

Corporate social responsibility's influence on organizational attractiveness: An investigation in the context of employer choice

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Bettina Lis

Universität Bayreuth, Germany

Abstract

While most studies of corporate social responsibility (CSR) have been conducted at the firm level, there is a nascent interest in research at the individual, particularly the employee, level of analysis. However, the extant literature has revealed that the effect of CSR on organizational attractiveness (OA) remains under-examined. Previous studies have overlooked the complex nature of the decisions that potential employees make about job choices while addressing the isolated effect of CSR on OA. Addressing this research gap, the present study aims to answer the question: What will be the result if CSR is compared to other factors when choosing an employer? Therefore, this study provides meaningful insights for both researchers and practitioners not only by analyzing how CSR affects the OA but also by showing the importance of CSR relative to other factors, such as remuneration, location, and intellectual challenge.

Keywords

corporate social responsibility, employer choice, organizational attractiveness, policy capturing

Based on the impact of demographic changes, mainly characterized by a decreasing and aging population, skilled young employees have increasingly become a scarce resource (Towers Watson, 2016). A slowdown in labor supply growth, coupled with increasing demand, is projected to cause a labor shortage in the future, rendering the war for talent, even fiercer (Kim et al., 2011; Uggerslev et al., 2012). Talented employees are important to the future success of companies. Organizations that attract larger applicant pools and more qualified applicants obtain greater utility in their selection systems and a potential competitive advantage. Of great importance for human resources departments is knowing the criteria that are ultimately decisive for the choice of a future employer (Uggerslev et al., 2012). Research on employee recruitment has illuminated that potential employees distinguish very well among different factors, such as remuneration, location, career opportunities, and work–life balance (e.g. Barber, 1998; Gatewood et al., 1993; Towers Watson, 2016). The perceived attractiveness of future employers results from an individual weighting of these factors, which ultimately influences the decision for or against entry into an organization (Uggerslev et al., 2012).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is regarded as a major factor for potential employees in their career choices (Backhaus et al., 2002; Lis, 2012). In response to increasing

public demands for companies to accept social responsibility in pursuing their economic objectives, various activities have been initiated under the heading of CSR in recent years (Towers Watson, 2016). For researchers and practitioners, the interest in this area of research has grown steadily (Jones et al., 2014). Previous research has shown that socially engaged companies are able to create an improved image and consequently can attract more applicants (e.g. Backhaus et al., 2002; Greening and Turban, 2000; Jones et al., 2014; Lis, 2012). For companies, this outcome indicates that they likely stand out by emphasizing their CSR activities in the war for talent and can attract a large number of potential employees (Rupp et al., 2013).

However, the extant literature reveals that the effects of CSR on organizational determinants remain under-examined. More specifically, the previous literature has overlooked the complex nature of the decisions that potential employees make about job choices while addressing the isolated effect of CSR on organizational attractiveness (OA; e.g. Backhaus et al., 2002; Greening and Turban,

Corresponding author:

Bettina Lis, Universität Bayreuth, Universitätsstraße 30, 95447 Bayreuth, Germany.
Email: bettina.lis@uni-bayreuth.de

2000; Rupp et al., 2013). Examining the isolated effect of CSR on OA is too simplistic because it does not reflect the complex nature of the decisions that potential employees make about job choices. Thus, previous studies have not required respondents to make realistic trade-off decisions about jobs offered to them in job choice situations (e.g. Backhaus et al., 2002; Greening and Turban, 2000; Rupp et al., 2013). For example, choosing among job offers requires individuals to trade off more than one factor (Backhaus et al., 2002). Previous research has so far neglected direct comparison of the effects of CSR in terms of other important factors in the employer choice process, such as remuneration, location, and intellectual challenge (Montgomery and Ramus, 2007; Rupp et al., 2013). These studies have failed to adequately consider the realistic decision-making process that potential employees use when making job choices, limiting a more nuanced understanding of the relationships (Backhaus et al., 2002; Greening and Turban, 2000).

