

Article

Strategy for Staffing: Employer Branding & Person Organization Fit

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For an effective talent management strategy there is the need to build an employer branding intervention. The current study examines research literature on employer branding and person–organization fit. The study investigates the process of developing effective employer brand intervention through a case study. The qualitative study found the need for a strong HR and communication strategy for effective employer branding intervention. For the construct of person organization fit, there was little data found in the case study. The paper contributes to the sparse literature in India on employer branding interventions and HR plus a communication strategy to build employer branding within an organization. Theoretical and practical implications are presented in the study.

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Introduction

Globalization, pressure for speed and innovation, and growing competition for talented workers have given organizations added incentives to review their employee relations strategies in order to attract, motivate, and retain the workforce that will help them be successful (Zivnuska, Ketchen, & Snow 2001). Research literature (Clarke 2001, Axelrod et al, 2001, Corporate Leadership Council 2005 a, b) suggests a shortage of skills in the present decade. Jamrog and Stopper (2002) have referred about the present decade as the decade of the employees. Further Rynes and Cable (2003) in their account of recruiting for the twenty-first century note that serious job applicants are likely to demonstrate as much concern about choosing the most appropriate organization for them to work for as much as the most appropriate job for them to perform. Hence it is crucial for an organization to develop a sound human capital strategy to act as a key differentiator in its corporate success by ensuring continuous supply of the right talent. Conversely, a good workplace, according to Levering (1996), is believed

to produce higher quality products, support more innovation, have the ability to attract more talented people, and experience less resistance to change and lower turnover costs, all of which translate directly into a better bottom line. Organizational effectiveness depends on having the right people on the right bus (Collins 2001) to meet rapidly changing work environments (Bechet & Walker 1993).

From an organizational perspective, while conventional selection processes were centrally concerned with work oriented analyses and the determination of sets of knowledge, skills and abilities required for in-role behavior, more recent research has sought to look beyond the job to identify extra-role behavior. In this way, the priority is seen to have shifted from conventional models which are primarily based on “KSA’s” for “jobs” to hiring for organizational compatibility as manifest through a fit between an individual’s personality, beliefs and values and the organization’s espoused culture, norms and values.

Talent is scarce resulting in a tight labour market hence it has numerous choices especially in knowledge based and service driven organizations. Organizations are facing great competition in chasing the same skill set. According to a survey based on 33,000 employers from 23 countries, 40% of them had difficulty in finding and hiring the desired talent (Manpower Inc. 2006) and approximately 90% of nearly 7,000 managers indicated talent acquisition

and retention were becoming more difficult (Axelrod, Handsfield-Jones & Welsh, 2001). Therefore organizations are putting all their strength towards finding the right talent with specific skill set, hiring it at any cost and retaining only those whom they want.

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It is crucial for organizations to develop rigorous, well thought out innovative recruitment practices as an HR strategy that is able to develop talent pools and supply the right talent to meet a changing business climate. A talent resourcing process, which is well-defined and well-executed from the start to the finish yields consistent, compliant results and is a competitive advantage in the war for talent (Ronn 2007). It is important to recognize that hiring is not simply a single decision made by the hiring manager but a system; one that comprises definite stages. Decisions are made at each stage, starting with the creation of the position requirements through the presentation of the final slate of candidates and the ultimate hire. Hiring, which includes selection and recruitment falls under the domain of the theory of staffing and related literature. In this study we visit the research literature on recruitment and under employer branding strategy and the

person organization fit model for theoretical underpinnings found in recruitment strategy. We also adopt an exploratory research design and investigate an organization that is facing the problem of talent attraction. The next section focuses on the emerging research literature on the subject.

Research Literature

The nature of work in the 21st century arising due to globalization, knowledge era, changing demographics etc., presents many challenges for staffing and creating growing global shortfalls of qualified and competent applicants (Ployhart 2006, 868). Moreover, Kwak (2001) suggests a Stanford University research project (SPEC, Barron & Hannon 2001) which is looking at the employment models based on knowledge workers in the silicon valley. They suggest the *Engineering model* which describes organizations that attract employees by providing challenging work, hire for specific skills, and provided peer group control. *Star model* on the other hand requires employees to internalize professional commitment to excellence and requires little control. Employees are selected for their long term potential; the third kind is the *Commitment model*, which reflects organizations in which strong bonds are the basis of employee attraction. Commitment based organizations believe in informal peer group control and emphasize on cultural fit in hiring. *The Bureaucracy model* covers organizations with formal control

