Ecaterina CHIŢU
Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania

SPECIFICITY OF EMPLOYER BRANDING IN THE ROMANIAN ECONOMY

Original
Research

Keywords
Employer branding;
Strategies;
Transition;
Benefits

JEL Classification
O15

Abstract

At the national level, against the background of the transition from a socialist economy to a market economy, a series of divergences of theoretical and practical nature were generated in the whole spectrum of human resources, but also of the process of attracting, maintaining and developing them. Changing the vision of man and his role in the work process, but also increasing the interest in how he perceives the employer has determined an approach of specialists in the treated area by everything that means brand and its connection with the role of employer. Thus, this article deals with employer branding in the contemporary market economy, from a new perspective, namely the implementation of employer branding strategies based on national specificity. The methodology used is represented by a qualitative approach, based on the interview guide, applied to companies in Romania that use employer branding strategies, in order to identify the employer branding strategies used and the benefits they bring. The general benefits of using employer branding strategies have been on the quality of work, human involvement in this activity, in increasing the creative capacities of the employees and the interest to use time efficiently.

INTRODUCTION

Once with Romania's entry into the EU, the market competition strengthened and a "war for talents" began. The challenging economic conditions and the competitive market generated a profound lack of human resources, and to address this shortcoming, organizations turned to dedicated strategies that positioned them as top employers. At the same time, considering the current migration and fluctuation of personnel, it is imperative to identify strategies for attracting, developing, and retaining human resources, a process that must be carried out by authorized personnel and with expertise in the domain.

Organizations need to develop strategies to ensure that the employees meet the needs of the business, the challenges involved, and the evolution of the competitive environment. Within these extremely competitive labor markets, the development of branding strategies by the employer is essential when it comes to attracting, retaining, and developing human resources capable of creating a competitive advantage for the organization (Wilden, Gudergan, & Lings, 2010).

The development of strategies involves a complex knowledge of the employees or of the potential employees, implicitly from the perspective of the talents natively developed by them, so that a faithful portrait of the personal capabilities and the individual professional and material expectations will be realized, criteria that will allow an analysis of the economic effort report and the profitability generated by the existence of a certain employee.

Competitiveness, a component which is representative of the market economy, requires, in the development, verification, and implementation of strategies, an advanced knowledge of the competitive activation environment, the approached visions, and the methods and offers used, so that the creativity, novelty, and attractivity of the management's approach responds to the impact wishes of the target individuals.

Under the conditions of increased migration, the recruitment of qualified personnel who present useful talents for the purpose of maintaining or increasing the profitability of the enterprise presents very fine features, with a marked psychological component, a component in which the individual or group vulnerabilities must be known, exploited, and solved using an offer, through the viability of the solution, all against the background of the human need of stability and security.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employer branding

Brands are amongst the most valuable assets of a company, therefore brand management poses a key activity inside major companies. Although organizations usually channel their branding efforts towards developing the brand of products and companies, branding can also be utilized in the internal marketing department, addressing employees. The application of marketing principles in human resources management is what has been called in specialized literature "employer branding" (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Employer branding is defined as a long-term strategy aimed at managing the knowledge and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and associated employees that are interested in a particular company (Sullivan, 2004). Initially, the brand was used to differentiate tangible products, but over the years, it was used to differentiate people, places, and companies (Peters, 1999). According to Asker, the brand is considered an essential means to differentiate products and to create a competitive advantage for organizations (Aaker, 1992). Similarly, employer branding became a new tool to help gain an advantage in the competitive business world. Thus, reference is made to the process of identifying and creating the brand message of a company, by applying traditional marketing principles to obtain the status of chosen employer (Sutherland, Torricelli, & Karg, 2002).

Employer branding is comprised of tangible as well as intangible benefits that an organization offers in order to attract and retain human resources. Traditionally, a competitive pay structure represents the basis of employer branding, but according to research, psychological factors such as work environment, life-work balance, and workplace flexibility are very important for employees (Tanwar & Prasad, 2017).

In terms of perfecting employer branding, the following techniques are considered: various leadership practices, professional training assistance, internal communication, recruitment practices, reward programs, and feedback received from staff and clients (Vatsa, 2011).

Biswas and Saur (2016) state that: "The theory of social identity confirms the idea that employer branding increases the attractivity of organizations due to the fact that current and potential employees pursue to join an organization that stimulates their self concept". At the same time, the theory of social identity examines the moment people start considering themselves to be members of a group and why (Zuegner-Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2015).

