the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA, acceptable if  $< .10$ ), the adjusted goodness of fit test (AGFI, acceptable if  $> .90$ ) and the Bentler comparative fit index (CFI, acceptable if  $< .10$ ), as these tests are less sensitive to sample size. We assess the internal consistency reliability of the scales using Cronbach's Alpha. The minimum acceptable standard for demonstrating internal consistency is a suggested alpha of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). Furthermore, we assess the quality of the factor structures for each of the subgroups of respondents (lower educated, medium educated, higher educated).

## Results

We discuss the outcomes of our analyses for each of the job and organizational characteristics.

### Type of work

For the characteristic challenge we found a three-factor structure. Factor 1 is 'learning

new things' (three items,  $\alpha = .778$ ). Factor 2 is labeled 'performing tasks with a clear impact' (five items,  $\alpha = .754$ ). Factor 3 is 'performance tasks that are related with existing knowledge' (three items,  $\alpha = .691$ ). The confirmatory factor analysis shows that the fit of the model is acceptable (see table 2). The first two factors are in line with the usual operationalisation found in job design literature (e.g. Van Vianen, De Pater & Preenen, 2008), the third factor is added by our respondents. Young job seekers, especially the lower educated students, associate challenging work with tasks that are related to skills, knowledge and abilities (SKA's) they already possess. Their argument is that only with this type of tasks, they can use their skills and abilities and prove themselves.

For task variety we retrieved a three-factor structure. Factor 1 is 'variety in type of tasks' (3 items,  $\alpha = .730$ ). Factor 2 is 'variety in social contacts' (4 items,  $\alpha = .736$ ) and factor 3 is 'variety in workplace' ( $\alpha = .820$ ). The confirmatory factor analysis reveals that the fit of the model is acceptable (see table 2). The first factor is in line with existing measurements of this characteristic in work design research (e.g. Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). The second and third factor are added by our respondents. Our respondents have very strong preferences for variety in working in different teams or with different colleagues in the company and for variation in places to work at (e.g. departments)

For autonomy we identified a three-factor structure. Factor 1 is 'clarity about how to perform the job' (3 items,  $\alpha = .875$ ). Factor 2 is 'autonomy in work methods' (5 items,  $\alpha = .780$ ). Factor 3 is 'Trusted to perform a job independently' (4 items,  $\alpha = .700$ ). The confirmatory factor analysis shows that the fit of the model is acceptable (see table 2). The second factor is in line with existing measurements in job design research (e.g. Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). The first and third factors are added by our respondents. They associate autonomy with clarity because in

their view autonomy means working independently and to realize that, they need clarity about how to perform the job and trust (from the supervisor) to do the work independently.

For the characteristic colleagues we found a three-factor structure. Factor 1 is ‘work atmosphere’ (3 items,  $\alpha = .700$ ). Factor 2 is ‘opportunities to develop friendships’ (3 items,  $\alpha = .780$ ). Factor 3 is ‘social support’ (3 items,  $\alpha = .700$ ). The confirmatory factor analysis shows that the fit of the model is acceptable (see table 2). The factors are in line with existing operationalizations (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Next to these three factors, young job seekers have strong preferences for “humor” in the workplace. Our factor analyses did not confirm an acceptable scale for this dimension. We are currently refining this scale.

For the characteristic manager we found a three-factor structure. Factor 1 is ‘respect’ (3 items,  $\alpha = .876$ ). Factor 2 is ‘participative style’ (3 items,  $\alpha = .815$ ). Factor 3 is ‘personal interest’ (3 items,  $\alpha = .820$ ). The confirmatory factor analysis shows that the fit of the model is acceptable (see table 2). The factors are in line with existing operationalizations (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006).

For flexibility we retrieved a three-factor structure. Factor 1 is ‘flexibility in place of work’ (3 items,  $\alpha = .805$ ). Factor 2 is ‘clarity about work planning: timely and fixed work schedules’ (3 items,  $\alpha = .804$ ). Factor 3 is ‘flexibility in working days’ (3 items,  $\alpha = .742$ ). The confirmatory factor analysis shows that the fit of the model is acceptable (see table 2). The first and third factor are in line with existing operationalizations (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006), the second factor is added by our respondents. They associate flexibility with clarity about working days and working times. Their argument is that if they are clear about when they have to work exactly, they have a lot of flexibility to plan their appointments with friends, do sports, have family outings etc.

The explorative factor analyses revealed that the characteristic training opportunities (5 items,  $\alpha=.872$ ) and the characteristic development opportunities (5 items,  $\alpha=.872$ ) are in fact one single-factor. This factors are in line with existing operationalization (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006).