procedures that attract staff with challenging work and focus on specific skills in selecting employees. *The Autocracy model* on the other hand motivated employees through financial rewards where hiring decisions were made on specific skills, and control and command mode was present with close personal oversight. These were looking at academic findings which looked at organizations. Yet surprisingly, a study by Rynes, Brown, and Colbert (2002) found that the staffing domain demonstrated the largest differences between academic findings and the beliefs of managers. This means that, although staffing should be one of the most important strategic mechanisms for achieving competitive advantage, organizational decision makers do not understand staffing or use it optimally (Ployhart 2006, 869).

By reflecting recruitment and culture need fit in the staffing strategy, an environment is created at the workplace where employees feel more passionate about their work and exhibit the behaviours that organizations need to drive better results. It gives them a continuous work experience that is difficult for competitors to replicate (Bhatnagar 2007, 2008). Recent literature has termed this work experience in ‘*employer of choice*’, found in many surveys carried out recently. These are as reported by Joo and McLean (2006, 229) *Fortune* magazine’s annual list of “100 Best Companies to Work for in America,” *Working Mother* magazine’s “100 Best

Companies for Working Mothers,” and *Computerworld*’s “100 Best Places for IT Professionals to Work” (Ballou, Godwin & Shortridge 2003). Hewitt Associates, a global HR consulting and outsourcing firm, has conducted similar studies in Australia/New Zealand, Canada, Europe, India, and Latin America. Recently, Hewitt conducted three pan-Asia studies, *Best Employers in Asia*, in 2001, 2003, (Bennet & Bell 2004) and 2005. In this study we focus on employer branding.

Employer Branding

Recently employer branding has received a lot of attention for managing corporate identities (Lievens, Hoyer & Anseel 2007). Researchers (Ambler & Barrow 1996) found that HR is too important a function to be left to the responsibility of HR managers and thus emerged the concept of employer branding from applying marketing principles to the field of personnel recruitment (Cable & Turban 2001, Maurer, Howe & Lee 1992). While exploring the potential for branding as a new performance discourse for HR, Martin, Beaumont, Doig & Pate (2005) stressed that employer branding is more than just a passing phase. In fact now, it has become a key strategy (Brewster, Sparrow & Harris 2005) to attract and retain the right kind of talent as people want to work for great brands. Ambler and Barrow (1996, 186) defined “Employer Brand” as “the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company”.

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Employer Branding is a concept derived in HR from Marketing. It defines the personality of a company as a preferred employer so that a person joins it instead of its competitors. An employer brand helps differentiate organizations from their competitors by creating a distinct image of the total employment relationship and clearly conveying the Employment Value Proposition the organization offers to its prospective and current employees (Heger 2007). It avoids mismatches between employer and employees that lead to job changes. Creating a positive employer image radiates to the community at large and attracts potential job applicants. Improving the external and internal communication, signals to the potential talent about the total employee experience there. The word of mouth publicity is the most effective way of recruiting (Hoyer & Lievens 2007) by influencing employer brand image which in turn impacts applicants’ decision (Collin & Stevens 2002). Fortune’s “Best Companies to Work For” survey suggests that developmentally oriented organizations are more likely to be seen as attractive employers (Fortune 2005).

Providing the employees with the knowledge and skills to do their job and further recognizing and rewarding the knowledge and hard work of the

employees, providing a safe and stable work environment, giving them opportunity to be creative and entrepreneurial are important tasks done by a company to retain employees. By giving them an environment where they do not have to worry about job security, they get more time and energy to concentrate on the important aspect of the organization. An employer brand creation may or may not lead to employee of choice, on which literature is sparse. Further to this trend, Ployhart (2006, 870) suggests that the staffing strategy of recruitment in strategic HRM literature has found recruitment critical for not only competitive advantage but for organizational survival (Taylor & Collins 2000). In consonance with this trend there have been several literature reviews on recruitment (Breugh & Starke 2000, Taylor & Collins 2000, Highhouse & Hoffman 2001, Rynes & Cable 2003, Saks 2005). Ployhart (2006) further reports the meta-analysis on recruitment strategy conducted by Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin & Jones (2005). According to him (Ployhart 2006, 870), they summarized 71 studies to estimate the effect sizes and path relationships between recruiting predictors (job/organizational attributes, recruiter characteristics, perceptions of recruitment process, perceived fit, perceived alternatives, hiring expectancies) and applicant attraction outcomes (job pursuit intentions, job/organization attraction, acceptance intentions, job choice).

