

# Measuring Organizational Attractiveness

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## Abstract

The war for talent has returned after the Covid pandemic. One way for organizations to win this war is by becoming more attractive than other organizations on the labor market. Previous research has shown that by becoming a high performance organization (HPO), an organization will be seen as ‘a winning team’ for which people like to work. This research evaluates whether organizational attractiveness can be measured by the objective ‘average bottleneck vacancies fulfillment time’ measurement, which measures the time between posting a vacancy on the job market and fulfilling that vacancy. In preparation for a webinar, organized by the Flemish Department of Employment on the attractiveness of organizations, registered respondents were sent a survey with which they could indicate the high-performance level of their organization and how long it took for their organization to fulfill its bottleneck vacancies. The collected responses were statistically analysed with the aim to evaluate whether or not there is a relationship between the level of high-performance and time to fulfill its bottleneck vacancies variables. The research results show that there exists a linear and positive relationship between being an HPO and the time it takes for such a company to fulfill its bottleneck vacancies: increasing the high-performance level of a Flemish for-profit company decreases the time it takes to fulfill its bottleneck vacancies.

**Keywords:** High-Performance Organizations, HPO, Organizational Attractiveness, Bottleneck Vacancies

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### 1. Introduction

Nowadays every organization is competing on the (international) labor market for the acquisition and retention of the best talent (Al Badawy et al., 2013; Pingle and Kaur, 2019; Stewart Black and van Esch, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic initially seemed to put a halt to this “war for talent” (McNulty, 2018), but this “war” returned quickly after the (initial) diminishing of the pandemic (Lund et al., 2021). This is not that surprising as organizations are experiencing two long-term trends that affect the availability of employees for organizations (Linthorst and de Waal, 2020). The first trend is the increasing “skills mismatch” which refers to the gap between the skills of the current employees and the skills needed for jobs in the future (Bakshi et al., 2017; Illanes et al., 2018; Whysall et al., 2020). The second trend is the shortage in the workforce, especially in the Western world, because of the aging of the population with many baby boomers retiring this decade (Alshathry et al., 2017; Kubicek and Korunka, 2017; Rudolph et al., 2018). A logical consequence of these two megatrends is that, as there are not enough sufficiently qualified people available in the labor market, the only way for an individual organization to satisfy its labor needs is to be better than other organizations in enticing scarce available labor from the labor market or from those other organizations, by being more attractive (Lis, 2012). In the research described in this article we develop an objective measurement with which the construct of “organizational attractiveness” can be tracked.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. Firstly, the construct of “organizational attractiveness” and possible ways to measure it are discussed. Then, in the next two sections the HPO framework is introduced, and its relation with organizational attractiveness is explained. Subsequently the bottleneck vacancies fulfillment time measurement, with which organizational attractiveness can be measured in an objective way, is discussed. This is followed by descriptions of the research approach and the research results. These research results are then analyzed and recommendations are provided. The article ends with a conclusion, the limitations of the research, and opportunities for future study.

### 2. Organizational Attractiveness

In recent years organizations have come to the realization that employer attractiveness in the eyes of potential employees is *the* key to the organizational capacity to attract and retain talents (Collins and Kanar, 2013). Organizations that are perceived as an attractive employer on the labor market will attract the best talent, as people want to work for organizations with a strong and positive reputation and prestige (Alshathry et al., 2017; Berthon et al., 2005; Highhouse et al., 2003; Turban and Cable, 2003). Thus, organizations increasing their attractiveness to potential employees follow a winning strategy on the labor market (Altmann and Suess, 2015; Bakanauskiene et al., 2017; Botha et al., 2011). Organizational attractiveness, also called “employer attractiveness” (Berthon et al., 2005), is the process by which a potential employee views an organization as the best place to work for (Ahamad, 2019; Aiman-Smith et al., 2001; Ehrhart and Ziegert, 2005). It can be described by various attributes that are either instrumental (what the organization offers and is desirable to the potential employee)

or symbolic (intangible aspects such as prestige and reputation) (Chandler, 2019). Examples are:

- benefits (salary, fringe benefits) that a potential employee perceives as attainable by working for a particular organization (Cafolla, 2008; Chandler, 2019);
- opportunity to work for a well-branded organization providing a higher social status (Cafolla, 2008);
- opportunity to grow and develop as an individual through training, overseas assignments, career growth, variety in work (Cafolla, 2008; Cervellon and Lirio, 2017; Terjesen et al., 2007);
- working in an attractive, dynamic, innovative and forward-looking work environment (Cafolla, 2008; Grăjdieru and Khechoyan, 2019; Terjesen et al., 2007);
- working for an environmental and socially responsible organization (Agnihotri and Bhattacharya, 2021; Albinger and Freeman, 2000; Jiang and Iles, 2011; Lian and Naoko, 2021; Turban and Greening, 1996).