For the characteristic physical workplace we found two relevant factors. Factor 1 is a ‘comfortable workplace’ (4 items,  $\alpha=.904$ ). Factor 2 is ‘availability of digital tools at work (3 items  $\alpha=.736$ ). The confirmatory factor analysis shows that the fit of the model is acceptable (see table 2). The first factor is in line with existing operationalization in job design research (e.a. Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). The second factor is added for young job seekers. They spend a lot of time on their mobile phones, social media and internet and have strong preferences for organizations where access to these digital tools is allowed.

The confirmatory factor analysis reveals an adequate fit of the measurement instrument for the whole group (see table 2) and each of the three subsamples (see table 3): lower educated students (vmbo), medium educated students (mbo) and higher educated students (hbo).

Table 2

Results confirmatory factor analysis

Characteristic	$\chi^2$	df	RMSEA	CFI	GFI	AGFI
Challenge	84.76	24	.05	.91	.97	.94
Variety	120.31	32	.06	.87	.95	.91
Autonomy	69.20	24	.05	.93	.97	.94
Flexibility	137.68	32	.06	.88	.95	.91
Colleagues	74.99	24	.05	.92	.96	.93

Characteristic	$\chi^2$	df	RMSEA	CFI	GFI	AGFI
Management style	56.22	24	.04	.94	.97	.95
Physical workplace	42.815	13	.05	.95	.97	.94

Note:  $\chi^2$  = Chi Square; df = degrees of freedom; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CFI = comparative fit index; GFI = goodness-of-fit index; AGFI = adjusted GFI

Table 3

Results confirmatory factor analysis for each of the subsamples

Characteristic	Group	$\chi^2$	df	RMSEA	CFI	GFI	AGFI
Challenge	vmbo	62.99	24	.09	.86	.93	.86
	mbo	112.31	24	.07	.86	.95	.90
	hbo	82.37	24	.06	.91	.96	.93
Variety	vmbo	76.19	32	.08	.81	.90	.84
	mbo	66.21	32	.04	.95	.98	.96
	hbo	111.51	32	.06	.86	.95	.91
Autonomy	vmbo	62.35	24	.09	.89	.94	.89
	mbo	85.22	24	.06	.90	.96	.92
	hbo	55.67	24	.04	.94	.97	.95
Flexibility	vmbo	60.05	32	.07	.92	.95	.91
	mbo	137.29	32	.06	.87	.94	.89
	hbo	105.76	32	.06	.90	.96	.92
Colleagues	vmbo	70.01	24	.10	.84	.93	.87
	mbo	117.68	24	.07	.86	.94	.88
	hbo	69.69	24	.05	.92	.96	.92
Management style	vmbo	47.15	24	.07	.93	.95	.91
	mbo	68.11	24	.05	.92	.96	.93
	hbo	55.72	24	.04	.94	.97	.94
Physical workplace	vmbo	26.11	13	.07	.93	.96	.91
	mbo	27.11	13	.04	.97	.98	.96
	hbo	29.46	13	.04	.96	.98	.95

Note: GFI = goodness-of-fit index; AGFI = adjusted GFI; IFI = incremental fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation

### Study 3

#### Method

**Sample** We used a revised version of the measurement instrument as developed in the second study, to evaluate the job and characteristics by employees of forty-two companies in the eastern part of the Netherlands. This sample (N=1599) consisted of employees from the tech industry (22%), health care companies (47%) and the public sector (31%).

**Procedure** We asked employees to evaluate the job and characteristics with a revised version of the measurement instrument as we used for students. Therefore we made a revision in the items: we asked employees to evaluate their perceptions of the job and organizations characteristics instead of their preferences. An example is “In my job I experience that I can use social media during working hours”. The corresponding item in the questionnaire for students was: “I prefer a job where I can use social media during working hours”. We evaluated the quality of the factor structure of the revised measurement instrument with a confirmatory factor analysis (see table 4) and evaluated the internal consistency reliability of the scales using Cronbach’s alpha (see table 5).