Prospective employees prefer organizations where their personalities are aligned to that of the organizational attributes.

Innovative Recruitment Strategy: P-O Fit

The literature pertaining to P-O fit indicates that higher levels of fit result in higher levels of attraction to an organization (Dineen, Ash & Noe, 2002). Prospective employees prefer organizations where their personalities are aligned to that of the organizational attributes (Bretz, Ash & Dreher 1989, Burke & Deszca 1982). Yet many HR professionals find this difficult. Rynes, Brown & Colbert (2002) reported that some of the most common misperceptions of HR practitioners were in the area of selection. There are several reasons for these gaps. First, research is not well disseminated and remains buried in jargon laden pages of academic journals (Rynes, Colbert, & Brown 2002), rather than translated into “something useful” (Ryan & Tipnis 2004, 306). Many USA based HR professionals in staffing functions and particularly those in tight labor markets face constant pressure to deliver qualified candidates quickly and lack the time to create new recruiting and selection programs that take into account current research findings (Ryan & Tipnis 2004, 306).

Schneider (2001) advances an attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) model suggesting that work values are a

core means by which individuals judge their P-O fit and individuals are attracted to and seek employment with organizations that exhibit characteristics similar to their own and organizations in turn tend to select individuals who are most similar to the organization. Despite significant advances in what has been characterized as a “robust” stream of literature (Pappas & Flaherty 2006), P-O fit as a concept remains somewhat problematic and as Kristof-Brown et al. (2005 : 282) note there are a number of challenges to this kind of analysis, most especially “the proliferation of conceptualizations, measures and analytic approaches” (Morley 2007).

According to McCulloch and Turban (2007), organizations could use P-O fit to both improve recruiting by identifying (and communicating to) those individuals who will be attracted to the firm and improve hiring by selecting those individuals who are likely to stay longer with the firm (i.e., those with higher fit). Looking at the above need in the literature the current study is designed to investigate these issues in a real life case study.

Research Question & Research Design

The research question of this study is to find out the lacunae in the employer branding strategy at Organization B which fails to attract talent despite having a well known brand outside India. It also entails the suggestions made to the organization as

a part of the study that would help it to gain visibility and a distinct identity before its prospective employees. The research design adopted was Yin’s (1994) holistic case study design for data collection and analysis to explore a live issue in a pharmaceutical organization in the National Capital Region of India. The identification of the organization is camouflaged on the request of the participants of focused group interviews and personal interviews. The researchers adopted multiple strategies of data collection, and tried to establish chain of evidence among the various interviews and present it in the form of a problem based case. A survey was conducted on the employees whose stay at Organization B had not exceeded 8 months. These employees belonged to four different zones of India- North, East, West and South. The target sample consisted of five people from each zone across India, thus, a total of twenty employees were interviewed and their reactions were recorded and transcribed later. The focus of the interview was on understanding the sources that made them aware of Organization B as a prospective employer, what was the brand message conveyed to them through various sources of information, their experience of the Training and Induction program at Organization B, one thing they really like about Organization B and one thing that they would like to change about it. They were also asked about their views on the HR department. Later a focussed group interview was also conducted

between the various employees on the above issues. These were content analysed and reported as various themes.

Case Study

Organization B India, a therapy focused integrated healthcare provider is a subsidiary of Organization B International Inc. It started its operations in India in 1997 to provide critical therapies for people with life threatening conditions. The company is headquartered in Gurgaon and has offices across the country. Organization B Healthcare, the Global company, is fully committed to research and development and continually pursues breakthrough technologies at their research facilities in many parts of the world. Its corporate brand demands a lot of respect but it has still not been able to establish its brand as a desirable employer. As it comes in contact with mostly doctors and hospitals and not the direct consumers, it has not been able to create an image in the market due to which it is facing a lot of problems like attracting and recruiting new employees and building relations with recruitment agencies.