Organizational attractiveness can be measured in different ways. One of the most commonly used ways is the EmpAt scale, developed by Berthon et al. (2005) and derived from Ambler and Barrow's (1996) dimensions for psychological, functional, and economic benefits. This scale consists of five dimensions:

1. interest value, encompassing innovation and interest in the product or services of an organization;
2. social value, referring to the organizational work environment;
3. economic value that refers to economic benefits offered by an organization;
4. development value which provides possibilities to (potential) employees for future job opportunities;
5. application value entailing opportunities for employees to use what has been learned and the extent to which the organization is customer-oriented.

Alternative scales have been developed such as:

- the inclination of current employees to recommend the organization they work for to potential employees (Cervellon and Lirio, 2017);
- the inclination of potential employees to apply for a job at the organization (Highhouse et al., 2003; Lievens et al. 2001; Nadler et al., 2010);
- (perceived) fit between the potential employee and the organization (Yu, 2014);
- characteristics of the organization itself which might appeal to the potential employee, such as attention to CSR, reputation, quality of leadership, appraisal and reward systems in place (Barrow and Mosley, 2011; Edwards, 2010; Kausel and Slaughter, 2011);

- cultural aspects of the organization which might appeal to the potential employee, such as atmosphere, work environment, sincerity, respectfulness (Jiang and Iles, 2011).

When reviewing the literature on organizational attractiveness two issues can be noticed. Firstly, the attractiveness of an organization is mainly described by its attributes, but a holistic view of how an organization can increase its attractiveness to potential employees seems to be missing. This constitutes a problem as an organization is not merely a collection of attributes but an intricate network of cooperating parts that form an entity (Alshathry et al., 2017). Therefore, ways to increase organizational attractiveness should be viewed in a holistic manner. Secondly, organizational attractiveness seems to be mainly measured in a subjective manner - how potential employees see and/or perceive the organization and its attributes - and not by any objective measure. This makes it difficult to evaluate whether organizational attractiveness in practice does have a significant positive effect on the willingness of potential employees to apply. In this research we combine a holistic view of the organization, provided by the high performance organization (HPO) framework (de Waal, 2021), with a novel way to measure organizational attractiveness, by utilizing the bottleneck vacancies fulfillment time (VDAB, 2021).

Previous research has shown that organizations that become high performing are more attractive to potential employees than non-HPOs (de Waal, 2018; Mroueh and de Waal, 2020). The bottleneck vacancies fulfillment time's measurement is used in practice by labor associations (see for instance VDAB, 2021) to measure the time between posting a vacancy on the job market and fulfilling that vacancy with a new employee. The measurement is not used for all vacancies but only for those historically hard to fill positions in organizations, such as technical occupations. The assumption is that the shorter the average fulfillment time for bottleneck vacancies in the organization, the more attractive this organization is, as it does not take the organization much time to attract new employees to these vacancies. Our research objective is to evaluate whether the high-performance level of an organization has a positive correlation with its average bottleneck vacancies fulfillment time. Thus, our hypothesis is that *the higher the high-performance level of an organization, the shorter its average bottleneck vacancies fulfillment time will be*. We expect the research results to contribute to the academic literature as an objective measure for organizational attractiveness, to the knowledge of the author, has not been developed and described yet. The research results will also have a practical contribution as they will provide practitioners with a framework helping them transform their organizations into HPOs thus making them more attractive to potential employees.

### 3. The HPO Framework

For measuring the level of high performance, we use the de Waal's HPO framework (2012) scale. The HPO framework is a conceptual, scientifically validated structure which practitioners can use for analyzing how high performing their organizations are and to decide what is needed to improve organizational performance and make it sustainable (de Waal and Goedegebuure, 2017). An HPO is in this respect defined as

an organization that achieves financial and non-financial results that are exceedingly better than those of its peer group over a period of five years or more by focusing in a disciplined way on that what really matters to the organization (de Waal, 2021). The reason for using this particular framework is twofold. Firstly, Do and Mai (2020) state, based on an extensive literature review, that “across the HPO literature, we found only the HPO framework developed by de Waal (2012) as an example of scientifically validated conceptualization of HPO”. Therefore, de Waal’s HPO framework seems to be the most suitable choice as our research tool. Secondly, the HPO framework has already been used in previous research to investigate the relation between the high-performance level of an organization and its attractiveness to potential employees (de Waal, 2018; Mroueh and de Waal, 2020). Thus, we will build on and extend previous academic research in the domain of HPO.

