

EMPLOYER BRANDING AS AN INNOVATIVE ELEMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: Changes caused by liberalization of the market of postal logistic services, as well as the development of information and communication technologies, impose numerous challenges to business entities competing in the market in order to achieve the satisfaction of their customers and gain their loyalty. Business transformation activities created as a response to market reality are often primarily focused on structural and process improvements, while neglecting the most important aspect of customer-oriented business: current and potential employees. The concept that appears as a way in which they improve existing communication towards this vital stakeholder is called employer branding. The paper explains the market context that led to the development of this concept, its definition and role, goals and scope, attractiveness dimensions and an overview of relevant available studies.

Keywords: employer branding, transformation, communication, attractiveness dimensions

1. Introduction

Modern market environment, characterized by complete liberalization, but also by dynamic changes caused by the development of information and communication technologies, is radically changing the way business entities operate, especially providers of postal and logistics services. Their customers are becoming more self-aware and their demands and expectations, regarding the overall quality of service are constantly increasing. Quality of service is reflected in customer satisfaction, which can be determined by the difference between their perception of the overall process and their expectations, with the fact that the lower limit of expectations is actually the level of quality that the customer had when last using a particular service. The possibility of choosing a service provider, increasing delivery options, its feedback, increased visibility and ability to monitor the process, enrichment of basic services with various additional benefits, such as improved communication both those interpersonal of frontline staff and

those at the corporate level, are some of the imperatives that this stakeholder places before market participants.

The above points to the change of previous "inside-out" paradigm of business to a customer-oriented "outside-in", which aims for a better customer experience, and implies the research of their real needs and desires and, accordingly to the results of these studies, the development of such services. This includes the transformation of ways of thinking, behaving, acting and communicating, both at the individual level and at the organizational level. Simultaneous, rapid and radical change of the most important organizational business activities such as strategy, culture, structure and processes with the intensive application of available digital technologies and resources, which aims to create new business models and ways of doing business Spremić defines with the term of digital transformation (Spremić, 2017: 16).

When deciding on a choice, customers take into account (technical and functional) quality of service and its price. However, if these parameters are approximately the same for all service providers, then they choose those with a better brand, defined as "a cluster of functional and emotional values that enables organizations to create the promise of a unique and pleasant experience." (de Chernatony, McDonald & Wallace, 2011, according to Ćorić, 2019: 224). Veljković and Đorđević consider precisely the expected quality, along with recognition and brand loyalty, as the basic dimensions of the brand, defining it as "an organizational promise to meet the expectations of stakeholders." (Veljković & Đorđević, 2010, according to Ćorić, 2019: 224)

The impression is that as organizations attempt their digital transformation, they direct the focus of their activities towards structural changes and digitization of already existing processes, while neglecting the human dimension. Research conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina states that the most common barriers to implementation of digital transformation are resistance to changes and innovations, lack of necessary knowledge and skills, and fear of job loss (Turulja et al., 2021), which confirms the results of some previous studies (Microsoft, 2017, Forbes, 2019, according to Alavi and Habel, 2021). On the other hand, the lack of much-needed "knowledge workers", which Drucker describes as "those who work with their minds, ... are ever-changing, dynamic and autonomous, ... and possess convergent and divergent thinking..." (Drucker, 1959, according to Eyl, 2015) is more and more evident.

In order to successfully beat the competition in a sort of war for acquiring the best on the labor market, but also to strengthen internal human resources capacities, successful organizations increasingly practice employer branding in their communication, as a concept that prioritizes the importance of human capital in creating organizational value.

2. Employer branding: definition and strategic role

Most of the literature in the field of branding is devoted to the topics of branding countries, cities, organizations, products, services, while only a few papers deal with employer branding (Aldousari et al., 2017), a concept for which the interest of the scientific and professional public has been actualized by the recognition of the importance of human potential by employers and when they, intellectual assets, have

become a factor that affects organizational success to a greater extent than material resources (Lukić, Brkljač & Perčić, 2019: 83).

Although product, service and companies branding have similarities with employer branding, Kymäläluoma (2017) states that there are two main differences: (1) employer branding focuses solely on characterizing the company's identity as an employer, (2) unlike product and service or corporate branding that focus mainly on external audiences, employer branding is focused to both internal and external audiences (Kymäläluoma, 2017: 13).

The term employer branding was first introduced and defined in the business world by business consultant Simon Barrow in 1990. One of the first definitions of this concept was determined by Ambler and Barrow in 1996 in the "Journal of Brand Management", defining it as "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and defined by the organization" (according to Srednoselec, 2019: 15).

