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Flexible work practices and organizational attractiveness in Germany: The mediating role of anticipated organizational support

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes how flexible work practices (FWPs) such as flexible work schedules, telecommuting, and sabbaticals affect the organizational attractiveness of companies to job seekers in the German job market. We apply conservation of resource theory to propose that FWPs are positively related to perceived organizational attractiveness. Furthermore, we use organizational support theory to suggest that this link is mediated by job seekers' anticipated organizational support. We test our predictions using two complementary studies among German job seekers: A field study ($N = 188$) at two job fairs and an online scenario experiment ($N = 469$). Our findings indicate that flexible work practices, in particular flexible work schedules and sabbaticals, significantly increase organizational attractiveness as perceived by job seekers and that these effects are indeed mediated by anticipated organizational support. Our results further suggest that this link is independent of job seekers' attitudes towards FWPs and that the effect of sabbaticals is stronger than the effect of either flexible work schedules or telecommuting.

KEYWORDS

Flexible work practices; anticipated organizational support; organizational attractiveness; conservation of resources theory; organizational support theory

Introduction

Organizations increasingly report difficulties in hiring qualified staff, since declining birth rates in most developed countries have intensified the shortage of skilled workers (e.g. Ortlieb & Sieben, 2012). As an organization's competitive advantage is typically based on strong human resources (Wright, McMahan, & McWilliams, 1994), it is crucial for organizations to attract skilled employees. A particular challenge for organizations is to capture the interest of talented graduates, whose demands go ever further beyond purely professional motives such as challenging tasks, excellent career opportunities, cooperative collaboration, and competitive salaries towards a good work-life balance (Deal, Altman, & Rogelberg, 2010). As

a response to these developments, organizations have increased their efforts to introduce a multitude of flexible work practices (FWPs), such as flexible work schedules, whereby employees can autonomously schedule their working time (e.g. Fiksenbaum, 2014), telecommuting, whereby employees may work outside the office (e.g. Fleetwood, 2007), and sabbaticals, whereby employees can take paid leave from work (often at reduced salary) lasting from three to twelve months (e.g. Kröll & Nüesch, 2017).

In this article, we test how and why FWPs increase organizational attractiveness. In line with conservation of resources theory (COR) (Hobfoll, 1989), we suggest that individuals seek to maintain their resources and therefore positively respond to FWPs as a means of doing this. Based on organizational support theory (OST) (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986), we further suggest that the link between FWPs and organizational attractiveness is mediated by job seekers' anticipated organizational support, since they perceive the offer of FWPs as a signal of the potential appreciation and care provided by that organization. While there are many other types of FWPs, such as compressed workweeks, job sharing, and phased retirement (Fiksenbaum, 2014; Fleetwood, 2007; Thompson, Payne, & Taylor, 2015), we focus on three specific FWPs, each of which represents one of the three dimensions of work flexibility defined by Hill et al. (2008): when (flexible work schedules), where (telecommuting), and for how long (sabbaticals) work is conducted.

We test our theoretical considerations by following a two-study approach with complementary designs. In Study 1, we collect and analyze survey data from 188 graduates and students enrolled in their final year who participated in German job fairs. In Study 2, we conducted a scenario-based experiment, in which 469 German students assessed the attractiveness of an organization based on a website that advertised its employment offer with one of four different FWP scenarios. We find that FWPs, in particular flexible work schedules and sabbaticals, significantly increase organizational attractiveness as perceived by job seekers with sabbaticals yielding the strongest effect. Furthermore, we show that these links are mediated by anticipated organizational support and that this link is independent of job seekers' attitudes towards FWPs.

This study contributes to the literature on organizational attractiveness and flexible work practices (e.g. Casper & Buffardi, 2004; Thompson et al., 2015) in several ways. First, we are the first in this context to combine the high external validity of a field study with the high internal validity of experimental data. Both Casper and Buffardi (2004) and Thompson et al. (2015) provide only experimental evidence. While scenario experiments have a high internal validity, the external validity is often questionable. In scenario experiments the study participants assess the attractiveness of organizations after being exposed to exogenously manipulated but restricted information about FWPs. In reality, however, job seekers use multiple sources (Baum & Kabst, 2014) and process much more information about the organization than the information given to the study participants in the scenario

experiments. We therefore use two complementary methods: A field study with young job seekers at job fairs and scenario experiments with university graduates, to examine the relationship between FWP and organizational attractiveness.

Second, we contribute by responding to the call for research that separates and compares the effects of different FWPs on organizational attractiveness (Allen, Johnson, Kiburz, & Shockley, 2013). Whereas Casper and Buffardi (2004) examine only flexible work schedules, Thompson et al. (2015) compare the effects of flexible work schedules and telecommuting, finding stronger effects for flexible work schedules. The present study tests the relative attractiveness of flexible work schedules, telecommuting, and sabbaticals. We argue that sabbaticals are particularly interesting as they not only help to maintain but also gain new resources at work.

Third, our study examines the relationship between FWPs and organizational attractiveness in a non-US setting. This is important as the prevalence of sabbaticals in the non-public sectors and academia is much higher in Germany and Europe than in the US. In contrast to Thompson et al.'s (2015) study conducted in the USA, we find no significant difference between the effects of when and where to work on anticipated organizational support and organizational attractiveness in a German setting.

Literature review and hypotheses

While there are many other types of FWPs, such as compressed workweeks, job sharing, and phased retirement (e.g. Fiksenbaum, 2014; Fleetwood, 2007; Thompson et al., 2015), we focus on three specific FWPs, each of which represents one of the three dimensions of work flexibility defined by Hill et al. (2008): when (flexible work schedules), where (telecommuting), and for how long (sabbaticals) work is conducted. Flexible work schedules allow employees to choose their contractual working time according to their personal preferences (Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright, & Neuman, 1999); telecommuting allows employees to work from locations other than the office (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007); sabbaticals allow employees to take contractually designed, temporary, paid leaves from the work environment to pursue their own interests (Carr & Tang, 2005; Davidson et al., 2010; Kröll & Nüesch, 2017). During their sabbatical, employees continue to receive a salary and social insurance contributions (Siemers, 2005), though these may be reduced, and thus do not lose their legal rights as employees. Various arrangements exist for employees and organizations to finance the sabbatical. For example, employees can save overtime or vacation days on a working time account to accumulate the necessary amount of time for a sabbatical (Necati & Suhre, 2005; Siemers, 2005). Alternatively, employees can get a part-time contract for a certain period of time to collect the necessary amount of overtime for a sabbatical (Siemers, 2005). While flexible work schedules and telecommuting affect daily working life, sabbaticals involve a period away from work entirely. Hence, sabbaticals help individuals to also disconnect from their work environment and

pursue personal or professional self-fulfillment (Carr & Tang, 2005; Davidson et al., 2010). This not only protects their resources at work such as their health (Davidson et al., 2010; Hobfoll, 1989), but also provides them with the opportunity to access and foster new resources of higher value by for instance gaining new experiences and perspectives in life, or attending further education that might contribute to their future career.

Starting as a new trend in the 1960s in Europe (Gordon & Elbing, 1971), FWP were soon adapted in U.S. industries (Hicks & Klimoski, 1981). Since then researchers have examined the impact of different FWPs on work-life balance in China (e.g. Bloom, Liang, Roberts, & Ying, 2014), Denmark and the Netherlands (e.g. Bekker & Wilthagen, 2008), Germany (e.g. Kröll & Nüesch, 2017), Israel and New Zealand (e.g. Davidson et al., 2010), and the USA (Baltes et al., 1999; Hicks & Klimoski, 1981; Leslie, Manchester, Park, & Mehng, 2012). Kröll, Doeblner, and Nüesch (2017) performed a meta-analysis including 28 research articles on the effects of FWPs. They found evidence of a positive link between FWPs and psychological health and job satisfaction across studies conducted in the USA (39.29%), Europe (21.43%), Asia (10.71%), and on global markets (28.57%). These figures show that FWPs are an important topic for organizations across the globe.

