



This study critically examines an earlier presented content model of attractive work. The point of departure is a theoretical overview of attraction research in the fields of recruitment, retention, and employee commitment. The theories are summarized with emphasis on what can be learned from each theory, and on factors or aspects that have received empirical support. In total, 31 theories are included. The content model of attractive work is examined against the factors or aspects identified in the theories. The examination focuses on correspondence between model and theories, and on aspects or processes presented in the theories that are not included in the content model. The content model of attractive work gives an overall picture of dimensions and qualities that contribute to make work attractive, but, there are still factors relevant for work attraction that the model does not explicitly describe. The study therefore results in some opportunities for improvement of the model, as well as providing a first step in giving theoretical guidance to interventions for attractive work.

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## RESEARCHING ATTRACTIVE WORK

*Analyzing a model of attractive work using theories on applicant attraction, retention and commitment*

Work Life in Transition



*Mattias Åteg*  
*Ann Hedlund*

# Researching attractive work

Analyzing a model of attractive work using theories on applicant attraction, retention and commitment

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## **Abstract**

The purpose with this paper is to critically examine a content model of attractive work, based on a theoretical overview of attraction research in the fields of recruitment, of retention, and of employee commitment.

Theories used within attraction research are reviewed and summarized with emphasis on what can be learned from each theory, and on factors or aspects that have received empirical support. A content model of attractive work, aiming at providing an overall picture of the dimensions and qualities contributing to attraction is examined against the factors or aspects identified in the theories. The examination focuses on the level of correspondence between the model and the theories, but also on aspects or processes presented in the theories that are not included in the content model, and therefore provide opportunities for improvement of the model. A conclusion is that the content model of attractive work gives an overall picture of dimensions and qualities that contribute to make a work attractive, but, there are still factors relevant for work attraction that the model does not explicitly describe.

# Introduction

Researchers have long been interested in why people choose to enter organizations, why they are motivated, and why they stay (Sekiguchi, Burton & Sablinski 2008). These are the main topics for research on attractive work (Marks & Huzzard 2008). Accordingly, attractive work deals with the ability of an organization to recruit competent employees (applicant attraction); have a high degree of job stability (retention); and foster employee commitment (Åteg, Andersson & Rosén 2009). These aspects have also been included in definitions of attractive work used by Marks and Huzzard (2008) and Hedlund (2006).

Research on applicant attraction is extensive with a range of theoretical perspectives, and the attention has increased considerably in recent years. Attracting and retaining high-quality applicants is seen as very important, since it can provide a sustained competitive advantage (Turban, Forret & Hendrickson 1998; Holcombe Erhart & Ziegert 2005).

Research focusing retention explores why employees stay. Workforce trends point to an impending shortage of skilled employees, and organizations that fail to retain employees will be hindered in their ability to remain competitive (Hausknecht, Rodda & Howard 2009).

Commitment (engagement is another construct widely used) has, as in the case of recruitment and retention, been subjected to extensive interest based on the expected benefits (Meyer, Becker & Vandenberghe 2004). Commitment is argued to bind an individual to an organization and thereby contributes to retention (Meyer et al 2004; Korunka, Hoonakker & Carayon 2008; Chalofsky & Krishna 2009). Employees are also increasingly expected to show initiative, be responsible for their own development, and committed to high quality (Bakker, Schaufeli & Leiter 2008).

Attractive work has been defined and described in different ways. Attractive work has been treated as partly due to job characteristics, and to recruitment variables (Breugh 2008); or as organizational attraction (Highhouse, Lievens & Sinar 2003). Holcombe Erhart and Ziegert (2005) states that they use an expansive approach in defining attraction as getting potential candidates to view an organization as a positive place to work. Their definition focuses on the organization rather than on characteristics of the job itself. However, there are major differences between attractive work based on the characteristics of a particular job or position, and on characteristics of an organization. Attraction to an organization implies to what degree an individual wants to become a member – to a large extent without regarding the position. Holcombe Erhart and Ziegert (2005) uses ‘applicant attraction’ and ‘attraction to organizations’ synonymously, although some of the theories reported within their study include the perspective of job and position attributes. Organizational attraction focus on how an organization is perceived based on constructs such as signals, image, brand, exposure, fit, and self-concepts. Job attraction on the other hand, which is based on position attributes, focus on work environment, earning opportunities, challenging work, location etc (see e.g Turban et al 1998).

It is here argued that attractive work must include both organizational and job attraction. Attractive work is not just constituted by coveted organizational membership, but also includes the job characteristics, or position attributes. In order for work to be attractive, both job and organizational characteristics need to be perceived as attractive. Further, an attractive work also mean that the individual wants to stay, and becomes committed. These aspects have been included in definitions used by Marks and Huzzard (2008); Åteg et al (2009) and Hedlund (2006). Attractive work has been described as work that stimulates positive attention through its positive characteristics, even in the long term and with closer experiences (Åteg et al 2009).

In this paper, attractive work is defined as: a job position that an individual want due to positive job characteristics in an organization perceived as a positive place to work (applicant attraction); where the employee's closer experiences gain job stability (retention); and fosters employee identification and dedication (commitment).

Attraction research focuses on factors leading to positive outcomes, and Hedlund (2007) states that attractive work emanates from a promoting perspective where positive factors of work are emphasized. Hence, there is a strong case for claiming that attraction research is closely kindred to positive organizational scholarship (POS).

POS is described as the study of positive outcomes. POS focus on enablers, motivations, processes and attributes associated with positive phenomena, and factors that enable positive consequences for individuals, groups, and organizations (Cameron, Dutton & Quinn 2003; Wright & Campbell Quick 2009). One question asked within POS is what organizations can do to attract and retain creative, dedicated and thriving employees who make organizations flourish (Baker & Schaufeli 2008).

The need of activities to improve organization and job attraction can be seen in the fact that over 30 percent of the employers around the world have difficulties to fill available jobs depending on the lack of a suitable work force (Manpower 2010). Many development projects have been conducted within the work life, for example by labour organisations, often based on research results and in interaction with researchers (Johansson & Abrahamsson, 2009).

Further, attractive work can be seen as having components common with the concept "the good work", which has been an established concept and much discussed as a normative theory in the industrial context in the Swedish working life (Johansson & Abrahamsson 2009). Ambitions have been to describe how work should be constituted in order to reduce difficulties to recruit, reduce turnover, and to create more attractive work (Åteg 2006). Although an important concept in the Swedish working life since the mid-1980s, the concept is today relatively invisible, giving way to more individualistic perspectives and concepts such as lean production (Johansson & Abrahamsson 2009).

In order to develop an understanding of attractive work from an empirical standpoint, the concept has previously been charted based on interviews (Åteg, Hedlund & Pontén 2004; Hedlund 2006; Åteg et al 2009). A specific goal was to develop a content model using an empirical approach, since the previous research until then (2004) almost invariably used an expert perspective when stipu-

lating what an attractive work is. The model of attractive work that resulted is stated to give an overall picture of the qualities contributing to work attractiveness. The model contains about 80 qualities, constituting 22 dimensions, divided into three different categories. The categories are *attractive work content*, *work satisfaction* and *attractive working conditions* (Åteg et al 2004). The model will be more closely presented in the section The Attractive Work Model, below.

## Aim

The aim is to critically examine the content model of attractive work based on a theoretical overview of attraction research in the fields of recruitment, of retention, and of employee commitment.

## Method

The paper is based on a review of previous research on attractive work extending over applicant attraction, retention, commitment, and engagement. These fields are extensive and necessitate a high degree of condensation. The material used is peer-reviewed papers in scientific journals publishing research focusing on fields such as organizational and vocational behavior, HRM, and personnel, organizational and managerial psychology. The search engine ELIN@dalarna (Electronic Library Information Navigator) has been used in the search. Key words have been centered on the fields' attraction, retention, commitment, and engagement, but also in combination with work/job/organization, employee, recruitment, motivation etc. Also, in some cases, specific theories have been used in the search. In total, this has resulted in 102 read peer-reviewed papers, of which 63 has been included, along with some books. The decision of including a paper or not, and hence the theory used, has been made based on whether it uses one or more of the included theories as perspective, or tests the theory empirically, or describes how the theoretical contribution has received empirical support in previous research. Further, the papers and the included theory needed to explain factors within attractive work, i.e. in the fields of attraction, retention, or commitment.

The included theories have been used in studies conducted in a wide range of contexts, both in branches and in composition of people. A few random examples is recruitment interviews with campus applicants in marketing, finance and management, were over 90 percent where white and 49 percent where female (Turban et al 1998), a large American telecommunication company (Sekiguchi et al 2008), small companies in the Scottish technology sector (Marks and Huzard 2008), a regional grocery store chain with 77 percent women and employees in hospital (nurses, administration, maintenance etc) with 84 percent women (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski & Erez 2001). A majority of the studies are made in western countries.