A strong employer brand can reduce the costs of recruiting human resources, and retaining employees becomes more convenient than

replacing them (Biswas & Suar, 2016). Thus, the organization has the possibility to provide better career choices for employees, which allows the attraction of the best candidates (Ambler & Barroe, 1996). At the same time, the relations between employees are strengthened, which allows the reduction of turnover with the employees (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). The success of an employer brand is highlighted through the accuracy with which it is communicated and through the attractivity of the provided benefits (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). The success of an employer brand is highlighted through the accuracy with which it is communicated and through the attractivity of the provided benefits (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). Studies also reveal that the personality traits of a brand, such as sincerity, refinement, and emotion, create a connection with employer brand trust, and this connection predicts the attractivity of the employer brand (Rampl & Kenning, 2014).

Organization, culture and employees
Employees depend on organizations and organizations depend on employees. No company can succeed unless it has efficient employees. It is unanimously accepted that a corporate culture that is both an organizational phenomenon and an informal coordination mechanism is shaped by the thoughts and values shared by individuals, thus connecting both parties: the staff and the organization. In addition, commonly seen as an "adhesive" between the staff and the organization, the culture provides the company with structural reliability once it is adopted and becomes part of the organization. However, this stability does not imply flexibility, because the culture is framed within all the more important elements that give meaning to an organization. In this way, culture can be seen as the fuel that drives the organization. Therefore, authors Freilling and Fichtner state the following: "The culture of an organization plays a role of a connection between people and organization, contributing to the development of organizational skills in a very special way" (2010). The role of culture as an informal structural element is to provide the company with a different coordination potential for each institution. Thus, the organizational culture allows the shared knowledge and interaction processes based on the informal connections between people to easily flow into the organization. These connections grow over time and provide the company with flexibility and stability. In addition, uncertainty about what is appropriate in the processes of internal interaction is reduced, building trust and compromise. In the case of learning processes, the company is allowed to explore and exploit business opportunities more intensively.

Warner Burke states that "organizational development is a process of essential change in the culture of the organization" (1994). As human resources are increasingly involved in cultural transformation efforts, the employees' attitudes and behaviors play a very important role in the development of effective intentions that guide change processes. Thus, if it becomes clear that the emotional outcomes of individuals vary predictably from one culture model to another, human resources professionals can try to consolidate these emotional outcomes by making changes in the organizational culture.

In any case, culture as a set of values, meanings, behaviors or organizational practices more or less structured, represents the main filter for interpreting the reality of a company. Therefore, it must be understood that culture influences the way the company is seen as a whole, but also in each of its components. Thus, it will be responsible for some of the rules that govern behaviors in different situations: for example, this will serve as a response to the long series of phenomena that take place within the company, will define the communication style, the reward system, and, generally, the strategy of the company.

In this way, the organizational culture is considered a primary factor in:
· Forming the organization's procedures;
· Unifying the organization's capabilities as a coherent whole;
· Providing solutions to the problems the organization is facing.

In this way, culture can hinder or facilitate the achievement of the organization's goals. Therefore, the organizational culture can influence how people set personal and professional goals, fulfill their tasks, and manage the resources needed to achieve them. At the same time, culture affects the way people think both consciously and unconsciously, how they make decisions, and ultimately, the way employees perceive, feel, and act (Diskienė & Goštautas, 2010).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The general purpose of this research is to identify employer branding strategies and the benefits they bring in the organizations that are part of the national economy.

Research objectives
O1: Identifying the elements that contribute to the creation of a strong employer brand.
O2: Identifying the role of the human resources department in strengthening the employer brand.
O3: Identifying the employer branding strategies used by organizations that are part of the national

economy for attracting, retaining, and developing human resources.
O4: Identifying the benefits brought by employer branding on organizations that are part of the national economy.

Research hypotheses
H1: To create a strong employer brand, the analyzed organizations used a set of elements.
H2: In the process of strengthening the employer brand, the human resources department plays an important role.
H3: The analyzed organizations use employer branding strategies to attract, retain and develop human resources.
H4: The use of employer branding brings a set of benefits to the analyzed organizations.

Data collection
The method used in data collection is the interview, having as an investigative technique the in-depth interview, and as the research instrument the interview guide. Thus, six companies from Iasi (Romania) participated in this study, their choice being based on their use of employer branding strategies. The data collection was done by interviewing the human resources managers of these companies, using the structured interview process.

