International Journal of Public Sector Management

Recruitment messaging, environmental fit and public service motivation: experimental evidence on intentions to apply for public sector jobs

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Abstract

Purpose

Public organisations face increasing challenges to attract young and highly qualified staff. Previous studies have shown that public service motivation (PSM) is associated with a higher propensity to apply for public sector jobs, but the implications from these findings for the design of the recruitment process are still unclear. The study investigates how differently framed recruitment messages (i.e. inspirational and rational) affect perceptions of person-job (PJ) and person-organisation (PO) fit, how these associations are moderated by PSM and how they translate into application intentions.

Design/Methodology/Approach

We conducted a survey experiment and tested our hypotheses in a sample of 600 students in Germany. The experimental stimuli were hypothetical job advertisements in which inspirational and rational messages on organisational missions and job tasks were varied.

Findings

Results show that recruitment messaging, as mediated by perceived PJ and PO fit, can increase application intentions depending on the framing of the messages. Inspirational framings are more effective in attracting personnel than rational framings, especially when such messages convey specific and extensive information about job tasks. The extent to which recruitment messages translate into perceptions of fit depends, in part, on the level of the applicant's PSM.

Originality

By focusing on recruitment messages and their framings, this study is among the few that explore how human resource management (HRM) can capitalize on previous findings of research on PSM. The findings have implications for the selection and presentation of information on organisational missions and job tasks in the recruitment process. In a more theoretical vein, results contribute to the emerging consensus on the role of perceived PJ and PO fit in the attraction to public sector jobs. We deepen this reasoning by introducing self-discrepancy theory to the field of public management.

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Recruitment messaging, environmental fit and public service motivation: experimental evidence on intentions to apply for public sector jobs

Introduction

Demographic change and a shortage on the supply side of labour have recently become a challenge for many public sector employers. Public organisations face increasing difficulties to attract young and highly qualified staff and struggle to gear their recruitment towards the needs and desires of potential applicants in this generation (Ployhart, 2006; Ritz and Waldner, 2011). An expanding field of research suggests that a potential solution to this problem is to capitalize on the finding that people with high levels of public service motivation (PSM) feel attracted to public sector jobs (Lewis and Frank, 2002; Vandenabeele, 2008). PSM is defined as "[…] an individual's predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organisation" (Perry and Wise, 1990, p. 368). One of the most often repeated implications of previous research in this field is to align the human resource management (HRM) practices of public organisations with PSM and, more specifically, to address applicants' PSM in the recruitment process, e.g. by employer branding (Ritz *et al.*, 2016a).

Less clear, however, is what follows from these rather general recommendations for the design of the recruitment process. Some preliminary conclusions can be drawn from related research on organisational missions because such mission statements communicate the purpose and values of an organisation not only to current members but also to potential applicants. Research found that an attractive mission contributes to the satisfaction of personal ideals (Wright, 2007; Wright and Pandey, 2011) and increases an applicant's likelihood to join the organisation (Pandey *et al.,* 2008). Consequently, and intendedly or not,

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mission statements become part of the recruitment messaging by employers and form a key component of HR marketing. However, it is unclear how such messages affect the attraction process, particularly when their content is relevant to the PSM of potential job candidates.

The goal of this study is to examine how recruitment messaging triggers the intention to apply for public sector jobs and how this attraction process is affected by the potential applicants' levels of PSM. Conceptualizing recruitment messaging as an instance of persuasive communication between the sender (i.e. prospective employer) and receiver (i.e. potential applicant), we vary the framings of recruitment messages in terms of different influence tactics (i.e. rational and inspirational). We focus on messages that are communicated via job advertisements and convey information on both organisational missions and job tasks. Our conceptual model suggests that such messages do not translate into application intentions directly but indirectly via perceptions of fit with the organisation and/or the job, respectively. This reasoning builds on previous research on how person-job (PJ) and person-organisation (PO) fit translate into attraction to public organisations (Lewis and Frank, 2002; Pandey *et al.,* 2008; Steijn, 2008; Taylor, 2008; Wright and Pandey, 2011). PJ fit refers to an alignment of the individual's values with the actual job role, whereas PO fit refers to a congruence of the individual's values with those of the organisation.

We address our research goal using data from a survey experiment with 600 university graduates in Germany. Results show that recruitment messaging, as mediated by perceived PJ and PO fit, does indeed increase application intentions depending on the framing of the messages. Inspirational framings are more effective in attracting personnel than rational framings, especially when such messages convey specific and extensive information about job tasks. The extent to which recruitment messages translate into perceptions of fit depends, in part, on the level of the applicant's PSM.

Our study makes several contributions to the literature: Firstly, previous research has repeatedly stressed the implications of PSM for HR marketing but has been largely silent on how recruitment messages may refer to PSM and intervene in the attraction process. Our study advances this stream of research and allows conclusions on how recruitment messages should be framed in an appealing way such that their impact on the intention to apply is increased for people with high levels of PSM. Secondly, we address research on the relevance of PJ and PO fit for intentions to apply for public sector jobs. Our study not only adds further empirical evidence to the emerging consensus in the literature, but also deepens the theoretical foundations by introducing self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) to the field on public management. Thirdly, recent works called for a stronger integration of HRM and public administration research (Gould-Williams *et al.,* 2014; Homberg and Vogel, 2016; Vandenabeele, 2009). In this spirit of cross-fertilization, we follow such calls and narrow the gap between these two disciplines. And finally, we advance knowledge on PSM in Germany by generating unique empirical data. Germany is an interesting setting because of the unique Weberian administrative tradition that is still shaping the structure and culture in public services.

