

EMPLOYER BRANDING VS PERSONAL BRANDING

Introduction

In the recent years employer branding has become a vital element of functioning of many companies. It is argued that appropriately conducted actions in this field result in numerous benefits for organizations. The most important ones include:

- greater confidence in organizations,
- better relationships between the organization and its employees, clients, business partners and other stakeholders,
- greater loyalty, satisfaction and involvement of employees,
- greater interest of potential candidates in joining the organization,
- lower recruitment and selection costs, reduction in operating costs,
- increased stability of functioning on the market,
- more efficient product launch on the market [Oczkowska, 2015].

However, when undertaking actions in the area of employer branding one frequently fails to consider the changes related to the system of employee values as well as the fact that the expectations and needs of the generation dominating among the employed differ substantially from the needs of former generations [Juchnowicz, 2018].

It may be observed in many fields, in particular in the approach to building one's professional career. Strenuous climbing up career ladder has been replaced by personal branding.

The aim of the presented article is to analyze the interrelationship between the notions of employer branding and personal branding as well as their implications for the human capital management in modern organizations.

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1. The concept of employer branding

According to Renata Oczkowska [2015], the interest in organization's image goes back to the early 50s of the previous century. The idea of building the image of an organization as an attractive employer appeared forty years later – in the 90s of the 20th century. T. Ambler, an English scientist and S. Barrow – practitioner dealing with marketing were the first to identify the concept of employer brand and defined it as 'the sum of functional economic and psychological benefits associated with and achieved due to employment by a particular organization. Employer branding involves the use of marketing techniques aimed at creating appropriate climate and area of organization which will prove attractive to the presently employed as well as the potential candidates Oczkowska [2015].

The present popularity of the discussed topic is reflected by numerous definitions. Even a brief overview of these concepts will take substantial part of the article. Therefore it has been assumed after Katarzyna Wojtaszczyk [2014: 86], that 'employer branding is a process of creating value for stakeholders which results from one's identification with a strong employer brand'.

The above term of stakeholders is a fairly complex one. There are three groups of people who perform critical role in development of the image of an organization in practice, these are:

- 1) candidates,
- 2) present employees,
- 3) former employees.

Ad 1. For years activities related to building employer brand focused on potential employees. It is no coincidence that initially the term '*employer branding*' was related entirely to endeavors aimed at attracting candidates and building the position of the first-choice employer, etc. At present one may observe shifting away from the narrow understanding of this notion; however awareness of the importance of actions aimed at potential employees has remained a vital element of operations undertaken by HR departments these days. In order to attract the right people interested in working for a particular enterprise numerous interesting actions are taken.

It concerns both recruitment and selection of employees. A growing number of employees understand that the role of recruitment process is not limited to filling a vacancy but developing appropriate brand image of the organization as well. It is hard to imagine effective *employer branding* without undertaking actions in the field of recruitment and selection – friendly worded job advertisements, easily understandable names of positions, unambiguous description of expectations and requirements regarding future employees, informing about the length of the recruitment process, etc. Recently, Coalition for Friendly Recruitment (Koalicja na rzecz Przyjaznej

Rekrutacji) has been established. It brings together several dozens of companies and the number continues to grow. The Code of Good Practice in recruitment has been created – compliance with its principles is becoming a compulsory trend.

Ad 2. As regards those already employed in an organization the starting point for employer branding is the appropriate adaptation period [Zarczyńska-Dobiesz, 2008]. However, even the most successful course of this process will not result in long term involvement of a valuable employee unless the enterprise continuously strives for better standards in all aspects of human capital management. Particular attention must be paid to:

- open internal communication enabling employees to genuinely participate in decision making,
- building involvement systems based on the feeling that one's job is meaningful,
- well thought through remuneration system (financial and nonfinancial) based on modern theories of motivation,
- fair system of periodic performance assessment which is a means to provide feedback and not 'judgment over the employee',
- developing progressive training policy,
- establishing a set of procedures related to termination of employment in the company.

