

EMPLOYER BRAND BUILDING STRATEGY IN THE LABOUR MARKET: METHODICAL PROCEDURE FOR COMPANIES FROM B2B AND B2C MARKETS

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Abstract: The contribution of this study is the identification of dependencies and assumptions about the relationship of selected variables within the employer brand building process and the proposed methodological procedure for employer brand building (the EB Concept) that should contribute to easier implementation of the employer brand building strategy in the labour market. This methodological procedure is based on theoretical knowledge and the basis of available literature in the field of building the employer's brand and the practice of the authors. The methodological procedure can be applied to companies with different characteristics. They can be of different industry, different legal forms, number of employees, operating on the B2B and B2C market. The application of the methodological procedure requires support throughout the company. From the CEO, through top management, middle management to the employees themselves. The authors of the study used first the available literature and information on the process of employer brand building. This was followed by communication with four selected companies, where a unified scheme for introducing the employer brand concept was gradually set up. Two companies were SME, two large companies with more than 250 employees. At the same time, two companies operate in B2B and two in B2C markets. The proposed unified concept of introducing the employer brand is also usable in SMEs and large companies.

Keywords: human resource management, employer brand, Czech Republic, labour market

JEL Classification: M10, M12, M50

INTRODUCTION

According to the authors and their studies concerned, the process of building an employer brand can be divided into several parts. Creating an employer brand begins with diagnosing the employer brand and drawing up an action plan. The company tries to understand its position on the labour market, to analyse its current situation, both from the internal, and external environment. (Kang & Sung, 2017; Dineen et al., 2019; Sharma, 2019)

The importance of the employer brand is noticeable. However, Tkalac Verčič (2021) states that the existing literature does not provide a sufficient construct for small and medium-sized enterprises and for many

companies the concept of employer branding is still new. Carpentier et al. (2017) explains that employer branding is a young discipline that SMEs are beginning to use to motivate and recruit employees. Other authors point to the lack of scientific discussion on employer branding (Dabirian et al., 2017; Kucharska & Kowalczyk, 2019). Klimkiewicz and Oltra (2017) add that despite the considerable importance of the employer brand, there are few studies on this topic. Being the employer of choice for a company means being competitive in the labour market and being able to attract potential employees. Although this assumption holds true, there is a lack of research into how to become an employer of choice or an attractive employer (Tkalac Verčič & Pološki Vokić, 2017). There are examples in the literature referred on how to discover the employer brand but there are no more elaborate instructions on how to apply this employer brand in practice, how to further maintain and develop it so that it really serves and fulfils the company's goals (Frasca & Edwards, 2017; Arasanmi & Krishna, 2019). The literature focuses mainly on the concepts and results obtained by building the employer brand, and research on the attractiveness of the employer brand is still rare (Cheesman, 2017; Carpentier & Van Hoyer, 2021).

The aim of this study is the identification of dependencies and assumptions about the relationship of selected variables within the employer brand building process and the proposed methodological procedure for employer brand building (the EB Concept) that should contribute to easier implementation of the employer brand building strategy in the labour market.

The paper consists of four parts. The first part – Literature Review - presents the current form of perception of the employer brand building issue. The second part – Methods – describes the process of creating a methodology for the introduction of the employer brand. The third part – Results and discussion – brings a proposal for a new methodology that emphasizes the creation of a unified methodological procedure for employer brand building. The fourth part – Conclusions – represents a summary of the paper and contains reflections and limits of the paper and possibilities for further research.

1. LITERATURE REFERENCES

The employer brand was first defined by Ambler and Barrow (1996). It was described as a specific package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits that a particular firm provides to its employees to distinguish itself from other employers. The employer's brand is supposed to simplify the work of the personnel department, it is supposed to help HR managers to focus on priorities, increase productivity, improve recruitment, attract potential candidates, retain current employees, strengthen their engagement, and motivate them, to engage in employer brand communications (Ambler and Barrow, 1996).

