

Employee Branding: An Innovative Way to Transform Employees into Brand Ambassadors

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Abstract - Owing to the dynamic environment, among leading and competitive organizations, acquisition and retention of the best and qualified employees has become crucial for the survival of the organization and for gaining competitive advantage over other competitive organizations. Employee branding is actually an image that the company makes of itself in the minds of employees that it is the best place to get employed at. It ensures a sense of belongingness in the people and this makes the employees play an integral role in the achievement of success. One can also introduce employee branding as one of the core values of an organization to retain the talent workforce, since employees today are different and significant. It is evident from observations that human resources are the crown resource of the organization. Within a growingly saturated labor market employment and retention of premium human resources has become the core objective of businesses and employers (Collins 2001). This has started a talent acquisition war among organizations. It is very important that firms take steps to ensure talent acquisition and its retention to become competitive. Enterprises are focused on integrating the branding principles with the strategic human resource management strategies and practices.

Branding is a concept derived from marketing, and employee branding is defined as the process of applying branding principles to Strategic HRM, which is used to distinguish firms from competing firms by inviting, inspiring and engaging both potential, as well as existing employees (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). Employee branding is focused on a firm's individuality and uniqueness. A number of studies have concluded organization as a brand only relates to organizational characteristics that may include quality and innovativeness, etc. based on organizational values, culture, programs, and most importantly, its people. In current times, employee branding is being used as a new tactic to attract new, talented and qualified employees along with ensuring the loyalty of the existing ones. So, it is not only an employee seeking strategy, but also a

strategy to ensure a trustworthy and appealing reputation of the organization (Nappa 2013).

Owing to a "War for Talent" every organization is struggling for the best employee status. Thus, attracting, recruiting and retaining talented human capital is the primary focus of every organization.

Index Terms - Brand ambassadors, Employee Branding, Employee strategies and practices.

1. EMPLOYEE BRANDING: INTRODUCTION

An organization with excellent employee branding not only turns your employees into brand ambassadors but also helpful in retaining the talent within the organization. Employee branding stems down to the attraction of right talent for an organization. On the top of that, productivity, brand loyalty, motivation and reputation also increase. Irrespective of how advanced an organization is, the backbone of an organization is their employees. We can say that Employee branding is a process where the principles of marketing are applied to the HR activities in relation to current and potential employees.

According to D.K. Srivastava, Vice President, HCL, "An unsatisfied customer tells ten people about his experience while an unsatisfied employee tells a hundred."

Employee branding is actually an image that the company makes of itself in the minds of employees that it is the best place to get employed at. It ensures a sense of belongingness in the people and this makes the employees play an integral role in the achievement of success. One can also introduce employee branding as one of the core values of an organization to retain the talent workforce, since employees today are different and significant. They have excellent opportunities in hand and as soon as they feel dissatisfied with the current job, they switch over to

the next. Hence, it is the responsibility of the employer to retain their best employees through elegant retention strategies and if they do not retain them, then they would be left with no good employees. Employee branding projects are becoming increasingly important business tool to help companies stay ahead of other competitors. For this reason HR heads are increasing the number of specialist support managers leading employer brand projects within their departments. It must be remembered that employee branding is actually the image of an organization for the people working in the organization. It is this reputation that the companies make of themselves inside their premises that are also carried outside to the passive candidates, the customers, the clients and also the others who are affected by the proceedings of the company. Hence, it is very clear that within the company, employee branding is done to attract the employees, and also for their subsequent retention in times to come so as to improve the company's image of employee branding.

The management of every country has to understand a very simple fact that it can't lay a narrow focus on the employee branding. If this is done, it would only be a departmental project and would not have been entitled to be a part of the overall business strategy of the company. One must keep another fact clear that if employee branding is only considered to be a part of the recruitment process and then given the back seat, there will be too many cases of absenteeism resulting in subsequent resignations at frequent intervals.

Employee branding is a specific kind of identity regulation by an organization, through which employees are directed to develop self-images and work orientations that are deemed congruent with managerially defined objectives. It is the process by which employees internalize the desired brand image and are motivated to project that image to the guests.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF EMPLOYEE BRANDING

Employee Branding is a persona & an image of the organization as a company brand for being a great place to work, learn and grow. It creates a sense of ownership and employees feel pleasure and contacts tell what it feels like to be the member of the firm. Employment branding utilizes all necessary tools of marketing, branding and marketing research to create a selling image of the organization hence applicants

aspire to buy in the contract with the organization (Sullivan, 1999) Attracts best pool of applicants for employment within the organization. Employee Branding is the half art and half science that involves attracting, engaging and retaining efforts aimed at enhancing overall company image. The public persona of the company, its culture, its management style, work practices and the growth opportunity is created. Employee Branding helps in alignment with corporate brand product, employment brand and continually review the external environment and ensures the maintenance of healthy employment brand. Employee branding is an indirect branding effect in which communication of the company employees serves to characterize their company's employee brand. Employee branding may be understood to include the process of promoting the image of an employer through his/her employee.