This article adds to and differs from the previous research in several manners. While previous studies have addressed the isolated effects of CSR on organizational determinants (e.g. Backhaus et al., 2002; Greening and Turban, 2000), the present study answers the question: What will be the results if CSR is compared to other factors when choosing an employer? Therefore, this study provides meaningful insights for both researchers and practitioners not only by analyzing how CSR affects OA but also by showing the importance of CSR relative to other factors (such as remuneration, location, or intellectual challenge). Bhattacharya et al. (2008: 37) described as a potential impact that “CSR can humanize the company in ways other facets of the job cannot.” In addition, there also remains little work on gender and grade comparisons in CSR (Lis, 2012). Thus, this study analyzes differences in the assessment of OA in relation to gender and grade point average (GPA). It is worth noting that not all dimensions affect potential employees alike, and not all applicants respond identically to such measures. The benefits of the present study also result from the identification of the dimensions that influence potential employees in particular. However, this study is the first attempt to use such methods Western Europe (Germany). As several studies have shown, the war for talent will intensify up to 2030, and key regions and countries, such as Western Europe, will suffer a serious shortage of qualified employees (Montgomery and Ramus, 2007; Towers Watson, 2016). Thus, this study helps to better understand the process of attracting potential employers by comparing different factors as essential sources of competitiveness for companies. Finally, using a policy-capturing approach, an environment is simulated that is closer to reality than well-established CSR models (Graham and Cable, 2001; Karren and Barringer, 2002).

Taken together, this study tests hypotheses regarding the effects of different job factors (such as CSR, remuneration, location, or intellectual challenge) on OA. It updates the general management literature by including a more complete set of factors. The hypotheses were tested with a dataset collected in Germany. Focusing on the importance

of CSR relative to other factors (remuneration, location, and intellectual challenge), the results show that not all factors of employer choice have the same relevance. For general management, this approach yields new challenges. To attract new employees, attractive remuneration is no longer sufficient. The results of the study show that, in particular, highly qualified graduates prefer employers not only that act responsibly for themselves but also that have overall social commitments.

Literature review and hypotheses development

Employer choice

Employer selection is a complex process in which employers and applicants attempt to gather as much information as possible about each other and to appear as attractive as possible to each other. Signaling theory (Spence, 1973) has provided a theoretical foundation for research in this area, including for general management (e.g. Cable and Turban, 2003). Research has shown that recruitment experiences provide signals that affect job seekers' attitudes and choices (e.g. Cable and Turban, 2003; Rynes et al., 1991). In this process of signaling and screening, on the one hand, applicants seek to obtain information about the company and to present themselves positively. On the other hand, the organization seeks to provide information and to be perceived as positively as possible or as attractive to arouse the interest and motivation of potential candidates to apply (Cable and Turban, 2003). During the selection process, both parties, recruiters and candidates, must make selection decisions at the same time (Kübler et al., 2008; Spence, 1973, 1974). If the decision is made by the potential employee, one speaks of employer choice.

The decision to become a member of an organization is often justified by an assessment of its OA (Rynes and Barber, 1990), which is defined as “[...] positive affective attitude towards an organization that goes along with the motivation to contact you in a relationship and enter it.” (Turban and Keon, 1993: 199). As social identity theory has suggested, the entry decision refers to the cognitive connection that exists between the identity of an organization and the identity that an individual applies to himself or herself (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). An individual's social identity is enhanced when the group to which he or she belongs is distinctive and more favorable than comparable groups (Ashforth et al., 2008). Consequently, companies seek to find ways to attract potential employees and to retain existing ones. To do so, companies seek the best possible “fit” between their own identities and those of prospective employees.