This paper is partly based on a broad theoretical overview. This means that a range of approaches and theoretical fundamentals are represented, as theories based on different perspectives are included. However, as a large portion of the



paper is indebted to Holcombe Erhart & Ziegert (2005) and their theoretical framework for applicant attraction, it is here suggested that their foundation and examination of theoretical underpinnings applies. The perspective used in their examination is why individuals are attracted to organizations, from the applicant's perspective. Hence, their perspective is not based on the view of the organization, but on the applicants' point of view based on empirical research focusing on individuals' attitudes and behaviours.

The content model of attractive work holds a similar perspective. The model is also based on attitudes and behaviors of the individual. However, a significant difference is that the model does not only focus on applicants' point of view, but also emphasizes the view of those already employed. The theoretical framework presented by Holcombe Erhart & Ziegert (2005) is further stated to have implications throughout the job search and employment process, indicating that also theoretical contribution within the fields of retention and commitment is possible to bring together within the perspective that they apply. This means that although founded on several theoretical underpinnings, the theories here presented can be brought together within the broader perspective of representing factors affecting individuals' attraction to work.

In the following, focus is on theories which expresses or implicates significance for work attraction. The content model of attractive work is then critically examined based on the theories included.

## Theoretical Overview of Attractive Work

The overview of will focus on recruitment, retention, and commitment, in that order.

### **Attractive Work and Recruitment**

Recruitment is an employer's actions that are intended to bring a job opening to the attention of potential job candidates, influence whether these apply for the opening, affect whether they maintain interest until a job offer is extended, and influence whether the offer is accepted (Breugh 2008). In attraction research the concept applicant attraction is used. Applicant attraction is in itself an extensive field, one which Holcombe Erhart and Ziegert (2005) have given a thorough treatment, which is drawn upon in the section below. However, original articles have been treated in order to explore significant details. Also, theories and studies published in later years are added.

Holcombe Erhart and Ziegert (2005) states that most research on applicant attraction only briefly refer to theory and instead place emphasis on empirical research. But research on applicant attraction still roots in a number of theoretical approaches.

Attraction can be seen as partly due to characteristics of the job itself – that is to say position attributes, such as pay, job tasks and work hours – or to recruitment variables, such as the content of job advertisement, the design of a company's website, or a recruiter's behaviour. Conventional wisdom is that characteris-

tics of the job itself are more important to job applicants than recruitment variables, but still advertisement and recruiter behaviour can be crucial for the right people to attend a job opening and accepting a job offer (Breaugh 2008).

However, Holcombe Erhart and Ziegert (2005) define applicant attraction as getting potential candidates to view the organization as a positive place to work. This, they claim, include a number of components, such as having a positive affective attitude toward an organization, viewing it as a desirable entity, and exerting effort to work in it. Thus, their definition focuses the organization rather than job characteristics.

Further, Holcombe Erhart and Ziegert (2005) organize the theoretical approaches to applicant attraction into three metatheories. The first include theories that focus on how individuals process information to develop perceptions of the organization, which determine attraction. The second metatheory include theories that incorporate the fit between personal and organizational characteristics. The third metaheory include theories that focus on how processing of information about the self influences perceptions of fit and attraction.

**Attraction as a function of perceptions of the organization.** The theories in this metatheory are, first, *signalling theory*, *image theory*, and *the heuristic-systematic model*. However, we have added the *elaboration likelihood model*, since it has been used in the context of the effect of recruiter on attraction. These four theories provide understanding of how individuals process information about organizations or work, and perceive their characteristics. Further, the metatheory includes the theories *exposure theory*, *expectancy theory*, and *decision processing model*. These theories explain how perceptions of organizations or work are processed and related to applicant attraction (Holcombe Ehrhart & Ziegert 2005). Theories we have added is *the brand equity perspective*, and *employer branding*.

*Signalling theory* is based on that applicants often have limited information about job and organizational characteristics of potential employers, at the time job choice decisions are being made (Larsen & Phillips 2002). Signalling theory offers an explanation of how individuals interpret the available information about the organization as signals of organizational characteristics, e.g firm's reputations being used as signals about working conditions (Cable & Turban 2003). That individuals interpret organizational variables such as organizational policies, recruiter behaviour and recruitment activities as signals has been established in several studies, but the theory has been commented upon not to be able to predict which variables are the most important (Holcombe Ehrhart & Ziegert 2005).

However, the theory does propose a useful perspective on how individuals from limited information form an opinion of attractivity based on organizational features. Empirical support is reported, where firms engaged in socially responsible activities are perceived as more attractive employers than other firms. Such results suggest that firms with more positive reputations will attract larger applicant pools than other firms (Cable & Turban 2003).

Further, individuals who view a recruiter as personable, trustworthy, informative, and competent are more attracted to a position within the organization. Also, applicants are suggested to have more positive perceptions of job and organi-

zational attributes and greater attraction to the firm when recruiters provide more information (Breugh 2008).

*The elaboration likelihood model (ELM)* describes the recruiter effects on attraction, through the applicants processing of information. ELM proposes that the processing of information occurs along a continuum with the end points high and low elaboration. Elaboration describes to what degree a person engages in examining the content of presented information. High levels of elaboration mean careful examination and formation of attitudes by central processing – i e requires “thought” and occurs only when both ability and motivation to evaluate the information about the job and organization are high. Lower levels of elaboration mean use of peripheral processing and formation of attitudes based on simple environmental cues, such as signals from the recruiter (e g preparedness may be interpreted as a signal of organizational efficiency). The lower the degree of elaboration, the more likely the applicant is to interpret recruiter behaviour as information about the organization (Larsen & Phillips 2002).

*Image theory* proposes that individuals evaluate attraction to jobs and organizations through considerations of how the job alternatives fit their image of what is desired. People do not only use the available information, but evaluate and weight certain information heavier and disregard some (Holcombe Ehrhart & Ziegert 2005). A job offer prompts a comparison of the information with the person’s important values regarding the job (value image). Next, the individual will compare the job offer with the goals that motivates job behaviour (trajectory image). Last, the job offer is compared with the strategies believed to be effective in attaining job-related goals (strategic image). If the job offer is compatible with the three images, then the individual compares the job offer with status quo or other alternatives (Harman, Lee, Mitchell, Felps & Owens 2007). However, image theory has not been widely used in attraction research (Holcombe Ehrhart & Ziegert 2005).

*The heuristic-systematic model* proposes that different kinds of cognitive processing of information are used depending on the message. A specific and personally relevant message is systematically processed and more information is considered. Processing in a heuristic manner uses less effort and information. Holcombe Erhart and Ziegert (2005) reports that individuals become more attracted to the organization when both receiving feedback indicating a high degree of fit with the organization and using systematic processing.

Exposure theory states that repeated exposure to an object yields increasingly positive evaluations of it, and has been used in attraction research in treating individuals’ familiarity with an organization. Exposure theory contributes by explaining how attraction develops through individuals’ processing of perceptions (Holcombe Ehrhart & Ziegert 2005).

Further, *expectancy (VIE) theory* (Vroom 1964) suggests that individuals are attracted to jobs or organizations that can be perceived to offer valued characteristics. According to Holcombe Erhart and Ziegert (2005), expectancy theory is an important theoretical foundation for applicant attraction. The theory predicts attraction and job choice based on the degree of consistency between perceptions of the environment and the individual’s desires, needs, and goals – i e an organization is attractive if one perceives that one’s desires can be satisfied by it (Hol-

combe Ehrhart & Ziegert 2005). However, expectancy theory also takes into account the degree to which a job is seen as attainable. Thus, an excellent firm reputation should be more attractive to applicants, but may lead applicants to perceive difficulties obtaining a job since the competition probably is high and the firm highly selective (Cable & Turban 2003).

*The decision processing model* states that choice of a job or organization is based on the individual's ideal work environment. A set of criteria is used in the decision process to select an implicit favourite – the most preferred job or organization. Acceptable alternatives are then evaluated against this implicit favourite, as well as important criterias of the work environment. Although supported in early studies, the theory have not been used explicitly in more recent attraction research (Holcombe Ehrhart & Ziegert 2005).

*Brand equity* is common in marketing research, and Cable and Turban (2003) states that organizational reputation is a major determinant of an organization's ability to recruit new talent: a job is more attractive when offered by an organization with a positive reputation. The organizational reputation, or brand, is seen as adding value to a job beyond the attributes of the job itself. The brand is influenced by type of industry, financial performance, company size, media exposure, and advertisement (Cable & Turban 2003). The concept "brand" is applied to names, terms, signs, symbols, and designs in order to differentiate goods and services, create loyalty, to satisfy and to develop an emotional attachment, and distinguish the employer in the minds of employees (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004; Davies 2008).

