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Workplace authenticity as an attribute of employer attractiveness

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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate the relevance of authenticity as a possible attribute of employer attractiveness. Additionally, the study compares authenticity to other factors of attractiveness, such as economic, development, social, interest and application values.

Design/methodology/approach – A survey was conducted with a total of 937 respondents. The questionnaire consisted of the employer attractiveness scale developed by Berthon, Ewing, and Hah (2005) and an adapted version of the authentic living scale (Wood *et al.*, 2008).

Findings – The results show that workplace authenticity is equally valued as an attractiveness attribute as having opportunities for economic and personal development, and that it is significantly more highly valued than other attractiveness dimensions of the work environment, such as interest value, social value, and application value. The results also show that authenticity matters more as an attribute of attractiveness for top management, older professionals as well as women.

Practical implications – The findings suggest that firms become more competitive in attracting talent if their recruitment strategies place more emphasis on authenticity as a psychological benefit that can be obtained through working in the company. The use of social media (e.g. employee testimonials, chats, and blogs) can help to this end.

Originality/value – The subject of workplace authenticity has been receiving increasing attention in the academic literature, and the studies reveal the benefits that it may entail for both developing and retaining a more engaged and productive workforce. However, previous research has not considered how perceptions of workplace authenticity may also help organizations become more attractive in the eyes of potential job applicants.

Keywords Quantitative, Employer attractiveness, Recruitment, Authenticity, Employer branding

Paper type Research paper

Introduction
The subject of workplace authenticity has been receiving increasing attention from scholars (Cable *et al.*, 2013; Robinson *et al.*, 2013), practitioners, and companies (Rosh and Offermann, 2013). Authenticity involves "the subjective experience of alignment between one's internal experiences and external expressions" (Roberts *et al.*, 2009, p. 3), where internal experiences may include thoughts, feelings, values, and behavioral preferences, whereas external expressions refer to both verbal disclosures and non-verbal behavior (Leroy and Sels, 2008; Roberts *et al.*, 2009). In management research, authenticity has been studied in relation to employee socialization and retention (Cable *et al.*, 2013), employee well-being (Ménard and Brunet, 2011), leadership effectiveness (Avolio and Gardner, 2005), and career development (Craddock, 2004; Svejenova, 2005).

This previous literature has focused on the outcomes or benefits (e.g. work engagement) that increasing authenticity within the workplace may bring to organizations and employees (Bosch and Taris, 2014). This study adopts a different perspective, and investigates whether authenticity may also help in attracting new talent to the firm, that is, as a significant factor of attractiveness in firms' recruitment drives.

There are several reasons for thinking that our focus on authenticity and employer attractiveness is a timely one. First, the topic of workplace authenticity is attracting ever more attention from the business media (Rosh and Offermann, 2013), and companies are being advised to develop more authentic employer branding strategies (Harris, 2014). The so-called "war for talent" (Minbaeva and Collings, 2013) requires organizations to differentiate themselves as employers in order to attract the best candidates available; we thus argue that understanding underexplored and less conventional dimensions – such as workplace authenticity – may benefit the development of competitive employer branding and recruitment strategies.

Second, workplace authenticity has been considered an important dimension in the development of more meaningful professional careers (Craddock, 2004; Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005; Svejenova, 2005). Research shows that individuals look not only for financial rewards in their professional choices, but also for meaning in what they do, which is linked to the possibility of doing things in ways that are more consistent with their own values and beliefs (Judge and Bretz, 1992; Kahn, 1990); hence we posit that authenticity may be considered and valued by job applicants when they choose a potential employer.

In sum, these arguments underscore the increasing significance that workplace authenticity may hold for employers' recruitment efforts. Given the lack of research in this area, we pose the following research questions:

RQ1. What is the relevance of authenticity as an attractiveness attribute?

RQ2. What is the significance of this new factor in comparison to other factors of attractiveness that are more commonly studied?

In order to address these questions, an exploratory-descriptive survey was conducted with a sample of 937 professionals in Brazil.

The next sections develop the concepts of workplace authenticity and employer attractiveness in more detail, and outline our methodology.