conducted in two phases (de Waal, 2012). The first phase involved a literature study on high performance and organizational excellence. This yielded 290 studies that satisfied the search criteria. From these studies the elements were extracted that the authors regarded as essential for high performance. Because different authors used different terminologies, similar elements were placed in 189 groups of common characteristics. The next step was to calculate the “weighted importance” which denotes the number of times a characteristic occurred in the identified studies, with the 54 characteristics with the highest weighted importance chosen as the characteristics that potentially comprised an HPO. In Phase 2 of the research study, these 54 potential HPO characteristics were incorporated in a questionnaire that was distributed during lectures and workshops delivered to managers by the author in many global locations. The questionnaire respondents were asked to indicate how well their organization performed on each of the various HPO characteristics – on a scale from 1 (very poor) to 10 (excellent) – and also how their company’s results compared to those of its peer group. The questionnaire yielded, in the period 2002 – 2007, 2,015 responses from approximately 1,470 profit, non-profit and government organizations. With a statistical analysis, 35 characteristics with both a significant and a strong positive relation with organizational performance were extracted, identified and categorized into five factors. These factors have, since 2007, been validated for many countries, based on data collected worldwide from more than 55,000 respondents from profit, non-profit and governmental organizations (see for instance Santos and de Waal, 2020). It is important to note that, in essence, the HPO factors remained unchanged regardless of the type of organization being diagnosed, the type of industry involved or the country in which the organization was based.

The HPO framework identified the factors that affect the sustainable high performance of an organization. These factors are:

- HPO factor 1: management quality. HPO managers focus on encouraging belief and trust from their employees in them. They value loyalty and live with integrity; they treat their employees respectfully and maintain individual relationships with them. HPO managers are highly committed to the organization and have a strong set of ethics and standards. They are supportive and help employees in achieving results, and also hold them accountable for these results. HPO managers are role models for the rest of the organization.

- HPO factor 2: openness and action orientation. HPO managers value the opinions of employees and always involve them in important business and organizational processes. Making mistakes and taking risks are always permitted in an HPO, as these are considered valuable opportunities to learn, to develop new ideas and to exchange knowledge in pursuit of collective improvement.
- HPO factor 3: long-term orientation. For an HPO, long-term commitment is more important than short-term gain. Stakeholders of the organization benefit from this long-term orientation, and are assured that the organization is maintaining mutually beneficial long-term relationships with them. HPO managers are committed to the organization, and new positions are filled from within the organization. An HPO is a secure and safe workplace where people feel free to contribute to the best of their ability.
- HPO factor 4: continuous improvement and renewal. An HPO has a unique strategy that makes the organization stand out in its sector. It is responsive to market developments by continuously innovating its products and services, thus creating new sources of competitive advantage. An HPO ensures that core competencies are retained in-house and non-core competencies are outsourced.
- HPO factor 5: employee quality. HPO employees are flexible and resilient, as they are trained (formally and on-the-job) and encouraged to achieve extraordinary results. As a team, they are diverse and, therefore, complementary, enabling them to deal with all types of issues and generate sufficient alternative ideas for improvement.

The HPO framework has been validated as a suitable technique to analyze an organization on its level of high performance in numerous studies, such as previous research on the relation between the level of organizational performance and organizational attractiveness (de Waal, 2018; Mroueh and de Waal, 2020). An organization can evaluate its HPO status by conducting an HPO Diagnosis. During this diagnosis, management and employees complete the HPO questionnaire comprising questions based on the 35 HPO characteristics. The individual scores are converted to average scores on the HPO factors for the complete organization. These average scores indicate for which HPO factors and HPO characteristics the company needs to implement improvements to become an HPO.

#### **4. The HPO Framework and Organizational Attractiveness**

Previous research has shown that one way to increase its attractiveness on the labor market is for an organization to become high-performing. Based on a large-scale survey of Dutch managers and employees into their happiness at work, de Waal (2018) showed that transforming an organization into a high-performance organization (HPO) will not only increase the happiness of employees at work but will also increase the attractiveness of the organization as a place to work. The study showed that becoming an HPO increases employees' happiness at work which causes them to stay working at the organization and to tell their friends and relatives about how attractive a workplace the organization is to them, thus strengthening the organization's external reputation as an attractive and desirable place to work. These research results were confirmed in

follow-up research conducted at a Takaful insurance company in the United Arab Emirates (Mroueh and de Waal, 2020). This study showed that by transforming itself to an HPO, the Takaful insurance company became more attractive to current and future employees, thus basically mirroring the results of a study done in the Western context in a study conducted in a Middle Eastern context.