In Germany, the need for FWPs has increased over the last few decades due to globalization and increased competition (Hanglberger, 2010). Plantenga and Remery (2010) show that among 30 European countries, Germany is one of the countries with the widest dissemination of flexible work schedules. For example, around half of the women and men in Germany already work under flexible work schedules, behind only Denmark and Sweden. Sabbaticals are more prevalent in Europe than in the USA even outside academia and public service. Legal regulations have facilitated the diffusion of FWPs in Germany. In 1998, for example, a new law called ‘Gesetz zur sozialrechtlichen Absicherung flexibler Arbeitsregelungen’ (Engl. ‘Act for the social-legal protection of flexible work regulations’) took effect that grants social security to employees taking a sabbatical (Kröll & Nüesch, 2017). A report by the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (2010) shows that in 2009 16.1% of privately held companies in Germany offered paid sabbatical programs, which is admittedly lower than in other European countries such as the UK (35.0%), Sweden (30.5%), and France (27.0%), but indeed higher than in the USA (5.0%), as indicated in the employee benefit reports by The Society for Human Resource Management (2009).

FWPs and organizational attractiveness

According to Hobfoll (1989), COR suggests that people are motivated to obtain, retain, foster, and protect their resources to avoid exposure to stress. He suggests that resources include objects, personal characteristics, conditions, and energies that people value. When individuals interact with their environment, they

experience stress if (1) there is a threat of resource loss, (2) resources are effectively lost, and (3) resources cannot be regained in proportion to their prior investment (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999; Hobfoll, 1989). For example, individuals tend to experience stress if their time resources are depleted without being adequately compensated or if they do not have the opportunity to gain new resources by developing personally or professionally. Viewed from this perspective, FWP's enable employees to control and conserve their resources, gain new resources, and ultimately avoid stress (Chandra, 2012) making employment more attractive. Transferred to job seekers, we expect that job offers including FWP's increase the perceived organizational attractiveness, as individuals value the potential for controlling and conserving their resources at work. In line with Thompson et al. (2015), we therefore expect FWP's to positively affect the job seekers' perception of organizational attractiveness, i.e. the extent to which a job seeker desires to work for a specific organization (e.g. Highhouse, Lievens, & Sinar, 2003; Yu & Davis, 2017).

Flexible work schedules increase employees' control of resources through the self-determination of when to work, which reduces work–life conflicts by enabling employees to take care of their non-work demands (e.g. Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005; Fiksenbaum, 2014). Telecommuting provides employees with the ability to choose where they accomplish work tasks. This, for instance, supports athletes in their training and coaches if they have to take care of their teams (e.g. Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Otto & Dalbert, 2010). Sabbaticals protect resources by offering time off work in which employees can pursue self-fulfillment according to their personal preferences (e.g. Baruch, Dickmann, Altman, & Bournois, 2013; Carr & Tang, 2005; Ortlieb & Sieben, 2012).

FWP's differ with regards to when (flexible work schedules), where (telecommuting), and how long (sabbaticals) work is conducted (Hill et al., 2008). This categorization draws attention to two distinct dimensions of flexibility: regular flexibility, which refers to flexibility in determining the work schedule (flexible work schedules and telecommuting), and irregular flexibility, which refers to sporadic breaks from work (sabbaticals) (Bal & De Lange, 2015). Whereas individuals using flexible work schedules or telecommuting are still working daily (Allen et al., 2013), sabbaticals enable employees to take a longer period off (Kröll & Nüesch, 2017). Hence, sabbaticals provide employees with the opportunity to disconnect from work to pursue self-fulfillment (e.g. in volunteer projects) and to obtain new perspectives and renewed vigor (Baruch et al., 2013; Davidson et al., 2010). Additionally, sabbaticals are less commonly offered (e.g. Baruch et al., 2013; Ortlieb & Sieben, 2012) and can thus serve as a differentiation strategy for employers. Considering this, we assume that similar relationships hold for the offering of FWP's and job seekers' perception of the focal firm's organizational attractiveness. We argue that individuals will be more attracted to organizations that offer sabbaticals than those that offer flexible work schedules and telecommuting.

Hypothesis 1: Offering flexible work schedules (H1a), telecommuting (H1b), or sabbaticals (H1c) increases the perceived organizational attractiveness of a firm to job seekers. This effect is stronger for sabbaticals than for flexible work schedules or telecommuting (H1d).

Anticipated organizational support

As expectations about an organization or job strongly influence job seekers' application decisions, organizations design their recruitment activities to create positive expectations about the potential working experience (Cable, Aiman-Smith, Mulvey, & Edwards, 2000) and organizational culture (Judge & Cable, 1997). Turban (2001) shows that recruiting materials can act as a strong signal for job seekers if such materials succeed in indicating that an organization cares about their employees' well-being, which ultimately enhances its organizational attractiveness (Casper & Buffardi, 2004). OST suggests that employees view organizational actions such as offering FWPs as an indicator of being appreciated by their employer (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Fiksenbaum, 2014). Scholars in human resource management have argued that offering such practices has a similar effect on job seekers' attitudes about potential employing organizations (e.g. Jones, Willness, & Madey, 2014; Yu & Davis, 2017). Employees and job seekers tend to personify an organization and its culture (Judge & Cable, 1997), and perceive the support it covers as real care for their well-being (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Yu & Davis, 2017). Employees reciprocate this perceived care with higher work commitment (Eisenberger et al., 1986), while job seekers consider the organization to be a more attractive future employer (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005; Yu & Davis, 2017).

Seen in the light of these arguments, organizations that offer flexible work schedules or telecommuting support their employees by allowing them to control and customize their personal schedules (Chandra, 2012), enabling them to take care of their non-work-related demands, thereby protecting employees' resources and reducing their exposure to stress (Hobfoll, 1989). Furthermore, organizations that offer sabbaticals enable employees to learn, develop, and grow professionally and personally (Baruch et al., 2013). Job seekers will consider these practices as organizational support (e.g. Casper & Buffardi, 2004; Casper & Harris, 2008) and value them with regards to resource protecting and growing effects. Thus, offering FWPs acts as an indicator of a good person–organization fit (Chapman et al., 2005; Judge & Cable, 1997; Yu & Davis, 2017) that ultimately leads to a higher organizational attractiveness (Thompson et al., 2015). We therefore argue that the positive relationship between FWPs and organizational attractiveness is mediated by their anticipated organizational support.

Hypothesis 2: Anticipated organizational support mediates the positive relationships between flexible work schedules (H2a), telecommuting (H2b), and sabbaticals (H2c), and the perceived organizational attractiveness of a firm to job seekers.

Job seekers' attitudes

The degree to which FWP's are perceived as organizational support may differ between individuals. Consistent with OST and its inherent norm of reciprocity, the value of received FWP's depends on the employees' need for and attitudes towards FWP's (Armeli, Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Lynch, 1998). Armeli et al. (1998) showed that perceived organizational support (POS) strongly depends on an individual's socioemotional needs, i.e. a personal demand for positive social feedback such as respect, caring, and approval (Eisenberger et al., 1986), and personality traits. Their findings suggest that among police officers with needs for esteem, affiliation, emotional support, and social approval, socioemotional resources encourage work effort. Furthermore, they show that POS fulfills a variety of socioemotional needs and that the value of POS and the obligation to reciprocate with high performance increase with the strength of these socioemotional needs. Furthermore, scholars have argued that a positive attitude towards and needs for FWP's enhances the anticipated organizational support (Casper & Harris, 2008; Grover & Crooker, 1995). Certain responsibilities in life, such as high civil or private obligations, render individuals more dependent on FWP's for achieving work–life balance. We argue that a need for such practices is likely to increase a positive attitude towards them and a feeling of support.

Hypothesis 3: Perceiving flexible work schedules (H3a), telecommuting (H3b), or sabbaticals (H3c) as essential for achieving work-life balance moderates the positive relationship between FWP's and anticipated organizational support by strengthening this link.