Literature review and hypotheses

Recruitment and recruitment messaging

Given changing workforce demographics, employee recruitment is particularly important for public sector organisations because the quality of public services largely depends on qualified staff. By recruitment, we mean "all organizational practices and decisions that affect either the number, or type, of individuals who are willing to apply for or accept a given vacancy" (Rynes, 1991, p. 429). At an early stage of recruitment, potential applicants have little

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information on characteristics of the employer and the vacancy. Thus, in order to increase

awareness and interest, and to influence application intentions, employers send recruitment

messages through various channels. Although potential applicants pay selective attention to

such messages and may process them superficially (Cacioppo and Petty, 1984), the conveyed

information reduces uncertainty about the organisation and job. Thus, recruitment messages

help to form initial attitudes which are hard to change afterwards (Breaugh, 2013).

We focus on recruitment messages in the text corpus of job advertisements. Although other

methods of recruitment have gained in importance, written job advertisements are still an

ubiquitous tool for attracting applicants (Baum and Kabst, 2014; Born and Taris, 2010; Jones

et al., 2006). Since job advertisements can be considered as a low-information recruitment

practice because of their space limitations and the missing personalized interaction between

job seekers and employers (Baum and Kabst, 2014; Collins, 2007), presenting the right

information in an accessible style for the target group gains importance and helps to enlarge

the pool of applicants. Research on personnel selection has provided plenty of evidence that

the design and wording of job advertisements have impact on the self-selection of candidates

into the advertised jobs (e.g. Fruhen *et al.*, 2016; Wille and Derous, 2017).

Such recruitment messages may differ in terms of both content and language. Previous

research has shown that attributes of the job and the organisation are of utmost relevance to

potential applicants when they evaluate the attractiveness of a job opening (Chapman *et al.,*

2005). The purpose, goals and values of an organisation are among its most fundamental

attributes, which are often expressed in mission statements. Accordingly, "the attractiveness

of the mission is expected to influence the ability of the organization to recruit" (Wright and

Pandey, 2011, p. 24). We therefore focus on organisational missions, on the one hand, and

job tasks, on the other hand, as elements of job advertisements. While the organisational

mission is an attribute of the prospective employer, job tasks characterize the vacancy to be filled.

Since recruitment can be theorized as a process of persuasion in which the sender (i.e. employer) tries to exert influence on the receiver (i.e. applicant) (Breaugh, 2013), socio-psychological research on influence tactics in organisational communication is useful for advancing the understanding of this process (Yukl and Falbe, 1990; Yukl *et al.,* 1996). According to this literature, rational persuasion and inspirational appeal are among the core influence tactics for building favourable attitudes and supportive behaviours. *Rational persuasion* occurs when a "person uses logical arguments and factual evidence to persuade you that a proposal or request is viable and likely to result in the attainment of task objectives" (Yukl and Falbe, 1990, p. 133). When applied to early-stage recruitment, rational persuasion refers to the use of logic and facts in order to convince an applicant that the advertised job is instrumental to the pursuit of his/her objectives. In contrast, *inspirational appeal* is present when a "person makes an emotional request or proposal that arouses enthusiasm by appealing to your values and ideals, or by increasing your confidence that you can do it" (Yukl and Falbe, 1990, p. 133). In the context of recruitment, this influence tactic aims to trigger affective responses on the part of the applicant who feels his/her normative beliefs to be addressed by the job advertisement. Accordingly, rational persuasion and inspirational appeal differ profoundly in the use of language by the sender as well as in the processing of information by the receiver (Yukl and Falbe, 1990; Yukl *et al.,* 1996). These tactics may thus have different impacts on application intentions of job seekers. We therefore examine how rational and inspirational recruitment messages translate into the intent to apply for public sector jobs.

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The mediating role of environmental fit

We argue that the relationship between recruitment messaging and application intentions is mediated by perceptions of PO and PJ fit, which can broadly be defined as compatibility between people and organisations or jobs, respectively (Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown *et al.,* 2005). When potential applicants are exposed to job advertisements, they develop cognitive responses to the stimulus and make inferences from the presented information about the employer and the job (Cacioppo and Petty, 1984). This enables them to evaluate how well they fit both and, in turn, to inform their decision as to whether to apply or not. Previous research has shown that perceived PO and PJ fit are important predictors of pre- and post-hire outcomes, such as job application, job offer, job acceptance and job satisfaction (Kristof-Brown *et al.,* 2005).

Self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) further underscores the importance of PO and PJ fit for information gathering and job choices in the recruitment process. According to this approach, there are three domains of self: the actual, the ideal and the ought self. These domains represent an individual's characteristics that someone thinks he/she actually has (actual self), would like him/her to possess (ideal self), or believes he/she should have (ought self). These states of self can be viewed from someone's personal standpoint or from the perspective of significant others. The basic assumption of self-discrepancy theory, then, is that the degree of discrepancy between the domains of self is associated with different kinds of emotional distress (Higgins, 1987). Since individuals want to avoid the discomfort caused by inconsistent beliefs, they strive for congruence between different self-states.

Thus, when exposed to recruitment messages in job advertisements, job seekers compare the information about the organisation and the job with their actual and ideal self (Nolan and Harold, 2010). Potential applicants infer from recruitment messages the employer's

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aspirations for the future holder of the advertised position (ideal self) and his/her duties, obligations or responsibilities (ought self). When these views differ from the candidate's own point of view on his/her self, he/she will expect psychological discomfort in the job. Hence, self-discrepancy occurs when the current state of a candidate's actual attributes, from his/her own point of view, does not match the ideal state that the candidate believes the employer asks for. In contrast, high levels of perceived self-congruence will result in perceptions of good PO and PJ fit and, thus, translate into intentions to apply for the job because low levels of emotional vulnerability are expected. Thus, we conclude:

H1a-b: The relationship between recruitment messages conveying an (a) inspirational and (b) rational organisational mission and the intent to apply for public sector jobs is mediated by perceived person-organisation fit.