The authors pay the attention to the value proposition of the employer brand (exactly the Employer Value Proposition – EVP) (Barbaros, 2020). There is also an opinion in the literature referred that building an attractive employer brand consists in defining a value proposition – what brand benefits can be communicated to selected audience (companies compile a unique proposal of employer values – i.e., benefits to be communicated to potential and current employees) (Tkalac Verčič, 2021; Tkalac Verčič & Pološki Vokić, 2017). The value proposition represents the skeleton of the entire employer brand because it creates a clear vision of how the company wants to be perceived (Carpentier et al., 2019).

Marketing and strategy play an important role in strengthening the employer brand. It is all about communication towards both the internal and external labour market (Kang & Sung, 2017; Ployhart et al., 2017). Carpentier and Van Hoyer (2021) developed their own value model design, if an employer brand has a clear vision and mission that expresses its personality and brand value, a value design follows for employees. From the point of view of the EVP, it is essential to examine the company's culture and environment, employee experience (tangible benefits such as salary but also intangible ones such as awards and career opportunities), company integrity and reputation, internal communication, performance appraisal systems, social responsibility, external marketing, organizational performance, leadership, security, company stability (Arasanmi & Krishna, 2019; Pucheva-Michelotti et al., 2018). Dabirian, Kietzmann

and Diba (2017) look at the employer brand from five key dimensions: people and culture (job description, goals, work environment and conditions), company (what it offers: vision, mission, values), employer's reputation (achievements, social activities, CSR), job offer (opportunity, key roles, onboarding, and adaptation process/program), remuneration and development (evaluation, salary and benefits, career). There is a presumption that employees having a well-managed career satisfied at their work are unlikely to leave the company (Sharma, 2019; Market Research Explained, 2019; Binz Astracha et al., 2018). EVP captures the essence of how a company wants to be perceived in the minds of potential and current employees. So, the unique benefits that make an individual want to become part of the daily life of the company (Theurer et al., 2018). The company should be interested in employees from their start to retirement (Cheesman, 2017; Moore et al., 2020). The authors also focus on the value proposition because it gives the company the opportunity to excel in the labour market. A set of unique values, relevant to all groups concerned, allows the company to differentiate itself from the competition (Klimkiewicz & Oltra, 2017; Miles & McCamey, 2018). A company should know its competition in the labour market and find out the communicated advantages of the competition through surveys (Tkalac Verčič & Sinčić Ćorić, 2018). It is also possible to find out that the employer brand applies only to large corporations. Therefore, small, and medium-sized enterprises have a difficult role to play in the belief of the company's management that the systematic building of the employer brand has its meaning and justification (Arijs et al., 2018; Kapuściński et al., 2021). It follows from practice that whether a company does not have its employer brand defined and does not communicate it towards the labour market, it loses potential applicants who do not have enough information about the company and move on towards its competition (Carpentier et al., 2017; Dineen et al., 2019; Frasca & Edwards, 2017).

2. METHODS

The aim of this study is to propose a unified methodological procedure for building the employer brand (EB concept) that should contribute to easier implementation of the strategy of building the employer brand in the labour market.

This methodological procedure is based on theoretical knowledge and available literature in the field of building the employer brand and the authors' practice. This methodology was verified on four companies from the private sector, operating in B2B and B2C markets, and they were both, SMEs, and large companies. The authors of the study used first the available literature and information on the process of employer brand building. This was followed by communication with four selected companies, where a unified scheme for introducing the employer brand concept was gradually set up. The results of the proposed methodology represent the subject of the presented paper. Two companies were SME, two large companies with more than 250 employees. At the same time, two companies operate in B2B and two in B2C markets.