Research on employee recruitment has illuminated various factors that affect people's attraction to organizations (Aiman-Smith et al., 2001; Lievens and Highhouse, 2003). These factors vary in their importance. Signals for job applications can come from traditional job characteristics, such as remuneration, location, and job security (Turban and Keon, 1993), activity (Barber, 1998), intellectual challenge and flexible working hours (Aiman-Smith et al.,

2001), as well as pensions or health insurance (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003). The central perspective of these studies is the question of how companies are perceived by (potential) employees and the variables that are important in the selection process (Aiman-Smith et al., 2001; Lievens and Highhouse, 2003). The most important job factors in the studies determined the selection of factors to include in this study. A literature review of relevant studies found remuneration, location, and intellectual challenges to be the most important factors (Aiman-Smith et al., 2001; Lievens and Highhouse, 2003; Montgomery and Ramus, 2007; Uggerslev et al., 2012). These variables have been recognized as the most important and consistent criteria for assessing OA from the perspective of job applicants (Aiman-Smith et al., 2001). However, none of these studies analyzed these factors relative to CSR. Thus, this study adds to this literature by analyzing the importance of these factors relative to CSR.

In recent years, another factor has considerably increased in importance: CSR (Barber, 1998; Lis, 2012; Montgomery and Ramus, 2003; Uggerslev et al., 2012). CSR incorporates organizational actions on social issues representing values and norms that are prevalent in a particular firm (Greening and Turban, 2000). Job seekers are likely attracted to firms that they view as having values and norms that they deem important (Chatman, 1989). However, many of the previous studies of OA did not consider CSR (Backhaus et al., 2002). Other studies in the CSR literature have indicated the importance of these value-related factors but have considered these factors in relative isolation from other job preference factors, such as financial package, geographical location and type of position (Backhaus et al., 2002; Greening and Turban, 2000; Luce et al., 2001; Scott, 2000; Turban and Greening, 1997). However, past research has overlooked the complex nature of the decisions that potential employees make about job choices while addressing the isolated effect of CSR on OA. Therefore, it is not possible to assess the relative importance of these factors for potential employees on the basis of these studies. Addressing this research gap, the present study analyzes the importance of CSR relative to other factors that influence OA.

Hypotheses

A number of empirical studies have supported the importance of CSR in the employer choice process (Backhaus et al., 2002; Bauer and Aiman-Smith, 1996; Greening and Turban, 2000; McWilliams and Siegel, 2001; Wright et al., 1995). Previous research has suggested that CSR positively affects employer attractiveness (e.g. Bauer and Aiman-Smith, 1996; Greening and Turban, 2000; Lis, 2012; Turban and Greening, 1997). Bauer and Aiman-Smith (1996), for example, showed a positive impact on a company's attractiveness. Similar results were also found by Turban and Greening (1997), Albinger and Freeman (2000), Greening and Turban (2000), and Backhaus et al. (2002). Furthermore, Lis (2012) showed that CSR can be a major factor in the context of employer choice. The results showed that CSR could be a decisive factor in attractiveness for potential employees.

H1: *The higher that the CSR orientation of a company is, the higher that the OA is.*

In addition to CSR, the literature points to monetary remuneration as an equally important attractiveness factor for the evaluation of employers (Powell, 1984; Rynes et al., 1989). Although the importance of remuneration has decreased compared to other factors in recent years, it is nevertheless an integral part of the decision for an employer because it has a significant influence on the assurance of existence and quality of life (Uggerslev et al., 2012). Remuneration is understood as the compensation of a company for the services of individuals who have joined the company or have been contracted to provide these services (Rynes et al., 1989). It serves as a benchmark for the quality of individual services, as well as safety and motivational tools. Potential applicants, therefore, evaluate companies that pay higher remuneration more positively (Powell, 1984).

H2: *The higher that the remuneration of a company is, the higher that the OA is.*

Another important factor in the choice of an employer is the location of the company (Montgomery and Ramus, 2007). On the one hand, the location factor could be interesting for an applicant at the technical level, for example, by a settlement near other important companies. On the other hand, a site by local cultural and leisure facilities and the residential atmosphere could be attractive for a candidate. The operationalization ranges from "location" (Lewandowski and Liebig, 2004), "attractive location" (Böttger, 2012), "preferred location" (Montgomery and Ramus, 2007) to "convenient location" (Towers Watson, 2012). Auger et al. (2012) divided the locations into "location (relocation)" and "city/size." Due to different definitions and methodological approaches, previous studies have found location to be an important factor in the employer choice process (e.g. Böttger, 2012; Lewandowski and Liebig, 2004; Montgomery and Ramus, 2007).