Ad 3. Creating positive company image among employees subject to workforce reduction may prove extremely difficult. Fear of the future, feeling of helplessness and even humiliation – these are only some of the difficult emotions accompanying those who are made redundant. However, building appropriate company culture in this area may help employees to see their situation differently after some time has passed. 'There was no other solution, they had to make redundancies. On the other hand, one must admit that the company behaved decently towards me and others who were made redundant. It is a truly decent company'. This opinion is a lot more valuable in terms of employer branding than an extensive promotional campaign.

Many companies developed *outplacement* programs – aimed at helping employees that were let go to find new opportunities on the employment market. These complex and costly activities are focused on minimizing the negative impact of downsizing for both departing employees as well as the company image.

The concern for the culture of separation is critical not only in relation to those leaving the company due to the employer's decision but also those who decided to resign. Attention to employer brand requires conducting a conversation known as *exit interview* with all employees who decided to leave. Its aim is to:

- find out why they decided to leave,
- discuss observed shortcomings in personnel policy,
- monitor company's management system.

It is vital that companies strive to create a positive image not only among the candidates, currently employed but also former employees. A growing number of companies recognizes importance of the aforementioned activities. It is reflected in the studies conducted by Katarzyna Wojtaszczyk [2014: 148], who argues that '(...) the best organizations who understand that opinions of employees who were made redundant, those who resigned, the retired and their families have big impact on the image of the company as an employer. Therefore, they pay more attention to the way they part with the employee than other institutions. From the *employer brand* perspective it is vital to maintain contact with employees after they had left the company. Thus, many enterprises hold clubs for former employees and organize activities specifically dedicated to them'. The importance of these activities for employer branding cannot be overstated.

2. The concept of personal branding

Tom Peters is considered to be the founder of contemporary approach to personal branding. In the article 'The brand called you' published in 1997 he presented a kind of *personal branding* manifesto.

'Regardless of our age, occupied position and the branch we work in we all need to be aware of the importance of *branding*. We are managing directors of our own enterprises: I Ltd. (...). In the business world today our main task is to promote the »You« brand. (...) You are a brand. You are the one to manage the brand... You must begin to think about yourself differently. You are not an »employee«, you »don't belong« to any organization for ever, you are not defined by the job description of the position you occupy, you are more than that. (...) The position of managing director in the I Ltd. obliges you to develop yourself, promoting yourself and undertaking measures to ensure market's interest in you' [Peters, 1997].

Characteristic feature of the majority of *personal branding* definitions is their strongly persuasive nature. Authors of these definitions, similarly to Tom Peters, tend to refer directly to the recipient as a guide and urge one to take particular actions. This way the significance of personal branding is highlighted.

According to Katarzyna Wojtaszczyk and Filip Maszewski [2014], from the theory of management perspective 'personal brand may be defined as the total of benefits or values it brings to all entities (brand owner and other stakeholders such as the employer, family and friends) who have contact with the brand. These benefits may be functional (rational) or emotional (symbolic) and are connected with the broadly understood potential of the person identified by a particular personal brand whose 'company' in terms of an individual is their name and surname.

Attributes of a strong personal brand include its authenticity, good reputation and visibility [Schawbel, 2012: 18–19; Wiśniewska, 2015]. The strive to enhance visibility of the brand requires promotional activities connected with the following dilemma: How to promote one's brand efficiently without going too far with excessive promotional attempts? Hubert Rampersad [2010: 188] warns against such excessive activities and argues that personal branding should involve predominantly trust building.

Conscious personal branding involves defining *personal value proposition* (PVP). PVP implies informing various labor market entities (particularly present and potential employers, current and future co-workers) what they can expect of the individual employee. PVP includes both rational values (such as professional predispositions, level of education, experience, propensity to invest in one's development), as well as the emotional ones (e.g., motivation level, involvement, interpersonal skills, self-confidence, creativity) [Wojtaszczyk, Maszewski, 2014]. Personal branding is a long-term process which varies for different individuals.

