Employer Branding Practices Amongst the Most Attractive Employers of IT and Engineering Sector

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ABSTRACT

Employer branding is a marketing strategy that helps employers stay competitive in their markets. Although it is a concept used for over 20 years, its process and consequences have not yet been fully scrutinized. This study characterizes the employer branding implementation and the employers’ perspective on it. By conducting ten semi-structured, in-depth interviews, the authors examine not only how employer branding practices have been applied, but also the role of human resources management in the process and used employee attraction and retention practices. The results suggest that although the employer branding process is not clearly structured, some stages can be identified as common. For that reason, the authors outline a stage divided framework and analyse each one of the identified stages. Furthermore, practical insights are provided about the company’s departments roles and link them to the current state of the art. Finally, the authors suggest future investigation in particular stages of employer branding.

KEYWORDS
Attraction Practices, Employer Branding, Human Resources Management, Retention Practices

INTRODUCTION

Employer branding (EB) represents a current challenge for companies. Nowadays people’s feedback about their work experience and employer is extremely valued because it serves as an orientation for the potential collaboration with this company in the future by new employees. For example, it is much more likely that people apply for the job at a company with a positive employer image than to a negative one. Therefore, the company’s strategy of defining and communicating an image that attracts or retains the candidates – through EB is determinant of its future and reputation.

The “war for talent” is now more important than ever and the strategies to conquer the best individuals are making the difference between successful and unsuccessful companies (Cheese, Thomas, & Craig, 2007; Crous, 2007; Michaels, Handfield-Jones & Axelrod, 2001; Minchington, 2006).

Furthermore, there is a knowledge gap in the area of EB in Portugal. Little empirically-based evidence exists about EB in general or about the role of human resources management (HRM) in EB. However, Berlenga (2010) examined the most desirable attributes of a company from employee perspective and Tavares (2014) has deepened the same study with relating attributes to the level of employee commitment to the organization.

DOI: 10.4018/IJHCITP.2020010101

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It is also important to create awareness about the role of HRM in the process of the EB. HRM is often ignored even though it is utterly relevant in the process, for instance, it contributes to the design of EB with knowledge about employee conditions, expectations and consequently reassuring greater level of efficiency in processes like recruitment and selection (Sokro, 2012).

This particular study examines how the most attractive Portuguese IT and engineering develop their EB. Since there are few empirically-based evidences about Portuguese EB in general and about the role of Human Resources Management (HRM) in the EB processes, (Berlenega, 2010; Tavares, 2014) we also give a special attention to these two dimensions.

This article is organized into four sections; Literature Review, Methodology, Results, Discussion & Conclusions. In the first section the current studies on the themes of EB, its correlation to HRM and Employee Attraction and Retention practices are highlighted. The second section, Methodology, gives an overview of the methodological process as well as the study’s objectives. In the third section, the results are presented and illustrated with various examples of codes that were identified in the interviews. The last section, Discussion & Conclusions, connects results with theoretical framework and addresses possible future work and limitations too.

LITERATURE REVIEW

EB is a concept that was first introduced by Ambler and Barrow (1996) as a set of functional, economic or psychological benefits that an organization provides to their employees with the aim to develop a greater employee loyalty and output. EB emerged upon the attempt of applying traditional marketing techniques of branding to the field of human resources (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Cable & Turban, 2003). What differentiates EB from classic branding is the target group: the employee’s vs the customer’s attention and loyalty towards a certain brand respectively (American Marketing Association, 2016).

Nowadays, EB is concisely described as a strategy for winning the “war for talent” (Amelia & Nasution, 2016) that strives to appeal for the ideal of current and future employees. Considering that EB serves as a communication tool through which an organization presents its attributes and offers (Love & Singh, 2011; Srivastava & Bhatnagar, 2010), it consequentially triggers desire on the target individuals to join it (Cooper, 2008).

In the EB process the organizations communicate their Employee Value Preposition (EVP), a unique proposal designed and regulated to attract and retain employees. This offer answers the employee’s question “what’s in it for me” (Barrow & Mosley, 2005) and consists of attractive benefits, like for example, salary, bonuses, career development, possibility of promotion, etc. (Minchington, 2010).

The EB process can be organized in three phases (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Lievens, 2007):

1. Creating the employer brand by defining the EVP and unique requisites, i.e., organization’s offers.
2. Defining the external marketing of EB by deciding how the communication of EVP will be done outside of the organization.
3. Defining the internal marketing of EB by deciding how the communication of EVP will be done inside of the organization and how the promises will be implemented.

On the other hand, Deb (2006) claims that the process of EB starts before the development of an employer brand, with the diagnostic on the present perception of an organization, and with analysis of current employee profiles, EVPs, values, personalities and differentiators (Miles & Mangold, 2005). Other authors (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Mosley, 2009) also suggest adapting EB to the distinctive
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