### **5. The Bottleneck Vacancies Fulfillment Time Measurement**

In the aforementioned studies organizational attractiveness was measured by combining scales previously used by Highhouse *et al.* (2003), Turban and Keon (1993) and Dreves *et al.* (2015), to arrive at the following measurement statements: ‘This organization is attractive to me as a place for employment’, ‘For me, this organization is a good place to work’, ‘I would not be interested in this organization except as a last resort (reverse coded)’, ‘I would not recommend this organization to a friend (reverse coded)’ and ‘I like this organization’. These measurements rely on the subjective opinion of people already working at the organization. It would be useful to measure the attractiveness of the organization as experienced by people not (yet) working at this organization, in a more objective manner. A possible measurement is that of the average bottleneck vacancies fulfillment time. This measurement for difficult to fill vacancies is used in practice by labor associations (see for instance VDAB, 2021) to measure the time between posting a vacancy on the job market and fulfilling that vacancy with a new employee. The measurement is not used for all vacancies but only for those historically hard to fill positions in organizations, such as technical positions. By measuring only the difficult to fill vacancies the risk of distortion in fulfillment time is reduced because the many types of vacancies (easy to fulfill, moderately difficult to fulfill, difficult to fulfill) is narrowed down to one category, the difficult to fulfill vacancies. As it is not practical to collect fulfillment times for all the individual bottleneck vacancies, we are asking for the average fulfillment time. Using the average ‘bottleneck vacancies fulfillment time’ is thus used as a proxy for attractiveness of an organization on the labor market.

### **6. Research Approach and Results**

Our exploratory descriptive research into the relation between the level of high performance of an organization and its attractiveness to potential employees was performed in Belgium, to be more precise in Flanders, one of the three Belgian regions. The occasion was a webinar, organized by the Flemish Department of Employment (Vlaams Departement voor Arbeidsbemiddeling, VDAB) on high performance organizations and their attractiveness in the labor market. During this seminar, the author was going to present the HPO Framework and its relation to happiness at work and organizational attractiveness. This was a hot topic in Flanders as before the Covid-19 pandemic there was already a severe scarcity of talent on the Flemish job market (Cambien, 2016; Jobat, 2019) which has not really abated during the pandemic. According to Cambien (2016), Flemish people tend to be loyal employees and do not change jobs quickly. Nevertheless, in recent years more employees than before have been looking for new job opportunities. In addition, the population in Flanders is aging rapidly causing less available workers, while at the same time there has been a “de-juvenation” where young Flemish people have left the

province during or after their studies, contributing to shortage of qualified employees in the region.

In preparation for the webinar all registered participants received a link to the internet-based HPO Questionnaire and the request to complete this questionnaire so that the data could be used as input for the webinar. Every week for four weeks a reminder was sent to all registered participants, and in the end 97 fully completed questionnaires were received from 208 registered participants, giving a response rate of 46.6 percent. The research population was quite homogeneous as only small and medium sized profit companies are a member of the VDAB. Thus the respondents – who were all members of the management team of small or medium sized companies – originated from 41 companies with less than 50 full-time equivalents (FTE), 25 from companies with between 50 and 250 FTE, and 31 from companies with more than 250 FTE. The respondents formed a cross-section of Flanders' industrial sectors: construction and wood (7 respondents); business, retail en ICT (7); services to individuals and companies (43); industrial (15); transport/logistics (3); and others (23).

### 6.1. HPO factors for Flemish companies

Reliability of the overall HPO scale as well as for each of the subscales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The aim was to verify whether the original 35 HPO items were proper measurements of the HPO framework's five dimensions in the Flemish context (Albright and Park, 2009). Based on this analysis, for the Employee Quality subscale, item 30 was removed, and for the Long-Term Orientation subscale, item 34 was removed. Thus satisfactory levels were obtained (0.950 for the full scale), indicating satisfactory levels of internal consistency (Acock, 2013), see Table 1. Although Cronbach's alpha was high for the complete scale as well as for some of the subscales, the value after item removal was still lower for the Employee Quality and Long-Term Orientation subscales. The subscales were retained in the analysis because the subscales were found to be reliable in previous studies with much larger sample sizes.