H3: *The more attractive that the location of a company is, the higher that the OA is.*

Another important factor in the context of employer choice is an intellectual challenge for (potential) employees. Various studies have determined the importance of this factor for employer choice (e.g. Böttger, 2012; Montgomery and Ramus, 2007; Uggerslev et al., 2012). For example, Montgomery and Ramus (2003, 2007) showed that intellectual challenge is the most important criterion in the choice of an employer of MBA students. The importance of this factor was confirmed by the surveys of Böttger (2012) and Towers Watson (2012). The present study uses these results and examines the influence of intellectual challenge on OA.

H4: *The higher that the intellectual challenge of a company is, the higher that the OA is.*

However, past research has analyzed the influence of different attraction factors, but it has overlooked the

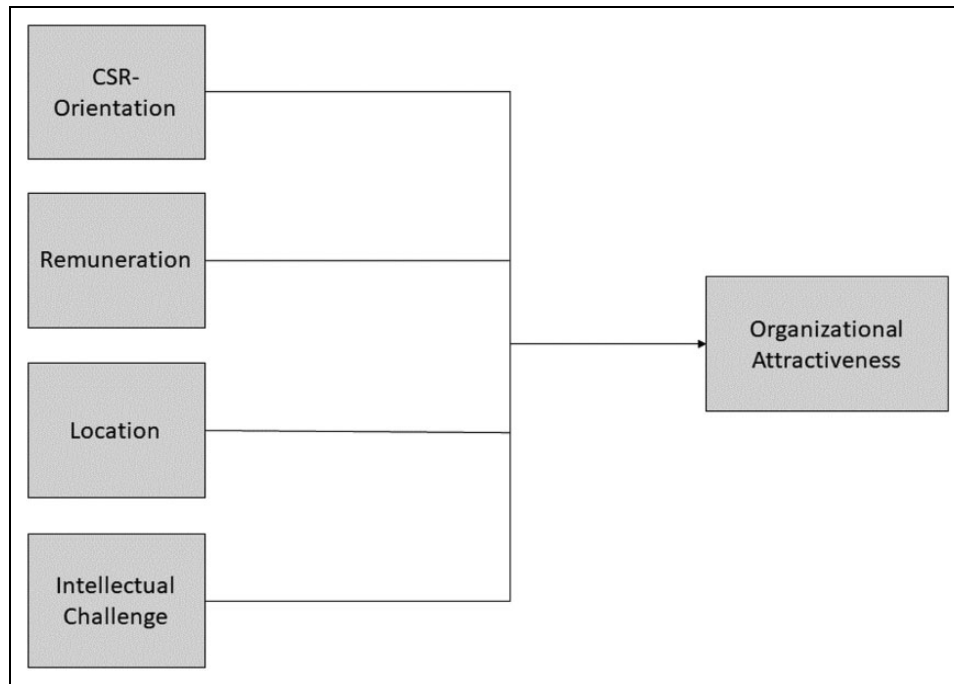


Figure 1. Research model.

complex nature of these decisions while addressing the isolated effect on OA (Backhaus et al., 2002; Greening and Turban, 2000; Scott, 2000). For example, examining the factor of CSR, Bauer and Aiman-Smith (1996) showed that an environmental orientation was positively correlated with the company's attractiveness. Similar results were found by Wright et al. (1995), Greening and Turban (2000), and Turban and Greening (1997). While these studies made important contributions, they considered CSR in relative isolation from other important job preference factors, such as remuneration, location, and intellectual challenge, which are the boundary conditions that limit the effects of CSR on recruitment outcomes (Sen et al., 2006). Additionally, previous studies have shown *ex ante* validity for predicting actual job choices (Montgomery and Ramus, 2007); these studies did not consider a set of job factors, such as remuneration, location, and intellectual challenge (e.g. Böttger, 2012; Lewandowski and Liebig, 2004). However, there is evidence from research that, for example, the factor of CSR can compensate for the factor of remuneration (Bolvig, 2005; Frank, 1996). At this point, the current study considers this research gap and analyzes the relative importance of the job factors of CSR, remuneration, location, and intellectual challenge.