The content analysis of the personal interviews (n=20) and focus group interviews (n=12) revealed the following themes:

Majority of the people have very little or no information about the company they were applying for.

I. Lack of Communication Strategy for Signalling the Employer Brand Message

It was found that only a few employees were shown a presentation by the consultants about Organization B. This led majority of the people having very little or no information about the company they were applying for. The only source of information these people have was the official website of the organization. It also had very little information about the company as an organization and as an employer. Thus, as prospective employees they did check the website but could not garner much information about the products. It was also realized that Organization B India did not have any link on the global site so this made half of the people just go through Organization B.com only and leaving them blank about Organization B India.

According to some employees, Organization B did not have a good reputation in the market. It was considered to be unstable with a high turnover. The public perception was that the work that they were expected to carry out was stressful.

II. Run of the Mill Induction & Training Programmes

The interviews revealed that the induction and training programme was good but should be made more interactive, creative and innovative. The employees reflected a preference towards a longer period of training, with

more specific inputs and a few practice sessions with the specific profile. Essentially they were looking for on-the-job training session in the induction.

The training periods were at fixed intervals in time. This meant that some employees who were more than a few months old in the organization had still not received their formal training and were assigned to their jobs. This left many of the employees confused.

III. 'Feel Good' Factor at Organization B

The internal assessment of the organization by its current employees revealed different aspects of Organization B as an employer that were appreciated by them. The current employees liked its friendly work culture, flexibility to define their own career path, helpful superiors, employee friendly policies, transparency, challenging goals, comfortable work place. Despite these positive aspects of employment experience at Organization B, this was not communicated to its prospective employees and hence could not attract them.

IV. Perception about the HR Department

The new employees were quite satisfied with the HR department of the company. Most of them had good things to say for them. Communication strategy of town hall meetings and video conferencing emerged as a strong

strategy among the new employees and helped in the socialization process within the organization.

As an outcome of the study some recommendations were made to Organization B that would help it in improving its Employer Brand Image. The recommendations made were three fold in nature. First, to improve the communication strategy across the three main stakeholders in focus, namely the recruitment agencies/ staffing partners, prospective employees and employee referrals. This would help to increase the visibility of the brand across all these parties in an effort to making it an '*employer of choice*' for its prospective employees and lastly, to inform them about its businesses and hold in the market.

The vendor must be well aware about the business that it is recruiting for, so that this can be explained to the potential employees and also help in matching profiles.

Recommended Stakeholder Communication Strategy

Since a lot of the recruitment is taking place through recruitment agencies (most of the laterals), relationship between these vendors and the organization should be maintained. The vendor must be well aware of the business that it is recruiting for, so that this can be explained to the potential employees and also help in matching

profiles. It is necessary for the organization to have strong relations with the vendor so as to make themselves a preferred customer for the agency.

As a part of the study, in order to create awareness about the organization, it was decided to design a document kit that would contain all details about Organization B that the vendor should be aware of. It was accompanied by a cover letter seeking a long term relationship with the vendor (just a feel good mail welcoming them into the relationship), a recently launched newsletter 'WE!', a CD of the corporate presentation about the basic details of the company, videos on life at Organization B and a newly designed brochure. This was aimed to give the vendor an idea of the basic details of the business, current happenings at Organization B and the life of employees there. This was to emphasize on the fact that it also focuses on its people and reflect on its work-culture, which he could also share with the employees he refers. Suggestions were made for the common vendor meet to be organized once in every 4 months and the best performing vendor should be recognized before the other vendors and rewarded with a bonus prize money.

Web-Based Advertising Strategy

Organization B should start advertising in job portals like naukri.com and monster.com to get a diverse pool of talent to choose from. Normally the first source of information for a prospective employee about an

organization is through its website. It was found that the official website of Organization B was not very attractive and also did not highlight the success stories of the organization to grab immediate attention. Suggestions were made to make the website more eye-catching and user friendly by displaying its strengths and achievements.

In order to make it more appealing for its Indian applicants, the website should also provide some more details on India centric figures and information. A map showing the plants and offices of Organization B should also be included. The website does not contain any link related to careers at Organization B which is a prerequisite to solve the queries of the prospective employees as well as to kindle their interest in the organization. A link for the careers option should be present on the home page which would also have options for submitting online applications. This suggestion has already been incorporated by the organization and a website devoted entirely to its Indian operations is coming up soon.