The brand equity perspective is supported through results showing that reputation perceptions are positively related to job seekers' evaluations of job attributes. Also, employers are an important part of people's self-concept and social identity, and joining an organization is an expression of a person's values and abilities. Membership in an organization with a positive reputation is positively related to anticipated pride – replaced by embarrassment and discomfort in the case of an organization with poor reputations (Cable & Turban 2003).

*Employer branding* is the use of branding principles to human resource management (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004). Employer branding is described as the sum of a company's efforts to communicate to existing and prospective staff that it is a desirable place to work (Berthon, Ewing & Hah 2005). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) define employer branding as '*a targeted, long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm*' (p 501).

A strong employer brand can facilitate employee acquisition and increase employee retention (Berthon et al 2005). Employee satisfaction is increased when the employer brand is characterized by an image for agreeableness – the employer is perceived as friendly, concerned, honest, thrust worthy, supportive and open. This is supported by research stressing the importance of trust in the relationship between employer and employee (Davies 2008).

**Attraction as a function of interaction.** The theories included are *need-press theory, interactional psychology, theory of work adjustment, and attraction-selection-attrition.*

*Need-press theory* is an early theory that states that environments have characteristics that either facilitate or inhibit the satisfaction of individual's needs. The theory stresses the match between individual's needs and the satisfaction of those needs by the environment (Holcombe Ehrhart & Ziegert 2005).

*Interactional psychology* is another early theory that has influenced attraction research. Interactional psychology views behaviour as a result of interaction between person and situation, and thereby highlights the importance of similarity between individual and actual environmental characteristics to attraction (Holcombe Ehrhart & Ziegert 2005).

*The theory of work adjustment* (Dawis & Lofquist 1984) does not in itself use the concept of attraction, but states that individuals desire "correspondence" with their work environments, which is achieved and maintained through a process of work adjustment (Holcombe Ehrhart & Ziegert 2005). This match is initially made during the recruitment process. Thereafter the employee continuously adjust to changing personal or work circumstances, such as downsizing or balancing work and family life. The adjustment can be active, e.g. the workers try to achieve correspondence by changing the work environment, or reactive when workers try to change themselves, e.g. by increasing skills (Eggerth 2008). The theory has received support for its predictions that correspondence is related to outcomes such as tenure and satisfaction (Holcombe Ehrhart & Ziegert 2005).

*The attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) model* is the most frequently applied theory in attraction research. The ASA-model states that different kinds of organizations attract, select, and retain different kinds of people (Holcombe Ehrhart & Ziegert 2005). Since attraction is seen as a result of individuals' perception of the correspondence between personality and organization, e.g. goals, processes, structures and culture, individuals are predicted to experience varying degrees of attraction to different organizations (Schneider & Goldstein 1996). ASA describes how an individual with personalities that corresponds with the organization tends to be attracted to it (*Attraction*). Through selection, organizations tend to recruit individuals that are similar to those already employed (*Selection*). Over time, individuals with personality features that do not correspond with the organization or other employees are more likely to exit the organization, voluntary or involuntary (*Attrition*) (Schneider & Goldstein 1996; Schneider 2001; Slaughter, Stanton, Mohr & Shoel 2005).

The processes of attraction, selection and attrition lead to what is called the homogeneity hypothesis (Denton 1999; Halfhill, Nielsen & Sundstrom 2008): as organizations mature, they become increasingly occupied by similar people – not by socialization but depending on individual's original values. As a result, members in an organization are thought to be similar in terms of personality, values and interests (De Cooman et al 2009). Hence, organizations could be well served by developing greater tolerance for diversity, since diversity in personality characteristics is believed to be important to organizational functioning (Slaughter et al 2005), and a more heterogeneous workforce would broaden their fit with a wider range of recruits (Gardner, Reithel, Foley, Coglisier & Walumbwa 2009).

The support for the ASA-model is extensive (Gardner et al 2009). The attraction component have been supported in a number of studies (Holcombe Ehrhart



& Ziegert 2005). People are attracted to organizations that fit their personalities, organizations are relatively homogenous when looking at member personalities, and employees are more likely to leave organizations where they do not perceive fit (Gardner et al 2009). Further, the ASA-model is supported in studies showing that individuals are attracted to organizations which culture reflects the individual's personality characteristics, e.g. individuals high in attributes such as materialism and self-efficacy has been shown to be more attracted to organizations with high pay levels and individual-based pay. However, personality traits such as self-esteem moderates the interaction between person and organization and thereby attraction (Lievens, Decaestecker, Coetsier & Geirnaert 2001).

**Attraction as a function of perceptions about the self.** The theories included are *social learning theory*, *consistency theory*, and *social identity theory*. However, we have added the self-categorization theory.

*Social learning theory* includes a self-efficacy component which has been argued to influence the interaction between subjective fit and attraction. Individuals are attracted to jobs and organizations where they believe they can be successful, judged against perceived self-efficacy, i.e. they believe they will fit. For example, people who generally perceive themselves to be capable of high performance should be more attracted to organizations that offer individual performance or skill based rewards (Holcombe Ehrhart & Ziegert 2005).

*Consistency theory* states that individuals prefer work that fits with their self-image, where self-esteem is said to be positively associated with attraction. Individuals with high self-esteem should be more attracted to organizations with fitting characteristics, than individuals with low self-esteem. Individuals with lower self-esteem are said to not value fit with their environment as much, based on their more negative self-evaluations. However, the theory has not been explicitly used in attraction research (Holcombe Ehrhart & Ziegert 2005).

*Social identity theory* also considers the role of the self in attraction. Social identity theory states that the self-concept is influenced by the evaluation of the group that an individual identifies with (Holcombe Ehrhart & Ziegert 2005). Social identity can be described as when individuals classify, define and evaluate themselves in terms of membership in a social group (Lembke & Wilson 1998). Individuals relate to important social entities, such as work, as "us". Social entities have the capacity to provide personal security, social companionship, emotional bonding, intellectual stimulation, and collaborative learning, and provide a sense of self in terms of group membership (Haslam, Jetten, Postmes & Haslam 2009).

Social-identity theory also focuses on the obtainment of social approval. It is suggested that a person's self-concept is made up of a personal identity (e.g. perceptions of one's own abilities and traits), and a social identity (e.g. organizational affiliations). Thus, people will find it attractive to identify with an organization that enhances their self-esteem, lets them express themselves and acquire social approval. Organizational attraction is stated to be determined partly by instrumental attributes of the job (such as the perceived quality of its pay, benefits, and opportunities for promotion), and partly by symbolic meanings associated with being a part of a particular firm. In a study of banks, symbolic factors such as perceived innovativeness and competence were found to be of more im-

portance for firm attraction than factors such as pay and advancement (Highhouse, Thornbury & Little 2007).

Further, people are likely to differ in their concern for social adjustment in organizational choice. Self-representation consists of social adjustment and value expression, and people high in social-adjustment consciousness are likely to be more attracted to firms with high reputation, while people high in value-expression consciousness are more attracted to firms that are more socially conscious (Highhouse et al 2007).

*Self-categorization theory* has been used in combination with social identity theory. Individuals become team members through a behavioural as well as a cognitive and emotional process of alignment, achieved through social identification, including discarding all other options for identification. Identification is based on the individual's desire to become a member of a group, based on how attractive and clearly understood the group purpose is. Adopting a social identity requires that the individual is aware of the group's social category and seeing that one can be part of it. The process is seen as unconscious (Lembke & Wilson 1998). Self-categorization theory is treating group or organizational membership at a greater length than social identity theory through the categorization process where people evaluate whether they are sharing category membership with others, or not (Haslam et al 2009).

## **Attractive Work and Retention**

Retention of valued employees is critical for organizations, to avoid replacement costs, disrupted social networks (Holtom, Mitchell & Lee 2006; Gardner et al 2009), as well as in reduced customer satisfaction, productivity, future revenue growth, and profitability. However, some individuals may have a propensity to quit while others are likely to stay (Zimmerman 2008).

Research focusing retention of employees has been utilizing theories such as *the behavioural model*, *job embeddedness*, *the unfolding model*, *realistic job preview (RJP)*, *quality of working life (QWL)*, and *psychological contract theory*. Further, some of the applicant attraction theories treated above would also be relevant within the context of retention – e.g. the ASA-model and the theory of work adjustment.