Theoretical framework
Workplace authenticity
Authenticity is commonly understood as knowing oneself and acting accordingly (Harter, 2002). The concept of authenticity is rooted in the humanistic tradition in psychology. According to Maslow (1968), authenticity increases as individuals are able to satisfy their higher growth-oriented psychological needs. "Focusing on growth-oriented needs presumably results in fuller knowledge and acceptance of one's true or intrinsic nature, furthering one's path toward self-actualization" (Goldman and Kernis, 2002, p. 18). Rogers (1961) similarly argues that fully functioning persons, those capable of continuous self-actualization, are able to identify their subjective experiences and feelings, and come to terms with them without judging them by externally based standards or expectations. Along these same lines, other authors have defined authenticity as self-determined and self-initiated behaviors that are in tune with basic psychological needs; for example, competence, autonomy and relatedness (Deci and Ryan, 2000), as opposed to those behaviors designed to meet other people's expectations or demands.

Goldman and Kernis (2002) and Kernis (2003) have developed a multidimensional conceptualization of authenticity that includes awareness, unbiased processing, behavior,

and relational orientation. Awareness refers to an individual's self-knowledge concerning his/her desires, motives, and values. Unbiased processing refers to one's ability to be objective about one's own strengths and weaknesses. The behavioral component involves behaviors that are self-determined (i.e. reflecting autonomy and choice) rather than motivated by external goals. Finally, the relational component of authenticity refers to an individual's ability to achieve openness and truthfulness in one's close relationships.

More recently, Wood *et al.* (2008) have developed a measure of authenticity that includes three different dimensions. The first, self-alienation, concerns the level of congruence between one's conscious awareness and actual experiences. The second dimension, authentic living, concerns the level of congruence between conscious awareness and actual behavior. The third aspect of authenticity, acceptance of external influence, involves the extent to which one accepts the influence of other people and conforms to their expectations.

Most research on authenticity at work has so far focused on employees' level of authenticity and its consequences, such as the relation between authenticity and in-role performance, job satisfaction, and work engagement (Bosch and Taris, 2014), job engagement and life satisfaction (Colbert *et al.* 2014), and behavioral integrity and trust (Leroy, 2014). Some studies have also focused on the antecedents of employee authenticity in the workplace, such as the effects of authentic leadership on employees' levels of authentic self-expression (Yagil and Medler-Liraz, 2013). In addition, Roberts *et al.* (2009) have built a conceptual model to explain how individuals may become more authentic at work.

In sum, empirical research has so far focused mostly on the antecedents and consequences of employees' authenticity, providing a largely positive view of workplace authenticity. However, as noted in the Introduction, previous research has not focused on how perceptions of workplace authenticity may also help organizations become more attractive in the eyes of potential job applicants. We start exploring this issue by first reviewing the state-of-the-art on employer attractiveness, and discussing why authenticity could be a significant factor of attractiveness.

Employer attractiveness
Employer attractiveness refers to inferences about an organization's characteristics (Singh, 2011) and the related benefits that potential employees perceive they would obtain by working for it (Berthon *et al.*, 2005; Pingle and Sharma, 2013). Attractiveness is relevant because it influences career intentions and job choice decisions (Gomes and Neves, 2011; Singh, 2011), as well as employee retention (Helm, 2013). In addition, attractiveness also influences jobseekers' decisions, such as whether to gather additional information about an employer, or consider any new information that might be forthcoming (Cable and Turban, 2001).

An employer's attractiveness depends largely on the beliefs that jobseekers hold about an organization's different attributes (i.e. employer image), as well as on their actual familiarity with the employer's brand and its reputation (Cable and Turban, 2001; Edwards, 2010). The more positive the set of beliefs jobseekers hold about the organization, the more likely they will be attracted to it, and the readier they will feel to apply for job vacancies. Hence, identifying these attributes and determining their relative influence or weight in jobseekers' schemas is important for the design of appropriate employer branding initiatives (Berthon *et al.*, 2005; Edwards and Edwards, 2013; Pingle and Sharma, 2013). Researchers have come up with different ways of classifying the attributes that determine an employer's image – and therefore also its attractiveness – (Alniaçik and Alniaçik, 2012; Berthon *et al.*, 2005; Cable and Turban, 2001; Srivastava and Bhatnagar, 2010). In general, these taxonomies integrate the functional benefits of working for a particular employer (e.g. development opportunities) with economic (e.g. good salary) and psychological ones (e.g. an exciting work environment) (Berthon *et al.*, 2005). Other authors distinguish solely between instrumental and symbolic attributes (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003), or hard and soft ones (Baum and Kabst, 2013).