H2a-b: The relationship between recruitment messages conveying (a) inspirational and (b) rational job tasks and the intent to apply for public sector jobs is mediated by perceived person-job fit.

The moderating effect of public service motivation

One of the original hypotheses in PSM research is that individuals with high levels of PSM will self-select into public sector work (Perry and Wise, 1990; Vandenabeele, 2008). While it is concluded from this assumption and affirmative findings that the self-selection might be reinforced by employer brands and recruitment messages (Ritz and Waldner, 2011), it is less obvious how PSM affects the process of attraction in detail. The level of PSM will have influence on how receptive individuals are to recruitment messages from public sector employers and on how the reception of such messages translates into perceptions of fit with

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the organisation and the job. More technically speaking, we argue that PSM is a moderator of the relationships between differently framed recruitment messages and perceived PO and PJ fit. The main reason why we do not consider PSM as being directly affected by recruitment messages is the short-term character of how information is received and processed in early-stage recruitment. As outlined above, job advertisements are essentially communication tools sending signals about missions and tasks which help potential applicants to form an initial picture of the employer (Cable and Turban, 2001). Job seekers process such recruitment messages often subconsciously and within minutes or even seconds (Cacioppo and Petty, 1984).

In contrast, PSM has shown some stability develops over time. Research has broadly acknowledged that PSM is an individual-level predisposition (Perry and Wise, 1990), but has underscored the differences to other states such as commitment or job satisfaction. While the latter are usually conceived of as malleable states, there is some debate in the literature as to what extent this applies to PSM (Wright and Grant, 2010). To date, although labelled as motivation (a prime example of a state), the common theoretical consensus emerging in the literature is to understand PSM as being more stable than traditional states but less stable than deeply engrained personality traits like the Big Five (Costa and McCrae, 1992). Oberfield (2014) confirms the stability of PSM in his two-year multimethod study with police officers. Vogel and Kroll (2016) show that PSM-related values in the general population of Germany are stable over time, too. They conclude: "Since such attitudes have proven to be quite stable over longer periods of time, a person's motivational level when entering the organisation is very likely to be the best predictor of future PSM scores. In order to attract this type of employee, managers will need to emphasize such values in job listings and information supplied to applicants, and link them to their organization's mission" (Vogel and Kroll, 2016, p. 71).

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Given the short-term character of information dissemination and processing in early-stage recruitment, on the one hand, and the aforementioned arguments and empirical findings on the stability of PSM, on the other hand, we consider PSM as an ex-ante condition of how potential applicants respond to recruitment messages and translate them into perceptions of PO and PJ fit. Individuals scoring high on PSM who are exposed to recruitment messages from public sector employers are likely to perceive a higher fit with the organisation and job tasks as compared to potential applicants displaying low levels of PSM. This interaction occurs because organisations and jobs in the public sector respond to their values associated with PSM and allow them to contribute to society (Steijn, 2008; Taylor, 2008). Thus, in line with these theoretical and empirical arguments, we consider PSM to be a moderator in the relation between recruitment messages and the perceived fit with the organisation and tasks. Therefore, we stipulate:

H3a-b: Public service motivation moderates the relationship between recruitment messages conveying an (a) inspirational and (b) rational organisational mission and perceived person-organisation fit, such that this relationship is stronger for candidates with high levels of public service motivation.

H4a-b: Public service motivation moderates the relationship between recruitment messages conveying (a) inspirational and (b) rational job tasks and perceived person-job fit, such that this relationship is stronger for candidates with high levels of public service motivation.

Figure 1 shows the theoretical relationships between components of the measurement model.

**** Please insert Figure 1 about here. ****

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Data and method

Sample

We commissioned a professional online panel provider to randomly sample participants

among final year students in Germany who were enrolled into a master or similar degree

programme and therefore were likely to look for job advertisements. The final sample

consists of 600 students of business administration, social sciences, geography, law,

engineering and medicine (Appendix 1). All programmes in our sample meet the entry

requirements for the highest grade of German civil service careers ("höherer Dienst") [1]. On

average, respondents were 23.3 years of age. The questionnaire was administered online in

June 2016.

Experiment

In a pre-test among German master students (n = 22), we presented various task descriptions

and mission statements and asked as to whether the framings of these messages were

perceived as rational or inspirational. We then selected rational and inspirational framings

with the least ambiguous evaluations und included them into the stimuli for the main test. In

designing the experiment, we followed the best practice guidelines as outlined by Baekgaard

and colleagues (2015). Participants were randomly assigned to one out of ten subgroups

which resulted from the manipulation of four stimuli. The treatment is a job advertisement

which differs in the framing of the presented recruitment messages (i.e. organisational

mission and job tasks; Appendix 2). Table 1 shows the experimental groups. For example,

group 'RI' comprised participants who saw a rationally framed mission combined with

inspirationally framed tasks. The job advertisement remained permanently visible during data

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collection in the first part of the survey (see Appendix 3 for an example of a job

advertisement).

**** Please insert Table 1 about here. ****

Measures

The main dependent variable for this study is the individual intent to apply for the presented

job. We used a modified form of the single-item measure by Collins (2007) and asked

participants for their agreement (1 "strongly disagree" to 7 "strongly agree") to the statement

"If I saw this job offer, I would apply for it".

Independent variables were the experimental treatments, on the one hand, and the three latent

constructs in our research model (i.e. PSM, PO and PJ fit), on the other hand. We

transformed the experimental stimuli into four dummy variables each of which indicates one

of the varied elements in the job advertisements (i.e. rational mission, rational tasks,

inspirational mission, and inspirational tasks).