The application of the methodological procedure (or the whole approach to the concept of building the employer brand) requires support throughout the company. From the CEO, through top management, middle management to the employees themselves. An integral part of successful implementation is the corporate culture of the company. The methodological procedure can be applied to companies with different characteristics. They can be well-known and unknown brands, Czech and foreign, with different business objects, different legal forms, with the number of employees up to 100 employees, but also over 300 employees, operating on the B2B and B2C market, in different locations and in one place, with own marketing, but also without it and with various input funds.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the phase of creating an employer brand, the company must know the answers to the questions: what, to whom and how to communicate. Subsequently, there is talk of an action plan and control tools. The creation of an action plan and the compilation of suitable control tools is included in a separate part, because according

to these two outputs, the employer brand will then be followed and measured, the project approach is considered appropriate. The Gantt chart is most often used to create an action plan. The main phases of the employer brand concept will be formed – the analytical phase, the creation phase, and the implementation phase.

The authors of the paper present a proposal for a methodological procedure for the creation of an employer brand in a logical sequence streamlined into three successive steps with mutual connections.

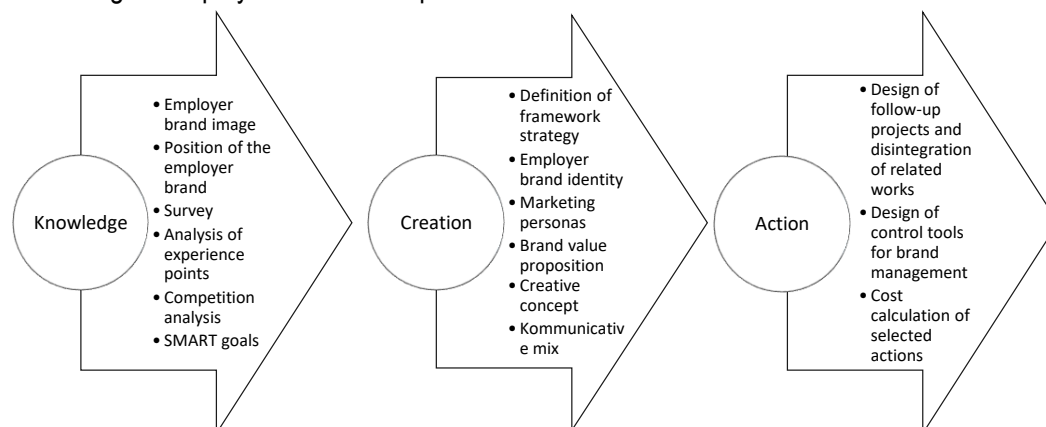
3.1 Creating an employer brand concept (EB concept/plan)

The creation of the employer brand concept (the EB plan) takes place in three phases: knowledge, creation, and implementation.

- Knowledge – analysis of the current situation and setting the SMART goals.
- Creation – proposal of communication strategy and selection of suitable communication tactics.
- Implementation – creation of an action plan with detailed calculation and design of control tools.

The sequence of individual phases and specific outputs are shown in Figure 1.

Fig. 1: Creating an employer brand concept



Source: own elaboration

3.1.1 Knowledge

The initial analytical phase of plan development focuses on the following main areas (3 C's):

- company – a company in the role of an employer;
- customers – i.e., employees, applicants, or the public;
- competitors – competition and the situation on the labour market.

Thus, it is possible to obtain a comprehensive overview of the current situation of the employer brand in the labour market.

The specific outputs of this phase, which are followed up in other parts of the project, are:

Employer brand image – brand image from the perspective of employees

The image of the employer brand shows how the company is perceived by its employees, what is the image of the employer brand in the minds of the audience. Outputs are evaluated using the Brand Identity Prism emphasizing six key elements – Physique, Personality, Culture, Self-image, Reflection and Relationships.

The position of the employer brand – advantages and disadvantages of the offered job

The position of the employer brand brings an overview of what the job itself gives to employees and takes what pleases them, and on the contrary, they do not like them. The main criterion is then the perception of the uniqueness of work for the company, i.e., the advantages and disadvantages of work. At the same

time, it is good to ask about the most important values related to work in the company. The company strives to understand its employees and their motives so that it can subsequently improve their job satisfaction and strengthen their commitment. The uniqueness of the job offer is further used in the creation phase (Phase 2) in the design of the value proposition of the employer brand. The outputs of this analysis will be important in creating the positioning of the employer brand in the labour market.