Table 4

Results confirmatory factor analysis revised measurement instrument

Characteristic	$\chi^2$	df	RMSEA	CFI
Challenge	266.32	32	.05	.91
Variety	265,48	32	.06	.97
Autonomy	250	24	.07	.97

Characteristic	$\chi^2$	df	RMSEA	CFI
Flexibility	137.68	32	.06	.88
Colleagues	146,35	24	.05	.99
Management style	298,59	24	.07	.98
Physical workplace	131.71	13	.07	.98

Note:  $\chi^2$  = Chi Square; df = degrees of freedom; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CFI = comparative fit index

Second, we compared students' preferences for job and organizational characteristics with employee's perceptions about these job and organizational characteristics. Therefore, we conducted an independent sample t-test<sup>1</sup> to compare the mean-scores of the student and organizational sample. We evaluated the effect size of the differences using Cohen (1988) criteria of .1 =small effect, .3 =medium effect, .5 =large effect.

## Results

We found significant differences between preferences (student sample) and perceptions of job and organizational characteristics (employee's sample). The results are described in Table 4. The most important differences are:

1 Development opportunities: on average, students have stronger preferences (M=4.14, SD 0,68) for this characteristic than employees experience in their job (M=3,10, SE: 0,97). This difference was significant ( $t= 32,17$ ,  $p > .05$ ); and did represent a large-sized effect.

<sup>1</sup> We are currently in the process of refining this method with a more specific analysis such as MANOVA and regression analysis. Feedback is very welcome.



2 Physical workplace - working conditions: on average, students have stronger preferences ( $M=4,26$ ,  $SE: 0,0,74$ ) for this characteristic than employees experience in their job ( $M=3,50$ ,  $SE: 0,80$ ). This difference was significant ( $t= 22.60$ ,  $p > .05$ ); and did represent a medium-sized effect.

3 Training opportunities: on average, students have stronger preferences ( $M=4,12$ ,  $SE: 0,68$ ) for this characteristic than employees experience in their job ( $M=3,40$ ,  $SE: 0,89$ ). This difference was significant ( $t= 19.35$ ,  $p > .05$ ); and did represent a medium-sized effect.

4 Work atmosphere - humor, no slander, openness, honesty: on average, students have stronger preferences ( $M=4,37$ ,  $SE: 0,70$ ) for this characteristic than employees experience in their job ( $M=3,69$ ,  $SE: 0,73$ ). This difference was significant ( $t= 20.29$ ,  $p > .05$ ); and did represent a large-sized effect.

5 Variety in rooms: on average, students have stronger preferences ( $M=3,41$ ,  $SE: 0,87$ ) for this characteristic than employees experience in their job ( $M=2,61$ ,  $SE: 1,07$ ). This difference was significant ( $t= 21.61$ ,  $p > .05$ ); and did represent a medium-sized effect.

6 Autonomy - clarity: on average, students have stronger preferences ( $M=4,18$ ,  $SE: 0,66$ ) for this characteristic than employees experience in their job ( $M=3,58$ ,  $SE: 0,83$ ). This difference was significant ( $t= 20.29$ ,  $p > .05$ ); and did represent a large-sized effect.

7 Flexibility in workplace: on average, students have stronger preferences ( $M=3,11$ ,  $SE: 1,10$ ) for this characteristic than employees experience in their job ( $M=2,28$ ,  $SE: 1,31$ ). This difference was significant ( $t= 15.48$ ,  $p > .05$ ); and did represent a medium-sized effect.

8 Innovative product/service image: students have stronger preferences ( $M=4,07$ ,  $SE: 0,66$ ) for this characteristic than employees experience in their job ( $M=3,60$ ,  $SE: 0,78$ ). This difference was significant ( $t= 12.32$ ,  $p > .05$ ); and did represent a medium-sized effect.

9 Type of workplace: on average, students have stronger preferences ( $M=3,53$ ,  $SE: 0,88$ ) for this characteristic than employees experience in their job ( $M=3,02$   $SE: 0,95$ ). This difference was significant ( $t= 12.32$ ,  $p > .05$ ); and did represent a medium-sized effect.

10 Variety in social contacts: on average, students have stronger preferences ( $M=3,90$ ,  $SE: 0,64$ ) for this characteristic than employees experience in their job ( $M=3,48$ ,  $SE: 0,64$ ). This difference was significant ( $t= 16.58$ ,  $p > .05$ ); and did represent a medium-sized effect.