In these typologies, functional and economic aspects are considered similar, and labeled as instrumental. The instrumental aspects of an employer's image consist of applicants' beliefs about objective aspects of the organization itself and the job being offered (Cable and Turban 2001, Lievens, 2007, Edwards, 2010). In contrast, symbolic elements correspond to aspects that are not tangible or readily observable, but rather inhabit the applicants' imagery, being linked to an individual's need to express themself and maintain a positive self-image (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003). Symbolic aspects are characterized as human traits that applicants attribute to the employer (Lievens, 2007; Slaughter *et al.*, 2004), such as sincerity, cheerfulness, and excitement.

The research that examines employer attractiveness has addressed the relative significance or weight held by different attributes for an overall measure of attractiveness (Gomes and Neves, 2011; Lievens, 2007; Thomas and Wise, 1999). In addition, researchers have also studied whether and how individual differences in values (Martins and Parsons, 2007; Stone *et al.*, 2006), race (Thomas and Wise, 1999), or gender (Terjesen *et al.*, 2007; Thomas and Wise, 1999) affect the significance of different attributes for perceiving employer attractiveness.

Authenticity as an attribute of employer attractiveness
In the same way that corporate policies may affect the extent to which employees are more or less attracted to firms due to the existence of attractive development opportunities or reward packages, the extent to which a work environment fosters more authentic behaviors is also likely to play a role in employee attraction. This is based on the notion that individuals not only seek careers and companies that guarantee rewards and promotion, but also look for contexts that are meaningful and allow them to be and express themselves. The findings reported by Judge and Bretz (1992) suggest that job applicants are more likely to choose jobs whose values are aligned with their own; moreover, the search for value expression and need fulfillment are relevant drivers for the person-organization fit (Yu, 2014).

Recent theorizing on career development also supports the premise that individuals look for self-expression at work. For example, the so-called kaleidoscope career model (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005) states that individuals focus on three parameters (challenge, balance, and authenticity) when making career decisions. These authors refer to authenticity as the extent to which "the individual's internal values are aligned with his/her external behaviors and the values of the employing organization" (Sullivan *et al.*, 2009, p. 290).

Finally, previous research also tells us that jobseekers find more satisfying positions when in selection processes they are able to portray themselves as they really are (Cable and Kay, 2012), and that inauthentic behaviors in the workplace increase psychological stress and decrease an employee's well-being and work engagement (Kahn, 1990; Roberts *et al.*, 2009).

Given the above arguments, we believe that whether or not an organization allows employees to act more authentically may be a significant attractiveness attribute for jobseekers. Hence, companies may be interested in finding ways to foster authenticity at work, and more importantly, communicate these policies as part of their recruitment strategy. There are indeed several ways in which firms may foster authenticity through their human resource (HR) management practices, and we know from previous research that the HR systems in place influence job applicants' decision processes (Bretz and Judge, 1994). Companies may vary, for example, in the extent to which their recruitment practices influence job applicants' perceptions of authenticity (Sullivan *et al.*, 2009). The same is true for their socialization practices, which may inhibit the expression of a new employee's personal identity and authenticity or, by contrast, create an environment that prioritizes the expression of the newcomers' true selves (Cable *et al.*, 2013). This information can travel by word-of-mouth from current employees to potential job applicants, contributing to a more or less authenticity-friendly employer brand, and eventually influencing the employer's overall attractiveness.

Methodology

Exploratory-descriptive research was conducted with a sample of Brazilian professionals. The scales used in the study were first submitted to a validation and reliability analysis to avoid inaccuracies in the interpretation of the results and conclusions (Mackenzie, Podsakoff, and Podsakoff, 2011). The questionnaire used therefore contained a validated version of the Employer Attractiveness Scale (Alniaçik and Alniaçik, 2012; Berthon *et al.*, 2005; Wallace *et al.*, 2012), which includes widely researched and accepted dimensions of attractiveness, and the Authentic Living scale (Wood *et al.*, 2008); all these constructs are further explained below. We also included the following demographic questions: gender, age, educational background, and hierarchical level. The questionnaire was translated into Portuguese by one of the authors, and translated back into English by a different translator to ensure consistency.