**Table 1: Cronbach alpha's for the HPO factors of Flemish companies**

Factor scale	Cronbach's alpha	Number of items
HPO overall	0.950	35
Management Quality	0.928	12
Openness and Action Orientation	0.812	6
Long-Term Orientation	0.680	4
Continuous Improvement and Renewal	0.876	8
Employee Quality	0.723	3

The conclusion which can be drawn from Table 1 is that the HPO framework, just as in previous HPO studies performed in European countries (de Waal, 2012; de Waal et al., 2012; de Waal et al., 2014; de Waal et al., 2017; de Waal and Meingast, 2017; Santos and de Waal, 2020), is also applicable – albeit in a slightly different factor structure – for the Flemish context. All 35 HPO characteristics are significant for our research sample of Flemish\_organizations and the resulting HPO factor structure closely resembles the original HPO factor structure.



## 6.2. Organizational attractiveness

As stated above, organizational attractiveness was measured by asking the respondents to calculate the average time period they needed to fulfil their bottleneck vacancies. In total 18 respondents chose the period of less than 2 months; 52 needed between 2 and 6 months; 22 required between 6 and 12 months; and 5 took longer than 1 year. The relationship between each of the HPO subscales and bottleneck vacancies fulfillment times was evaluated by testing for a linear contrast in a one-way ANOVA. When the linear contrast turns out to be statistically significant, this means that there is evidence for a linear relationship between the particular subscale of HPO and the levels of bottleneck vacancies fulfillment time (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Linear contrast between HPO factors and bottleneck vacancies fulfillment times**

Scale	F	p-value
HPO overall	8.201	0.005
Management Quality	5.794	0.018
Openness and Action Orientation	8.860	0.004
Long-Term Orientation	1.983	0.162
Continuous Improvement and Renewal	6.141	0.015
Employee Quality	5.890	0.017

As Table 2 shows, there is a linear relationship between the overall HPO and the individual HPO factors (except for Long-Term Orientation) and the levels of bottleneck vacancies fulfillment time. To further evaluate this relationship and test whether our hypothesis can be validated, we looked whether the difference between the bottleneck vacancies fulfillment times and the high-performance level of an organization is statistically valid. For this, we divided the bottleneck vacancies fulfillment time into two groups: shorter than 2 months and longer than 2 months. We chose 2 months because we expected HPOs to be so attractive that they are able to fulfill their bottleneck vacancies in a considerably shorter time than average and low-performing organizations. The difference in scores on each of the HPO subscales between <2 months bottleneck and >2 months bottleneck were tested using an independent t-test with N=18 (<2 months) and N=79 (>2 months) data points. All tests were performed two-sided and the results are given in Table 3.

**Table 3: T-test for the bottleneck fulfillment times and HPO factors**

Scale	T	p-value	Cohen's d
HPO overall	2.862	0.008	0.704
Management Quality	2.167	0.039	0.532
Openness and Action Orientation	3.596	0.001	0.908
Long-Term Orientation	1.986	0.058	0.511
Continuous Improvement and Renewal	2.279	0.030	0.541
Employee Quality	2.437	0.022	0.606

In Table 3, a positive T-value indicates that the shorter than 2 months group scored higher than longer than 2 months group. Cohen's d is a measure for the effect size (the strength of the relationship between the two variables in a population), with 0.3 being a small, 0.5 a medium and 0.7 a large effect. As can be seen in Table 3, looking at the relationship between the overall HPO factors and bottleneck vacancies fulfillment time

there indeed seems to be an effect that HPOs are able to fulfill their bottleneck vacancies quicker than non-HPOs (which is especially caused by the HPO factor Openness and Action Orientation). This means that our hypothesis that *The higher the high-performance level of an organization, the shorter its average bottleneck vacancies fulfillment time will be* is validated for this sample of Flemish for-profit organizations.

### 7. Analysis and Recommendations

Now that our hypothesis has been validated, it is interesting to see what Flemish companies can do to become more attractive. Or, in other words, what they need to pay attention to in order to become an HPO and thus become more attractive in the labor market and thereby potentially becoming able to fulfill their bottleneck vacancies more quickly. Figure 1 gives the HPO scores for the Flemish companies in the research sample, compared to those of Belgium profit companies (excluding Flemish companies) and European Profit companies (excluding Belgian companies) in the HPO database (which collects data from respondents on the HPO Questionnaire worldwide). Appendix 1 provides the detailed scores on the HPO characteristics for the Flemish for-profit companies.