*The behavioural model* has been a foundation for traditional theories on employee voluntary turnover, and states that dissatisfaction will ultimately cause employee turnover (Sekiguchi et al 2008). When entering an organization, employees agree to be subjected to organizational authority and perform the activities instructed in accordance with the employment contract. When employees feel dissatisfaction, and perceive the employment contract as unchangeable, the only options is either to accept or withdraw (Mahoney 2005). However, dissatisfaction is combined with the perceived ease of movement to job alternatives (Harman et al 2007). Hence, the two major causes of employee turnover or retention are seen to be job satisfaction and job alternatives. People who are satisfied with their job will be less attracted to alternative jobs. Those who are dissatisfied and perceive many alternatives will be likely to leave, whereas those who are dissatisfied but perceive few available alternatives are likely to stay. However,

that people who are satisfied or have few alternatives will remain on the job is a simplistic view (Holtom et al 2006). Also, the model's ability to predict voluntary turnover has been remarkably weak (Harman et al 2007).

*Job embeddedness* create understanding of why people stay, by looking at forces that keep employees in their current employment, even when alternatives exists (Mitchell et al 2001; Sekiguchi et al 2008; Ng & Feldman 2009b).

The term "embeddedness" has been used in the sociological literature to explain the process by which social relations influence and constrain economic action (Granovetter 1973). A person's life can be seen as a web created by links connecting the different parts of one's life. A person who has more roles, responsibilities, and relationships would have a more complex web than someone who has fewer. The person with the more complex web is more embedded in a situation; more links to the job brings more "job embeddedness" (Holtom et al 2006). Empirical studies have supported the theory in that individuals with high job embeddedness are less likely to exit voluntarily (Ng & Feldman 2009b).

Employees become tied to their organizations through many different types of links, investments and affective and cognitive appraisals that create this web. However, not only links to the job or organization is relevant. Employees with high levels of job embeddedness are involved in and tied to projects, people, friendship, task interdependence, and activities in and outside the organization, and they will feel professionally and personally tied to the organization (links). They fit well in their jobs and community, and can apply their skills, their abilities match organizational requirements and their interests match organizational rewards (fit). They also believe they will loose valued things if they quit (sacrifice), e g the perceived cost of material or psychological benefits such as pensions, insurances, or a safe or pleasant work environment. These links, fit and sacrifice have both on-the-job factors (e g the organization or job) and off-the-job factors (e g family or community). Both kinds of factors are relevant in explaining why individuals stay (Mitchell et al 2001; Holtom et al 2006; Sekiguchi et al 2008; Ng & Feldman 2009b). The effect of job embeddedness on employee retention has been well supported in a variety of research settings (Sekiguchi et al 2008).

*The unfolding model* criticize the view that employees leave an organization due to negative job attitudes, and that increased job satisfaction is the solution to avoid voluntary turnover. According to the model, voluntary turnover has much more to do with shocks than satisfaction (Harman et al 2007). When an employee is faced with information that leads to reconsideration of job-related values and goals, and strategies for obtaining the goals, this is described as shocks. A shock that can trigger the decision to leave a job can be internal or external to the employee. Examples are a fight with the boss, winning the lottery, or receiving an unanticipated job offer. The unfolding model holds five paths to voluntary turnover. In the two first paths, the employee leaves the organization without considering alternatives. In the first path, a shock triggers a pre-existing script

(e g will quit work if becoming pregnant). In the second path, new information is interpreted as violating a person's value, goal or strategic images, and triggers leaving (e g a disliked co-worker gets promoted to be one's boss). The third path contains a shock that triggers an evaluation of the current job, which

may lead to voluntary turnover through comparison of job alternatives (e.g. due to an unexpected job offer). The fourth path holds two branches. In the first, job satisfaction becomes low enough to trigger the employee to leave immediately, without considering job alternatives. In the second, low satisfaction leads to search of job alternatives (Harman et al 2007).

The unfolding model has received support from several turnover studies and is claimed to be more accurate than rationalistic approaches such as the behavioural model and stresses that job satisfaction may not be governing the decision to quit. Even satisfied employees may leave, and turnover is not stopped by lack of job alternatives (Harman et al 2007).

*Realistic job preview (RJP)* is another approach used in research on employee retention. The basic assumption is that applicant expectations generally are inflated due to employers' habit of trying to appear to be a good place to work. After accepting a position based on inaccurate perceptions, employees are expected to be more likely to become dissatisfied, and therefore quit, than applicants who have more accurate expectations (Breugh 2008). Early communication about corporate culture, opportunities for development, compensation, and benefits have been shown to be related to applicants' attraction to the organization as well as their sense of fit, satisfaction and retention after accepting a position (Gardner et al 2009). The logic is that the degree of person-job and person-organization fit, and hence retention, increases through the communication of both positive and less desirable (but accurate) information (Breugh 2008). RJPs have been shown to be effective in reducing turnover, i.e. improving employee retention (Gardner et al 2009). However, according to Breugh (2008) the results of many RJP studies have not been able to satisfyingly confirm the logic of RJPs.

*Quality of working life (QWL)* encompasses the quality of the relationship between employees and the total working environment, with special focus on job satisfaction, organizational involvement and stress, since these are assumed to influence employees' intention to turnover (Korunka et al 2008). QWL has been used in attraction research, e.g. in hotels and hospitality organizations who find it difficult to attract and retain employees. One of the reasons is the perceived poor working conditions. The job characteristics included where person-job fit, company image, HR policies, work-group relationships, physical working conditions, work-life balance, and interaction with customers. However, QWL has been argued to be lacking an accepted definition (Kandasamy & Ancheri 2009).

QWL has also been applied in research predicting turnover based on job demands, job control, social support, job content, role conflict, and role ambiguity (Korunka et al 2008). Research have found that improved quality of work life have an impact on turnover, through a process by which an organization responds to employee needs, allowing participation in decisions and ensuing the well-being of employees (Kandasamy & Ancheri 2009).

QWL has also been used in explaining turnover intention in IT workforce, where retention was positively related to employees control over their work, challenging work, supervisory support, career opportunities, and rewards. Salary is one of the most important reasons to leave a job, while a perceived fair reward system increases retention (Korunka et al 2008).

*Psychological contract theory* is relevant for understanding and managing employment relationships. Generally speaking, a psychological contract is based on subjective interpretations and evaluations of the employment deal (De Vos & Meganck 2009). Specifically, a psychological contract consists of beliefs of reciprocal obligations – a belief that a promise has been made and accepted by both employer and employee. However, since the psychological contract is subjective, the parties do not necessarily share a common understanding of the contract – even though they believe this to be the case (Robinson & Rousseau 1994).

The psychological contract is renegotiated throughout the employment based on social interaction and workplace changes (Robinson & Rousseau 1994; Conway & Briner 2005).

Violation and breach are two important aspects of psychological contract. Breach consists of perceptions of failure to fulfil the agreement. Violation is the emotional state that may result from breach (Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski & Bravo 2007). Often focus lies on the perceptions of promises made by the employer, but both parties can experience violations (Robinson & Rousseau 1994). Employees, who believe their psychological contract is breached, react with reduced commitment, intentions to leave, or actual turnover. Perceived violations of the psychological contract can explain the difficulties many organizations experience in retaining their employees (De Vos & Meganck 2009). Violations are most common regarding career perspective, compensation and promotion (Zhao et al 2007). Further, breach severity describes the extent to which employees perceive that the most important promises in their psychological contracts have gone unfulfilled. The reaction to breach is likely to be both more intense and more negative, the more severe the breach (Ng & Feldman 2009a). Although there is a relationship between violation and turnover (Robinson & Rousseau 1994), employees may not actually withdraw from the organization, due to the high cost of withdrawal (Zhao et al 2007). Nevertheless, for effective retention management, the employer needs to manage employees' perceptions of the employment deal (De Vos & Meganck 2009), especially during organizational change (Robinson & Rousseau 1994).

## **Attractive Work and Commitment**

The constructs of engagement and commitment are closely related and in everyday language the definitions and meanings are often overlapping. However, in academic research there is a need to understand each construct as distinct and unique (Saks 2006), and there are examples where they are treated as distinguishable from each other (Meyer et al 2004).

*Engagement* is a popular concept, but its theoretical structure and definition is stated to be in need of development, as well as clarification of the connections to commitment (Wefald & Downey 2009). While the commitment construct has been researched for more than four decades, the research on engagement is of recent origin (Chalofsky & Krishna 2009). Engagement has been defined as a persistent and positive affective-motivational state of fulfilment in employees, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá & Bakker 2002).



Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort, and persistence. Dedication is characterized by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge, and brings psychological identification with work. Absorption means being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in work, whereby time passes quickly and detachment is difficult (Schaufeli et al 2002; Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova 2006). However, absorption has started to be seen as more closely related to flow than to engagement (Schaufeli, Bakker & van Rhenen 2009).