We used Kim and colleagues' (2013) 16-items scale to measure PSM. Since Kim *et al.*

(2013) did not include German data, we ran an exploratory factor analysis to investigate the

underlying factor structure. Deviating from the four-dimensional solution of Kim *et al.*

(2013), we found three dimensions: Besides 'attraction to public service' (APS) and 'self-

sacrifice' (SS), the original dimensions 'commitment to public values' and 'compassion'

combined into one factor (CPV/COM) (Appendix 4). This three-factor solution is reasonable

in student samples because students usually lack working experience in the public sector

(Vandenabeele, 2008). Due to this lack of socialization into the values and ethics of the

public sector, the CPV dimension is unlikely to be a distinct factor. We examined the

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convergent validity of the resulting dimensions by estimating the average variance extracted

(AVE) using the software Smart PLS version 3. Since the three dimensions have an AVE

above 0.5, we have good reason to assume convergent validity. Table 2 provides the

descriptive statistics and the correlation matrix.

**** Please insert Table 2 about here. ****

We used four items to measure perceived PO and PJ fit, respectively (Saks and Ashforth,

2002). The initial AVE for PJ fit showed a value of 0.869 and a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.950,

thus suggesting a single-item solution for the measurement (Hair *et al.,* 2017, p. 54). Due to

similar wording, the items seemed to be redundant. We thus decided to include only the item

"To what extent is the job a good match for you?" into the models (Saks and Ashforth, 2002).

Control variables are gender and age (see Appendix 5 for an overview of the applied

constructs with their Cronbach's alpha and AVE).

Analytical method

We used structural equation modelling (SEM) with moderated mediation analyses (Hayes,

2013). More precisely, we applied partial least squares (PLS-)SEM which is a variance-based

approach (Hair *et al.*, 2014, p. 14). In large data sets (n >= 250), the estimation results of

PLS-SEM are very similar to covariance-based (CB-)SEM if four or more indicators are used

(Hair *et al.*, 2017). Facing these two options, we chose PLS-SEM for several reasons: Firstly,

and most importantly, CB-SEM assumes the dependent variable to be normally distributed,

whereas PLS-SEM makes no such distributional assumptions (Hair *et al.*, 2017). In our case,

the dependent variable (i.e. intent to apply) violates the assumption of normal distribution

(Shapiro-Wilks test: $p < 0.05$). Secondly, our study is exploratory because only little prior

knowledge on the relationships between recruitment messaging and application intentions

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exists. In contrast to CB-SEM, "PLS-SEM is […] the preferred method when the research

objective is theory development and explanation of variance" (Hair *et al.*, 2017, p. 17). And

thirdly, PLS-SEM is better suited than the classical CB approach when single-item measures

are to be handled. In our research model, 'intent to apply' and 'PJ fit' are constructs which

are measured by only one item, respectively.

Results

Table 3 displays the results of the SEM. To evaluate the measurement model, we used

nonparametric evaluation criteria. Since PLS-SEM does not use maximum likelihood

estimation but ordinary least squares (OLS), "classical" fit indices (e.g. TLI) are not

available. In line with OLS techniques, we use adjusted R^2 as our main fit index (Hair *et al.*,

2014, p. 174). Model 1 (adj. $R^2 = 0.212$) as well as Models 2 to 7 (adj. $R^2 = 0.523$) show

moderate predictive accuracies.

**** Please insert Table 3 about here. ****

A preliminary analysis to evaluate all direct effects on the intent to apply showed that only

the inspirational framings have significant effects on the intention to apply (Appendix 6).

Hence, we excluded the rational framings from the mediation analysis (Hair *et al*., 2014).

Model 1 presents the results of the mediation analysis without moderators. Perceived PO fit

fully mediates the relationship between inspirational missions and the intent to apply for the

advertised job because the direct effect of inspirationally framed missions on the intent to

apply is not significant (0.065, n.s.) once we include the mediator into the model (Hair *et

al.,* 2014, p. 224). For the same reason, Model 1 shows that the relationship between

inspirationally framed tasks and application intentions is fully mediated, too, with a total

effect of 0.250 ($p < 0.001$). This mediation path is substantially stronger than the mediation

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via perceived PO fit (total effect of 0.039, $p < 0.001$), which indicates that perceived PJ fit is

a dominant predictor of application intentions of highly qualified people. Across all further

models, the mediation effects are robust and constant in terms of direction and significance.

H_{1a} and H_{2a} are thus fully supported, whereas H_{1b} and H_{2b} must be rejected.

In Models 2 to 7, the moderators are included. Models 3 and 5 show significant moderations

by two dimensions of PSM. Model 3 indicates that increasing levels of APS strengthen the

impact of inspirationally framed tasks on PJ fit (0.084, $p < 0.05$). According to Model 5, high

levels of CPV/COM strengthen the relationship between inspirationally framed tasks and PJ

fit (0.080, $p < 0.05$). The findings do not support H_{3a}, H_{3b} and H_{4b}, while H_{4a} finds partial

support because only two dimensions of PSM have a moderating effect.

Table 4 summarizes the main findings. Among the control variables, age shows significant

effects on the intent to apply (Model 1: 0.070, $p < 0.05$; Models 2-7: 0.082, $p < 0.05$),

whereas gender has no such influence.

**** Please insert Table 4 about here. ****

Discussion and conclusion

Among the most prevalent practical implications in the literature on PSM is to account for

individual's PSM in personnel marketing and employer branding in the public sector (Ritz *et*

al., 2016a). However, how public managers can build on these insights and develop their HR

practices accordingly still awaits further exploration. Our study makes a step in this direction

by investigating the role of recruitment messages in an early stage of the attraction process.