**Figure 1: HPO scores of Flemish, Belgian and European for-profit companies**

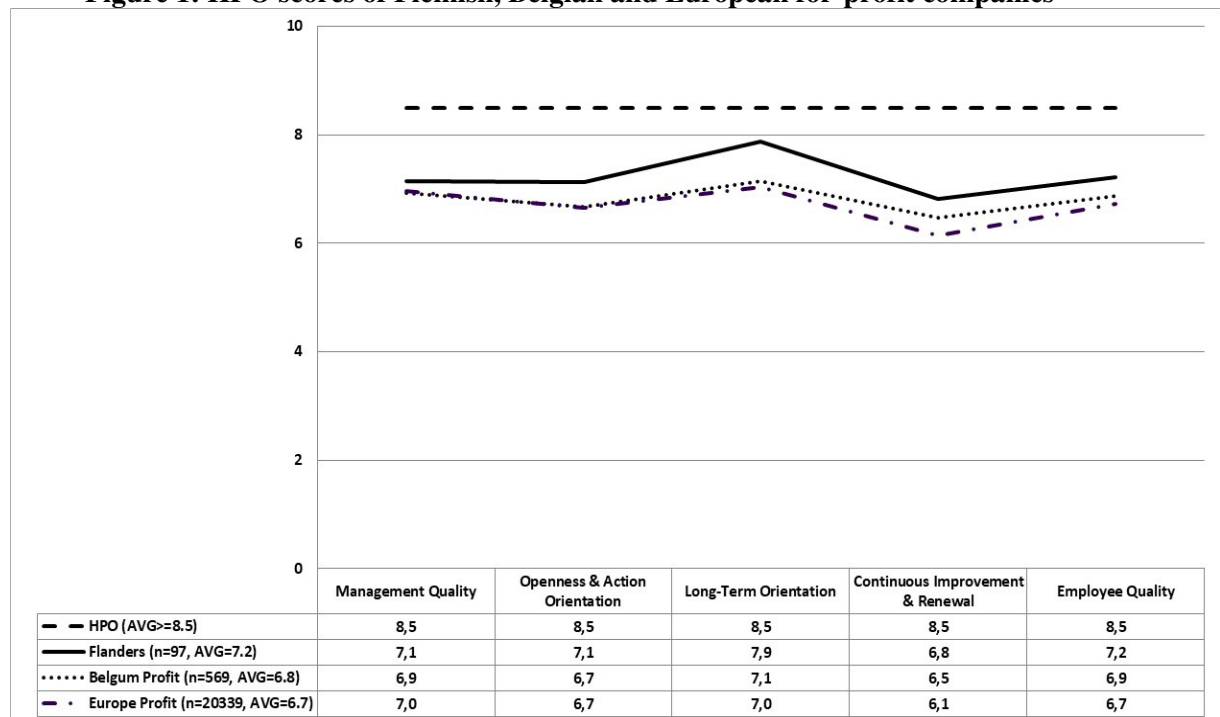


Figure 1 shows that the Flemish companies in the research sample are, on average, not yet high performing organizations as with a 7.2 they do not pass the HPO threshold of 8.5 (de Waal, 2012). They do score higher, meaning they are further along to the HPO status, than the average Belgium and European for-profit company. This could be because the research sample has a bias: all respondents were interested in the topic of

high performance, which is why they participated in the webinar in the first place, and in practice these people often work at organizations that are already undertaking organizational improvement projects. Another cause could be that the majority of the respondents had a managerial function (as managers were targeted in the invitation for the seminar) and from previous HPO research (de Waal, 2020) it is known that managers in general score higher than employees (or a mix of managers and employees). It is also possible that the different sample sizes have had an influence, where with a smaller sample size (such as in the case of the Flemish organizations) there is a higher chance on deviating results. Figure 1 also shows that the respondents on average work at typical Belgian and European for-profit organizations as the profiles of the scoring lines of all three types of organizations are basically the same.

Looking at the detailed scores in Appendix 1, it is noticeable that there are four attention points where Flemish companies have to focus on to strengthen these in a manner that they can become HPOs:

1. *Strengthen the innovative capabilities of the organization.* This attention point relates to HPO characteristics 1. The organization has adopted a strategy that sets it clearly apart from other organizations; 7. The organizational unit continuously strengthens its core competencies; and 8. The organizational unit continuously innovates its products, processes and services. Increasing innovative capabilities is very important as previous research has shown that creative SMEs in Belgium show a growth in employment that is almost double that of the average in all sectors (Nauwelaerts *et al.*, 2012). In addition, the increasing scarcity of raw materials and growing eco-sensitivity among customers and society, force Flemish companies to look for more innovative ways of producing products applying sustainable production processes (Crabbé *et al.*, 2012). However, research also shows that many SMEs lack systematic methods with which to measure the impact of their innovations, formal strategic innovation management systems, and financial and managerial knowledge to manage innovation successfully (Nauwelaerts *et al.*, 2012), and a such ambitious programs such as ‘Flanders in Action Pact 2020’ – aimed at turning Flanders into one of the five top regions in Europe and one of the world’s most competitive economies by 2020 (van Oudheusden *et al.*, 2015) – might not have come to full fruition yet. Therefore, when discussing this attention point, the following questions need to be answered: What is the “elevator pitch” of the organization?, What are the core competencies of the organization ... and are these the right ones for the chosen strategy?, and How can innovation be made a structural process in the organization?
2. *Strengthen the improvement capabilities of the organization.* This attention point relates to HPO characteristics 2. In the organization processes are continuously improved; 3. In the organization processes are continuously simplified; 4. In the organization processes are continuously aligned; and 6. In the organization both financial and non-financial information is reported to managers and employees. This attention point aligns with the aforementioned ‘Flanders in Action Pact 2020’ program which devotes central attention to creating more efficient and effective organizations by realizing substantial efficiency gains (Stroobants and Bouckaert, 2013). When discussing this attention point, the following questions need to be answered: How can the organization achieve better prioritization?, How can the