The empirical analysis involved the following steps: we first examined the importance given to authenticity by the respondents in the choice of a potential employer, compared to other attractiveness attributes; and we then explored the importance of authenticity for different groups of respondents, based on gender, hierarchical level, and age. This analysis was conducted because the hierarchy of attractiveness factors may vary based on individual differences (Alniaçik and Alniaçik, 2012; Terjesen *et al.*, 2007; Thomas and Wise, 1999).

Data collection and sample

Our sampling approach targeted professionals with diverse profiles and at different stages in their careers. A Brazilian recruitment company's mailing list was used for data collection, and a total of 3,000 professionals from a variety of industries were invited to answer the online questionnaire. The return rate was approximately 34 percent, and 937 valid questionnaires were used in the empirical analysis.

The sample comprises 315 women (34 percent) and 622 men (66 percent). In terms of hierarchical levels, the majority work in middle management (42 percent), followed by line management (19 percent), top management (16 percent), analysts (14 percent), and specialists such as engineers and statisticians (9 percent). The average age is 37, with individual ages ranging from 21 to 65.

Instrument development and constructs

The employer attractiveness scale (Berthon *et al.*, 2005) was used to measure each component's relative significance in a set of factors of employer attractiveness. The instrument was chosen because it has already been used in a number of international studies, with good reliability (Alniaçik and Alniaçik, 2012; Sivertzen *et al.*, 2013). We also chose this scale because it aggregates multiple attributes extracted from the extant literature on employer attractiveness (Berthon *et al.*, 2005), and encompasses a set of dimensions which apply to a wide range of employers and recruitment situations. The scale contains 25 items that address five different attributes that might be offered by organizations. Interest value: a challenging and stimulating job, with new work practices, and innovative products and services, in an environment that promotes creativity and innovation. Social value: a positive and pleasant social and interpersonal environment. Economic value: above-average salary, compensation package, security, and promotion opportunities. Development value: recognition, professional enhancement, development of skills, and career strengthening. Application value: opportunities to apply expertise and transmit knowledge; it also involves the extent to which the job is in an environment where the application is market – and society-oriented. The respondents evaluated each one of the instrument's items according to the following question: "To what extent is this aspect important to you in choosing a new job?" A five-point Likert scale was used accordingly.

To check and adjust the reading of the translated scale, a pre-test was carried out with six researchers in the field of HR. The scale was then submitted to a confirmatory factorial analysis (CFA) – involving structural equation modeling – to assess its validity and reliability. As a normal distribution was not observed (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test), the partial least squares (PLS) approach was adopted, as it does not require normal distribution assumptions (Hair *et al.*, 2011). The structural equation modeling used SmartPLS software (Ringle *et al.*, 2005).

Convergent validity was analyzed through the average variance extracted (AVE) in the first stage of the CFA. The AVE should be equal to or higher than 0.50 (Hair *et al.*, 2011). Thus, with a view to maximizing the AVE, two economic value items and two development ones were excluded. The table below shows the indicators used in the study and the AVE for each one of them. The table also shows the composite reliability indicators of each attractiveness dimension. The composite reliability of the dimensions was considered satisfactory because it was above 0.70 (Hair *et al.*, 2011).

Regarding indicator reliability, although factor loadings should ideally be equal to or higher than 0.70, loadings between 0.50 and 0.70 are still acceptable (Chin, 1998; Hair *et al.*, 2011; Hulland, 1999). The decision was made, nonetheless, to exclude the social value item "A fun working environment," which had the lowest factor loading (0.60); the loadings of the remaining indicators were higher than 0.60 (Table I).

Discriminant validity was evaluated through two procedures. First, the data were analyzed in order to detect any cross-loadings between the factors, but none were detected. Second, it was observed that, as required, the square roots of the AVE values were higher than the correlations between the factors (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Thus, discriminant validity was also considered satisfactory.