The results of our experiment provide several important insights as to how the association

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between recruitment messages and intentions to apply for public sector jobs is mediated by perceived PO and PJ fit, and how the different dimensions of PSM affect these relationships.

Most importantly, our findings show that recruitment messaging can be effective in attracting potential applicants to public sector jobs. However, this finding only holds for inspirationally framed messages regarding organisational missions and job tasks, while we find no impact of rational framings on the intent to apply for public sector jobs. This result is noteworthy as previous research has shown that the attraction of potential applicants to an organisation increases with the amount of information provided by the employer in early stages of recruitment (Acarlar and Bilgiç, 2013; Breaugh, 2013). However, we find that this general effect is contingent on the framing of the included information. Thus, HR managers who strive for an enlargement of the applicant pool should send inspirationally rather than rationally framed messages in job advertisements.

A possible explanation for the priority of inspirationally framed recruitment messages in forming application intentions is that job seekers respond differently to the presented information because inspirationally and rationally framed messages may be processed in different ways. Established theories in the field of HRM suggest that information processing in recruitment processes indeed varies with the kind of information and characteristics of the receiver (Cacioppo and Petty, 1984). Dual process theory proposes that cognitive processes of intuition and reasoning differ from one another and constitute two systems (Kahneman, 2002; 2003). Whereas the intuition system (i.e. "system 1" or "fast thinking") handles new pieces of information fast and emotionally, the reasoning system (i.e. "system 2" or "slow thinking") is characterized by slow and rational processing of information. Arguably, the limited amount of information provided in job advertisements as well as short attention spans of the reader trigger fast information processing in the intuition system which is generally more receptive towards inspirational messages.

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Supplementary to this explanation, we argue that inspirational recruitment messaging is likely

to convey symbolic rather than instrumental attributes of the job. As Lievens and Highhouse

(2003, p. 81) state, symbolic attributes "describe the job/organization in terms of subjective

and intangible attributes". In contrast to instrumental attributes, which are objective and

trigger interest because of their utility, symbolic attributes are associated with individual

needs to sustain their self-identity and to develop their self-image (Lievens and Highhouse,

2003). Hence, inspirationally framed messages about the job convey individual values and

aims which may, if positively charged, trigger expectations of self-congruence. As introduced

in the theoretical section, self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) suggests that individuals

strive for congruence of the actual, ideal and ought self in order to avoid emotional distress.

Consistent with this reasoning, the association between inspirational framings of

organisational missions and job tasks and the intent to apply for public sector jobs is, with a

minor exception in one specification, fully mediated by perceptions of PO and PJ fit.

Remarkably, the mediation path through perceived PJ fit shows substantially larger effects

than the mediation through perceived PO fit. This confirms previous research which shows

that perceived PJ fit has stronger behavioural implications for highly qualified people than

perceived PO fit (Carless, 2005, p. 423). A possible explanation for this finding in the context

of recruitment is that information about job tasks relates more closely to the prospective work

in the organisation than rather general mission statements and may thus be perceived as more

specific. Previous research has shown that information specificity is positively related to

organisational attraction and application intentions (Acarlar and Bilgiç, 2013; Breaugh, 2013;

Roberson *et al.,* 2005). Moreover, job advertisements tend to comprise more information

about job tasks than on organisational missions. As outlined above, the amount of

information is positively related to application intentions, too (Acarlar and Bilgiç, 2013;

Breaugh, 2013). We conclude from this that an inspirational framing of recruitment messages

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is even more effective in attracting personnel when such messages convey specific and extensive information about job tasks.

This effect particularly holds when the recruitment aims at attracting public service-motivated applicants. We find that two dimensions of PSM (i.e. APS and CPV/COM) moderate the relationship between inspirationally framed messages about job tasks and perceived PJ fit. Individuals scoring high on these two PSM dimensions feel a clear pro-social desire and want to do good for society in the job. Since recruitment messages translate more effectively into perceived PJ fit when received by such individuals, they help to attract an important target group for public sector recruiting. Regarding these results, our study has some broader implications for the field of public administration research. Investigating differently framed job advertisements provides insights about possible applications of private sector recruitment methods in the public sector. In contrast to the public sector, private sector organisations have extensive experience in developing employer brands in order to attract potential employees. Our study shows that similar strategies are applicable in the public sector by emphasizing that public sector organisations should embed the ideas of PSM in the recruitment of employees to a larger extent.

Our results should be interpreted in light of three limitations. Firstly, while experimental designs control for the conditions of decision-making and thus allow for strong causal claims, the manipulation is limited to only few stimuli while many other factors may have an impact on decisions, too (e.g. Dal Bó *et al.,* 2013). Our discussion above shows that the amount and specificity of information presented in job advertisements is likely to influence application intentions. Accordingly, future research could vary these (and other) factors and examine how they impact on the intent to apply for public sector jobs. Moreover, we consider that most students do not have work experience and thus might better be able to relate to inspirational messages than to rational messages. This is because the lack of experience might

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result in incorrect evaluations of the means/ends matching of rational messages. Hence, a mixed sample of students and employees might give further insights. Regarding the different impacts of the single PSM dimensions on application intentions, future research could compare these effects across countries in order to control for country-specific effects.

Second, our variations in the wording of job ads were based on a rather rough distinction between inspirationally and rationally framed messages. Although the stimuli were derived from research on influence tactics in organisational communication and displayed face validity in a pre-test, future research could arrive at more advanced operationalisations. Psycholinguistics (e.g. Lowrey, 1998; Percy, 1982) could make valuable contributions in this regard. Additionally, the use of visual cues such as (stereotypical) images (Fruhen *et al.*, 2016; Wille and Derous, 2017) of the public sector in the stimuli might be a further advancement of research on job advertisements and their impact on potential applicants.