Table 5

Means (M), standard deviations (SD), and outcomes t-test for each characteristic

Companies (C) /Students (S)	M		SD		Results t-test	
	C	S	C	S	Significance	Effect size (r) p
Doing tasks that are related with existing knowledge or education ( $\alpha=.74$ )	3,95	3,89	0,70	0,68	0,01	0,07
Learning new things ( $\alpha=.77$ )	3,68	4,08	0,84	0,66	0,00	0,24
Tasks with a clear impact ( $\alpha=.85$ )	3,71	3,96	0,68	0,66	0,00	0,19
Variety in social contacts ( $\alpha=.73$ )	3,48	3,90	0,84	0,64	0,00	0,25
Variety in workplace: working in different rooms / departments of the company ( $\alpha=.66$ )	2,61	3,41	1,07	0,87	0,00	0,39
Variety in type of tasks ( $\alpha=.82$ )	3,76	4,08	0,85	0,63	0,00	0,20
Freedom in method of work ( $\alpha=.86$ )	3,40	3,83	0,94	0,74	0,00	0,22
Clarity about how to perform the job ( $\alpha=.88$ )	3,58	4,18	0,83	0,66	0,00	0,38
Receiving trust to perform a job independently ( $\alpha=.87$ )	3,98	4,15	0,77	0,71	0,01	0,11
Flexibility in working days and times ( $\alpha=.80$ )	3,20	3,72	0,95	0,74	0,00	0,28
Timely and fixed work schedules ( $\alpha=.78$ )	3,66	3,98	0,95	0,81	0,03	0,17
Flexibility in place of work: opportunities to work from home ( $\alpha=.75$ )	2,28	3,11	1,31	1,10	0,00	0,33
Social support from colleagues ( $\alpha=.94$ )	3,81	4,05	0,79	0,69	0,00	0,15
Opportunities to develop friendships ( $\alpha=.81$ )	2,97	3,22	0,91	0,90	0,01	0,13
Work atmosphere: humor, no slander, openness, honesty ( $\alpha=.81$ )	3,69	4,37	0,73	0,70	0,00	0,47
Fun in the workplace ( $\alpha=.76$ )	3,96	4,26	0,75	0,83	0,00	0,23
Attention for personnel life ( $\alpha=.81$ )	3,28	3,50	1,04	0,85	0,00	0,09

Respect: dignity, openness, honesty ( $\alpha=.92$ )	3,96	4,33	0,81	0,64	0,00	0,25
Participative style: involvement in decision making process ( $\alpha=.93$ )	3,49	3,97	0,88	0,66	0,00	0,28
Opportunities for training ( $\alpha=.89$ )	3,40	4,12	0,89	0,68	0,00	0,42
Opportunities for development ( $\alpha=.87$ )	3,10	4,14	0,97	0,68	0,00	0,55
a clean, safe, tidy and well ventilated workplace ( $\alpha=.94$ )	3,50	4,26	0,8	0,74	0,00	0,48
availability of materials and digital tools at work ( $\alpha=.84$ )	3,07	3,58	1,06	0,94	0,00	0,23
Type of workplace ( $\alpha=.80$ )	3,02	3,53	0,95	0,88	0,00	0,27
Innovative product / service image ( $\alpha=.76$ )	3,60	4,07	0,78	0,66	0,00	0,31

### Discussion

We contribute with this paper to the discussion on how to operationalize and measure young job seekers' preferences for job and organizational characteristics. Young job seekers associate job and organizational characteristics with different aspects than are measured with existing scales commonly used in Job Design- and recruitment research (e.g. Hackman & Oldham, 1967; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Furthermore, they use another language to express their preferences. Especially lower educated job seekers are not able to understand the language which is used in existing measurement instruments.

The research instrument that we developed and validated using a large sample of students in higher and lower vocational education, adequately captures young job seekers' specific preferences for job and organizational characteristics in a language that is understandable for both lower and higher educated young job seekers.

Furthermore, our study reveals significant differences between young job seekers' preferences for job and organizational characteristics and the job and organizational characteristics of companies in the Netherlands. There were strong differences in characteristics related to (1) development & training; (2) work conditions (physical workplace, variety in

rooms, type of workplace), and (3) social contacts (variety in social contacts and work atmosphere).

The results suggest that companies can increase the attractiveness of jobs and organizations for young job seekers by some interventions in work and organization design, mainly in the work environment. For example, companies can offer a traineeship in combination with extensive support from a senior-employee as an attractive alternative for a fixed-term employment contract. In this traineeship, young people get the opportunity to develop different skills and workplace experience. It will fulfill their strong preferences related to training, development, variety in social contacts, and working in different departments. Second, our conceptualizations of preferences for job and organizational characteristics give organizations insight how to specifically address young job seekers. By using the aspects of the youngest generation in their recruitment material, they would more easily draw the attention of potential applicants. For example, they should communicate very clear to young job seekers about (1) training and developmental opportunities; (2) variety in tasks, social contacts and work conditions and (3) flexibility in time and place of work.

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