Kossek and Lee (2005) suggest that FWP's should be embedded within a supportive organizational culture to ensure a genuine commitment to all employees. Anderson, Coffey, and Byerly (2002) show that lack of managerial support and the fear of negative career consequences indeed increase the work-family conflict even when accounting for work schedule flexibility. As such, an effective implementation of FWP's requires broad acceptance among fellow employees and should not result in disadvantage through being considered insufficiently committed to the organization (Fleetwood, 2007). However, many organizations still favor a culture of presenteeism (Johns, 2010) that considers employees to be committed to the organization only if they show a high amount of face time at work. Hence, use of FWP's may jeopardize an employee's future career prospects (Giannikis & Mihail, 2011), as physically absent employees earn fewer promotions, have longer performance reviews (Judiesch & Lyness, 1999), and are perceived as less motivated (Leslie et al., 2012). Thus, job seekers who are aware of these potential disadvantages may perceive organizations that offer FWP's as less supportive and hence be less attracted to them.

Hypothesis 4: Perceiving flexible work schedules (H4a), telecommuting (H4b), or sabbaticals (H4c) to be a career barrier moderates the positive relationship between FWP's and anticipated organizational support by weakening this link.

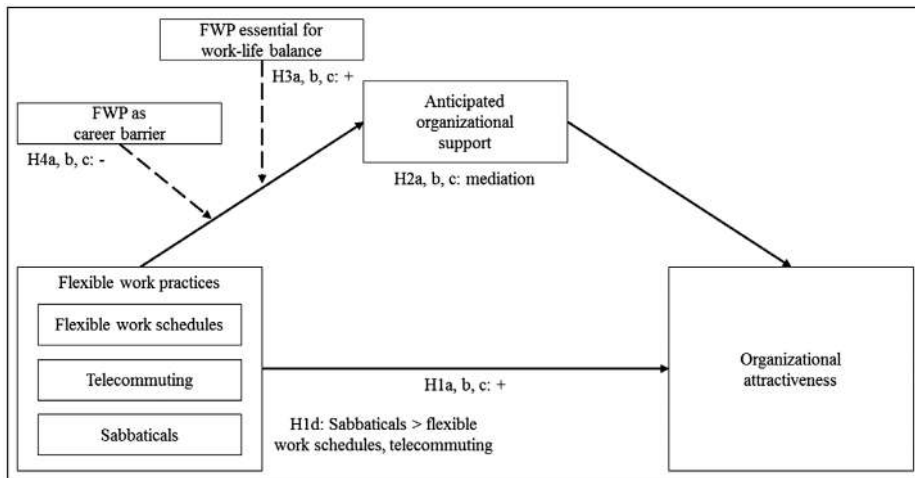


Figure 1. Conceptual model.

Figure 1 depicts our conceptual model that predicts a moderated mediation effect of the three FWPs on organizational attractiveness.

Methods

Study 1

Participants

Participants in Study 1 were first-time job seekers who attended two German job fairs. Two-sample *t*-tests showed that the means of the two sub-sample were similar with regards to age ($p > 0.1$), practical experience ($p > 0.1$), and familiarity with the organization they were asked about ($p > 0.1$). Only the *t*-test for gender indicated statistically significant differences between the two job-fairs. Subsequent analyses, however, revealed that gender neither significantly influenced organizational attractiveness nor moderated the relationships between FWPs and organizational attractiveness. Our final sample comprised 188 participants, who evaluated in total 101 organizations from various industries including consulting, engineering, retail trade, financial services, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals. Approximately half of the participants were female (50.5%) and the average age was 25.8 years (Min = 18, Max = 36, SD = 3.3). More than half of the participants held a bachelor's degree (58.1%) and 41.9% a master's degree.

Procedure

We collected our data at two public job fairs held in Germany in November 2014. Each recruiting organization had a booth with recruiters, recruitment materials, and job advertisements. Providing chocolate bars as an incentive to participate, we invited the job seekers to complete a survey that included questions on

sociodemographic profile, FWPs, personal attitudes, and organizational attractiveness of an organization of their interest to ensure knowledge of the organization's recruitment material, which included information on FWPs. To minimize range restriction in the variables, such as organizational attractiveness, we followed the approach of Jones et al. (2014) and randomly assigned participants to one of two conditions. In condition one, we invited the participants to rate their top choice for employment ($n_1 = 99$). In condition two, participants rated the least attractive organization that still presented a realistic choice for employment ($n_2 = 89$).

Measures

We measured all variables on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree), unless noted otherwise. To validate scales, we conducted a pre-test with 140 job seekers at a third German job fair.

Dependent variable. Our dependent variable encompasses job seekers' perception of organizational attractiveness. We measured organizational attractiveness using a factor based on a five-item scale from Highhouse et al. (2003). The items included (1) 'For me, this company would be a good place to work', (2) 'I would not be interested in this company except as a last resort' (inverted), (3) 'This company is attractive to me as a place for employment', (4) 'I am interested in learning more about this company', and (5) 'A job at this company is very appealing to me'.

Predictors. We followed Kossek, Lautsch, and Eaton's (2006) work by creating variables that capture whether the participant perceived the organization to offer one of the three FWPs. Accordingly, we measured FWPs as single items on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) for (1) flexible work schedules ('I believe that this employer offers me the possibility to flexibly arrange my working schedules'), (2) telecommuting ('I believe that this employer offers me the possibility to execute my work outside the office'), and (3) sabbaticals ('I believe that this employer offers me the possibility to take a lengthy, paid break during my working life'). The recruiting materials at the job fairs included information on the conditions of sabbaticals, e.g. limited length, frequency, potential reduced salary, and if for educational purposes only.

Mediator and moderators. We measured the mediator anticipated organizational support using a factor based on eight items adapted from Eisenberger et al. (1986), as suggested and used by Casper and Buffardi (2004) in their study on job pursuit intentions and work-life benefits. The original scale was developed to measure employees' perceptions of organizational support. Because we questioned job seekers and not employees, we altered the items of Eisenberger et al. (1986) accordingly. For instance, we adapted 'the organization really cares about my well-being' to 'The organization would really care about

my well-being.’ The same adapted measures have already been used in Casper and Buffardi (2004).

Following Giannikis and Mihail (2011), our set of six moderators consists of two items for each of the three FWP that measure whether participants perceive the use of that FWP to be necessary for achieving work–life balance (‘Flexible work schedules [telecommuting, sabbaticals] are essential for me to be able to deal with other interests and responsibilities outside work’) and whether they perceive the use of that FWP to be a career barrier (‘Working under flexible work schedules [telecommuting, sabbaticals] would negatively impact my career prospects’). Accordingly, both achieving work–life balance and career barrier are measured on the individual level. We multiplied the respective six-point Likert items, i.e. work–life balance and career barrier, with their FWP, i.e. (1) flexible work schedules, (2) telecommuting, or (3) sabbaticals.

Control variables. To account for possible confounding factors, we employed a set of control variables widely used in research on organizational attractiveness. According to Chapman et al. (2005), familiarity with an organization is linked to recruitment outcomes. We thus introduced a binary item that controls for familiarity (‘Before this job fair, I knew something about this organization,’ yes = 1). We accounted for work experience in weeks, gender (female = 1), and age in years.

Assessment of measures. Prior to testing the hypotheses, we assessed the validity and reliability of our constructs. We examined the validity of (1) anticipated organizational support and (2) organizational attractiveness by conducting a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The comparative fit index (CFI) was good with a value of (1) 0.96 and (2) 0.90 exceeding the threshold recommended by Kline (2005). The root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) was (1) 0.05 and (2) 0.09 and the chi-squared statistic are (1) 98.24 ($p < 0.01$) and (2) 152.55 ($p < 0.001$), which indicates a close approximate fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). The reliability indices were satisfactory, with a Cronbach’s alpha of (1) 0.78 and (2) 0.82. Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables.

Analysis

As our dependent variable is approximately continuous, we employed ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analyses with robust standard errors clustered at the organizational level to allow for potential non-independence of evaluations of the same organization. Our results were robust when estimating an ordered probit and a Tobit model. To overcome the limitations of Baron and Kenny’s (1986) step-wise approach for mediation analyses, we followed the procedure for (moderated) mediation analyses suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2004), and Hayes (2015). We obtained bootstrapped confidence intervals (with 5000 bootstrapping

Table 1. Summary statistics and correlations (Study 1).