Other authors have defined engagement as the degree to which an individual is attentive and absorbed in the performance of their roles. Engagement have also been divided into *job engagement* and *organizational engagement* (Saks 2006).

*Commitment* is suggested to be a component of work motivation, even though they have separate origins: work motivation from general motivation theories; and commitment from sociology and social psychology. In the organizational behavior literature, commitment has been used as a potential predictor of employee turnover (Meyer et al 2004). Commitment is used for important actions or decisions that have relatively long-term implications, while motivation is used also in cases including relatively trivial and short-term implications. Commitment is stated to be a force that binds an individual to a course of action and it can be directed towards various targets, such as the organization, occupation, team, customer etc (Meyer et al 2004). Organizational commitment is described as employee identification with and involvement in an organization (Leiter & Maslach 1988).

Three different aspects of commitment have been identified to influence retention and turnover: affective attachment to the organization, obligation to remain, and perceived cost of leaving. These aspects, labelled “affective commitment”, “normative commitment”, and “continuance commitment” respectively, all bind the employee to the organization (Meyer et al 2004). Affective commitment refers to employees’ emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization. Normative commitment refers to employees’ feelings of obligation to remain in the organization. Continuance commitment is based on the costs that employees associate with leaving the organization (Wasti 2003).

Both engagement and commitment holds important qualities for attraction research. Which of the constructs that is most suitable is difficult to conclude. Both constructs have been used in attraction research. Further, the two constructs are overlapping – e g the aspect of engagement that has been shown to be negatively related to employees’ intention to quit has also been described as continuance commitment (Schaufeli et al 2008).

This overlap is possibly indicating that one of the constructs is used as overarching and the other as an aspect, not based on a thorough theoretical or academic understanding, but as a result of the researchers’ theoretical and scholarly background. In the following, theories used based on both constructs will be included, although treated separately.

**Engagement-related theories.** Engagement theories that have been used in attraction research are *Job Demands-Resources model*, *Effort-Recovery model*, *Self-determination theory*, and *Job characteristics theory*.

*The Job Demands-Resources model* divides job characteristics into demands and resources. Job demands uses employees' capacities with psychological and/or physiological costs, which turn into stressors if the capacities are exceeded. Job demands can be task interruptions, workload, work-home interference, organizational changes, and emotional dissonance (Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte & Lens 2008). Job resources are social, organizational psychological or physical factors that can be used to reduce job demands, achieve goals, and stimulate personal growth, learning and development. Increased job resources, such as social support, feedback, skill utilization and variety, rewards, autonomy, learning opportunities, and career opportunities, leads to increased work engagement (Bakker et al 2008; Van den Broeck et al 2008; Schaufeli et al 2009). Engagement, in turn, leads to organizational attachment and a somewhat lower tendency to turnover (Schaufeli & Bakker 2004).

*The Effort-Recovery model* also utilizes job resources in explaining the motivational role that work environment may offer through many resources that foster the willingness to dedicate one's efforts and abilities to the work task. Engagement is stated to occur through satisfaction of basic needs or through achievement of work goals, which is made more likely when colleagues are supportive or when superiors give feedback (Schaufeli & Bakker 2004).

*Self-determination theory* states that work contexts that support psychological autonomy, competence and relatedness enhance well-being and increase intrinsic motivation (Schaufeli & Bakker 2004). The theory is based on an empirical foundation, but has been tested in relatively few studies within the organizational setting. The focus is on need satisfaction, where the need for autonomy is deemed as being more essential than competence and relatedness (Kuvaas 2009). Self-determination is the experience of engaging in behaviors that are not pressured or coerced, but based on autonomous reasons fully endorsed by the employee (Lam & Gurland 2008). Autonomy involves acting with a sense of volition and having the experience of choice. Autonomy-supportive work climates are ones in which managers are able to take employee's perspectives, provide greater choice, and encourage self-initiation. Even the value of uninteresting tasks – which people tend to feel resistance of doing – can be internalized by employees, if their perspective and feelings about the task is acknowledged by managers. Further, structuring work to allow interdependence among employees and identification with work groups, as well as being respectful and concerned about each employee, have been argued to have a positive effect (Gagné & Deci 2005). Identified positive outcomes are intentions to remain on the job as long as possible before retirement, greater work satisfaction, and lower emotional exhaustion, as well as lower turnover intentions (Lam & Gurland 2008).

*Job Characteristics Theory* also recognizes the intrinsic motivational potential of job resources. Job characteristics theory states that every job holds a potential for motivation, which is depending on the five job characteristics skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. It is argued that the job characteristics are positively linked to work performance, job satisfaction, low absenteeism and low turnover (Schaufeli & Bakker 2004). The characteristics are argued to be able to reach through combining tasks, forming natural work units, establishing client relationships, and feedback channels (Kira 2003).

**Commitment-related theories.** Commitment theories that have been used in research that adhere to attractive work include *Work centrality*, *Transformational leadership*, *Social exchange theory*, and *Affective events theory*.

Work centrality describes identification with the work role and conceptualizes what constitutes a general commitment to work based on the individuals' beliefs regarding the value and importance of work in their life. When work centrality is high, people strongly identify with work, which in turn is linked to highly committed employees (Hirschfeld & Feild 2000). However, Hirschfeld and Field (2000) raises the question whether engagement is one aspect of commitment, and hypothesize that employees who are committed to work both identify with the work role, and are engaged in work.

*Transformational leadership* has been described as having a significant and positive relationship with organizational commitment (Wang & Walumbwa 2007). A transformational leadership style includes "soft" influence behaviour: involving employees in decision-making, and using emotional language to arouse enthusiasm and create commitment through transformation of employees' value systems to be aligned with organizational goals (Clarke & Ward 2006). Being attentive to employees' needs, provide support, act as mentors, and foster individual growth, as well as provide constructive feedback and encourage creativity when faced with complex problems, are also included (Wang & Walumbwa 2007).

Research show a positive relationship between transformational leadership and commitment, especially when leaders are supportive and attentive to individuals and their needs (Lok, Westwood & Crawford 2005).

*Social exchange theory* is based on the principle of reciprocity, where employees feel obliged to exert extra effort in return for extra benefits. If employees perceive that they are being cared for, they are more apt to feel that the organization is treating them well and thus obliged to reciprocate with commitment to the organization. Research have provided support for social exchange theory through results showing that when organizations provide family-friendly programs and benefits to their employees, this produce higher levels of organizational commitment (Wang & Walumbwa 2007).

*Affective events theory* is closely linked to psychological contract theory and holds that a significant positive or negative workplace event triggers emotional experiences that influence work attitudes and behaviours, but also trust (or mistrust). Trust-based relationships are important emotional experiences, leading employees to make emotional investments. When employees experience that breach occurs, this is likely to cause lowered employee commitment to the organization. Within affective events theory, job satisfaction is important and seen as caused by the perceived relationship between promises and what is perceived to be offered. When there is a discrepancy, this is likely to lead to dissatisfaction (Zhao et al 2007).

## **Summarizing Comments**

Attraction research includes a large amount of empirical and theoretical contributions. Both the volume and the width of the field of attraction research bring

challenges, since some of the theoretical contributions are contradictory to each other. Also, some theories have received strong support, while others although based on sound logic, have not received much empirical support. One example is the common view where retention to a very large extent is seen as due to satisfaction – satisfied employees are believed not to leave voluntarily. Such assumptions are easily taken for granted.

Holcombe Erhart and Ziegert (2005) launched a systematic analysis on applicant attraction, and calls to attention of the other aspects of attraction research. The aim here can be described as mapping the theoretical territory of attraction research, and use the learning from each theory in an examination of the attractive work model. This way, the examination of the model as well as the theoretical overview may be suggested as a foundation for future attraction research.

## The Attractive Work Content Model

The attractive work model (Åteg et al 2004) builds on interviews with employees and HR-representatives in SMEs according to a chartering method, with an aim to create an understanding about what makes work attractive. The method is inspired by Grounded Theory (Walker & Myrick 2006) and repeated analysis was conducted through an iterative process starting with the empirical data followed by theoretical studies. The literature studies focused on theories on work organization such as scientific management, human relations, socio-technical systems, and motivation, but also attractive work and adjacent concepts. The result is stated to be a content model which focuses on promotion and possibilities. Qualities that do not contribute to attraction are not included, e.g. stress, or even the absence of stress. All in all, the content model is claimed to give an overall picture about dimensions and qualities that contribute to make a work attractive (Åteg et al 2004).