organization subsequently ensure that it sticks to the chosen priorities?, and How can the organization ensure that everybody is focused on results instead of effort?

3. *Strengthen the focus of management on (high) performance.* This attention point relates to HPO characteristics 18. Management of the organization applies fast decision making, 19. Management of the organization applies fast action taking, 20. Management of the organization coaches employees to achieve better results, 25. Management of the organization is decisive with regard to non-performers, and 26. Management of the organization always holds employees responsible for their results. According to Ryan et al. (2017) Belgium is a medium performance-oriented culture and as such does not have a very strong focus on achievement, result-orientation, and willingness to use formal feedback as in assessment contexts this is likely to be seen as discomforting. Thus, when discussing this attention point, the following questions need to be answered: Are the managers of the organization the leaders of tomorrow?, If not, how can they become that?, and How do the managers of the organization become more professional in giving feedback to employees and to each other?
4. *Strengthen employee development.* This attention point relates to HPO characteristics 9. In the organization management frequently engages in dialogue with employees, 10. Employees of the organization spend much time on knowledge exchange and learning, 11. Employees of the organization are always involved in important processes, 28. Employees of the organization are continuously stimulated to become more flexible and resilient, 30. The organization grows through partnerships with suppliers and/or customers, and 34. New management is promoted from within the organization. In regard to this attention point it is interesting to know that a decade ago, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training found that Flemish organizations did not score high compared to other EU regions in stimulating employee development (CEDEFOP, 2010) and talent management (Buttiens and Hondeghem, 2015). As a result, the Flemish government deployed several initiatives and programs to remedy this shortcoming, some of these specifically aimed at SMEs in Flanders (De Vos et al., 2015). It will be interesting to evaluate why these initiatives apparently have not been effective to a degree that a decade after commencing them Flemish companies still have to work on the development of their employees (Jobat, 2019). Thus, when discussing this attention point, the following questions need to be answered: How can managers in the organization involve their employees more?; How can people in the organization learn more from each other?, How can the organization successfully become and stay a “learning organization”?, and How can the organization offer more opportunities to employees so that they stay longer?

## 8. Conclusions, Limitations, and Future Research Opportunities

The aim of our research was to evaluate whether the attractiveness of an organization as experienced by potential employees (people not yet working at this organization) could be measured using the objective measurement of average bottleneck vacancies fulfillment time. This measurement measures the time between posting a vacancy on the job market and fulfilling that vacancy with a new employee, for difficult to fill

vacancies. The idea is that the more attractive an organization, the shorter the fulfillment time for its difficult to fulfill vacancies will be. In addition to evaluating the usefulness of this measurement, we also wanted to evaluate whether the high-performance level of an organization could be a measure for the attractiveness of organizations and thus would influence the bottleneck vacancies fulfillment time in a positive manner. Our hypothesis was that the higher the high-performance level of an organization, the shorter its average bottleneck vacancies fulfillment time would be. The research results show successively that the HPO framework, which we used to measure the high-performance level of organizations is valid for our sample of Flemish for-profit companies; and that there seems to exist a positive relationship between the high-performance level of a Flemish for-profit company and the time it takes for this company to fulfill its bottleneck vacancies. The research results also identify the main attention points Flemish for-profit organizations have to address to increase their high-performance level, thereby becoming more attractive on the Flemish labor market.