Analysis of experience points – the main moments forming the employer brand

These are important moments in which the employer brand can occur in all phases of the employee cycle. That is, in the role of job seekers, company current employees and former employees. These experience points are unique for each company because each company has specific processes and culture. Experience points include all internal tools, ongoing processes and set company policies. Based on experience points, the experience of each applicant with the brand of the company is formed. Experience points do not refer only to the applicants. The most numerous and at the same time the most experienced group are the company's own employees, they not only went through the whole process from job search, through selection process to personal experience with the brand, but they are also the main source of stimuli, ideas, and inspiration on how to do things better. The last group that needs to be mentioned in connection with experience points are employees who no longer work in the company, the "alumni". In the individual phases of the life cycle in the company, these are the following activities:

Competition analysis – analysis of experience points and inspiration

Competition is a natural part of any business. It would be short-sighted not to be interested in the competition and not to know with whom the given company has an honour in the same field of operation. From the point of view of employer branding, this is not competition in the market of products and services, but in the labor market. The same applicant may be suitable for more than one company, although each sells a different portfolio of products or offers different services and does not compete because they operate in different product and service markets. The company can get a picture of its competitors by analysing experience points, but it must not be in the viewfinder, but its competitor can be. In a very effective way, they will find out at which points it is better/worse and what the competition is doing differently, eventually better/worse. Competition analysis can take place on the three levels:

Branding – what image and position does the given competition try to create in the labour market.

Recruitment – which employees the competition is looking for and which benefits the job offers, including benefits.

Communication – which tools the competition uses (at least those that are detectable from publicly available sources).

3.1.2 Creation

This part of the project is creative. The aim of this phase is to decide which topics should be focused on within personnel communication. It is also necessary to define the brand identity and the main target audience. Finally, this phase focuses on the style and voice of brand communication, including the choice of appropriate tools.

The specific outputs that will be further used in the creation of the action plan and during all subsequent production of communication messages are the following:

- **definition of the framework strategy – main topics need to be focused on in communication**

Based on the information obtained so far and the set SMART goals, the company should be able to define a clear strategy that will help it get from the current situation to the situation in which the company wants to be.

- **employer brand identity – how the company should be perceived on the labour market**

The identity of the employer brand captures the uniqueness of the company and distinguishes it from other companies. The brand identity of the employer must communicate clearly what the company is. It connects the principle of the company, its history, present and future.

- **marketing persona – to whom the brand speaks**

When the identity is clearly defined, it is necessary to clarify for whom the communication will be created, i.e., to define, based on target audiences, marketing people to whom external personnel communication will be directed. Internal personnel communication is directed to all employees. The marketing persona can be compiled using the Brand Commitment Matrix that translates the brand's compliance with the "customer" on several levels, i.e., at the personnel level with the employee. The first half of the matrix will be used for the purpose of compiling the marketing persona.

- **The Employer Value Proposition (EVP) – what benefits of the brand can be communicated to the audience**

The Employer Value Proposition (EVP) is a set of all the unique benefits, associations and offers that the company offers in the labour market in exchange for the skills, abilities, and experience of its employees. The position of a given brand in predefined audiences can then be built on these values. The information obtained is valuable because it provides a realistic view of current employees and can give potential employees the certainty that the offered values can really be fulfilled by the company as an employer. On the other hand, it shows topics needed to be discussed in communication. The outputs are also used for content creation within the creative designs. The EVP must be unique, relevant, and compelling because it provides the company with key information to attract and retain other applicants.