RESEARCH RESULTS

O1: Identifying the elements that contribute to the creation of a strong employer brand.
Following the data analysis, among the identified elements that contribute to the creation and development of a strong employer brand are:
· The attention paid to the employee;
· Employees' perception of working conditions;
· Brand awareness – of products, services, and costs (in regard to the competitors);
· Solvency of the company;
· Compliance with the work schedule;
· The stable public perception regarding the existence of an increased level of employee satisfaction with the workplace;
· Qualitative pay and superior training level of colleagues;
· Staff policy and the human values promoted in the organization;
· Positive brand awareness;
· Stability on the market;
· Perception about the seriousness of the employer;
· Public visibility, consisting of social, philanthropic, and ecological actions;
· Public visibility, consisting of offering incentive pay packages paid on time;

· The existence of a policy focused on the employee and his material, spiritual, and professional needs.

O2: Identifying the role of the human resources department in strengthening the employer brand.
The human resources department is the image of the company's recruitment process and is often the first impression of new employees to the company. Following the centralization of data, it was identified that the role of the human resources department in developing and maintaining the employer brand in the analyzed companies is:
· Establishing company policies that are closely aligned with the organization's values;
· Creating a positive experience for each individual employee;
· Understanding the needs of employees and developing their skills and professional career;
· Keeping the promise made by the employer brand;
· Knowing the expectations of the employees, the directions in the field of competition, and the latter's approaches;
· Reconfiguration of the existing market formulas, with the introduction of new, attractive, and useful elements of work efficiency and of the way of allocating the working time, breaks, and rewards for meritorious results.
· The evaluation and positioning of the weaknesses and strengths, individually speaking, of the employees, proposing solutions meant to lead to their continuous improvement as well as to their motivation, so that the financial or subjective-affective criteria that can determine migration are eliminated.

O3: Identifying the employer branding strategies used by organizations that are part of the national economy for attracting, retaining, and developing human resources.
Among the employer branding strategies used by the organizations analyzed for the purpose of attracting, retaining and developing human resources are:
· The employee's knowledge of the employer's expectations and the employer's knowledge of the employee's expectations – from a position where they are perceived as being in relation to the physical and training possibilities.
· The formation of an own culture, adapted to thetraining level of the employees, of social, ethnic, and religious origin, respectively the dissemination of the values constructed as such.
· Achieving a balance in respecting the rights of the employees, of the work hours, thus addressing the personal recovery needs of the employees, a criterion of subjective separation in the forming of intent/option of employing the applicant.

O4: Identifying the benefits brought by employer branding on organizations that are part of the national economy.

The most important benefits provided by the employer brand are:

· The orientation of employees towards directions of interests in regards to personal development and the future of the company. This interest has led to involvement, mental comfort in the workplace, and increased attention in the technological production processes;
· Uniformization and encouragement of relationsbetween employees, an aspect that facilitates the attitude of mutual help, collegial protection, and empathy;
· Rehabilitation of employees with fresh forces, eliminating dissatisfaction and disappointment with the work schedule and workload;
· Knowledge of non-professional interests, eliminating the classic withholdings and perceptions of management and its executives;
· Generating positive opinions regarding the working environment, the time spent at work being useful, acceptable, and molded to human interests and needs;
· Reducing the costs of human resources recruitment;
· Transforming the employees into brand ambassadors with them recommending the employer in their group of friends;
· Reduction of absenteeism;
· Reduction of losses in regard to thefts and waste of resources. The basic idea in this context is represented by the fact that people rarely steal from those considered family;
· The customer satisfaction generated by staff involvement and commitment;
· Increasing employee satisfaction;
· Attracting and retaining key employees;
· Transformation of the human resources department into an employee collaborator and a partner of the management team;
· Reconstructing the credibility of the human resources department in the eyes of the employees.

Validation/invalidation of research hypotheses

Following the analysis of the collected data, all the research hypotheses are validated, namely:

H1: To create a strong employer brand, the analyzed organizations used a set of elements.

H2: In the strengthening of the employer brand, the human resources department plays an important role.

H3: The analyzed organizations use employer branding strategies to attract, retain, and develop human resources.

H4: The use of employer branding brings a set of benefits to the analyzed organizations.

Limitations and future research directions

The limits of the research and the directions of future research are represented by:

· Use of a non-probabilistic sample;
· Evasive responses received from respondents.

As future research on the presented topic, it is of interest to find the opinion of the employees over the aspects that gives companies the image of employer brand: here could be treated subjects such as: what motivates the potential employees to apply for a job in a specific company, what are the criteria they take into account when applying, what motivates existing employees to stay in the company, and how they consider that the company managed to have an employer brand image.

CONCLUSIONS

Adopting a recruitment process that aims to select employees with positive attitudes who are open to new experiences leads to the formation of a collective made up of employees with a perfectible personal image, who want stability and who think of their position as an employee as a step in a positive and upward professional path.

Consistently highlighting the importance of the work of each employee involved in the production or bureaucratic process, the periodic and split rewards of the results, and the setting of goals following joint meetings transform the authoritarian perception of the employer into a friendly one.