Variables	mean	sd	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
(1) Organizational attractiveness	4.5	1.0	(0.82)														
(2) Flexible work schedules	3.8	1.2	0.24*														
(3) Telecommuting	3.6	1.3	0.27*	0.50*													
(4) Sabbaticals	3.5	1.3	0.30*	0.32*	0.31*												
(5) Anticipated organizational support	0.0	1.0	0.56*	0.40*	0.35*	0.31*	(0.78)										
(6) Flexible work schedules (WLB)	4.1	1.2	0.17	0.14	0.11	0.15	0.13										
(7) Telecommuting (WLB)	3.8	1.3	0.13	0.27*	0.26*	0.17	0.20*	0.41*									
(8) Sabbaticals (WLB)	4.0	1.4	0.11	0.14	0.10	0.18	0.13	0.39*	0.30*								
(9) Flexible work schedules (CB)	2.7	1.4	-0.17	0.08	0.13	0.09	-0.05	-0.04	0.02	0.13							
(10) Telecommuting (CB)	2.5	1.3	-0.12	0.00	0.01	0.07	-0.06	-0.12	-0.13	-0.07	0.39*						
(11) Sabbaticals (CB)	2.6	1.3	-0.08	0.03	0.05	0.00	0.02	-0.06	0.01	-0.07	0.44*	0.38*					
(12) Age	25.0	3.3	-0.06	-0.07	-0.14	-0.04	-0.11	0.04	0.00	-0.03	-0.02	0.00	-0.05				
(13) Gender	0.5	0.5	-0.08	-0.18	-0.22*	-0.09	-0.13	0.12	-0.04	0.14	-0.14	-0.05	-0.18	-0.08			
(14) Work experience	24.4	25.7	0.00	-0.06	0.02	0.10	0.01	0.10	-0.04	-0.03	0.14	0.06	0.01	0.45*	-0.05		
(15) Familiarity	0.7	0.4	0.10	0.08	0.02	-0.03	0.05	-0.04	-0.16	-0.19	0.01	-0.08	-0.05	0.09	-0.21*	0.13	

* $p < 0.01$; $N = 188$; WLB = Work-life balance, CB = Career barrier.

replications) and directly tested the significance of the indirect effects at the five percent level. We preferred OLS over structural equation modeling (SEM), because OLS is the best linear unbiased estimator (e.g. Tabacknik & Fidell, 2014) and more efficient than SEM.

Table 2 shows the results from our analyses of the direct effects and the mediation in Study 1. The first row shows the dependent variable. The second row shows the number of each model. As suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2004), and Hayes (2015), we estimated three models for each of the three FWPs. The first model shows the estimate for the direct effect of the specific FWP on organizational attractiveness, the second model shows the estimate of the specific FWP on the mediator anticipated organizational support, and the third model shows the estimate of the specific FWP on organizational attractiveness when controlling for anticipated organizational support.

Table 3 shows the results from our moderated mediation analyses. The bootstrapped confidence intervals that indicate the statistical significance of the mediation are not included in the Table. We report them in the results section.

Results

Direct effects of FWPs on organizational attractiveness. In Hypotheses 1a to 1c, we proposed that each FWP is positively associated with job seekers' perception of organizational attractiveness. The regression results are depicted in Models 1, 4, and 7 of Table 2. Consistent with our expectations, the coefficients of flexible work schedules ($b = 0.21, p < 0.01$), telecommuting ($b = 0.23, p < 0.01$), and sabbaticals ($b = 0.26, p < 0.001$) are positive and statistically significant. Furthermore, Hypothesis 1d suggested that the effect of sabbaticals on organizational attractiveness is higher than the effect of flexible work schedules or telecommuting. To test this, we compare the regression coefficients across the three different FWPs using the Wald test. The results show that sabbaticals do not yield a stronger effect on perceived organizational attractiveness than flexible work schedules ($\chi^2(1) = 0.03, n.s.$) and telecommuting ($\chi^2(1) = 0.01, n.s.$).

Mediation effects of anticipated organizational support. In Hypotheses 2a to 2c, we suggested that the positive effect of FWPs on organizational attractiveness as perceived by the job seekers is mediated by anticipated organizational support. Models 2, 5, and 8 of Table 2 show that FWPs have a significantly positive influence on anticipated organizational support and Models 3, 6, and 9 of Table 2 show that the effects of the FWPs on organizational attractiveness become statistically insignificant when introducing anticipated organizational support as an additional control variable. All betas of the indirect effects of the FWPs on organizational attractiveness via anticipated organizational support (not included in Table 2) are significant at the five percent level, as the bootstrapped confidence intervals do not include a zero value for flexible work schedules ($b = 0.181, LLCI = 0.111, ULCI = 0.270$), telecommuting ($b = 0.145, LLCI = 0.074,$

Table 2. FWPs and organizational attractiveness (Study 1).

Variables	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
<i>Control variables</i>																		
(1) Age	-0.10	(0.07)	-0.13	(0.06)	-0.25	(0.06)	-0.05	(0.07)	-0.10	(0.07)	-0.01	(0.06)	-0.07	(0.07)	-0.13	(0.07)	-0.02	(0.06)
(2) Gender	-0.15	(0.14)	-0.16	(0.14)	-0.02	(0.13)	-0.04	(0.14)	-0.16	(0.15)	-0.04	(0.12)	-0.13	(0.14)	-0.23	(0.15)	-0.05	(0.12)
(3) Work experience	0.06	(0.07)	0.09	(0.07)	-0.01	(0.64)	0.02	(0.07)	0.05	(0.07)	0.00	(0.63)	-0.01	(0.07)	0.04	(0.07)	-0.01	(0.06)
(4) Familiarity	0.15	(0.16)	0.43	(0.15)	0.15	(0.14)	0.20	(0.16)	0.11	(0.15)	0.16	(0.14)	0.24	(0.15)	0.13	(0.15)	0.17	(0.14)
<i>Moderators</i>																		
(5) Predictor for WLB	0.14	(0.07)	0.11	(0.07)	0.09	(0.07)	0.07	(0.08)	0.14	(0.07)*	0.08	(0.70)	0.09	(0.07)	0.15	(0.08)*	0.07	(0.07)
(6) Predictor as CB	-0.18	(0.06)**	-0.07	(0.07)	-0.12	(0.06)	-0.10	(0.07)	-0.07	(0.07)	-0.12	(0.06)*	-0.07	(0.06)	-0.07	(0.07)**	-0.12	(0.06)*
<i>Predictors</i>																		
(7) Flexible working schedules	0.21	(0.07)**	0.33	(0.06)**	0.01	(0.07)												
(8) Telecommuting					0.23	(0.08)**	0.28	(0.07)***	0.07	(0.07)***	0.07	(0.06)						
(9) Sabbaticals													0.26	(0.07)***	0.25	(0.07)**	0.13	(0.07)
<i>Mediators</i>																		
(10) Anticipated organizational support					0.54	(0.07)***					0.52	(0.08)***					0.51	(0.08)***

N = 188; b = regression weights based on standardized variables except for binary variables; SE = robust standard error; WLB = Work-life balance; CB = Career barrier. The variables are standardized to increase the interpretability of the estimates and to reduce multicollinearity of the interaction variables.
 * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 3. Moderated mediation analyses (Study 1).