The research results have both a theoretical and a practical contribution. Theoretically, they add to the scarce literature on the topics of organizational attractiveness and high performance in Flanders. A search of the extant literature revealed hardly any studies into these topics, and when some studies were found they were mostly not holistic of nature but only about subareas (see amongst others De Vos *et al.*, 2015; Nauwelaerts *et al.*, 2012; Staessens *et al.*, 2019) and then often in the public sector in Flanders (see a.o. Buttiens and Hondeghem, 2015; Crabbé *et al.*, 2015; Stroobants and Bouckaert, 2013). The results of the research described in this paper are based on a holistic view of organizational high performance which is, in addition, connected to organizational attractiveness, thus making this research one of the first of its kind in the Flemish context. This also entails that the research results have a practical contribution in the sense that managers of Flemish for-profit organizations know that they can apply the HPO framework to increase both the level of high performance and the attractiveness of their organizations, thus helping these companies to better deal with the many challenges in the competitive labor market that exist in Flanders.

The main limitation of our research is twofold. Firstly, we had a limited sample of 97 respondents. Therefore it was not possible to distinguish between sizes of companies or between sectors in which these organizations operate, to evaluate whether there are differences in the relationship between the high-performance levels and bottleneck vacancies fulfillment time. There is also no way to know whether the 97 respondents are a true representation of the Flemish business sector. Secondly, the research results cannot be generalized as there were only for-profit organizations from Flanders in the research sample. Despite these limitations the research results tie in with the previously found causation between the high-performance level of an organization and its performance (see de Waal and Goedegebuure, 2017). Therefore, future research should expand the research sample to make it possible to evaluate whether the hypothesis of the higher the high-performance level of an organization, the shorter its average bottleneck vacancies fulfillment time holds for individual profit sectors and different sizes of organizations. Further research could also be expanded to other countries and the non-profit and government sectors. Finally it would be interesting to conduct longitudinal research at Flemish organizations aiming to transform themselves

into HPOs and then measuring whether or not their average bottleneck vacancies fulfillment time has decreased.

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**APPENDIX 1 – DETAILED SCORES HPO CHARACTERISTICS**

This Appendix gives the average scores of the respondents for the HPO characteristics.

<b>HPO factors</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Score</b>
Continuous improvement	1	Our organization has adopted a strategy that sets it clearly apart from other organizations.	6.5
Continuous improvement	2	In our organization processes are continuously improved.	7.2
Continuous improvement	3	In our organization processes are continuously simplified.	6.6
Continuous improvement	4	In our organization processes are continuously aligned.	6.7
Continuous improvement	5	In our organization everything that matters to the organization’s performance is explicitly reported.	7.2
Continuous improvement	6	In our organization both financial and non-financial information is reported to organizational members.	6.6
Continuous improvement	7	Our organization continuously innovates its core competencies.	6.8
Continuous improvement	8	Our organization continuously innovates its products, processes and services.	7.0
Openness & Action Orientation	9	The management of our organization frequently engages in a dialogue with employees.	7.2
Openness & Action Orientation	10	Organizational members spend much time on communication, knowledge exchange and learning.	6.9
Openness & Action Orientation	11	Organizational members are always involved in important processes.	6.5
Openness & Action Orientation	12	The management of our organization allows making mistakes.	7.3
Openness & Action Orientation	13	The management of our organization welcomes change.	7.5
Openness & Action Orientation	14	Our organization is performance driven.	7.4
Quality of Management	15	The management of our organization is trusted by organizational members.	7.1

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Quality of Management	16	The management of our organization has integrity.	7.5
Quality of Management	17	The management of our organization is a role model for organizational members.	7.6
Quality of Management	18	The management of our organization applies fast decision making.	6.9
Quality of Management	19	The management of our organization applies fast action taking.	7.1
Quality of Management	20	The management of our organization coaches organizational members to achieve better results.	6.9
Quality of Management	21	The management of our organization focuses on achieving results.	7.7
Quality of Management	22	The management of our organization is very effective.	7.2
Quality of Management	23	The management of our organization applies strong leadership.	7.2
Quality of Management	24	The management of our organization is confident.	7.5
Quality of Management	25	The management of our organization is decisive with regard to non-performers.	6.5
Quality of Management	26	The management of our organization always holds organizational members responsible for their results.	6.5
Quality of Employees	27	The management of our organization inspires organizational members to accomplish extraordinary results.	7.4
Quality of Employees	28	Organizational members are trained to be resilient and flexible.	7.0
Quality of Employees	29	Our organization has a diverse and complementary workforce.	7.7
Quality of Employees	30	Our organization grows through partnerships with suppliers and/or customers.	6.8
Long Term Orientation	31	Our organization maintains good and long-term relationships with all stakeholders.	7.8
Long Term Orientation	32	Our organization is aimed at servicing the customers as best as possible.	8.5
Long Term Orientation	33	The management of our organization has been with the company for a long time.	8.3
Long Term Orientation	34	New management is promoted from within the organization.	6.8
Long Term Orientation	35	Our organization is a secure workplace for organizational members.	8.0