- **A creative concept – visual style of communication, brand voice, topics for the communication**

This means a design process. The creation of the creative concept takes place in two phases. First, it is necessary to create a framework of rules for creative creation, and then it is possible to proceed to the design of prototypes of selected communication tools. The rules for creative work contain 3 main areas, namely the visual style of communication, the language style of communication (voice and tone of the brand) and, ideally, the personal slogan (motto). Within prototypes, communication can be created, either online (e.g., communication in social networks, social media, web presentations, etc.) or offline (billboards, leaflets, company magazines, notice boards, etc.). The uniform design must go across all communication channels and all employees must be identified with it.

- **A communication mix – selection of suitable tools for the communication**

The RACE methodology is used to compile the communication mix that ranks the selected tactics into 4 levels – Hit, Influence, Gain and Involvement. The compilation of the communication mix is based on the analysis of experience points, while discussing the existing tools, to which are added new tools that were designed during the creation of the concept. After a predefined period, the company should quality evaluate and optimize its tools for marketing activities and should regularly evaluate which tools are still effective and which are not. These comparisons may be made year-on-year or compared to the previous period.

3.1.3 An action

The final part of creating a plan requires mainly a logical thinking. This means an agency work, where selected action tactics create an action plan and select appropriate control tools. The output of this phase is an action plan for the following period that includes:

proposal of follow-up projects and disintegration of related works,
design of control tools for brand management,
calculation of costs of selected actions.

3.2 A marketing plan

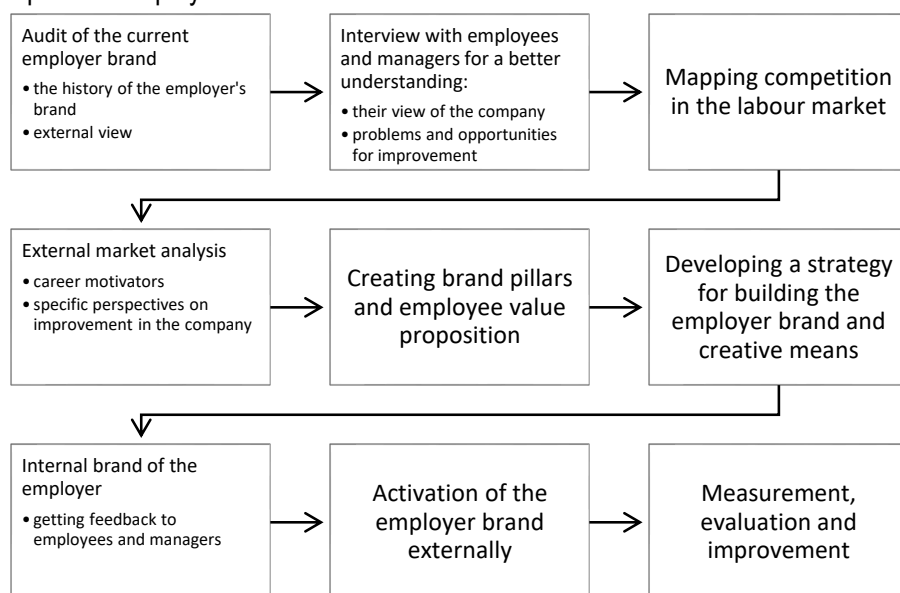
Based on the compiled action plan, it is possible to divide the proposed projects into individual phases. In most cases, it is necessary to implement projects in the Phase I., otherwise the company cannot prepare further

planning. These include mostly the production of career pages, setting up and implementing activities within internal communication, preparation, and implementation of the first issue of the company magazine and preparation of offline and online advertising. Within the Phase II., the company can start publishing content regularly in the blog section on the career page and on social networks, PPC advertising is launched, and further production takes place. To ensure sufficient content, there are workshops with employees and constant supervision of all activities in terms of support, advice, and analysis. In the next phases, the most effective communication tools are then evaluated, both for external, and internal communication.