Variables	10		11		12		13		14		15	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
<i>Control variables</i>												
(1) Age	-0.13	(0.06)	-0.01	(0.07)	-0.09	(0.07)	0.00	(0.06)	-0.13	(0.07)	0.00	(0.07)
(2) Gender	-0.20	(0.14)	0.00	(0.13)	-0.17	(0.16)	0.03	(0.12)	-0.25	(0.15)	0.01	(0.12)
(3) Work experience	0.10	(0.07)	-0.01	(0.07)	0.05	(0.08)	-0.02	(0.07)	0.04	(0.07)	-0.03	(0.07)
(4) Familiarity	0.42	(0.15)	0.15	(0.14)	0.11	(0.15)	0.15	(0.14)	0.13	(0.15)	0.17	(0.14)
(5) Predictor for WLB	0.11	(0.07)			0.14	(0.08)			0.14	(0.08)		
(6) Predictor as CB	-0.10	(0.07)			-0.09	(0.07)			-0.09	(0.07)		
<i>Moderating effects</i>												
(7) Predictor X Predictor for WLB	0.09	(0.06)			0.02	(0.07)			-0.04	(0.07)		
(8) Predictor X Predictor as CB	0.12	(0.06)			0.11	(0.09)			0.11	(0.07)		
<i>Predictors</i>												
(9) Flexible work schedules	0.34	(0.06)***	0.02	(0.07)								
(10) Telecommuting					0.30	(0.07)***	0.08	(0.07)				
(11) Sabbaticals									0.25	(0.07)**	0.13	(0.07)
<i>Mediator</i>												
(12) Anticipated organizational support			0.57	(0.07)***			0.55	(0.07)***			0.53	(0.07)***

N = 188; *b* = regression weights based on standardized variables except for binary variables; SE = robust standard error; WLB = Work-life balance; CB = Career barrier. The variables are standardized to increase the interpretability of the estimates and to reduce multicollinearity of the interaction variables.

p* < 0.05; *p* < 0.01; ****p* < 0.001.

ULCI = 0.236), or sabbaticals ($b = 0.126$, LLCI = 0.054, ULCI = 0.221). Hence, the positive relationships between the FWPs and perceived organizational attractiveness are significantly mediated by anticipated organizational support.

Moderated mediation effects of the job seeker's attitude towards FWPs. In Hypotheses 3a to 4c, we proposed that the positive effect between the FWPs and anticipated organizational support is moderated by the job seeker's attitude towards FWPs. We tested whether the job seeker perceives FWPs as necessary for achieving work-life balance or whether the job seeker perceives FWPs as a career barrier and expected the first to strengthen the positive effect and the latter to weaken the effect. The results, listed under models 10 to 15 in Table 3, show that all interaction effects are statistically insignificant. The confidence intervals of the indirect effects include zero. Hence, we find no evidence for a moderated mediation and reject Hypotheses 3a to 4c.

Study 2

Participants

In Study 2, we conducted a scenario experiment with 469 student participants, whose average age was 24.6 (SD = 3.9) years. More than half (63.8%) of them were female. Approximately forty percent of the participants were studying in the final year of their bachelor's degree (39%), while 61.0% were attending the final year of their master's degree. The most frequent courses studied by the participants were psychology (21.5%), management (19.8%), and science (18.7%). While 64.6% of participants stated their intentions to apply for a job after their studies, 44.3% were (also) interested in pursuing a postgraduate or doctoral program (multiple answers were possible).

Procedure

We conducted an experiment embedded in an online survey using Unipark's survey tool (<https://www.unipark.com>). Data for our sample were collected in early 2015. The survey was disseminated at several universities in Germany and in social online networks, e.g. LinkedIn, and XING. We raffled 20 Amazon vouchers among all participants as an incentive to participate. In the first section of the survey, we asked the participants sociodemographic questions. Subsequently, we randomly showed one of four artificial websites of a fictitious organization. Afterwards, the participants had to answer questions on FWPs, personal attitudes, and the attractiveness of the organization based on the website's information.

Organization websites. Based on examples from international organizations, we created a website for a fictitious organization with four versions that differed in offering one of the three FWPs or none. To refine these websites and assess how realistic these were, we conducted expert interviews and a pilot study, and

adjusted to the feedback we received. The resulting four websites were identical in style and presented identical information with the sole exception of offering one of the three FWP or none.

Manipulation. We randomly assigned each of the 469 participants to one of the four FWP conditions: flexible work schedule, telecommuting, sabbaticals, or no FWPs. Whereas the control website contained no information on flexible working conditions, the treatment websites included one of the following statements. (1) The flexible work schedules condition: ‘vookee¹ allows you to flexibly arrange your working hours. You can freely determine your starting and leaving times within a given framework.’ (2) The telecommuting condition: ‘vookee allows you to work outside the office. Professional telecommuting solutions allow you to work location-independently.’ (3) The sabbaticals condition: ‘We allow you to take a paid leave from the work environment for personal reasons lasting from 3 to 12 months. You can choose for yourself if you want to use your paid leave for family, for further education, or for other personal interests. We jointly prepare a concept and determine the appropriate time for your paid leave.’

To ensure that the participants had adequately understood the assigned condition, we integrated a manipulation check and conducted analyses of variances to compare the means of the four different conditions. Furthermore, we performed the Scheffé-test (Scheffé, 1959) to identify differences in the means. The results show that the four manipulation conditions were significantly distinguishable from each other. Hence, the participants in each treatment group recognized correctly that one website offered flexible work schedules ($F(520) = 120.22, p < 0.001$), one website offered telecommuting ($F(520) = 163.86, p < 0.001$), and one website offered sabbaticals ($F(520) = 250.64, p < 0.001$), and all four websites offered programs for further education ($F(520) = 0.44, p > 0.1$). In general, the participants perceived the websites as realistic and felt engaged in their role as job seekers, as indicated by the means and standard deviations of the 6-point scale for ‘The organization’s website could exist in reality’ ($M = 4.93, SD = 1.22$) and ‘I really tried to answer the question from the point of view of a job seeker’ ($M = 5.15, SD = 1.07$).

Measures

We employed the same set of measures in Study 2 as in Study 1 (i.e. organizational attractiveness, perceiving the use of that FWP to be necessary for achieving work–life balance, perceiving the use of that FWP to be a career barrier, anticipated organizational support, age, gender and work experience) with few exceptions, which we will describe in what follows.

Predictors. In contrast to Study 1, the predictors in Study 2 represent the three treatment dummies that indicate which FWP condition the participant was offered (1 = offered), i.e. (1) the flexible work schedule condition, (2) the telecommuting condition, or (3) the sabbaticals condition.

Control variables. We replaced the binary item that controls for familiarity ('Before this job fair, I knew something about this organization,' yes = 1) employed in Study 1 with controls for students' number of semesters and intention to work (yes = 1) after graduation in study 2.

Assessment of measures. A CFA showed that the fit of the two-factor model to the data was good. The CFI value was 0.98, and the RMSEA value was 0.05. All factor loadings were significant ($p < 0.001$), demonstrating convergent validity. Beyond that, the measures of anticipated organizational support ($\alpha = 0.86$) and organizational attractiveness ($\alpha = 0.91$) had good reliabilities. Table 4 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables.

Analysis

We followed the same analytical approach in Study 2 as in Study 1. Accordingly, we estimated OLS regressions and further employed the procedure for (moderated) mediation analyses suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2004), and Hayes (2015). Tables 5 and 6 follow the same logic as Tables 2 and 3.

Results

Direct effects of FWPs on organizational attractiveness. In Hypotheses 1a to 1c, we proposed that each FWP is positively associated with perceived organizational attractiveness. In contrast to our theoretical considerations, the Models 16, 19, and 22 in Table 5 show that only flexible work schedules ($b = 0.24, p < 0.05$) and sabbaticals ($b = 0.54, p < 0.001$) significantly increase job seekers' perception of organizational attractiveness, whereas the influence of telecommuting is statistically not significant. Hence, the results provide evidence for Hypotheses 1a and 1c, but show no support for Hypothesis 1b. Furthermore, Hypothesis 1d suggested that the effect of sabbaticals on perceived organizational attractiveness is higher than the effect of flexible work schedules or telecommuting. To test this, we compare the regression coefficients across the three different FWPs using the Wald test. The results of indicate that the effect of sabbaticals on job seekers' perception of organizational attractiveness is significantly stronger than those of telecommuting ($\chi^2(1) = 9.66, p < 0.05$) or flexible work schedules ($\chi^2(1) = 7.26, p < 0.05$). Hence, we find support for Hypothesis 1d.