Dimensions	Outer loadings
Social value (AVE: 0.51; comp. reliability: 0.84)	
Having a good relationship with your colleagues	0.81
Having a good relationship with your superiors	0.70
Supportive and encouraging colleagues	0.72
Happy work environment	0.73
Interest value (AVE: 0.60; comp. reliability: 0.88)	
Working in an exciting environment	0.81
Innovative employer – novel work practices/forward-thinking	0.83
The organization both values and uses your creativity	0.82
The organization produces high-quality products and services	0.73
The organization produces innovative products and services	0.66
Application value (AVE: 0.51; comp. reliability: 0.84)	
Humanitarian organization – gives back to society	0.77
Opportunity to apply what was learned at a tertiary institution	0.65
Opportunity to teach others what you have learned	0.72
Acceptance and belonging	0.71
The organization is customer-orientated	0.72
Development value (AVE: 0.54; comp. reliability: 0.78)	
Feeling more self-confident as a result of working for a particular organization	0.81
Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular organization	0.64
Gaining career-enhancing experience	0.75
Economic value (AVE: 0.56; comp. reliability: 0.79)	
Good promotion opportunities within the organization	0.89
An above-average basic salary	0.69
An attractive overall compensation package	0.64

Table I.
Attractiveness
dimensions

Workplace authenticity was measured using an adapted version of the Authentic Living scale (Wood *et al.*, 2008). Authentic living is the degree to which individuals are true to themselves in most situations, and live in accordance with their own values and beliefs. In this model, authentic living tackles the behavioral dimension of authenticity, which we deemed the most appropriate for studying employer attractiveness. Our assumption was that potential job candidates would assess workplace authenticity as an employer attribute based on whether they believed they would be able to behave more or less authentically within the organization. The authentic living scale was also chosen because it is short and easy-to-use, and has been applied in other studies with high reliability (White and Tracey, 2011). The four original items of the "authentic living" scale were adapted to better fit the subject of this study (i.e. employee attraction). For example, one of the original items, "I live in accordance with my values and beliefs," was modified to read "To be able to behave in my job in accordance with my values and beliefs." The authenticity items were randomly mixed with those of the attractiveness scale. The respondents therefore assessed them as described above, i.e., they evaluated the extent to which each one of these aspects is important in the choice of a new job, using a five-point Likert scale.

The authenticity construct and its four indicators were added to the previously tested CFA model in order to assess its validity and reliability. Convergent validity was considered adequate (AVE = 0.56), and the construct's reliability was satisfactory (composite reliability = 0.84). The reliability of the indicators according to the loadings obtained was also adequate (see Table II).

Regarding discriminant validity, the square roots of the AVE values were higher than the correlations with those factors (Table III), indicating satisfactory validity (Hair *et al.*, 2011). In addition, there were no cross-loadings between the authenticity indicators and the factors of the attractiveness scale, which suggests that authenticity is a specific factor. Thus, the discriminant validity for authenticity was also considered adequate.

Items	Outer loadings
To be able to be true to myself in most situations within the firm	0.78
To be able to be yourself rather than having to please others	0.73
To be able to behave in my job in accordance with my values and beliefs	0.77
To always feel free to stand by what I really believe in	0.73

Table II.
Authenticity-at-work
construct

	M	SD	z	r_{es}	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. A	4.25	0.59	–	–	0.75								
2. DV	4.24	0.58	−0.24	−0.01	0.42*	0.73							
3. EV	4.23	0.55	−1.57	−0.05	0.13*	0.26*	0.75						
4. SV	4.10	0.55	−7.45*	−0.24	0.44*	0.45*	0.26*	0.71					
5. IV	4.07	0.62	−8.35*	−0.27	0.41*	0.34*	0.25*	0.44*	0.77				
6. AV	3.81	0.64	14.40*	−0.47	0.04	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.05	0.71			
7. Gend.	–	–	–	–	0.09*	−0.13*	0.01	−0.08**	0.06	−0.02	–		
8. Age	37.04	8.23	–	–	0.13*	−0.04	−0.18*	0.03	0.13*	−0.03	0.20*	–	
9. H. lev.	–	–	–	–	0.09*	−0.10*	−0.14*	−0.04	0.11*	0.03	0.17*	0.60*	–

Table III.
Means, standard
deviations, and
intercorrelations

Notes: A = Authenticity; DV = Development Value; EV = Economic Value; SV = Social Value; IV = Interest Value; AV = Application Value; H. lev; = hierarchical level; Z: Wilcoxon test output; r_{es}: effect size. Values on the diagonal represent the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE). *$p < 0.01$; **$p < 0.05$ (two-tailed)

Results

Authenticity: comparison with other factors of attractiveness
Table III shows the descriptive statistics and inter-correlations of all the variables in the data set.