H5: *The factors (CSR, remuneration, location, and intellectual challenge) vary in their relative importance to OA.*

Empirical study

Research design

The aim of this study is to identify the relative importance of different job factors. To address this question, this study

uses a policy-capturing design to explore how job applicants' attraction to organizations is influenced by the confluence of multiple aspects of different job factors. Policy capturing has repeatedly been applied in studies investigating job choice decisions (e.g. Judge and Bretz, 1992; Rynes and Lawler, 1983). It is a regression-based methodology in which participants are asked to make decisions in response to a series of scenarios describing various levels of the explanatory factors or cues. The researcher regresses the decision outcomes on the values of one or more cues embedded in the scenarios and uses the regression weights to make inferences about the respondents' decision policies and their relative importance (Karren and Barringer, 2002).

Policy capturing offers a number of advantages for researchers. First, the inherent experimental control permits strong causal inferences and enables researchers to better assess the independent effects of cues. Second, policy capturing weakens social desirability effects, which are often found with self-report attribute methods, by indirectly assessing the importance of cues. Third, asking individuals to make overall judgments about multi-attribute scenarios is more similar to real-life decision problems than a self-report attribute design (Karren and Barringer, 2002). Taken together, this design allows for an estimation of the relative importance of the different job factors because the independent effects of each factor can be determined regarding OA. The approach provides statistical parameters for the importance that the various cues have to the assessment (Karren and Barringer, 2002).

In the present study, four job factors (CSR, remuneration, location, and intellectual challenge) were manipulated. The variables were varied in two stages (high/low level). Thus, this study employed a $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ within-subjects design. All of the values of each job factor were fully crossed with the values of each of the others, creating

The company behaves socially responsibly. The financial compensation is more than average. The company is located in an attractive location. The company offers intellectually challenging tasks.

Figure 2. Scenario with high levels of each job factor.

every possible combination. The completely crossed design resulted in $24 = 16$ scenarios. The descriptions of the variables were derived from previous research (e.g. Backhaus et al., 2002; Montgomery and Ramus, 2007; Uggerslev et al., 2012; Appendix 1). Three subject matter experts reviewed the descriptions and agreed that they were adequate to portray different levels of each job factor. Figure 2 reveals a scenario with high levels of each factor (see also Appendix 1).

Variables

A research instrument was developed to test the hypothesized relationships. The instrument items were adapted from previous research (Turban and Keon, 1993). A multi-item approach was used with each construct measured by a few items for construct validity and reliability. The data were screened for suspicious response patterns, with questionnaires with straight lining removed. First, casewise diagnostics using multiple regression analysis in IBM SPSS Statistics 24 was used to examine outliers. The results show that there were no cases with values substantially lower or higher than other values, indicating the absence of outliers in the dataset. Second, the values for kurtosis and skewness were within the acceptable limits of -1 to $+1$, indicating normality of the data distribution (Hair et al., 2013).

Referring to the dependent variable “organizational attractiveness,” the present study follows the definition of Turban and Keon (1993). Accordingly, OA is defined as a positive affective attitude toward an organization associated with the motivation to build a relationship with this organization and to enter it. The perception of OA was measured with four items, using a five-point scale adapted from Turban and Keon (1993; Appendix 2). The items were divided into the areas of general OA (e.g. “I would find a job with this company attractive.”) and job readiness (e.g. “I would like to work for this company.”). The conducted reliability analysis yielded Cronbach’s α of 0.93, indicating high internal consistency of the scales. Age and work experience were also measured because they have been used as control variables in previous studies (Greening and Turban, 2000).

Sample

Empirical tests of the hypotheses were performed by means of a written survey of university students from various disciplines. A pretest with 18 students in the social and business sciences aged 20–28 years old revealed no complaints. The final data collection resulted in a random sample of 111 completed records. The survey was attended by 53%

Table 1. Manipulation check.