Mediation effects of anticipated organizational support. In Hypotheses 2a to 2c, we suggested that the positive effect of FWPs on perceived organizational attractiveness is mediated by anticipated organizational support. In Hypotheses 2a to 2c, we suggested that the positive effect of FWPs on organizational attractiveness as perceived by the job seekers is mediated by anticipated organizational support. Models 17, 20, and 23 of Table 5 show that FWPs have a significantly positive influence on anticipated organizational support and Models 18, 21, and 24 of Table 5 show that the effects of the FWPs on

Table 4. Summary statistics and correlations (Study 2).

Variables	mean	sd	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
(1) Organizational attractiveness	0.0	1.0	(0.91)														
(2) Flexible work schedules	0.2	0.4	0.05														
(3) Telecommuting	0.3	0.4	-0.07	-0.33*													
(4) Sabbaticals	0.3	0.4	0.18*	-0.33*	-0.35*												
(5) AOS	0.0	1.0	0.73*	0.12	-0.06	0.16*	(0.86)										
(6) Flexible work schedules (WLB)	4.7	1.3	0.31*	0.08	-0.12	0.13*	0.25*										
(7) Telecommuting (WLB)	4.2	1.4	-0.16*	-0.09	0.08	-0.04	-0.10	-0.30*									
8. Sabbaticals (WLB)	4.0	1.4	0.20*	0.04	0.00	0.07	0.20*	0.53*	-0.17*								
(9) Flexible work schedules (CB)	1.8	1.0	-0.11	0.02	0.00	-0.02	-0.08	-0.17*	0.44*	-0.24*							
(10) Telecommuting (CB)	2.2	1.3	0.11	-0.07	0.01	0.12*	0.11	0.31*	-0.17*	0.41*	-0.12*						
(11) Sabbaticals (CB)	2.6	1.4	-0.07	0.02	0.01	-0.07	-0.07	-0.09	0.36*	-0.13*	0.38*	-0.33*					
(12) Age	24.1	3.6	0.00	-0.03	-0.01	0.09	-0.03	0.12	-0.04	0.13*	0.01	0.03	0.02				
13. Gender	0.6	0.5	0.04	0.02	-0.05	-0.02	0.03	0.07	-0.18*	0.06	-0.17*	0.12*	-0.14*	-0.07			
(14) Work experience	1.6	1.8	0.02	0.08	-0.06	0.05	0.04	0.06	-0.01	0.06	0.00	-0.01	0.04	0.43*	-0.06		
(15) Semester	4.5	2.8	-0.02	0.00	0.05	-0.02	-0.02	-0.01	0.05	0.02	0.09	-0.02	0.02	0.23*	0.03	0.18*	
(16) Intention to work	0.6	0.5	0.11	0.01	-0.05	0.02	0.06	0.03	-0.06	-0.09	0.00	-0.03	0.02	0.15*	-0.07	0.09	-0.19*

N = 469. AOS = Anticipated organizational support, WLB = Work-life balance, CB = Career barrier. **p* < 0.01.

Table 5. FWPs and organizational attractiveness (Study 2).

Variables	16			17			18			19			20			21			22			23			24		
	Organizational attractiveness	Anticipated organizational support	Organizational attractiveness	Organizational attractiveness	Anticipated organizational support	Organizational attractiveness	Organizational attractiveness	Anticipated organizational support	Organizational attractiveness	Organizational attractiveness	Anticipated organizational support	Organizational attractiveness	Organizational attractiveness	Anticipated organizational support	Organizational attractiveness	Organizational attractiveness	Anticipated organizational support	Organizational attractiveness	Organizational attractiveness	Anticipated organizational support	Organizational attractiveness	Organizational attractiveness	Anticipated organizational support	Organizational attractiveness			
<i>Control variables</i>																											
(1) Age	-0.03 (0.09)	-0.01 (0.08)	-0.03 (0.08)	-0.28 (0.13)*	-0.20 (0.15)	-0.14 (0.09)	0.01 (0.07)	0.01 (0.10)	0.01 (0.12)	0.01 (0.10)	0.01 (0.10)	0.01 (0.12)	0.01 (0.07)	0.01 (0.10)	0.01 (0.12)	0.01 (0.10)	0.01 (0.10)	0.01 (0.12)	0.01 (0.07)	0.01 (0.10)	0.01 (0.12)	0.01 (0.10)	0.01 (0.10)	0.01 (0.12)	0.01 (0.10)		
(2) Gender	0.07 (0.12)	-0.10 (0.12)	0.14 (0.10)	0.15 (0.13)	0.19 (0.13)	0.01 (0.10)	0.01 (0.12)	0.01 (0.10)	0.01 (0.13)	0.01 (0.10)	0.01 (0.10)	0.01 (0.13)	0.01 (0.07)	0.01 (0.10)	0.01 (0.12)	0.01 (0.10)	0.01 (0.10)	0.01 (0.13)	0.01 (0.07)	0.01 (0.10)	0.01 (0.12)	0.01 (0.10)	0.01 (0.10)	0.01 (0.12)	0.01 (0.10)		
(3) Work experience	0.03 (0.06)	0.06 (0.07)	-0.01 (0.06)	0.09 (0.08)	0.11 (0.08)	0.01 (0.06)	-0.05 (0.07)	-0.06 (0.08)	0.09 (0.08)	0.01 (0.06)	-0.05 (0.07)	-0.06 (0.08)	0.10 (0.07)	0.01 (0.06)	-0.05 (0.07)	-0.06 (0.08)	0.10 (0.07)	0.01 (0.06)	0.10 (0.07)	-0.05 (0.07)	-0.06 (0.08)	0.10 (0.07)	0.01 (0.06)	-0.02 (0.06)	0.02 (0.06)		
(4) Semester	0.06 (0.09)	0.09 (0.08)	0.00 (0.07)	0.06 (0.09)	0.00 (0.10)	0.06 (0.09)	0.10 (0.07)	0.06 (0.09)	0.06 (0.09)	0.06 (0.09)	0.06 (0.09)	0.06 (0.09)	0.10 (0.07)	0.06 (0.09)	0.10 (0.07)	0.06 (0.09)	0.06 (0.09)	0.10 (0.07)	0.10 (0.07)	0.10 (0.07)	0.10 (0.07)	0.10 (0.07)	0.10 (0.07)	0.10 (0.07)	0.10 (0.07)		
(5) Intention to work	0.24 (0.13)	0.14 (0.13)	0.15 (0.11)	0.49 (0.14)***	0.22 (0.14)	0.34 (0.11)	0.13 (0.13)	0.22 (0.14)	0.22 (0.14)	0.34 (0.11)	0.13 (0.13)	0.22 (0.14)	0.13 (0.13)	0.22 (0.14)	0.13 (0.13)	0.22 (0.14)	0.13 (0.13)	0.22 (0.14)	0.13 (0.13)	0.22 (0.14)	0.13 (0.13)	0.22 (0.14)	0.13 (0.13)	0.22 (0.14)	0.13 (0.13)		
<i>Moderators</i>																											
(6) Predictor for WLB	0.29 (0.07)***	0.26 (0.08)**	0.12 (0.05)*	0.24 (0.07)**	0.24 (0.08)**	0.07 (0.05)	0.09 (0.07)	0.24 (0.08)**	0.24 (0.08)**	0.07 (0.05)	0.09 (0.07)	0.09 (0.07)	0.09 (0.07)	0.24 (0.08)**	0.24 (0.08)**	0.07 (0.05)	0.09 (0.07)	0.09 (0.07)	0.09 (0.07)	0.09 (0.07)	0.09 (0.07)	0.09 (0.07)	0.09 (0.07)	0.09 (0.07)	0.09 (0.07)		
(7) Predictor as CB	-0.13 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.78)	-0.11 (0.05)*	-0.04 (0.07)	0.05 (0.08)	-0.07 (0.05)	-0.03 (0.07)	0.05 (0.08)	-0.04 (0.07)	-0.07 (0.05)	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.07)	0.05 (0.08)	-0.07 (0.05)	-0.03 (0.07)	0.05 (0.08)	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.06 (0.05)		
<i>Predictors</i>																											
(8) Flexible working schedules	0.24 (0.12)*	0.48 (0.12)***	-0.07 (0.10)																								
(9) Telecommuting																											
(10) Sabbaticals				0.16 (0.13)	0.03 (0.13)*	-0.04 (0.10)																					
<i>Mediator</i>																											
(11) Anticipated organizational support			0.65 (0.06)***			0.71 (0.05)***																				0.66 (0.05)***	

N = 469; *b* = regression weights based on standardized variables except for binary variables; *SE* = robust standard error; *WLB* = Work-life balance; *CB* = Career barrier. The variables are standardized to increase the interpretability of the estimates and to reduce multicollinearity of the interaction variables.
 p* < 0.05; *p* < 0.01; ****p* < 0.001.