Third, the various functions of the HR cycle are interdependent and should be considered holistically. While the practical implications of our study are limited to the recruitment stage, HR managers have to consider possible side-effects of recruitment practices on subsequent stages of the HR cycle. Since both the attraction and retention of personnel are among the goals of HRM, public managers have to balance the attractiveness and realism of recruitment messages.

Despite these limitations, our findings have significant implications for public managers who are concerned with recruitment. Job advertisements highlighting inspirational aspects of the organisational mission and, more importantly, job attributes exert a positive impact on the willingness to apply for public sector jobs. Individuals with high levels of PSM perceive a larger match between themselves and the job when they are exposed to such inspirationally framed job tasks. Hence, if the recruitment aims to attract public service-motivated

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candidates to public organisations, job advertisements should inform the reader about the

opportunity to serve the public and the potential contribution to society in inspirationally

framed terms. Although previous studies highlight the importance of the organisational

mission (Pandey *et al.,* 2008; Wright and Pandey, 2011), we find that job attributes are even

more relevant for the decision to work in the public sector, i.e. PJ fit appears to be more

relevant than PO fit.

Endnotes

1. The German public sector is hierarchically structured with originally four grades, from a low grade of civil service (*einfacher Dienst*) to the highest grade of civil service (in German called "*höherer Dienst*"). Every level provides different educational entry criteria. In this study we focus on the highest grade of civil service. Entrance requirements for this grade are a master or diploma degree or a state examination (in German called "*Staatsexamen")*. The latter one is a typical German degree for law students.

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Figure 1. *Theoretical conceptualization*
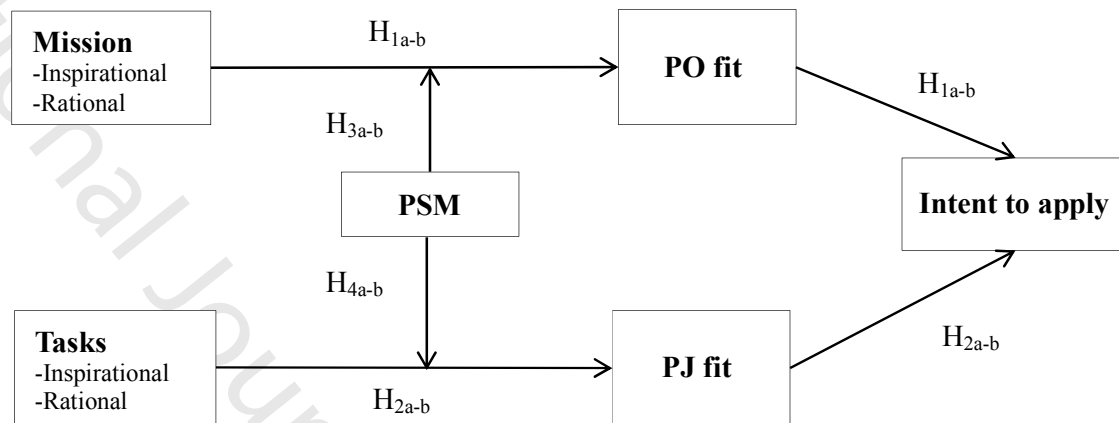
Table 1. *Experimental design*

		Framing of the organizational mission			
		Rational (R)	Inspirational (I)	Rational and Inspirational (RI)	Empty
Framing of the job tasks	Rational (R)	RR	IR	RI_R	-
	Inspirational (I)	RI	II	RI_I	-
	Rational and Inspirational (RI)	R_RI	I_RI	RI_RI	-
	Empty	-	-	-	Control group

Note: The "Empty" category implies that only the permanent elements of the job advertisement are shown.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlations

		Mean	SD	Min	Max	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	Variable																
1	Intent to apply	3.843	1.804	1	7	1.00											
2	Inspirational mission	0.505	0.500	0	1	−0.01	1.00										
3	Rational mission	0.505	0.500	0	1	0.02	−0.19*	1.00									
4	Inspirational tasks	0.598	0.490	0	1	−0.01	0.41*	0.42*	1.00								
5	Rational tasks	0.505	0.500	0	1	0.03	0.19*	0.20*	−0.01	1.00							
6	APS	5.675	0.995	1	7	0.34*	0.08	0.03	0.03	0.03	1.00						
7	SS	4.407	1.198	1	7	0.26*	0.09*	0.01	−0.02	0.02	0.47*	1.00					
8	COM/CPV	5.889	0.843	1	7	0.27*	0.03	−0.01	−0.00	0.01	0.70*	0.50*	1.00				
9	PO fit	4.726	1.092	1	7	0.56*	0.05	0.01	−0.01	0.01	0.55*	0.52*	0.52*	1.00			
10	PJ fit	4.102	1.591	1	7	0.71*	0.04	0.04	−0.03	0.05	0.39*	0.38*	0.32*	0.70*	1.00		
11	Age	23.338	4.071	15	80	0.02	−0.01	−0.04	−0.02	−0.03	−0.11*	−0.04	−0.03	−0.04	−0.08	1.00	
12	Gender (Male_Female)	n/a	n/a	1	2	0.07	−0.10*	−0.01	−0.04	−0.03	0.18*	0.01	0.18*	0.15*	0.10*	−0.22*	1.00

Note: Pairwise correlations; * $p < .05$.