HR & Communication Strategy for Campus Recruitment

In order to become an employer of choice, Organization B needs to increase its visibility among the business schools so that it is able to attract fresh talent. This could be done by organizing guest lectures, case study competitions and sponsored fests in different B-Schools and pharmaceutical colleges.

HR Strategy for Employee Referral Program

Presently, there are only 10-15% of employees in Organization B who have come through the employee referral scheme. The HR department in Organization B is planning to increase this number. This requires making the internal customers aware of the employee referral scheme. The HR department was recommended the following strategy by the researchers:

- The employees should be informed about the referral scheme during induction
- Send the employee referral scheme to the employees through mail/e-mail regularly
- Construct a hall of fame wall in the office
- Each employee who refers an employee who is selected gets a star.
- The star obtained by the employee would be put up on the wall (hall of fame) with his /her name on it.
- The employee with the maximum number of stars would get some incentives at the end of the 3 months.

Newsletter Recommendations

A newsletter 'WE!' has been started by Organization B. A few articles related to breakthroughs in the medical field or about Organization B should be included in this. In order to highlight the work culture and the lighter side of work at

Organization B, there could be news and pictures on personal achievements, various celebrations, informal get-togethers, company outings etc. This would reflect work-life balance initiatives at Organization B. The newsletter should also have a section called the referral star where the person with maximum referrals is shown with his picture and the others names are mentioned.

Conclusion

The Indian operations of Organization B are still at an evolving stage despite being in India for a very long duration. Its HR systems and processes are not as well established as those of Organization B international. It needs to build its brand and create awareness of its existence in the market. Suggestions have been given as part of the study, to help make the company an employer of choice in the long run.

Employer branding is about understanding what the company has to offer and then conveying it to its target applicants in such a way that it looks appealing and differentiating from its competitors.

Employer branding is about understanding what the company has to offer and then conveying it to its target applicants in such a way that it looks appealing and differentiating from its competitors. In order to build an

employer brand, Organization B India should develop a clear, consistent and honest “value proposition” based on research for their existing and prospective staff (Bennett & Bell 2005, Heger 2007). It is not just important to be a good employer. It is equally important to be perceived as a good employer by the prospective employees. Therefore, it should use its value proposition to attract the prospective employees. The brand message should be clear and consistent for the employer brand to be stronger.

The value proposition would convey the message about the kind of workplace the organization is, its culture and the total employment experience. This would help the prospective employees to assess their person-organization fit and they would join the organization only if they find their values and preferences match with the organization. This would not only increase employee engagement but also help reduce the turnover of disillusioned employees.

It is not just important to be a good employer. It is equally important to be perceived as a good employer by the prospective employees.

Though the internal employee seems relatively happy with the company, they have to be motivated to portray the same to the world. Employees are an important resource for company brand success (de Chernatony 1999). Internal

communication is one thing which needs to be increased. HR has to sell itself to the internal customers. Employees should be updated about the changes happening at Organization B i.e. internal customers should be getting regular updates about the company policies and future plans.

During talent acquisition the personal goals and values of the applicant should match that of the organization to make a better culture-fit.

Implications

We suggest that the organizations should make efforts to build effective, practical and holistic talent strategies that are not only able to attract talent but also address employee engagement and the retention of key skills thus boosting the productivity and business performance. Resourcing the best candidates from a bigger talent pool rather than the available applicants would result in a more efficient talent acquisition. Organizations should not ignore that during talent acquisition the personal goals and values of the applicant should match that of the organization to make a better culture-fit. Thus, it becomes imperative to build a strong employer brand that not only gives a distinct identity to the organization as a desirable employer (Ambler & Barrow 1996) but also differentiates it from its competitors (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004). Since not

much research has been conducted in this area, it has scope for further probing. This would help in anchoring the employees to the organization and reduce attrition. Organizations should also live up to the expectations of their employers as promised in their Employment Value Propositions in order to keep their employees engaged. The importance of studying person-organization fit in the context of employer branding is another area of future research.

The organizations should follow the contingency approach as given in the SHRM literature in designing their human capital practices wherein it provides a unified context within which organizations operate, and at the same time, allows for differences at the national and/or organizational level, due to cultural and institutional factors like ownership structures, labour markets, the role of state and trade unions (Brewster 1999).

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