Table 6. Moderated mediation analyses (Study 2).

Variables	25		26		27		28		29		30	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
<i>Control variables</i>												
(1) Age	-0.02	(0.08)	-0.02	(0.08)	-0.20	(0.15)	-0.11	(0.09)	0.02	(0.09)	0.00	(0.08)
(2) Gender	-0.11	(0.12)	0.21	(0.10)*	0.21	(0.13)	0.03	(0.10)	-0.03	(0.12)	0.05	(0.09)
(3) Work experience	0.06	(0.07)	-0.01	(0.06)	0.12	(0.08)	0.01	(0.06)	-0.06	(0.08)	-0.02	(0.06)
(4) Semester	0.09	(0.09)	-0.03	(0.06)	0.00	(0.10)	0.04	(0.06)	0.12	(0.07)	0.02	(0.05)
(5) Intention to work	0.14	(0.14)	0.19	(0.11)	0.23	(0.14)	0.32	(0.11)	0.13	(0.13)	0.05	(0.11)
(6) Predictor for WLB	0.25	(0.13)*			0.15	(0.13)			0.01	(0.12)		
(7) Predictor as CB	0.06	(0.10)			0.12	(0.11)			0.09	(0.11)		
<i>Moderating effects</i>												
(8) Predictor	-0.02	(0.16)			0.15	(0.16)			0.24	(0.16)		
(9) X Predictor for WLB	-0.23	(0.15)			-0.10	(0.14)			-0.08			
(9) X Predictor as CB												
<i>Predictors</i>												
(10) Flexible work schedules	0.47	(0.12)***	-0.03	(0.10)								
(11) Telecommuting					0.30	(0.13)*	-0.03	(0.10)			0.15	(0.09)
(12) Sabbaticals									0.60	(0.12)***		
<i>Mediator</i>												
(13) Anticipated organizational support			0.69	(0.05)***			0.72	(0.05)***			0.66	(0.05)***

N = 469; *b* = regression weights based on standardized variables except for binary variables; SE = robust standard error; WLB = Work-life balance; CB = Career barrier. The variables are standardized to increase the interpretability of the estimates and to reduce multicollinearity of the interaction variables.

p* < 0.05; *p* < 0.01; ****p* < 0.001.

organizational attractiveness become statistically insignificant when introducing anticipated organizational support as an additional control variable. All betas of the indirect effects of the FWPs on organizational attractiveness via anticipated organizational support (not included in Table 5) are significant at the five percent level, as the bootstrapped confidence intervals do not include a zero value for flexible work schedules ($b = 0.312$, LLCI = 0.156, ULCI = 0.475), telecommuting ($b = 0.199$, LLCI = 0.022, ULCI = 0.371), or sabbaticals ($b = 0.414$, LLCI = 0.251, ULCI = 0.587). These combined results provide evidence that anticipated organizational support is a mediator in the effects of flexible work schedules, telecommuting, and sabbaticals on the job seekers' perceived organizational attractiveness. Hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 2c can thus be confirmed.

Moderated mediation effects of the job seeker's attitude towards FWPs. In Hypotheses 3a to 4c, we proposed that the positive effect between the FWPs and anticipated organizational support is moderated by the job seeker's attitude towards FWPs. We tested whether the job seeker perceives FWPs as necessary for achieving work-life balance or whether the job seeker perceives FWPs as a career barrier and expected the first to strengthen the positive effect and the latter to weaken the effect. The results, listed under Models 25 to 30 in Table 6, show that a job seeker's attitudes towards FWPs do not moderate the effects on anticipated organizational support. Moreover, the confidence intervals of the indirect effects include zero. Hence, we find no evidence in either study for a moderated mediation and reject Hypotheses 3a to 4c.

Discussion

This article contributes to the literature on organizational attractiveness by separately testing the effects of three FWPs, flexible work schedules, telecommuting, and sabbaticals, on organizational attractiveness as perceived by job seekers. While previous studies have relied only on scenario experiments (Casper & Buffardi, 2004; Thompson et al., 2015), we combine the high internal validity of scenario experiments with the high external validity of field studies.

The evidence presented in this study is based on stated-preference information in Germany and supports the studies of Casper and Buffardi's (2004) and Thompson et al.'s (2015) conducted in the USA in that flexible work schedules significantly increase perceived organizational attractiveness and that this effect is mediated by anticipated organizational support. However, unlike Thompson et al. (2015), we find no significant influence of telecommuting in the scenario experiment (Study 2) and the strongest effect for sabbaticals, a FWP concept that was neither addressed by Casper and Buffardi (2004) nor Thompson et al. (2015). Thus, we show that both the irregular flexibility of a sabbatical and the regular flexibility of flexible work schedules significantly increase perceived anticipated organizational attractiveness.

With regards to the direct effect of telecommuting on organizational attractiveness, our analyses yield ambiguous results. In Study 1 (field study), the direct effect of telecommuting on organizational attractiveness is statistically significant, whereas in Study 2 (scenario experiment) it is not. This seemingly inconsistent result is due to the different measurement of the predictors in the two studies. Unlike the scenario experiment (Study 2), the field study (Study 1) measured FWP variables via subjective rating scales after visiting a job fair. Even though we specifically asked each participant whether or not the employer offers flexible work schedules, offers telecommuting, and offers sabbaticals as three separate questions, the responses could be based on vague and rather general perceptions about FWPs. In the field study, we indeed find positive correlations between flexible work schedules and telecommuting ($0.05, p < 0.01$), flexible work schedules and sabbaticals ($0.32, p < 0.01$), and telecommuting and sabbaticals ($0.31, p < 0.01$), indicating that organizations are generally perceived as either offering multiple FWPs or no FWPs at all. Thus, the three specific FWP variables in the field study may capture general perceptions about FWPs, which indicates why the effects are more similar in size than in the scenario experiment, in which the three specific FWP variables do not correlate per construction. In other words, the positive effect of telecommuting on organizational attractiveness may be statistically significant in the field study (but not in the scenario experiment), because the telecommuting variable in the field study may also embrace more general perceptions about FWPs.

While we can confirm the finding of Thompson et al. (2015) that flexible work schedules have a stronger effect on organizational attractiveness than telecommuting, unlike the scenario evidence by Thompson et al. (2015), we find only partial influence of telecommuting on organizational attractiveness. The insignificant effect indicates that job seekers may also be aware of its drawbacks. For instance, telecommuting turns home into a workplace, which makes it difficult for telecommuters to disengage from work (Heijstra & Rafnsdottir, 2010). As such, telecommuting increases the permeability of work–life boundaries. This in turn may amplify work–life conflicts. Telecommuters may feel a stronger obligation than other employees to respond to e-mails or phone calls even far outside of normal working hours (Heijstra & Rafnsdottir, 2010). Moreover, telecommuting reduces face-to-face interaction. This can be problematic, as face-to-face interactions increase an employee's sense of belonging, decrease feelings of isolation, and strengthen interpersonal relationships with coworkers and supervisors (Golden & Veiga, 2005). Still, telecommuting provides employees a high degree of flexibility (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007) and better opportunities to arrange private and occupational obligations (Raghuram & Wiesenfeld, 2004).

While sabbaticals have a stronger positive effect on organizational attractiveness than flexible work schedules and telecommuting in both studies, only in the scenario experiment is this difference statistically significant. The seemingly inconsistent results may also be explained by the construction of the variables in the two studies: In the field study, the predictors are perception variables for

which the differentiation between the three specific FWP may be less clear than for the predictors in the scenario experiment. This may explain why we find a significantly larger effect size for sabbaticals in the scenario experiment but not in the field experiment.