Table 3. *Results of the SEM*

Hypothesis		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Job advertisement								
	Rational mission → Intent to apply	0.053	0.050	0.050	0.050	0.050	0.050	0.050
	Rational tasks → Intent to apply	0.014	0.015	0.015	0.015	0.015	0.015	0.015
	Inspirational mission → Intent to apply	0.065[a]	0.062[a]	0.062[a]	0.062[a]	0.062[a]	0.062[a]	0.062[a]
	Inspirational tasks → Intent to apply	0.091*[a]	0.089[a]	0.089[a]	0.089*[a]	0.089[a]	0.089[a]	0.089[a]
	Mediators							
H1–H2	Inspirational mission → PO fit → Intent to apply	0.026***(fm)[b]	0.028***(fm)[b]	0.029***(fm)[b]	0.028***(fm)[b]	0.029***(fm)[b]	0.029***(fm)[b]	0.029***(fm)[b]
		0.039***[c]	0.090***[c]	0.091***[c]	0.090***[c]	0.091***[c]	0.091***[c]	0.091***[c]
	Inspirational tasks → PJ fit → Intent to apply	0.109***(fm)[b]	0.184***(fm)[b]	0.186***(fm)[b]	0.184***(pm)[b]	0.184***(fm)[b]	0.184***(fm)[b]	0.189***(fm)[b]
		0.250***[c]	0.273***[c]	0.273***[c]	0.273***[c]	0.273***[c]	0.273***[c]	0.278***[c]
	PSM							
	APS → PO / PJ Fit		0.177**	0.215***	0.158**	0.175**	0.039	0.186**
	CPV_COM → PO / PJ Fit		0.188***	0.016	0.207***	0.049	0.015	0.024
	SS → PO / PJ Fit		0.247***	0.207***	0.240***	0.202***	−0.082*	0.211***
	Moderators							
	Mission							
	APS × Inspirational mission		0.058					
	APS × Rational mission		0.025					
H3a-b	CPV_COM × Inspirational mission				0.047			
	CPV_COM × Rational mission				0.016			
	SS × Inspirational mission						−0.060	
	SS × Rational mission						0.003	
	Tasks							
	APS × Inspirational tasks			0.084*				
	APS × Rational tasks			0.052				
H4a-b	CPV_COM × Inspirational tasks					0.080*		
	CPV_COM × Rational tasks					0.029		
	SS × Inspirational tasks							0.063
	SS × Rational tasks							0.044
	Control variables							
	Gender → Intent to apply	−0.003	−0.013	−0.013	−0.013	−0.013	−0.013	−0.013
	Age → Intent to apply	0.070*	0.082**	0.082**	0.082**	0.082**	0.082**	0.082**
	Observations	600	600	600	600	600	600	600
	Adj. R^2	0.212	0.508	0.508	0.508	0.508	0.508	0.508

Notes: $* p < 0.05$; $** p < 0.01$; $*** p < 0.001$; [a] specified direct effects; [b] specified indirect effects; [c] specified total effects; fm: fully mediated; pm: partly mediated.

Table 4. *Summary of Results*

Hypothesis		Status
H_{1a}	Inspirational Mission $\rightarrow$ PO fit $\rightarrow$ Intent to apply	Fully supported
H_{1b}	Rational Mission $\rightarrow$ PO fit $\rightarrow$ Intent to apply	Not supported
H_{2a}	Inspirational Tasks $\rightarrow$ PJ fit $\rightarrow$ Intent to apply	Fully supported
H_{2b}	Rational Tasks $\rightarrow$ PJ fit $\rightarrow$ Intent to apply	Not supported
H_{3a}	PSM $\rightarrow$ Inspirational Mission $\rightarrow$ PO fit	Not supported
H_{3b}	PSM $\rightarrow$ Rational Mission $\rightarrow$ PO fit	Not supported
H_{4a}	PSM $\rightarrow$ Inspirational Tasks $\rightarrow$ PJ fit	Partially supported (APS and CPV/COM)
H_{4b}	PSM $\rightarrow$ Rational Tasks $\rightarrow$ PJ fit	Not supported

Appendix 1. *Sample characteristics*

		Absolute frequency	Relative frequency
Gender (n = 600)	Male	178	29.67 %
	Female	422	70.33 %
Degree (n = 600)	Master[1]	406	67.67 %
	Staatsexamen /Diplom	194	32.33 %
Course of studies (n = 600)	Business studies	177	29.50 %
	Social sciences	176	29.33 %
	Geography	15	2.50 %
	Law	53	8.83 %
	Engineering	127	21.17 %
	Medicine	52	8.67 %

Note: [1] A master degree and a Staatsexamen / Diplom are equivalent degrees in Germany. Staatsexamen and Diplom are degrees in some particular professions such as teachers or lawyers.

Appendix 2. *Experimental treatments*

	Organizational mission	**Job tasks**
Rational	*Render relevant public services for society!*	*1. Involvement in projects that benefit the common good.* *2. Protection and implementation of legal regulations for the guarantee of equal opportunities.*
Inspirational	*Make our town a more attractive and fairer place for living and working!*	*1. Involvement in projects promoting a harmonic and social togetherness in our town.* *2. Active participation in services for our young and old fellow citizens.*

Appendix 3. *Example of a job advertisement*

We are a public organization in a metropolitan area with more than 2,000 employees. Support us in our mission as (specific job title[d])*:**

Make our town to a more attractive and fairer place for living and working![a] Render relevant public services for society![b]

Your tasks and abilities:

-Confident manner in dealing with people [c]

-Organization and coordination skills [c]

-Involvement in projects promoting a harmonic and social togetherness in our town[a]

-Active participation in services for our young and old fellow citizens[a]

-Involvement in projects that benefit the common good[b]

-Protection and implementation of legal regulations for the guarantee of equal opportunities[b]

Note: [a] inspirational framing; [b] rational framing;[c] permanent element of the job advertisement;[d] The specific job title depends on the respondents' discipline of studies. For example, an individual on a law degree would see an advertisement featuring a corporate counsel and an individual on a business degree would see an advertisement featuring an expert advisor. This setup guarantees that the respondents can relate to the presented job which increases the external validity of the survey-experiment as compared to a setup using general job titles for all respondents.