3. Traditional and contemporary approach to professional career

According to Alicja Smolbik-Jęczmień and Agnieszka Żarczyńska-Dobiesz [2017], the key indicators of traditional professional career comprised: linearity, high predictability, formalized training program, rigid principles of promotion and limited impact of employees on the course of action. This approach was dominated by a recurrent scheme including the following elements:

- 1) Graduation followed by undertaking employment. This stage, sometimes referred to as 'entering adulthood', implied the end of *the time to learn* and the start of *the time to work*.
- 2) Building career between the 25th-45th year of age which implied strenuous moving up the ladder of organizational hierarchy.
- 3) The period of profiting from the efforts pursued in the past sometimes known as the 'harvest time'.

This model is nowadays rejected. Entering labor market does not imply the end of education. On the contrary, undertaking employment in a modern organization means intensive learning. It is commonly believed that a school or university will not prepare one to take up a particular post, and the ongoing changes require continuous learning. Professional career is no longer linear and becomes unpredictable. One's professional position does not increase with age but depends on many different factors. One may observe a shift of responsibility for career development from the organization to the employee who is the only 'owner of career capital' [Smolbik-Jęczmień, Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, 2017], that is one's knowledge and skills.

The volume of this capital depends primarily on one's employability. This notion is considered the most important competence of a contemporary employee. It cannot be denied that high qualifications may prove useless if the individual fails to find an organization interested in employing them. There are two approaches to this term – broad and narrow. According to the broad approach employability involves:

- personal flexibility – ability to move smoothly from one position to the other, from one organization to another;
- occupational expertise – comprises specific knowledge and ability to use it;
- optimization and anticipation – ability to predict future changes and to use them creatively;
- corporate sense – ability to work effectively in a team;
- balance – ability to achieve compromise between the individual interest and the interest of an organization [Marzec, 2010].

One may distinguish three types of employability:

- initiation employability which implies one's ability to take up the first job after graduation or training; it regards the time passed from graduation to getting the job,
- internal employability understood as one's ability to be promoted within the structure of one organization; it may be vertical or horizontal promotion and involves bigger responsibility,
- external employability concerning one's ability to change employers; high level of external employability implies ability to smoothly move between extremely varied organizations [Wiśniewska, 2015].

Each of the above mentioned types of employability requires concern for personal branding. It is the only constant element in the world of continuous changes in professional career direction. Researchers state that the employee's generation is the key factor differentiating his approach to professional development. Year of birth and belongingness to a particular generation is widely discussed and changes with the time. It may be assumed that at present there are five generation groups. These are traditionalists born before 1945, baby boomers (people born in the years 1946–1964), generation X (born in the years 1965–1979), generation Y (people born between 1980–1989) and generation C (people born after 1990) *Pokolenia na rynku pracy* [Wiktorowicz et al., 2016].

According to researches a considerable part of the traditionalists generation worked all their lives for one organization. Baby boomers on average worked in 3–4 companies. It is believed that generation X employee will have changed their job 7–8 times, whereas people representing generation Y will have worked for 15–16 different employers. Thus, each new generation changes the job twice as often as the previous one. Should the trend continue it may be assumed that generation C representatives would have changed their jobs 32 times throughout their career lives [Woszczyk, 2016]. Although this prediction may seem fairly unrealistic, interviews

with twenty-something people indicate that most of them do not plan to spend more than 1–2 years in one organization.

Traditional career concepts based on defining consecutive stages of one's life and assigning very specific activities to these stages are losing their relevance. What characterizes contemporary professional careers is their volatility and unpredictability resulting in individual's continuous readiness to introduce corrective measures to the decisions they made in the past. High psychological costs of this phenomenon should not be ignored.. 'Being a slave to one's development' converts employee into a collector of new professional experiences rather than professional with expertise in a particular knowledge or skills.

Contemporary concept of career involves the following aspects: thorough analysis of opportunities offered by the work environment; using external networks rather than relying on one employer, maintaining work-life balance [Sullivan, Arthur, 2006].