3. WAYS TO TURN EMPLOYEES INTO BRAND AMBASSADORS

Employee branding programs are intended to impress brand attributes onto the work behavior of employees, who are then expected to infuse brand attributes throughout their work. Employee Branding takes the organizational brand – the characteristics and attributes that the organization wants to project about itself—and impresses it upon the employees. The idea that branding should be used on an organization's employees is quite new.

There are many aspects which help to turn the employees into brand ambassadors. Employees are the real assets of an organization. An organization cannot survive without the human resource/manpower. Employee Branding is the mixer of many key ingredients which are interlinked to build employees as brand. Once employees understand the objectives of the organization and their vision, they will be in better positions to use their potential in the accomplishment of organizational goals. Some key components are discussed below:

3.1 Employee Retention:

Employee retention is the organizational goal of keeping talented employees and reducing turnover by fostering a positive work atmosphere to promote engagement, showing appreciation to employees, and providing competitive pay and benefits and healthy work-life balance.

In the words of Armstrong, “Employee retention is the ability of an organization to retain its best employees and hence maintain a lower turnover. An organization can achieve this by adopting various employee retention programs.” Employee Retention refers to the techniques employed by the management to help the employees stay with the organization for a longer period of time.

Employers are particularly interested in retaining employees during periods of low unemployment and heightened competition for talent. To retain employees, organization use human resource technology for recruiting, onboarding, engaging and recognizing workers and offer more work flexibility and modern benefits like physical and financial wellness programs. An organization cannot stop employees from leaving until it has a plan to make them stay. Employee retention involves five major things Environment, Growth, Compensation, Relationship and Support.

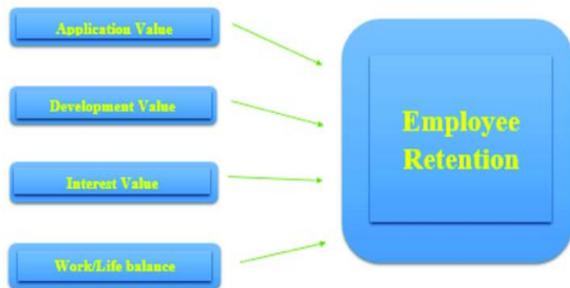


Figure 1: Dimensions of Employee Retention

Retention strategies:

- Empower the employees
- Hire the right person at the right place
- Compensation/pay
- Job security
- Foster respect in the work place
- Work life balance
- Encourage employee creativity

3.2 Improve Employee Engagement and Performance: Employee engagement is the extent to which employees feel passionate about their jobs, are committed to the organization, and put discretionary efforts in their work. Engagement also indicates the individual commitment’s to the company and their emotional connection to the people they work with. Employee Engagement is not similar to job

satisfaction. Employee engagement and job satisfaction are related to each other. Employee engagement includes work environment, culture and individual characteristics.



Figure 2 : Dimensions of Employee Engagement

These variables are prone to change over a period of time. To adapt the change, the organization should up to date and align with the changing scenario of employees. Moreover, expectations of employees have changed. Mobile professional careers are much more common than “job for lifers”. Retention of top talent is more difficult than before. A company that has an effective employee engagement strategy and a highly engaged workforce is more likely to retain top performers as well as attract new talent. Successful organizations are value-driven with employee-centric cultures.

Employee engagement refers to a situation where all the employees are engaged in their own work and take keen interest in the organization’s activities. As they say “an empty mind is a devil’s workshop”. In the same way, idle employees are the ones who loiter around and spread negativity all over the place. It’s not always about getting potential employees. A better employee branding means excellent working environment, career advancement, personal development.

Employees are more engaged when there is goal to achieve and purpose to inspire them. There are several ways to engage the employees, an organization should follow:

- Prioritize physical and mental health
- Recognize top performers and reward achievement
- Organize outdoor activities

- Foster innovation
- Offer professional development opportunities and carve out career paths
- Provide employees with flexibility

3.3 Miles and Mangolds Six Step Employee Branding Process:

The Employee Branding Process depicts that an organization tries to deliver its vision, mission and values to solidifying a clear and desired brand image in the minds of employees. An organization consistently tries to internalize desired brand image in

the minds of employees and projecting the same image in front of customers. There are several sources through which desired brand image convey to employees. An organization is continuously keeping eyes on employee’s mental health and their felicitation. The psychological contact is identified as a perceptual mechanism central to the employee branding process. The feedback loop allows to manage and monitor the consequences of the process and helps to identify the areas of improvement. A manger can improve and control the negative outcomes through feedback loop.