We also argued and found that the positive association of flexible work schedules, telecommuting, and sabbaticals with organizational attractiveness is mediated by the job seeker's anticipated organizational support. Our results are in line with organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Accordingly, FWPs raise expectations in job seekers that an organization that offers flexible work schedules and sabbaticals generally supports its employees (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Hence, organizations need to carefully consider the reasons for implementing FWPs. Introducing them as a cost reduction strategy or as a response to external constraints (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) may not be recognized as a supportive act and therefore may not have the desired positive effect on organizational attractiveness.

Finally, in contrast to our expectations, the results detect no moderating effect of job seekers' attitudes on the link between FWPs and organizational attractiveness. The literature on organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986) provides a possible explanation for this universal positive effect of FWPs on anticipated organizational support. Research suggests that employees may consider the provision of FWPs as sufficient evidence that the organization supports its workforce even if they do not use those FWPs themselves (Grover & Crooker, 1995; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Therefore, an organization that offers FWPs is attractive to potential employees regardless of whether they value those FWPs themselves. Another explanation could be the use of single item measures to capture our moderating variables, i.e. the predictor is either 'perceived as a career barrier' or 'perceived as a contributor to work-life balance'. Single items do not allow an assessment of construct reliability. We therefore suggest that future research should test multi-item constructs in a similar setting.

Theoretical contribution

The contribution of this study to the human resource management literature is at least twofold. First, we respond to the call for research that compares the separate effects of different FWPs on organizational attractiveness (Allen et al., 2013). We disentangle the bundled effect of FWPs by investigating the individual effects of three specific FWPs that serve as examples of three different types of work-task flexibility as suggested by Hill et al. (2008), namely when, where, and for how long they engage in work-related tasks. The differences between these dimensions of flexibility are important in their respective effects on job seekers' perception of organizational attractiveness. For instance, sabbaticals enable individuals to fully disconnect from work, whereas flexible work schedules help employees to

manage their non-work responsibilities. In this way, they might be perceived as particularly valuable for job seeking individuals.

Second, we also contribute to the literature on organizational support theory (OST) by arguing and showing that the link between FWPs and organizational attractiveness is fully mediated by the job seekers' anticipated organizational support. It seems that job seekers perceive the offer of FWPs as a signal of the potential appreciation and care provided by the organization, which ultimately improves their perception of an organization's attractiveness.

Implications for practice

This study entails several important implications for practice. Organizations should offer FWPs such as flexible work schedules and telecommuting, because these practices create a perception of organizational support and increase organizational attractiveness in the job market. We argue that it is important to implement and advertise such practices quickly to gain a short-term advantage over recruiting competitors. In the long-run, we expect, given the increasing opportunities for digitalized and geographically dispersed work, that most organizations capable of providing such services will offer them to their employees. In that case, remaining organizations who fail to implement FWPs will be put at a significant disadvantage in recruitment.

Because the prevalence of sabbaticals is still low outside academia (Baruch & Hall, 2004) even in Germany (Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women & Youth, 2010) and because their positive effect on organizational attractiveness is higher than the effects of flexible work schedules and telecommuting, this study argues that organizations should particularly implement and advertise sabbaticals. Offering sabbaticals can still provide a unique selling proposition in the job market, at least in the short-run. It should be noted, though, that implementing sabbaticals can require a great deal of effort from the organization and not all organizations in all industries will be able to offer them. In general, organizations need to efficiently communicate their offers of FWPs. Our findings suggest that they should explicitly describe the FWPs they offer on their websites, in their recruiting material, and during other marketing activities.

Our results also indicate that FWPs independently enhance organizational attractiveness. Therefore, organizations need not necessarily implement a variety of FWPs, but should rather select those that are most suitable to them. For instance, assembly-line work makes flexible work schedules and telecommuting infeasible, as the production capacity must be carefully planned. However, such organizations could still implement sabbaticals providing employees with the opportunity to develop personally and professionally if they were organized with sufficient notice.

Limitations and directions for future research

Despite its contributions to theory and practice, this article has its limitations. First, we could not observe the interaction between recruiters and job seekers during our field study at the job fairs. If the recruiters of organizations offering FWPs were more engaged and motivated than recruiters of organizations not offering FWPs, factors that are unobserved and therefore omitted, there would be a positive omitted variable bias of the effects of flexible work schedules, telecommuting, and sabbaticals on organizational attractiveness. Although we clustered the standard errors at the organizational level, this does not entirely account for this issue.

Second, the control condition of the fictitious organization's web page in the scenario experiment contained less information than each of the three FWPs conditions² that additionally included information about flexible work schedules, telecommuting, and sabbaticals, respectively. If job seekers consider more information always better than less information (e.g. Baum & Kabst, 2014), this could influence the positive effects of FWPs on organizational attractiveness in the scenario experiment.

Third, both the predictors and the dependent variable in our field study come from the same survey participants, which raises the issue of common method bias. In our case, however, organizational attractiveness is a conceptually subjective experience and cannot be captured by an objective third-party measurement that lacks individual-level variation. Also, social desirability, which is especially a concern in self-reports, may be of less importance in the context of organizational research (Moorman & Podsakoff, 1992). Further, Spector (2006) considers the common method bias to be overstated because mono-methods do not differ from multimethod studies in the sizes of the measured effects in most cases. In any case, we also collected recruiting materials from the organizations at the job fairs as a more objective measure for FWPs to address the issue of common method variance. Unfortunately, the organizations typically used very broad and general wording to describe their FWPs in the recruiting materials, which complicated the differentiation between the three FWPs.

Fourth, the sample in Study 1 comprises recent graduates and that in Study 2 comprises advanced students enrolled in university programs, which makes it difficult to generalize our findings to job seekers of different demographic backgrounds. Most young job seekers in our studies do not yet have family responsibilities. Despite the high relevance of our sample group, we encourage future scenario experiments and field studies to examine the effects of FWPs on organizational attractiveness for older job seekers who may have children or care for older relatives.

Fifth, some of our arguments are based on COR theory, which suggests that employees seek to obtain, retain, foster, and protect their resources at work to avoid exposure to stress (Hobfoll, 1989). We argue that FWPs support these endeavors, as they enable individuals to decide when, where, and for how long they work

(Hill et al., 2008). However, because we did not measure the individual resource endowments, we cannot directly test the link between FWP and the conservation of resources. We encourage future research to examine more directly the testable predictions of the COR theory.

Sixth, the two studies documented in this study are based on stated-preference information and not actual behavior (revealed preferences). We encourage future research to test how offering FWPs influences measures of actual behavior such as the number and quality of applications.

Finally, organizational culture may influence the attractiveness of FWPs. Kossek and Lee (2005) show that employees who use FWPs are exposed to a lower salary growth if they work in an organization whose managers consider such employees to be less committed to the organization. Leslie et al. (2012) find that FWPs limit career success if their usage is attributed to personal life accommodation rather than an increase in productivity. Thus, a promising avenue for future research is to examine the moderating and mediating influences of organizational culture on the relationship between FWPs and organizational attractiveness.

Conclusion

This article provides multi-method evidence on how and why different FWPs affect organizational attractiveness in the German job market. It shows that job seekers are more attracted to organizations that offer flexible work schedules and sabbaticals. We also find that the link between FWPs and organizational attractiveness is mediated by anticipated organizational support. Interestingly, perceiving FWPs as essential for achieving work-life balance and perceiving FWPs as a career barrier do not moderate the positive link between FWPs and anticipated organizational support, indicating that this link is independent of the job seekers' personal attitudes towards FWPs. In addition, we find the strongest effect for sabbaticals. Given their comparatively low prevalence even in a German setting, offering sabbaticals may provide a unique selling proposition in the job market, at least in the short-run.

Notes

1. Name of the fictitious organization.
2. In the control condition the web page of the target organizations contained 187 words, the web page in the flexible work schedules condition contained 227 words, the web page in the telecommuting condition contained 228 words, and the web page in the sabbatical condition contained 241 words.

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