Since a normal distribution was not observed, the non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test – indicated for comparing related scores (Siegel and Castellan, 1988; Guerci and Pedrini, 2014) – was used to assess whether there were any statistically significant differences between authenticity and all the other factors of organizational attractiveness. Table III also shows the Wilcoxon test outcomes (z) for each dimension, as well as their effect sizes (r_{es}) (Morris and Richler, 2012). The following criterion was adopted for analyzing effect sizes: 0.1 is considered small, 0.3 represents a medium effect, and finally, 0.5 is deemed large (Morris and Richler, 2012).

Mean differences were significant for Social Value ($z = -7.45$; $p < 0.01$; $r_{es} = -0.24$), Interest Value ($z = -8.35$; $p < 0.01$; $r_{es} = -0.27$), and Application Value ($z = -14.40$; $p < 0.01$; $r_{es} = -0.47$). In all these cases, authenticity recorded higher scores. Effects sizes were middling for social and interest Value, and large for application Value. The differences with economic Value ($z = -1.57$; $p = 0.12$; $r_{es} = -0.05$) and development Value ($z = -0.24$; $p = 0.81$; $r_{es} = -0.01$) were not significant.

Authenticity as a factor of attractiveness: differences by gender, hierarchical level, and age
We also examined whether there were any statistical differences in the extent to which different types of respondents valued authenticity as a factor of attractiveness. In particular, we focused on differences according to gender, hierarchical level, and age. In the case of gender, we found that women gave more importance to authenticity when applying for a job. The mean authenticity score for 315 female professionals was 4.32 (SD = 0.53), whereas for the 622 male respondents it was 4.20 (SD = 0.62). The non-parametric Mann-Whitney test -used for testing independent samples (Siegel and Castellan, 1988) – revealed a significant difference between these two mean scores ($U = 87,221$; $p < 0.01$; $r_{es} = 0.09$); the effect size in this comparison was small.

Regarding hierarchical level, Table IV shows the mean scores for respondents at different managerial levels. Top management had the highest scores for authenticity, followed by specialists, middle management, line management, and finally analysts, who had the lowest scores.

The Mann-Whitney test was used by pairing hierarchical levels (Table IV). Significant score differences were identified in the following comparisons: between top management and middle management ($U = 25,757.50$; $p < 0.05$; $r_{es} = -0.11$), between top management and line management ($U = 11,122.00$; $p < 0.01$; $r_{es} = -0.16$), and between top management and analysts ($U = 7,697.50$; $p < 0.01$; $r_{es} = -0.19$); effect sizes were slightly above small in the first comparison, and between small and medium in the other two. None of the other possible

	1. Top management		2. Middle management		3. Line management		4. Specialists		5. Analysts	
N	152		393		179		84		129	
M	4.38		4.25		4.22		4.26		4.13	
SD	0.56		0.58		0.55		0.63		0.67	
	U	r_{es}	U	r_{es}	U	r_{es}	U	r_{es}	U	r_{es}
1	–	–	25,757.50**	-0.11	11,122.00*	-0.16	5,732.50	-0.09	7,697.50*	-0.19
2	–	–	–	–	33,847.00	-0.03	16,135.00	-0.01	23,269.00	-0.06
3	–	–	–	–	–	–	7,078.00	-0.05	10,967.00	-0.04
4	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	4,874.00	-0.09

Notes: U: Mann-Whitney test output; r_{es}: effect size. *$p < 0.01$; **$p < 0.05$ (two-tailed)

Table IV.
Authenticity as an attractiveness attribute according to hierarchical level

relationships was significant. The results therefore show that respondents in top management positions value authenticity more than those below them.

Finally, Table V shows the authenticity scores for respondents in different age groups, which were defined according to age quartiles.

The results show that age is positively associated with the value assigned to authenticity in the workplace (as observed in the correlation matrix). In turn, Mann-Whitney tests recorded significant differences between the following age ranges stated in years: between 21-30 and 43-65 ($U = 20{,}183.00$; $p < 0.01$; $r_{es} = -0.17$) and between 31-35 and 43-65 ($U = 21{,}517.50$; $p < 0.01$; $r_{es} = -0.16$), with effect sizes between small and medium; moreover, the difference between 36-42 and 43-65 was also significant ($U = 23{,}978.00$; $p < 0.05$, $r_{es} = -0.11$), with a small effect size. These results are also corroborated and expanded by the relationships observed in the correlation matrix (Table III). For example, we can see that age negatively correlates with economic Value ($r = -0.18$; $p < 0.01$), and positively correlates with interest Value ($r = 0.13$; $p < 0.01$) and authenticity ($r = 0.13$; $p < 0.01$), as factors informing a job application. Finally, as expected, there is a positive and significant correlation between age and the respondents' hierarchical levels ($r = 0.60$; $p < 0.01$) (Table III).