According to Martin, Gollan and Grigg (2011), employer branding is the practice of joining concepts of branding, marketing as well as human resources (HR) techniques and communication (Tryfonos, 2015: 11). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) define it as a three-step process that includes developing the value proposition, external branding and internal branding of the employer brand. The employer brand is continuously built through corporate culture (value systems, rules, norms, beliefs), management and leadership style, policies, procedures, business methods, communication and functioning systems (Minchington & Thorne, 2007).

Employer branding is a targeted, long-term strategy for managing the awareness and perception of employees, potential employees and related stakeholders in relation to a particular company. The strategy can be adapted to encourage and improve efforts to recruit, retain and manage worker productivity (Brcković, 2021: 13).

Van Hoyer (2008, according to Tanwar & Prasad, 2016) emphasizes that the employer branding strategy has two communication processes: external and internal. Although external enables the organization to attract talented workforce, internal helps in motivating and retaining employees who further act as brand promoters of their organizations (Pejković, 2020: 17-18).

Bakanauskiene et al. (2011) believe that for the employer branding to be successful, it needs to include eight important elements, namely: (1) a culture of sharing and continuous improvement, (2) balancing good management as well as elevated productivity, (3) gaining public recognition, (4) current employees giving positive feedback about the organization, (5) having more people talk about the organization, (6) becoming a leading (benchmark) firm, (7) increasing potential talent consciousness and (8) branding assessment metrics (Tryfonos, 2015: 15-16).

HR experts also suggest five steps for strong employer branding: (1) understand your own organization, (2) create a 'compelling brand promise' for employees that mirrors the brand promise for consumers, (3) develop standards to measure the fulfillment of brand promise, (4) ruthlessly align all people practices to support and reinforce brand promise, and (5) execute the measure (Sokro, 2012: 165).

Most of the authors believe that in the process of branding, the best strategic approach is to form an internal team (despite the fact that there are specialized agencies for providing this type of service), which will consist of employees from the communications, human resources, marketing, and sales sectors, as well as leaders,

managers, at all levels of the organizational structure. This is how all the positive effects of teamwork are realized: more knowledge, more perspectives of observation, more ideas, the possibility of exchanging experiences, synergistic effects, better decisions and faster reaction to changes in the environment (Lazarević & Lukić, 2018). Drury (2016) points out that all of them with joint efforts choose the set of elements that present the organization as a great place to work. Eger et al. (2019) consider that an organization benefits from building employer branding only when current employees see it as a great place to work in (Domšić, 2021: 4-7).

3. Goals and scope of employer branding

Employer branding is used as a new technique of attracting new, talented and qualified employees, while ensuring the loyalty of current ones. Thus, it is not only a strategy for recruiting employees, but also a strategy for ensuring a reliable and attractive corporate reputation and brand (Nappa 2013). Berthon et al. (2005) believe that today's companies invest a generous amount of resources and efforts to achieve the status of "best employer" due to the increased competition to recruit and select new talented workers while competing for new customers and a larger market share (Hadi & Ahmed, 2018: 1).

Armstrong (2006) states that the goal of employer branding is to become an employer of the first choice, the place where people want to work, and the factors that contribute to this are multiple: providing job security; increasing the possibility of future employment due to the organization's positive reputation as one that hires and develops quality workers and provides many learning opportunities; employment conditions that enable work/life balance; reward system that recognizes and values employee contributions; competitive salary and benefits; interesting and challenging tasks that offer opportunities for learning and career growth and development (Sokro, 2012). These factors are considered the employer value proposition and serve to attract and retain employees. That is why, according to Backhaus and Tikko (2004), the central activity of employer branding is often the presentation of Employee Value Proposition (EVP) that is provided to employees, a unique employment experience (Večerin, 2021: 2-3).

Chhabra and Mishra (2008) point out that employer branding is the process of creating corporate identity, image and reputation, a long-term strategy that establishes a recognizable corporate identity of a desirable employer. Employer branding includes the development of an organizational culture that, in addition to specific attitudes and values, involves supporting people to accept and share goals related to achieving success, greater satisfaction and productivity. Such organizations easily attract talents and have no problems with retaining them (Jakovljević et al., 2012).

Pološki Vokić and Mostarac (2019) point out that the key advantages achieved by building a strong employer branding are the following:

- increase in the quantity and quality of applications per published job advertisement,
- lower attraction costs,
- reduced employee turnover,
- retention of knowledge in the organization,
- positive attitudes of employees (such as greater job satisfaction, employee engagement at work, organizational citizenship behavior and employee attachment),

- better alignment of employees with the organizational culture, lower overall rewards compared to organizations with a weaker employer branding (Domšić, 2021: 18).