Traditional approach to career development based on strenuous climbing up hierarchical career ladder within one organization (3–4 at most) has been losing its rationale. The days of *career surfers* are coming [Savickas, 2008] – i.e., individuals equipped with relevant skills, standing on their own two feet and able to take advantage of opportunities created by the ever-changing external environment. HR departments must prepare well in order to embrace the challenge.

Conclusions

The subject-matter of *Employer branding* has been covered by numerous studies, analyses, good practice codes and handbooks with step-by-step instructions on how to become a first-choice employer. However, it is frequently forgotten that the strength of the employer depends on the strength of its employees. Many employers tend to minimize the employee brands and expect that an individual will perform and present himself exclusively as a company representative and therefore neglect his own name and identity. This must be changed. Building cohesion between *employer branding* and *personal branding* is one of the key tasks facing those who are responsible for human capital management in contemporary organizations. This is not an easy task though. According to Dan Schawbel [2012: 33], who made same observations about the past, over ten years ago professional life involved 'hiding behind the corporation brand and using company logo as a protective shield against the world. Employees submitted to organization's policy and had very few networking tools (...). Typical career involved long-term employment in one organization. The observed »suppression of personal brands« restricted employees who were therefore deprived of other development opportunities and had to rely on one source of income”.

However, it is hard to agree with the author that the described relations belong solely to the past; the same situations are present in numerous contemporary organizations. *Personal brand suppressing* is still common and supporting personal brands is considered detrimental to the company. Providing such support, it is frequently believed, encourages employee's endeavors to look for a new job or increase their financial expectations. We should remember that in the past personnel training was perceived in a similar way. Staff training programs involve a certain degree of risk; however, very few employers today question their necessity. The same approach should be adapted towards *personal branding*. Therefore, it is necessary to accept employee's ownership of their career capital, and recognize that working elsewhere will enable them to better use their talents developed owing to the support obtained from the organization they are currently working for. Charles Woodruffe [2003: 53] wrote a dozen or so years ago: 'We are dealing here with an interesting paradox – in order to keep an employee in our company we need to develop their ability to leave it'.

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EMPLOYER BRANDING VS PERSONAL BRANDING

Abstract

The article presents analysis of the inter-relationships between the notions of “employer branding” and “personal branding”. It is argued that the contemporarily observed changes in the approach to building professional career require undertaking actions both in the area of employer branding and personal branding. At the time of *career surfers* the concepts of employer branding and personal branding must be treated complementarily – in order to obtain competitive advantage, employers must provide opportunities to employees to build their own brands.

KEYWORDS: EMPLOYER BRANDING, PERSONAL BRANDING, PROFESSIONAL CAREER, EMPLOYABILITY

JEL CLASSIFICATION CODE: O15

EMPLOYER BRANDING A PERSONAL BRANDING

Streszczenie

Celem prezentowanego artykułu jest analiza wzajemnych powiązań między pojęciami employer branding i personal branding, a także ich implikacjami dla zarządzania kapitałem ludzkim w nowoczesnych organizacjach. Autorka przedstawia krótki przegląd definicji tych pojęć. Opisuje także warunki wstępne dla skutecznego wdrożenia procesów employer branding i personal branding.

Druga część artykułu jest poświęcona tradycyjnemu i współczesnemu podejściu do budowania kariery zawodowej. Badane są pojęcia „zatrudnialności” i „własności kapitału kariery”.

W artykule przeanalizowano pięć grup pokoleniowych działających na współczesnym rynku pracy i wskazano różnice w ich podejściu do rozwoju zawodowego.

Autorka udowadnia, że w dzisiejszych czasach employer branding oraz personal branding należy postrzegać komplementarnie. Siła pracodawców zależy od siły ich pracowników. Przewagę konkurencyjną mogą osiągnąć jedynie ci pracodawcy, którzy stwarzają odpowiednie warunki rozwoju pracownikom, umożliwiając im budowanie silnych marek osobistych.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: EMPLOYER BRANDING, PERSONAL BRANDING, KARIERA ZAWODOWA, ZATRUDNIALNOŚĆ

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