Adopting strategies so that the employee or the potential employee is attracted by the recognition of his/her professional and individual value, by the real possibility of acquiring new professional competencies in the workplace, by his unconditional acceptance (confessional, cultural, political, lifestyle, etc.), and their work should take place in their dream environment.

A body of competitive, positive, and proactive employees is a model and a point of attraction for those outside the collective, resulting in positive competition. This fact becomes the basis of the employer brand – a capable, positive, stable, and competitive organization that it is viewed as a wish and not as a temporary solution or as a mere transient tool of a refugee career.

Retaining the human resource is the cornerstone in increasing the brand awareness of the employer, this resulting, as public perception, from the quality of the working environment, the level of remuneration, and the management's behavior.

The stability of the human resource beyond the material criteria ensures the propagation of positive and impactful feedback, facilitating an increase in

the brand awareness of the employer, even turning him into a landmark regarding workplace environment and efficiency of working time.

The stability of the human resource can have a positive character of individual security, but also of collective comfort, as long as, in general, people are attracted by those constructs that determine trust and foresight on the career, the personal life, and the evolution of the community they are a part of.

The importance of the individual work, its valorization, and its transposition at a level of organizational culture determines the attractivity of the staff that is found in such a pattern, having a potentiating effect for the organization on an internal level, but also improving its image externally.

The connection between brand awareness, organizational culture as part of identity, and retaining the human resource is a permanent one, definitely being a living and continuous process in the company, with a profound affective character in which the driving force can be equated with trust and determination.

The visionary manager is bound to look at a person as more than an element indispensable to profitability; he must look at him as a partner of the future and a bearer of the message of the company and its status in the outside world.

REFERENCES

[1] Aaker, D. (1992). Managing the most important asset: Brand equity. *Planning Review , 20* (5), 56-58.

[2] Ambler, T., & Barroe, S. (1996). The employer brand. *Journal of Brand Management , 4* (3), 185-206.

[3] Backhaus, K., & Tikoo, S. (2004). Conceptualizing and researching employer branding. *Career Development International , 9* (4/5), 501-517.

[4] Berthon, P., Ewing, M., & Hah, L. L. (2005). Captivating company: Dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding. *International Journal of Advertising , 24* (2), 151-172.

[5] Biswas, M., & Suar, D. (2016). Antecedent and consequences of employer branding. *Journal of Businees Ethics , 136* (1), 57-72.

[6] Burke, W. W. (1994). *Organization Development: A Process of Learning and Changing.* Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

[7] Diskienė, D. .., & Goštautas, V. .. (2010). Relationship between individual and organizational values and employees job satisfaction. *Current Issues of Business & Law , 5* (2), 295-319.

[8] Freiling, J., & Fitchtner, H. (2010). Organizational culture as the glue between people and organization: A competence-based view on learning and competence building. *Zeitschrift Für Personalforschung , 24* (2), 152-172.

[9] Moroko, L., & Uncles, M. D. (2008). Characteristics of successful employer brand. *Journal of Brand Management , 16* (3), 181-196.

[10] Peters, T. (1999). *The Br and Y ou 50: Fifty w a ys to tr ansform yourself into a Br and that Shouts Distinction.* New York: Knopf Publishers.

[11] Rampl, L. V., & Kenning, P. (2014). Employer brand trust and affect: Linking brand personality to employer brand attractiveness. *European Journal of Marketing , 48* (1/2), 218-236.

[12] Sullivan, J. (2004, Februarie 23). *The 8 Elements of a Successful Employment Brand.* Preluat pe November 10, 2019, de pe ERE Recruiting Intelligence: https://www.ere.net/the-8-elements-of-a-successful-employment-brand/

[13] Sutherland, M. M., Torricelli, D. G., & Karg, R. F. (2002). Employer-of-choice Branding for Knowledge Workers. *South African Journal of Business Management , 33* (4), 13-20.

[14] Tanwar, k., & Prasad, A. (2017). Employer brand scale development and validation: A second- order factor approach. *Personnel Review , 46* (2), 389-409.

[15] Vatsa, M. (2011). Leveraging employer branding for organiztional success. *Review of Management , 6* (1-2), 9-13.

[16] Wilden, R., Gudergan, S., & Lings, I. (2010). Employer branding: strategic implocations for staff recruitment. *Journal of Marketing Management , 26* (1), 56-73.

[17] Zuegner-Roth, K. P., & Diamantopoulos, A. (2015). Consumer ethnocentrism, national identity, and consumer cosmopolitanism as drivers of consumer behavior: A social identity theory perspective. *Journal of International Marketing , 23* (2), 9-13.