Many authors state that for successful employer branding it is important to take into account the needs of different generations. Lukić, Brkljač and Perčić (2019) in research dedicated to millennials state that attracting this generation to the organization is the first step that implies recognizable and strong employer branding, but keeping them in the company implies whole series of other activities. The process of employer branding implies taking into account the needs of different generations. The generation that is increasingly occupying important positions in the economy and in society in general - the millennial generation, also known by the names: Y generation, "me" generation, digital, net, e-generation, has specific preferences, demands and wishes when it comes to choosing an employer (Brkljač et al., 2018). In order for the organization to keep them, it is necessary first of all to select those to keep, and then: (1) reduce the level of monotony of the tasks and increase the dynamism of the work; (2) introduce millennials to training programs through various sectors in the company; (3) highlight the significance and importance of individual differences; (4) encourage the culture that embraces new ideas and innovation (Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009).

4. Attractiveness dimensions as a measure of employer branding strength

Berthon, Ewing and Hah (2005) define "employer attractiveness" as the envisioned benefits that an employee sees in working for a specific company. Observed from the point of view of potential employees, attractiveness represents the perception of the company as a desirable entity with which a certain relationship should be initiated (Reis & Braga, 2016). Building employer attractiveness is based on the perception of the current employees and potential employees, which is what differs it from the employer branding. In this sense, Bakanauskiene, Bendaravičienė and Barkauskė (2017) believe that the application of the employer branding strategy affects the strengthening of the employer attractiveness (Ognjanović, 2019: 54-55).

Berthon et al. (2005) defined the dimensions of employer attractiveness and classified them into five key elements that form the employer branding:

- Interest value: the extent to which the organization is attractive to the individual in terms of work environment, methods and work practices, unique and innovative culture.
- Social value: the extent to which an employee is willing to stay in the company because of the work atmosphere, exciting and pleasant work environment, good relationship with the colleagues and superiors.
- Economic value: the extent to which the employee is satisfied with the earnings, intangible types of rewards and promotional opportunities.
- Development value: the extent to which the employee is satisfied with the career advancement and opportunities for a springboard to future employment.
- Application value: the extent to which the employees are satisfied with the possibilities to practically apply what they have learned at work through their experience, training and development (Lukić, Brkljač & Perčić, 2019: 88). Dabirian et al. added two more dimensions in 2017:

- Management value: states that the good or bad influence of supervisors at work determines employee retention and social relationships.
- Work/life balance: an attribute determining that a proper balance among the employees' work and life allows them to work in harmony with all their identities. (Hadi & Ahmed, 2018: 4).

In their work, Tuzuner and Yuksel (2009) recognized two dimensions of attractiveness: integrated brand building (includes promotion opportunities, challenging tasks, good references, innovative solutions, strong culture, ethics, good leadership, market success, internal education, inspiring colleagues, dynamic organization, work/life balance, the environment friendly company, international career opportunities, good reputation, secure job, work on projects, further monitoring of work, a variety of work, good location of the employer, employees from various fields, hiring only the best, less overtime, exciting products or services, flexible working hours) and competitiveness (includes stimulating work environment, stimulating wages, possibility to work from home). Srivastava and Bhatnagar (2010) indicated eight dimensions: consideration, stimulating environment, career development, reliable and fair, flexible and ethical, positive employer image, global action (Srednoselec, Ružić, Benazić, 2021: 146-147).

For the purpose of grouping different dimensions of employer attractiveness, Drury (2016) lists two basic groups of benefits that arise for employees from employment, on the basis of which the employer's total value proposition is divided into two equally important groups:

- functional attributes (such as salary, benefits, health insurance and paid annual leave),
- symbolic attributes (such as organizational culture, opportunity for career advancement and the prestige of working for a well-known organization).

Functional attributes are predominantly material and tangible, and symbolic attributes refer to intangible values and they are intangible, and by combining them, employers can develop a unique value proposition for their employees that sets them apart from competitors with whom they are fighting for the same job candidate profile. Additionally, with increase in the work experience of employees, symbolic attributes become more important predictors of the attention of individuals in the search for a job (Domšić, 2021: 10-11).

The employer branding strategy contributes to the growth of the employer attractiveness and the improvement of the corporate reputation (Bakanauskiene et al., 2017).