Appendix 4. *Rotated[a] factor loadings*

Variable	CPV_COM	SS	APS	Uniqueness
PSM_1			0.8049	0.3021
PSM_2			0.7984	0.2150
PSM_3			0.7020	0.3458
PSM_4			0.6484	0.3619
PSM_5	0.6936			0.4718
PSM_6	0.7062			0.3949
PSM_7	0.6671			0.4241
PSM_8	0.6711			0.4425
PSM_9	0.5620			0.4020
PSM_10	0.5765			0.5156
PSM_11	0.6678			0.3684
PSM_12	0.5777			0.3580
PSM_13		0.8333		0.2239
PSM_14		0.7840		0.3678
PSM_15		0.8625		0.2368
PSM_16		0.7783		0.3273
KMO		0.9216		

Note: [a] Oblimin rotation is used.

Appendix 5. *Measurements*

Variable	Item	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
APS	I admire people who initiate or are involved in activities to aid my community *Ich bewundere Menschen, die meinem Umfeld helfen, indem sie entsprechende Projekte ins Leben rufen oder daran beteiligt sind.* It is important to contribute to activities that tackle social problems. *Es ist wichtig, zu Aktivitäten beizutragen, die soziale Probleme angehen.* Meaningful public service is very important to me. *Es ist mir wichtig, dass der öffentliche Sektor gesellschaftlich sinnvolle Dienstleistungen erbringt.* It is important for me to contribute to the common good. *Es ist mir wichtig, zum Gemeinwohl beizutragen.*	0.845	0.683
CPV_COM	I think equal opportunities for citizens are very important. *Ich denke, es ist wichtig, dass alle Bürger gleiche Chancen haben.* It is important that citizens can rely on the continuous provision of public services. *Es ist wichtig, dass sich die Bürger darauf verlassen können, dass öffentliche Dienstleistungen zuverlässig erbracht werden.* It is fundamental that the interests of future generations are taken into account when developing public policies. *Es ist von grundlegender Bedeutung, dass die Interessen zukünftiger Generationen in die Entwicklung öffentlicher Leistungen einbezogen werden.* To act ethically is essential for public servants. *Es ist wichtig, dass Beschäftigte im öffentlichen Sektor ethisch handeln.* I feel sympathetic to the plight of the underprivileged. *Ich habe Mitgefühl gegenüber sozial Benachteiligten und der Not, in der sie sich befinden.* I empathize with other people who face difficulties. *Ich kann mich gut in Menschen einfühlen, die in Schwierigkeiten sind.* I get very upset when I see other people being treated unfairly. *Ich ärgere mich sehr, wenn ich sehe, dass andere Menschen unfair behandelt werden.* Considering the welfare of others is very important. *Es ist sehr wichtig, das Wohlergehen anderer zu berücksichtigen.*	0.881	0.547
SS	I am prepared to make sacrifices for the good of society. *Ich bin bereit einen persönlichen Nachteil in Kauf zu nehmen, sofern es dem Allgemeinwohl dient.* I believe in putting civic duty before self. *Ich glaube daran, dass die Pflichten als Bürger vor meinen eigenen Interessen stehen sollten.* I am willing to risk personal loss to help society. *Ich bin bereit einen persönlichen Verlust in Kauf zu nehmen, um der Gesellschaft als Ganzes zu helfen.*	0.880	0.736

PSM
Kim et al., 2013

Construct	Item		
	I would agree to a good plan to make a better life for the poor, even if it costs me money. *Eine gute Idee zur Verbesserung der Lebenssituation bedürftiger Menschen würde ich befürworten, auch wenn mich das Geld kosten würde.*		
PO fit Saks & Ashforth, 2002	To what extent are the values of the organization similar to your own values? *Inwieweit sind die Werte der Organisation ähnlich zu Ihren eigenen Werten?*	0.906	0.780
	To what extent does your personality match the personality or image of the organization? *Inwieweit stimmt Ihre Persönlichkeit mit der Persönlichkeit oder dem Bild der Organisation überein?*		
	To what extent does the organization fulfill your needs? *Inwieweit erfüllt die Organisation Ihre Bedürfnisse?*		
	To what extent is the organization a good match for you? *Inwieweit ist die Organisation eine gute Partie für Sie?*		
PJ fit Saks & Ashforth, 2002	To what extent is the job a good match for you? *Inwieweit erachten Sie die ausgeschriebene Stelle als für Sie passend?[a]*	n/a	-
Intent to apply Collins, 2007; Taylor & Bergmann, 1987	If I saw a job opening for this organization, I would apply for it. *Wenn ich dieses Stellenangebot sehen würde, würde ich mich darauf bewerben.*	n/a	-

Notes: [a] *In the German translation of the English item, we modified the item marginally to simplify the understanding of the item in German.*

Appendix 6: Pre-analysis

	Model 0
Job advertisement	
Rational mission -> Intent to apply	0.076
Rational tasks-> Intent to apply	0.010
Inspirational mission -> Intent to apply	0.218***[a]
Inspirational tasks -> Intent to apply	0.206***[a]
PSM	
APS -> Intent to apply	0.124*
CPV_COM -> Intent to apply	0.058
SS -> Intent to apply	0.063
Control variables	
Gender -> Intent to apply	-0.003
Age -> Intent to apply	0.070*
Observations	600
Adj. R^2	0.242

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$