		Mean	Standard deviation	Sig. (1-sided)
Intellectual challenge	high	4.21	0.88	0.000
	low	1.80	0.89	
Remuneration	high	4.23	0.76	0.000
	low	1.80	0.94	
Location	high	4.15	0.94	0.000
	low	1.94	0.98	
Corporate social responsibility	high	4.22	0.87	0.000
	low	1.66	0.79	

women and 47% men. The average age was 25 years old. To address concerns about nonresponse bias, early (the first two-thirds) and late respondents (last one-third) were compared on the demographic factors of age, education, and income. No significant differences were found. The majority of participants were in higher semesters at the time of the survey and claimed to be in active job searches. One reason for the strong representation of students from higher semesters was the focus on potential employees and therefore on graduates, so high realism was ensured. Furthermore, the use of college student surveys as part of research in the context of potential employees is not unusual (Backhaus et al., 2002). The respondents were instructed to read a series of scenarios based on descriptions about the company’s CSR, remuneration, location, and intellectual challenges, representing the four job factors. They were asked to imagine themselves as job seekers preparing to interview with an organization possessing the characteristics depicted in the scenarios. At the end of each scenario, they were asked to answer a series of questions about the organization’s attractiveness as an employer (Appendix 1).

As part of a manipulation check, it was tested whether the manipulation of variables was successful and the results of the survey could be adequately interpreted (Table 1). A statistical examination of the manipulation was performed using the t test, which allows for detecting group differences. Table 1 provides an overview of the means and standard deviations of the independent variables. The results of the t test showed highly significant differences between the two groups, indicating successful manipulation of variables.

Results

The results of the regression analysis showed a significant, positive influence of each factor (CSR, remuneration, location, and intellectual challenge) on OA. Therefore, hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 4 are supported. With an empirical F value of 149.37, the model reached a significant overall level. The model explained 25% ($R^2 = 0.25$) of the variance (Table 2). However, the policy-capturing approach allowed not only for an analysis of the direction of the effect but also for an interpretation of the relative influence of each factor. As hypothesized (H5), the four factors did have differential effects on participants’ assessments of OA (Table 2). Thus, each job factor showed specific signals

Table 2. Findings on the influence of individual factors on the choice of the employer's organizational attractiveness.

	Organizational attractiveness
Intellectual challenge	0.14***
Remuneration	0.20***
Location	0.08***
Corporate social responsibility	0.42***
R ²	0.25
F value	149.37***
N	111

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

Table 3. Findings on organizational attractiveness as a function of gender.

Independent variable	Model 1, organizational attractiveness (female)	Model 2, organizational attractiveness (male)
Intellectual challenge	0.23***	0.03**
Remuneration	0.14***	0.28***
Location	0.10***	0.06**
Corporate social responsibility	0.45***	0.40***
R ²	0.28	0.25
F value	92.679***	69.79***

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

or values, which had different importance for the respondents. The largest changes in ratings were associated with CSR ($\beta = 0.42, p < 0.001$) and remuneration ($\beta = 0.20, p < 0.001$), followed by location and intellectual challenges. For example, the direct comparison of the two beta coefficients of CSR and remuneration emphasizes that the contribution of the factor of CSR was approximately twice as high as the contribution of the factor of remuneration. The prerequisite for this interpretation is that no multicollinearity was present. This condition was satisfied in the present case.

For the analysis, it is still interesting to determine whether there are differences between the respondents. In particular, it appears interesting whether the results differ with respect to the moderators gender and GPA. If there is a dichotomous moderator, the moderator effect, following Baron and Kenny (1986), is checked by testing whether the correlation for both versions of the moderator is different. Subsequently, the difference in the regression coefficients is tested for significance (Brockner et al., 1997). The corresponding results are shown below.