Digital transformation has become a key concern for many companies (Chaniias, Myers & Hessa, 2019). Therefore, many studies have shown that the use of social networks in employer branding increases the organizational attractiveness of the company and encourages job seekers' intention to apply for a job (Carpentier et al., 2017; Ha & Luan, 2018; Kissel & Büttgen, 2015; Sivertzen et al., 2013). Social networks allow an organization to build a positive employer branding and good organizational attractiveness when sharing accurate and complete information with job candidates about its culture and work environment, career advancement, business ethics, and growth prospects (El Zoghbi & Aoun, 2016; Turban & Cable, 2003). In addition to potential employees, the use of social networks in employer branding is also useful for the empowerment and loyalty of current and new company employees (Lissaneddine, El Manzani & El Idrissi, 2021: 265).

5. Overview of relevant studies on employer branding

Some studies on employer branding confirm that organizations that have clearly defined employer branding strategies have higher productivity compared to organizations that do not use them (Aldousari et al., 2017). Study by Collins and Stevens (2002) shows that organizations that have developed employer branding more easily implement the recruitment process, attract and retain more qualified candidates, and achieve numerous other benefits. According to Tanwar and Prasad (2016), an organization will be an attractive, desirable place to work if it offers a good work/life balance, quality products and services, stimulating compensation, the possibility of advancement, a challenging task, carries out socially responsible activities, enables the upgrading of knowledge and if it maintains a working environment with good interpersonal relationships. Chhabra and Sharma (2014) found out in their study that internal branding practices increase loyalty to the employer while simultaneously increasing the employer attractiveness to potential employees.

Lenaghan and Eisner (2005) and Minchington and Thorne (2007) consider the creation and maintenance of a favorable customer image with reduced employee turnover as a benefit that employer branding brings to the organization, while for Luthans and Peterson (2002) the benefit is the creation of a positive identity and a positive reputation, the brand. Love et al. (2011) believe that employer branding brings a competitive advantage to the organization and the assimilation of organizational values. Lievens et al. (2007) state that employer branding leads to increase in quantity and quality of job candidates, while Backhaus et al. believe that employer branding influences an improved supportive organizational culture (Aboul Ela, 2016: 155-157).

6. Closing remarks

The information revolution has implied numerous changes in business, which, among other things, relate to the ways of communication of business entities, as well as to the channels and techniques they use to deliver their messages to those they are intended for. In doing so, they encounter numerous challenges and the biggest one is how to win the "war for talent". It is increasingly difficult for organizations to attract qualified, "digitally literate", potential employees, as well as to improve knowledge and skills of current employees and to retain them. It is becoming more and more important to employees what the organization is offering them, beside dynamic job, and they are especially interested in the work/life balance. Organizations are facing workforce that, thanks to the digital transformation of society, know exactly what they want from employers. Employer branding as a concept that contains various constructs is a perfect tool for differentiating organizations from the competition, attracting talent, but also retaining current workforce. With appropriate internal and external communication activities, adapting the organization business model to current market needs is possible, the same as developing the desired organizational identity, culture and brand and positioning it as desirable for work. Only the organizations accepting changes imposed by liberalization and development of information and communication technologies and those that place employees as their most important potential can achieve a competitive advantage. Since the application of employer branding in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also more widely, is still emerging, the recommendations are to conduct research that

would indicate the prevention of potential talent crises, research on the dimensions of employer attractiveness and their impact on potential and current employees, but also research on the perception of employer branding, both internally and externally.

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Rezime: Promene izazvane liberalizacijom tržišta poštanskih logističkih usluga, kao i razvojem informaciono-komunikacionih tehnologija, nameću brojne izazove privrednim subjektima koji se takmiče na tržištu u cilju postizanja zadovoljstva svojih korisnika i sticanja njihove lojalnosti. Aktivnosti poslovne transformacije kreirane kao odgovor na tržišnu realnost često su prvenstveno usmerene na strukturalna i procesna poboljšanja, a zanemaruju najvažniji aspekt poslovanja orijentisanog na klijenta: sadašnje i potencijalne zaposlene. Koncept koji se javlja kao način na koji poboljšavaju postojeću komunikaciju prema ovom vitalnom stejkholderu naziva se brendiranje poslodavca. U radu se objašnjava tržišni kontekst koji je doveo do razvoja ovog koncepta, njegova definicija i uloga, ciljevi i obim, dimenzije privlačnosti i pregled relevantnih dostupnih studija.

Ključne reči: brendiranje poslodavca, transformacija, komunikacija, dimenzije atraktivnosti

BRENDIRANJE POSLODAVCA KAO INOVATIVI ELEMENT ORGANIZACIONE KOMUNIKACIJE

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