The model contains about 80 qualities, constituting 22 dimensions, divided into three different categories: *attractive work content*, *work satisfaction*, and *attractive working conditions*. Attractive work content includes dimensions dealing with aptitudes the employee uses and characteristics encountered while carrying out the work. *Work satisfaction* encompasses dimensions dealing with aspects the employee perceives as resulting from carrying out the work. *Attractive working conditions* encompass dimensions describing the circumstances surrounding the work, some of which are common to all employees at a work place.

**Table 1.** Dimensions and categories in the content model of attractive work (Åteg et al 2004).

Category	Attractive Work Content	Work Satisfaction	Attractive Conditions	Working
<b>Dimensions</b>	Familiarity	Sought after	Location	
	Freedom to plan	Acknowledgement	Hours of work	
	Physical activity	Status	Physical work environment	
	Mental work	Stimulation	Suitable equipment	
	Practical work	Outcomes	Organization	
	Work rate		Leadership	
	Variation		Loyalty	
			Contact	
			Relationships	
			Salary	

Table 1 shows the dimensions divided into the three categories. The whole attractive work model, including categories, dimensions and qualities, is presented in attachment 1. The content model of attractive work describes what contributes to make work attractive. Below, a brief description is made of the dimensions (within quotes) and qualities (in italic) in the model.

### Attractive Work Content

“Familiarity” includes qualities describing that the employee knows what and how to do, and *what to expect during the work day*.

“Freedom to plan” refers to the possibility to *organize and manage one’s own and others’ work*.

“Physical activity” means that there is some kind of bodily activity within the work task. It includes that *the work load is healthy and movement between different work areas*.

“Mental work” refers to cognitive activity within the work. It can be as a part *in the work tasks* or when *solving problems*, as well as to *learn* new things through teaching or in daily work, and to be involved in *organisational development*. It is also attractive if the mental work is done *together with work mates and/or management*.

“Practical work” means that there are practical tasks included when performing the work, i e *working with one’s hands*, but also to be creative and to use one’s *skills*.

“Work rate” refers to in which pace the work is performed. In order for work to be attractive, it shall hold both *intensive* and *calm periods* and *breaks*. These three qualities support each other and all of them must be present to make work attractive. The *calm* periods give opportunities to *reflection* and *recovery*.

“Variation” means the presence of different work tasks. It includes *work rotation*, *altered tasks* and *flexibility*. *Work rotation* is obtained by doing *several tasks*, which concerns *all employees*. *Altered tasks* can be achieved by develop-



ing current tasks or by *getting new ones and get rid of old*. The flexibility can be *within tasks*, i.e. to perform a task in different ways, or between tasks, i.e. to vary the order in which different tasks are performed.

## Work Satisfaction

The dimension “sought after” includes that the employee feels that *his/hers competence is in demand*, that *what he/she does is important* and that he/she is *needed*.

“Acknowledgement” can be divided into *inner* and *external acknowledgement*. *Inner acknowledgement* is constituted by the personal perception of doing a good job. *External acknowledgement* is to get appreciation from management, *co-workers* or *other people*, for example customers. *The external acknowledgement* can be expressed as *rewards*, which can be *related to performance and individually based*. The *rewards* can also be expressed as *extraordinary activities or monetary rewards*.

“Status” contains the qualities *pride*, *success* and *professional identity*. Both *pride* and *success* can be dependent on own performance or linked to the organization.

“Stimulation” means the satisfaction that the employee feels by doing his/her work. It can be achieved by a *challenging work*, *personal development* and an *interesting job*.

“Outcomes” are expressed in different qualities. Outcomes can be direct in conjunction with performed work, *visible* to the employee and *concrete*. To work with *different types* of products or services, and to have a *sense of context* for the own outcomes contributes to attraction.

## Attractive Working Conditions

“Location” concerns the geographical place of the work place. To travel *to and from work* includes *time* and *cost* for transportation, and *means of transport*, such as being able to walk, bicycle, go by bus etc. Also the *convenience* of the workplace related to residence and the *area* around the work place are important.

“Hours of work” includes the time that the employee is at work. It is important to have *known* working hours, to know at which hour the work starts and ends. It also includes the possibility to influence the *range*, and *weekly distribution*, and to have *flexible* working hours, as well as being able to take *time off at short notice*.

“Physical work environment” concerns the environment around the employee during work, how the *premises* and the *interior* are looking. The *air quality* should be good, *the noise level* low and it should be *clean*.

“Suitable equipment” means that the organization supply with machines, tools and other equipment which are *modern* and gives conditions to perform a *good job* with high *quality* and high *productivity*. The equipment shall contribute to a *healthy work load*, both physically and mentally.

“Organization” concerns how *prosperous* the company is, as well as its *size*. *Job security* is important. Also *career opportunities* and *fringe benefits* contribute to attraction.

“Leadership” contains well working *communication* and *confidence* between management and employees. The manager should have *confidence for the employee* and the employee should have *confidence for the manager*. By *information*, the employees know what is happening within the organization. The management should be *innovative*, make *appropriate demands* and *encourage* the employees. It is also important that the management *delegate responsibility and authority* which contributes to *participation and influence*.

“Loyalty” is divided to three different directions. *Loyalty towards co-workers* can be expressed by supporting each other. *Loyalty towards the workplace* can be found between different departments. To feel for and stand up for the business are signs for *loyalty towards the organization*.

“Contact” means that there are social contacts at work. It can exist during work and during *breaks*. The employee can have contact with *co-workers* or with *other people*, such as customers.

“Relationship” describes how the social contacts within the organization functions. It is important to give *support, empathy*, and to be *helping each other*, as well as to have a *team spirit, cooperation, honesty, outspokenness, openness* and *humour* at the work place. *Social interaction* can occur *during work* and *during leisure time*.

“Salary” means the agreed monetary pay for performed work. Of importance is that the salary is *high*, its *relation to performance*, that the salary *increases regularly* and that is *sufficient* in order to manage.

## Comments on the Model

Åteg et al (2004) reports that in working with the model, it became apparent that there is a need to take the dialectics between parts and whole into consideration. The qualities can only be fully understood in the context of the dimension and category to which it is belonging. The qualities and the dimensions are complementary and in order not to be overly reductionist, the model must be seen as a totality where qualities and dimensions sometimes may be combined in order to achieve combinations allowing for greater complexity.

The model has been commented upon as stimulating a focus on promotion and possibilities, and is intended to contribute to a positive outlook on the organization. The model can be used in order to give a comprehensive view on work (Bornberger-Dankvart, Ohlson, Andersson & Rosén 2005).

# The Attractive Work Model in Light of the Theoretical Overview

The purpose with this paper is to examine the Attractive Work model based on the theoretical overview in order to scrutinize the theoretical support for the model, as well as to identify where the theories contradict or holds qualities or factors not included in the model, and to identify whether there are dimensions or qualities in the model for which there are no corresponding attraction theory.

However, it has become apparent that many of the theories included in the overview holds a rather different perspective when looking at attraction, compared to the perspective which the model is based on. This is especially evident for most theories used within applicant attraction research. Many of these theories do not present factors or aspects of the job or organization that contributes to attraction, but are instead describing HOW or WHY attraction is created: i.e. they explain by which processes the individual becomes attracted. This means that the content in these theories do not correspond with the content in the attractive work model, which instead describes WHAT qualities in work that contributes to attraction. However, these theories still holds valuable contributions to the understanding of work attraction. Also, the model does not always explicitly show correspondence with factors or aspects in the theories, but by combining dimensions or qualities in the model in the manner in which Åteg et al (2004) commented it is sometimes possible to identify a correspondence with specific factors from theories

(e.g. the dimension *leadership* with the quality *support* found in the dimension relationships provide support as an aspect of transformative leadership).

In the analysis, the level of correspondence between the theories and the model has been described through three different groups (see table 2). The first group is theories which have a very high degree of correspondence with qualities in the model: the factors that the theory in question states is significant for attraction is matched by qualities in the model. The second group is theories which show a correspondence with the model, but which holds some factors that bring new or partly new information with which the model could be developed. The third group holds theories for which there are no or less clear correspondence with qualities in the model, and as described above do not present factors, but instead how attraction is created through informational, interactional, or mental processes. However, signalling theory, which is included in group two, also emphasize such a process but will only be discussed in the context of group two.

**Correspondence between theories and the attractive work model.** In total, there are 31 theories presented in the overview of attraction research. Out of these, the attractive work model can be identified to have qualities or dimensions that correspond to the content in factors or aspects within 18 of the theories, which places them in group one or two.