Discussion

This exploratory study focused on authenticity as an attractiveness attribute. The results show that authenticity was more highly rated by respondents than all the dimensions encompassed by the employer attractiveness scale (Berthon *et al.*, 2005), namely, economic value, development value, interest value, social value, and application value. This means that the possibility of being true to oneself in most situations and acting in accordance with one's values and beliefs weighed more in accepting a new job than all the other attractiveness attributes. Although authenticity's mean scores were always higher, statistically significant differences were found exclusively for comparisons between authenticity and Interest Value, Social Value, and Application Value. Our statistical tests therefore confirmed that workplace authenticity had more value than the following: a) a job in a challenging and stimulating place, in a company with innovative products, or in a creative and innovative environment (interest value); a positive and pleasant social and interpersonal environment (social value); and a job in a company where expertise can be applied and shared, as well as used to deliver to the market and society (application value). Although authenticity as a factor of attractiveness obtained higher ratings than economic value and development value, the differences were not statistically significant. Hence, having promotion opportunities, above-average salaries, and an attractive compensation package (economic value), as well as being able to acquire valuable career experiences and feel more professionally self-confident (development value), were valued on a par with authenticity at work.

Our results are consistent with previous research showing that both instrumental and symbolic attributes matter for organizational attractiveness (Lievens, 2007; Lievens and Highhouse, 2003; Slaughter and Greguras, 2009). We contribute to existing research by highlighting a different –and relevant- symbolic attribute, namely, authenticity. Early work

Table V.
Authenticity as an attractiveness attribute according to age (in years)

	1. 43-65		2. 36-42		3. 31-35		4. 21-30	
N	229		240		231		220	
M	4.37		4.26		4.18		4.16	
SD	0.54		0.56		0.61		0.65	
	U	r_{es}	U	r_{es}	U	r_{es}	U	r_{es}
1	–	–	23,978.00**	−0.11	21,517.50*	−0.16	20,183.00*	−0.17
2	–	–	–	–	26,134.00	−0.05	24,367.50	−0.07
3	–	–	–	–	–	–	24,897.50	−0.02

Notes: U: Mann-Whitney test output; r_{es}: effect size. *$p < 0.01$; **$p < 0.05$ (two-tailed)

on brand identity (Aaker, 1997), as well as research on corporate personality (Otto *et al.*, 2011; Slaughter *et al.*, 2004), addresses symbolic attractiveness attributes such as sincerity and honesty, although their focus is on perceptions of moral soundness and social value (e.g. friendliness) rather than on authenticity *per se*. Our findings instead highlight the unique role of authenticity as an attribute of employer attractiveness. Finally, we also show that the value of authenticity is contingent on employees' gender, age, and hierarchical level.

Indeed, our results indicate that women value authenticity, development value, and social value more than men do. These results are consistent with theory on gender roles and stereotypes (Konrad *et al.*, 2000), which argues that men and women learn at an early age to internalize gender self-concepts that fit social expectations. These self-concepts also influence the type of job attributes that both genders tend to value later in life. Our results are also in line with those in other empirical studies, such as those by Konrad *et al.* (2000) and Peterson (2004), who have found that women prioritize intrinsic and relational aspects of work, such as the job itself and enjoyment in the workplace, personal growth, the ability to use their creativity and knowledge, and having good colleagues. Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) also highlight the importance of authentic living for women, which tends to increase with time, as they worry less about family (children and/or aging parents), and try to act more in accordance with their own expectations. Finally, Alniaçik and Alniaçik (2012) have also observed significant differences between men and women in four of the six dimensions found: social value, market value, application value, and cooperation.

As for hierarchical level, we contend that the value of authenticity as a factor of attractiveness is greater for individuals higher up the ladder. This result is in keeping with Kraus *et al.* (2011), showing the influence of power on authentic expression: people in positions of greater social power act more in accordance with their own beliefs and convictions. According to our results, people in positions of power also value workplaces that allow them to behave more authentically.