The results for the gender effect showed interesting differences (Table 3). While in both groups, the factor of CSR had the greatest influence on OA, the factors of remuneration and intellectual challenges showed significant differences. While women (model 1) placed value on intellectual challenges ($\beta = 0.23, p < 0.001$), for men (model 2), remuneration was of central importance ($\beta = 0.28, p < 0.001$).

Table 4. Findings on organizational attractiveness as a function of the average grade (grade point average).

Independent variable	Model 1, organizational attractiveness (honors grade)	Model 2, organizational attractiveness (less than honors grade)
Intellectual challenge	0.21***	0.12***
Remuneration	0.15***	0.20***
Location	0.10***	0.05**
Corporate social responsibility	0.45***	0.39***
R ²	0.28	0.21
F value	88.00***	54.66***

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

The group differences were proved at a significance level of 5%.

To test the assumption that the GPA as a moderator exerts an influence on the dependent variable, in a further step, two separate regression analyses of each of the expressions for GPA, "honors grade" and "below honors grade," were calculated and then compared (Baron and Kenny, 1986). The corresponding results are listed below.

The results regarding the moderating effect of GPA for both subgroups again showed the dominant effect of the factor of CSR for both groups (Table 4). However, honors level students preferred companies that provide them with intellectual challenges ($\beta = 0.21, p < 0.001$). For below honors level students, the factor of remuneration played a central role in the assessment of OA ($\beta = 0.20, p < 0.001$). A group comparison showed that the slopes of the regression lines differed significantly from each other. With regard to the location factor, no significant differences were found.

Conclusions

Summary and theoretical implications

The results of this analysis showed that not all factors of employer choice have the same relevance for potential employers: CSR is the most important factor, followed in order by remuneration, intellectual challenge, and location. Thus, for the respondents, the social engagement of employers plays a prominent role. As the results showed, CSR can improve the attractiveness of a company and, in terms of the theory of social identity, can have a positive impact on the individual's self-esteem. In agreement with signaling theory, a positive external effect of CSR can also be assumed. Because of the social commitment of the company (and the associated values), potential employees likely value the organization as more attractive. As a possible reason for the different weighting of each factor, it was assumed that each dimension sends specific signals or values that have different personal significance for study participants. The results showed a new trend in the context of employer choice: As a few years ago, the factor of remuneration was decisive for young graduates (Montgomery and Ramus, 2007); it is now

obvious that “soft” factors, such as CSR, have increasingly gained importance in recent years.

For companies, the results indicate that it is no longer sufficient to pay much money to graduates. Instead, emphasis is placed by graduates on “soft” factors, in agreement with the current demands of society for socially responsible companies. CSR is not limited to the environmental awareness of enterprises, but it also implies socially responsible behavior and, consequently, factors such as diversity management, family-friendly behavior, and retirement plans. These factors have all won enormous importance for employees in the recent past. CSR is thus a versatile aspect that has won importance for the whole society in the recent past and it is likely to continue in the near future.

Second, the results are interesting also in light of the moderating factors. There are implications for signaling theory and social identity theory because initial job applicants place varying weights on each of the job factors. While graduates with “below honors grade” rated remuneration as an important factor, graduates with “above honors grade” rated CSR as most important in their job choice decision. For general management, this result is of the highest relevance because it shows the importance of CSR as part of the recruitment of highly qualified graduates. CSR is therefore quite suitable to stand out for employers and to place themselves in the battle for top talent in the front row. In the context of an aging population and the increasing shortage of skilled employees—especially those who are highly qualified—this result is important.

For general management, this approach yields new challenges. To attract high potential for the company, attractive remuneration is no longer sufficient. The results of the study show that highly qualified graduates prefer employers not only that act responsibly themselves but also that have overall social commitments. A few years ago the remuneration was for 78% of graduates a decisive factor (Kienbaum, 2008), while today, factors such as diversity management, retirement plans, or a family-friendly corporate policies play prominent roles in the context of CSR. In addressing and developing high potential, it is a major challenge for general management in addressing the changing demands for companies.