**Table 2.** Correspondence between the theories divided into three groups and the attractive work model.

<b>Group of theories</b>	<b>Included theories</b>	<b>Correspondence</b>	<b>New factors</b>	<b>Focus: Factor/ Process</b>
1	Appl. attr. Brand Equity perspective Employer Branding Social Learning theory Social Identity theory	High	No	Factor
	Ret. Job Embeddedness			
	Eng./ Com. Job Demands-Resources Effort-Recovery Work Centrality			
2	Appl. attr. Exposure theory Signaling theory	Medium	Some	Factor/ Process
	Ret. Realistic Job Preview Quality of Working Life Psychological Contract theory			
	Eng./ Com. Self-Determination theory Job Characteristics theory Transformational Leadership Social Exchange theory Affective Events theory			
3	Appl. attr. Elaboration Likelihood model Image theory Heuristic-Systematic model Expectancy theory Decision Processing model Need-press theory Interactional Psychology Theory of Work Adjustment Attraction-Selection-Attrition Consistency theory Self-Categorization theory	Low /less clear	No	Process
	Ret. Behavioral model Unfolding model			

The first group, which content as mentioned is matched by the attractive work model, holds four applicant attraction theories, one retention theory, and three engagement-related theories (see table 2). In short, the theories present factors or aspects on organizational level, such as the company's size and performance, and more individual and job specific aspects such as individual successfulness, stimulation, pay, benefits and promotion, but also a safe and pleasant work environment.

The second group, describing theories with correspondence but also adding new information to the model, holds two applicant attraction theories. *Signalling theory* describes the importance of firm reputation. This is well covered by the attractive work model. But, the theory also provides the factor organizational policies, which does not correspond with any single quality or group of qualities (dimension). Instead, organizational policies can be seen as being a more general factor, including many different aspects. Further, *signalling theory* describes the importance of recruiter behaviour for applicant attraction. These are however not factors explaining what is attractive in the job or organization. Instead, recruiter behaviour describes a process of how attraction can be created, regardless of job or organizational characteristics. *Exposure theory* adds the importance of familiarity with the organization.

The three retention theories in the second group are *realistic job preview (RJP)*, *quality of working life (QWL)*, and *psychological contract theory*. *RJP* actually holds the aspect of taking efforts to give accurate expectations. The attractive work model does not include such a quality, but mentions openness, outspokenness, communication, and information, which if combined comes a long way in contributing in creating more accurate expectations.

Further, the theory also holds the aspect of communication about corporate culture. Corporate culture per se is not mentioned in the attractive work model, but communication is one important leadership quality. The model does not, however, prescribe what the communication should be about. Instead the quality focuses on how the communication is functioning. *QWL* holds a large number of factors that are important for attraction, and which correspond with qualities in the attractive work model, such as relationships, physical work environment, customer interaction, job demands, job control, job content, support, career, rewards, participation in decisions, etc. However, *QWL* also adds the aspect of roles, with an emphasis on avoiding role conflict and role ambiguity. Since role conflict and ambiguity can be seen as contrary to attractive, such qualities are not, and should not be, included in the attractive work model.

*Psychological contract theory* holds the aspects of fulfilment of promises and perceptions of the employment deal. Such qualities are not included in the attractive work model. However, the dimension of leadership holds several positively oriented qualities, such as confidence, communication, and participation and influence etc, that taken together more or less rules out management behaviour that leads to psychological contract breach and violation.

The latter of the aspects is closely connected to leadership, since the theory emphasizes the importance of managing such perceptions. There is no single corresponding leadership quality in the attractive work model, but the dimension holds several qualities that taken together cover a large area, such as raising ap-



propriate demands etc. *The psychological contract theory* illustrates important aspects which are not explicitly described in the model. Even if qualities and dimensions in the model does not exclude that view is taken of promises and the employment deal, the theory still brings focus on these aspects so that opportunities are given for acting consciously and to a greater extent avoid negative consequences.

This group also holds five commitment/engagement theories. *The self-determination theory* includes autonomy, competence, and relatedness. From managers, the theory stresses providing choice, encourage self-initiation, acknowledge feelings, allow employee interdependence, facilitate group identification, and being concerned of employees. However, taking employee perspectives and being respectful are factors that show less correspondence with the attractive work model. These factors therefore provide new information that could be added to the attractive work model. *Job characteristics theory* holds the forming of natural work units as a strategy to reach the characteristics. In the model, aspects of group work are mentioned, but not explicitly natural work units. *Transformational leadership* provides four new aspects which is not included in the model, from being attentive to employee needs, provide support, mentoring and encourage creativity. Encouragement is mentioned in the model as an aspect of leadership, but not specifically related to creativity. *Social exchange theory* specifically mentions family-friendly programs. This is not mentioned directly in the model, but the model does include the dimension of work hours, with qualities such as flexibility, possible to influence, and allowance for employees to take time off at short notices. In the work hour dimension, it is explicitly stated that in order for work to be attractive, it is important to be able to work daytime in order to making life with children easier (Åteg et al 2004). However, family-friendly programs may include other aspects than work hours, aimed at facilitating a satisfactory work-life balance. *Affective events theory* holds one aspect which is new to the model, which it has in common with the retention theory *psychological contract theory*. This aspect is the fulfilment of promises in order to avoid employee experiences of breach and violation. In the attractive work model, a combination of the leadership qualities information, communication and confidence, but also openness and outspokenness provides a content that comes close to what is stated to be important in order to avoid such negative experiences.

As seen in table 2, the third group, which has been labelled as containing process theories, includes a majority of the applicant attraction theories and two of the retention theories. These theories, while contributing with important insights to how applicants become attracted to jobs/organizations, starts out from a somewhat different approach, making it less fruitful to look for aspects or factors that can contribute to the attractive work model. The content of the theories in the third group does not fit to be used in order to develop the content of the model itself. Instead, these theories can be used in bringing a more specific understanding of the processes that foregoes a situation where the model comes into play.

**Dimensions without support from theories.** The attractive work content model consists of 22 dimensions. For 20 of these, there is correspondence with

attraction theories, even if the model sometimes is more detailed and the dimensions holds more qualities than the number of factors or aspects that are described in the theories.

Two dimensions belonging to the category working conditions are not described in the theories. These dimensions are *suitable equipment* and *loyalty*.

*Suitable equipment* points out the importance of the equipment, which should be modern, and provide conditions to have a healthy work load and to perform a good job. The importance of a healthy work load shows correspondence with the theories *Job embeddedness* and *Effort-recovery*. But these theories do not raise the importance of the equipment. To perform a good job is supported by *the Social learning theory*, described as wanting to be successful. Neither in that theory is the equipment mentioned. If the dimension *suitable equipment* only contained the two qualities of healthy work load and of perform a good job, one could consider the equipment only to be an instrument to reach attractivity, and not a quality of an attractive work. But, the quality “modern” and the division of suitable equipment as a part of the conditions supports that the equipment in itself is important for the attractiveness. A scenario is that a person is choosing between two different jobs which are identical except for the equipment. One work place offers new computers, wireless networks and cell phones. The other one offers typewriters, reference books and telephones. For many (albeit not necessarily to all) the first job is the more attractive.

The dimension *loyalty*, with qualities describing the loyalty to be directed towards co-workers, work place and organization, is included in the model, but there is no corresponding factor in the theories. *Loyalty* towards co-workers can partly be seen as included in the quality support/empathy in the dimension *relationship*. However, a distinction is that the dimension *relationship* is describing how the social interplay is functioning while the dimension *loyalty* is describing a feeling/an emotion. Loyalty should also be directed towards the workplace and the company, besides towards co-workers. It is not only the own loyalty that is important, but also the loyalty of workmates.

**Processes for attractive work.** As mentioned, the third group of theories can be used to bring understanding of processes contributing to individual’s perceptions of attraction. This group contains mainly applicant attraction theories, but also two retention theories. The theories in this third group can be divided into on the one hand those connected to the recruitment processes, and on the other hand those that concern the individual’s decision processes.

Qualities that are important to take into consideration in the recruitment process are pointed out by *signalling theory* and *elaboration likelihood theory*. *Signalling theory*<sup>1</sup> tells us that a recruiter who is personable, trustworthy, informative, and competent contributes to make a position within an organization more attractive. *Elaboration likelihood model* describes that the individual’s attitudes and perceptions of attraction is formed dependent on how carefully examined the information is about the job and the organization, and how recruiter behaviour is interpreted. These theories indicate that opinions of attraction are not only

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<sup>1</sup> Signaling theory is included in group two, since it includes both factors and processes.

formed by characteristics of the work, and thus affect applicants' job choice. Recruiter behaviour and how the recruitment process is managed are important aspects for organizations in their efforts to be attractive.

Most theories in the third group concern the individual's process of forming attitudes of attraction. The theories describe in a general way what the attraction is based on, for example satisfaction (*need-press theory* and *behavioural model*), homogeneity (*attraction-selection-attrition*) and social identification (*self-categorization*). However, the theories do not point out which qualities are being judged in the decision process of whether applying for a job, or of leaving an employment. Ten different theories<sup>2</sup> are dealing with the basis for attraction. Most of them are describing how attraction is based on the individual's values or needs, to which characteristics of the job are compared. *The heuristic-systematic model* describes that different kinds of cognitive processing of information are used depending on the message, indicating that employers have a possibility to increase attraction by giving personally relevant messages.