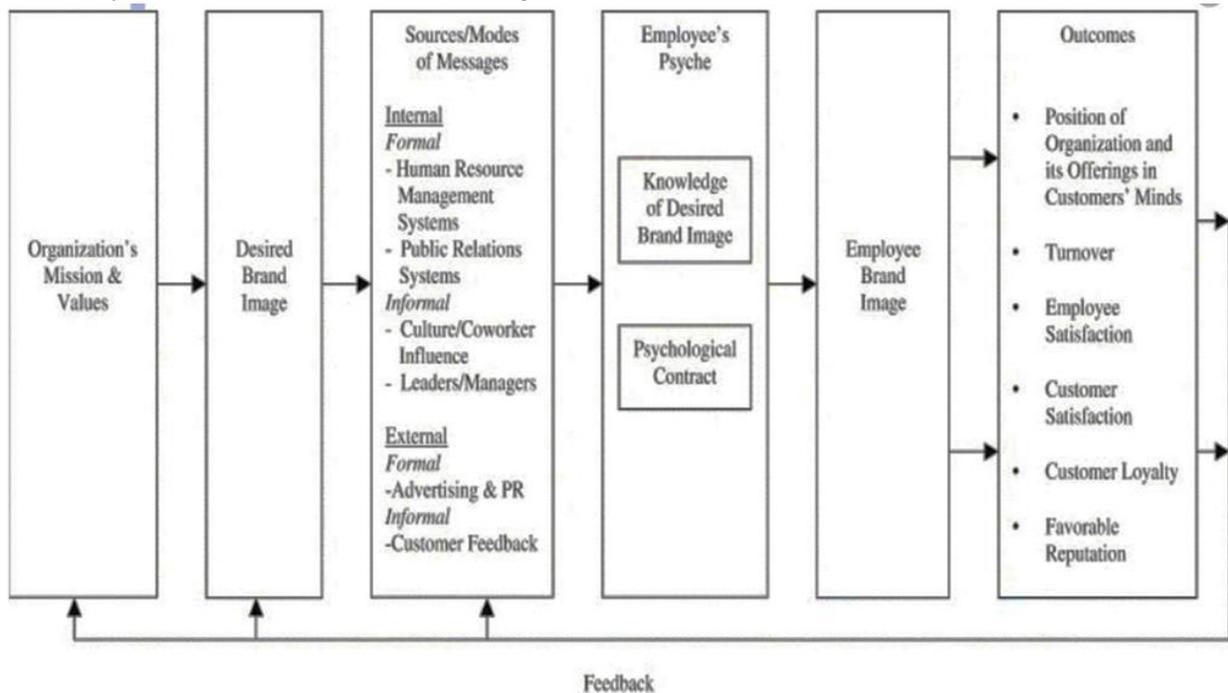


Figure 3: Miles and Mangolds Six Step Process

4. FRAMEWORK OF EMPLOYEE BRANDING

Thus employee branding is considered as the “new mantra to build brand loyalty”. “Employee branding is the image projected by employees through their behaviors, attitudes and actions. This image is impacted on by employee’s attitude and engagement towards the employer brand image promoted through the culture of the organization.” Employee branding can be achieved through recruiting selectively, communicating vision, and mission, values of the organization, effective training programmers, and work culture. Once employees understand brand and

objectives, they'll be in better positions to act as ambassadors for the brand.

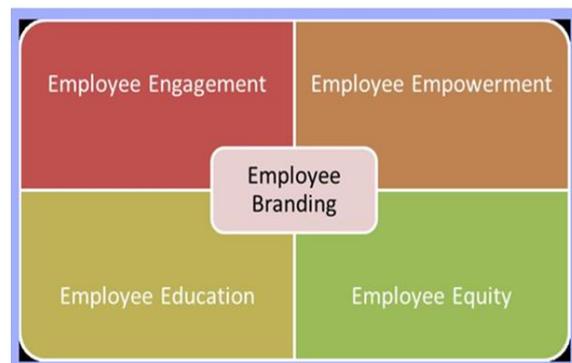


Figure 4: 4 E's of Employee Branding

4.1 Engaged Employees featured at:

- Believes in decorum of respectful work environment
- Is ready to go —Extra mile
- Is aware of developments in his/her field
- Believes in the values of Business
- Passionate to work to make things better
- Cognizant about overall business & understands the —Bigger Picture

4.2 Employee Education features:

- Highly skillful employees when not empowered become de-energized
- Managers and employees must objectively discuss tasks , roles and define boundary for decisions
- Strong brands need people with a clear point of view and the passion to express
- Educate for all involved process i.e. pronunciation to selling Employee

4.3 Empowerment features:

Employees Empowerment is positively correlated with performance, effectiveness, innovation and commitment.