The results regarding the moderating effect of gender show that, for women and men, the CSR commitment of a company is highly relevant when choosing a future employer. However, there are significant differences between women and men regarding the factors of remuneration and intellectual challenge. While men place great emphasis on financial aspects, among women, intellectual challenge ranks second after CSR. The results are consistent with the study by Chapman et al. (2005), who showed that individual characteristics of companies are perceived and evaluated differently by gender, which could be explained first by fundamentally different approaches by genders in the analysis of available information. Second, the socially dominant roles for men and women affect their self-concept and, as a result, their behavior in employer choice (Caterall and Maclaran, 2002). To the extent that

these differences exist, they are for general management, especially HR management, of the utmost relevance because tailoring to gender the needs of potential employers’ specific recruitment strategies could prove effective.

Managerial implications

For general management, it is important to recognize and understand the factors that are ultimately decisive for the choice of a future employer. The results of this study show that the candidates weight individual factors in different manners, indicating that each factor influences the perception of the candidate differently. The findings indicate that, for managers, no “one size fits all” strategy will work. In particular, in the contest for the best of the best. CSR can be a decisive competitive factor. Companies should, therefore, adjust their strategies and activities, especially regarding these dimensions, and should promote or expand the activities of CSR explicitly. The company could, therefore, conduct concrete measures to increase the factor of CSR, such as the production of environmentally friendly products, the promotion of older employees, the reconciling of work and family, measures related to retirement agreements, promotion of women in leadership positions, or the establishment of company nurseries. These activities provide the general management with the opportunity to influence the OA of the company for the candidate specifically. A further step in this context is precisely the communication of these measures.

Limitations and further research

A limitation of the present study was that it analyzed the effects based on prospective employees of fictitious companies, making the detection of long-term dynamic effects impossible. Long-term studies using real social initiatives by businesses could provide worthy information and could strengthen the external validity of the results. In addition, actual behavioral consequences, and not only behavioral intentions, could be recorded as research targets. It should also be noted that the use of a policy-capturing approach examines the reaction of respondents to fictitious enterprise scenarios. The manipulation of organizational characteristics does not reflect all of the information that potential applicants could possibly gather about the organization itself and the activity profiles of the respective organizations. Nevertheless, attempts were undertaken to develop realistic descriptions by vivid representations of organizations based on current research and studies. In this manner, the design should achieve a precise simulation of potential employers in the decision-making processes of applicants. Finally, this success varies according to situations and circumstances and varies among cultures. Cultures and countries with high rates of unemployment and poverty will seldom consider CSR in seeking employment.

The results can be used to initiate important steps in employer-choice research. A further study could analyze whether the perception of the individual factors of employer choice is influenced by personal characteristics. Returning to the organizational culture profile of O’Reilly et al. (1991), for instance, it could be considered in a further

step whether personal characteristics moderate the perception of the dimensions of CSR.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Information on survey questions

Survey instructions
<p>Please imagine yourself as a job seeker preparing to interview with an organization. Below you will find descriptions of 16 organizations that could be potential employers. The organizations differ in their (1) corporate social responsibility orientation; (2) remuneration (financial compensation); (3) location (geographic location); and (4) intellectual challenge (intellectually challenging tasks).</p> <p>Please rate your likelihood of each organization using the 7-point scale below, where "1" is <i>strongly disagree</i> and "7" is <i>strongly agree</i> (mark one block for each section). You should answer completely all of the questions about one scenario before moving on to the next scenario. Because you have many choices, please focus on the differences between the organizations.</p>

Example scenario with low levels of each dimension

	The company does not behave socially responsibly. The financial compensation is less than average. The company is located in an unattractive location. The company does not offer intellectually challenging tasks.
1	I would like to work for this company.
2	I would choose this company as one of my first choices for an employer.
3	I would find a job with this company attractive.
4	I would exert a great deal of effort to work for this company.

Appendix 2: Measurement of organizational attractiveness (Turban and Keon, 1993)

	Organizational Attractiveness (OA)
OA1	I would like to work for this company.
OA2	I would choose this company as one of my first choices for an employer.
OA3	I would find a job with this company attractive.
OA4	I would exert a great deal of effort to work for this company.

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