3.3 Measurability of goals and success of the employer branding

Randstad (2020) deals with the employer branding in practice and states that in a highly competitive labour market, creating and maintaining a consistent employer brand is an essential tool for attracting and retaining the right employees. The impressive employer brand facilitates the recruitment of the best candidates and increases the loyalty of current employees. Randstad (2020) defines 5 steps to develop a better employer brand. The first step is to evaluate the current situation with managers about the required culture and values of the organization. Here, there must be a unified opinion of all managers, management, and leadership of the company. The second step is the analysis of the current employer brand, where the employer brand is now located and where it is headed. The key is how the company wants to be perceived in the labour market and must be able to successfully translate this idea into all marketing communication. From the second step, the company obtained information about the current situation and set specific goals, in the third step, it sets out a plan for achieving these goals, how to implement and measure them. In the fourth step, Randstad recommends involving its own employees in shaping the employer brand so that they are properly informed and actively involved. Some goals can be achieved quickly, others more slowly. The employer brand is constantly evolving. In the fifth step, it is now possible to spread the employer's brand among the public through social networks, online and offline media and share authentic content that resonates with the target audience and the shared values of the company. The process of creating an employer brand is shown in Figure 2.

Fig. 2: The map of the employer brand



Source: Randstad (2020)

Although Randstad (2020) mentions 5 steps, in graphic terms there are 9 steps that are arranged without further division. Here, it is not stated how to work out the individual inputs.

Brandbakers (2020) helps companies create brand communication, increases the efficiency of the recruitment process, helps bring talented and right people to companies. According to Brandbakers (2020), the process of creating an employer brand has three phases – Knowledge, Strategy and Activation. In the knowledge phase, it is found out why the given people work for the company, what makes the company's offer unique, what criteria decide when deciding on the company, who is the company's competition and what kind of recruitment communication the competition has. Again, the analytical phase is emphasized that gives a clear picture of the company, employees, applicants, and the competition. The strategy decides which communication channels will be used for the target audience. Activation then represents the very creation of the proposed tactics and activities. Compared to the proposed methodological procedure for building the employer brand in this study, Brandbakers (2020) needs two phases (Knowledge and Strategy) to create a concept, because the third phase – Activation, already represents the creation of proposed tactics and activities. pages, printed recruitment materials, profiles on social networks, etc.).

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to design a unified methodological procedure for building the employer brand (EB concept) that should contribute to easier implementation of the employer brand building strategy in the labor market. The proposal of a suitable methodological procedure for the creation of the employer brand is proposed in the paper in logical connections with the use for companies operating in both, B2B and B2C markets. The proposed unified concept of introducing the employer brand is also usable in SMEs and large companies. The proposed methodology was subsequently verified in four companies. The methodology consists of 3 phases: 1) Knowledge – analysis of the current situation and setting SMART goals, 2) Creation – design of communication strategy and selection of appropriate communication tactics, 3) Implementation – creation of an action plan with detailed calculation and design of control tools.

The competition among employers may increase due to talent and quality human resources shortages. The paper points out that companies must realize the importance of quality employees, both current and potential. Companies ask themselves questions about how to stand out from other companies and how to be an attractive employer in the long term. They start looking new strategies in the field of human resources management. The paper brings a new approach in human resource management, which is employer brand building. Employer branding is a long-term strategy that helps companies in a competitive environment attract quality potential employees while retaining current key employees. Earlier approaches to human resource management understood employees only as a factor of production and considered assets and capital more important. Over time, this opinion has changed, and current literature considers human capital to be the most valuable. Human capital should be seen as an important resource creating competitive advantage. The paper points out that the introduction of the employer brand concept in the company is also beneficial for by reason most of the strategies used by HR professionals are short-term and reactively designed (that is, when there is a problem, a solution is found), but the employer brand is a long-term and proactive solution that attempts to prevent a problem, created to provide stability to the firm.

The benefits of this paper can be used both, for the management of small and medium-sized enterprises, and for large companies. Certain limitations can be seen in the application to multinational companies, where parent companies often pass on their own methodology for building the employer brand to their subsidiaries. The authors see further research as focusing on organizations in the field of state administration.

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