Five of the theories<sup>3</sup> concern processes of retention or turnover. *The theory of work adjustment* and *ASA* indicate that employees' will decide to leave an employment if correspondence respectively homogeneity is not fulfilled. *The behavioural model* states that whether or not an employee will stay is not only depending on the level of attraction to that current job, but also on other job alternatives. *The unfolding model* supports the fact that events external to the organization influences whether the employee will stay or not. According to this theory, the process of deciding whether to stay or leave an employment can be short, while many other theories indicate a decision process more prolonged in time. *Psychological contract theory* is an example where the decision process is longer. The individual will consider leaving the organisation if promises are not fulfilled.

## Concluding Remarks

The aim with this paper was to critically examine the content model of attractive work based on a theoretical overview of attraction research in the fields of recruitment, retention, and commitment. We have identified three potential weaknesses in the theoretical overview.

First, within then field of recruitment, there was already an extensive overview available through Holcombe Ehrhart & Zeigert (2005). In the fields of retention and commitment no such existing overview was found. Potentially, this gives a larger probability that theories that could have been included might be missing. On the other hand, the volume of papers included in the search and the

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<sup>2</sup> Image theory, Heuristic-systematic model, Expectancy theory, Decision processing model, Need-press theory, Interactional psychology, Theory of work adjustment, Attraction-selection-attrition, Consistency theory, and Self-categorization theory all concern the decision process when an individual is judging whether to apply for a job or not.

<sup>3</sup> Theory of work adjustment, Attraction-selection-attrition, Behavioral model, Unfolding model, and Psychological contract are theories that concern the decision process on whether to stay or leave a job.

number included in the overview gives an indication that the important theories are included.

Second, the theories included have had different impact in attraction research and are described and supported to different degrees. Here, the included theories have not been weighted against each other since the focus has been to identify factors contributing to attraction.

Third, only theories within the fields of recruitment, retention and commitment that explicitly have been used in attraction research are included. However, it is much likely that theories in other fields hold factors that impact organizational or job attraction.

The analysis shows that the theories to a high degree support the content of the model of attractive work, i.e. most dimensions and qualities that according to the model contribute to make work attractive can also be found in the theories. However, for the two dimensions *suitable equipment* and *loyalty* in the model of attractive work, there is no correspondence in the attraction theories. This can be interpreted in several ways. One is that this indicates that the model contributes with new knowledge. Most theories focus on factors or aspects that are stated to be of great importance or the most important factors for attractive work. The model on the other hand aims to cover as many dimensions and qualities as possible that contribute to work attraction, which could explain that the model is “wider” than the theories. Another interpretation is that since the dimensions is given no support from the theories these dimensions are of minor or even no degree in contributing to explain work attraction. This interpretation would rest on the assumption that the theories really do cover the important factors for attraction, and that these dimensions would be obsolete. In order to provide support to one of these interpretations, if any, a larger survey needs to be done.

The many qualities in the model also show the depth and width of the content of the attractive work model. Even so, some theories describe aspects which could be included in the dimension *leadership* within the model, but which are not. A conclusion is that the content model of attractive work gives an overall picture of dimensions and qualities that contribute to make a work attractive, but, there are still factors relevant for work attraction that the model does not explicitly describe.

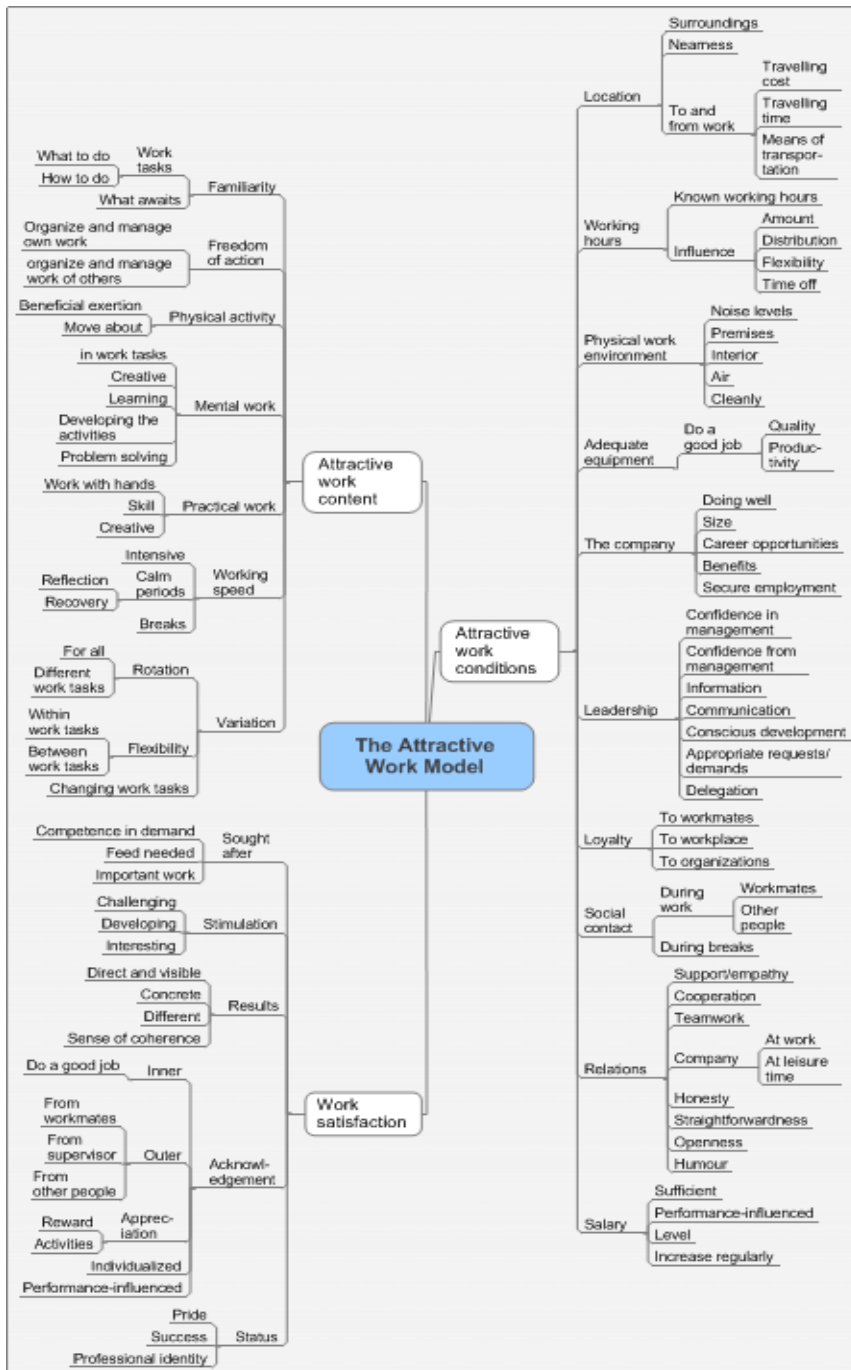
The analysis has also contributed to an understanding of the importance not only of the content of the model of attractive work, but also of processes contributing to perceived attraction. Especially these processes concern recruitment, but to some extent also retention and commitment, and therefore influencing people to be attracted to, stay employed, and become committed in a job. The theories points out different types of processes. Some of these can be influenced by the employers, others can not. The knowledge that can be obtained can be used by companies in order to prioritize efforts in their ambitions to become more attractive.

There is a close relation between the attractive work model and many of the theories in the fields of recruitment, retention and commitment. This relationship can be useful in development processes aimed at increased attraction. The model of attractive work can be used to identify areas in need of development, i.e. dimensions and qualities which are prioritized to work with to raise the attractive-

ness, or where opportunities for improvement exist. Depending on which dimension or quality is in focus, one or more theories can provide information on how the development can be carried out.

Finally, this article has focused on the content of attractive work: the dimensions and qualities described by the attractive work model; and the factors and aspects identified in the theories. How to develop more attractive work, on the other hand, has not been more than briefly touched upon. Further research can be directed in several ways. One is to describe and analyze processes aiming at increased attraction. Another is to use results from quantitative studies using questionnaires to analyze the attractive work model.

**Attachment 1.** The content model of attractive work contains about 80 qualities that contribute to make a work attractive. The qualities constitute 22 dimensions divided into the three categories Work Satisfaction, Attractive Working Conditions, and Attractive Work Content.



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