Finally, our results also indicate that older professionals (aged 43-65) value authenticity in the workplace more highly. This is consistent with the notion that aging is associated with a reorganization of motives for action and the primacy of different types of values (Kanfer and Ackerman, 2004). For example, aging is associated with a decrease in the relevance of instrumental values such as financial security (Ryff and Baltes, 1976), and an increase in the relevance of generativity (i.e. prosocial) motives (McAdams and de St Aubin, 1998). The results from career surveys also indicate that older people tend to value a good salary and promotion opportunities less than younger workers do (Briscoe *et al.*, 2012). Socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen *et al.*, 1999; Kanfer and Ackerman, 2004) provides a rationale for why age is positively associated with the search for authenticity as a factor of attractiveness. According to this theory, younger adults are interested in social interactions primarily for their informational and instrumental value, whereas during later adulthood this informational value declines as the individual becomes conscious of the passage of time (Diehl *et al.*, 2014), and focuses on "time left." This makes older adults more selective in their relationships, as the focus for social interaction shifts towards emotional satisfaction, meaningful relationships, and supporting one's own identity (Kanfer and Ackerman, 2004). Thus, senior professionals focus more on the present, and look for relationships and environments where they can better act in accordance with who they are or perceive themselves to be.

Our findings also have relevant implications for practice in terms of employer branding strategies. Our results suggest that firms become more competitive in attracting talent if their branding strategies place greater emphasis on the concept of authenticity as a psychological benefit that can be obtained by working for them. One effective way of developing a more authentic employer image is through the use of social media such as employee blogs, chats, and testimonials (Henderson and Bowley, 2010; Sandlin and Peña, 2014; Walker *et al.*, 2009). These interfaces allow potential jobseekers to interact with current employees and gain a

first-hand appreciation of their experiences, enhancing transparency in the recruitment process. In terms of authenticity though, it is not only the use of social media *per se* what matters but, more importantly, how these channels are used. Sharing personal experiences rather than making generic claims about the organization allows prospective recruits to identify with their potential peers, and by extension, with the organization itself (Sandlin and Peña, 2014). In addition, faking or trying to control corporate communication will undermine the authenticity message (Henderson and Bowley, 2010). While offering an authentic recruitment message has its risks, as jobseekers will necessarily discover both positive and negative aspects of the work environment, our results suggest that these firms will be in a favorable position to attract better professionals.

Limitations and directions for future research
A limitation of this study is that it is cross-sectional; it does not therefore examine the attractiveness phenomenon over time, so questions remain: To what extent do attributes valued by people, such as authenticity, effectively influence their job choices? Moreover, do they vary over time? Do they contribute to employee retention? These aspects could be investigated in future studies, and a longitudinal methodology may contribute to our understanding of this subject.

Our results suggest that authenticity may be one of the main symbolic factors of attractiveness. Although this construct has specific characteristics, and is not explored by existing taxonomies in the literature, new studies could explore the interfaces and interconnections between authenticity and other symbolic factors. In addition, it would be useful to investigate the types of organization in which authenticity is an actual attribute, and how this factor can be used in concrete branding strategies.

Finally, a restricted number of sample segmentation categories were tested: gender, hierarchical level, and age. Other categories may have additional influences, such as the effect of functional areas and specific industries on the valuation of authenticity as a factor of attractiveness. These aspects may be the focus of further studies.

Conclusion
This study has shown that being authentic could be understood as a relevant factor of attractiveness that is valued by professionals. The results suggest that, in general, authenticity is as important as other dimensions, such as economic value and development value, and more important than the dimensions of interest value, application value, and social value. Authenticity can thus be used in talent attraction and branding strategies in companies with this attribute. This is particularly relevant because attractiveness attributes incorporated into employer branding strategies only make sense if they are an actual part of the employer's reality, they are delivered to the employee, and are integrated within the employee's experience in the company (Ambler and Barrow, 1996; Cable and Turban, 2001; Edwards and Edwards, 2013).

Moreover, authenticity seems to be valued more by women and older professionals; whereby to the extent that the population is aging and talent is a scarce resource in emerging markets, authenticity will be increasingly relevant for attracting these different groups of employees; even more so, because competing for talent on the exclusive basis of functional and economic benefits is a non-sustainable and costly strategy.

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