4.4 Employee’s equity features at:

- A company should invest in employee benefit programs and must develop employees as real assets.
 - Key drivers that can be used to gauge an employee’s performance, optimum intensity and worth to the business.
1. Profitability
 2. Efficient use of resources
 3. Team Work
 4. Learning and innovation
 5. Orientation towards society (Corporate social responsibility)

5. MODEL FOR EMPLOYEE BRAND EVALUATION

Employee branding defines the employee recognition/identity within the organization. The proposed model of employee branding encapsulates the following components:

Identity: The structure of organization can define the employee branding. The top management is important in positioning the employees in the organization setting. Another important aspect is employee’s personality. Personality is the dynamic organization within the employees.

Competency: Competencies are the sum of knowledge, abilities and attitude that sustain employees’ capacity to fulfill their tasks and responsibilities in an efficient manner.

Acknowledgement: Acknowledgement is manifested through organizations position towards the employees. Employees need attention, regular feedback and constant help to develop their professional life.

Vision: It is the general vision of the organization. It lies at the level of each employee, even if their values and contribution differs. To achieve the organizational objectives, the vision of the employee and the vision of the organization are pulled together and layered on the same values.

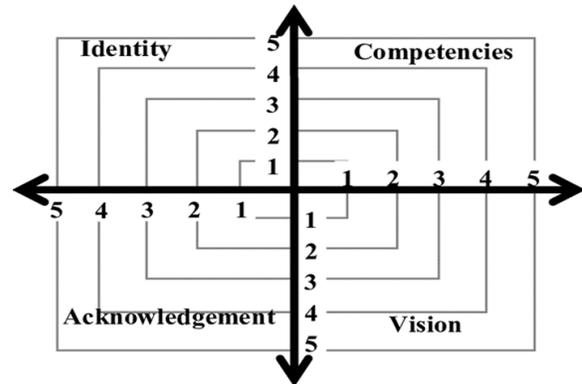


Figure 5: Model for Employee Brand Evaluation
The value of each employee branding component from the employee branding instrument are represented on a scale from “0” to “5”, where “0” means the lowest importance and “5” the greatest importance. The proposed Employee Branding Instrument is based on following features: It can be used for formulating internal brand of the company; helps preparing and mapping the process using organizational structure; enhance group to team evolution by sharing and supporting the same brand; provides the company with a snapshot on efficiency, employee satisfaction and position in relation to the objectives and strategies of the company; and finally offers sound criteria for brand

evaluation. The proposed model of employee branding helps to find out the projected image of the organization in the minds of employees and also highlights the area for improvement. It helps to align the employees with the vision of organization.

Employee Brand Evaluation – A way of Building a Brand: Organizations with a strong employee brand have the ability to turn their employees into powerful brand ambassadors. They are also more likely to improve employee loyalty, contribute to solid brand reputation management, increase employee motivation levels, contribute to customer experience management, and attract and secure the right talent. The objective is to be able to guide or shape employee behavior so that people who work for the company can effectively and creatively project the brand identity of the organization. Remember: engaged, motivated employees are more likely to become brand ambassadors than employees who aren't invested in the company's success.

6.CONCLUSION

The present study proposed a conceptual framework for identifying key employee branding dimensions, which provides a deep insight into the decision makers regarding various aspects of brand management practices. Employee Branding is a new twist in employee identity and engagement. It shapes the behavior of employee so that they project the brand identity in their daily activities. The prospect ways to improve employee branding within the organization includes mission, vision and value statement of the organization, recruiting the right people, providing effective training to the employees, identifying the employees, proper internal communication must be there, proper feedback system has to be developed, reinforcement, let the employees ask and do the work and finally give employees the authority along with responsibilities so that they can achieve the given work in proper and satisfying manner. Thus it reveals that employee branding is becoming the mantra of achieving Competitive Advantage in today's business world. Employee branding helps the companies to have better perspective of their consumers and motivate the employees as well. The brand interpretation in the mind of customer is very important and is a result of strong internal Branding

Process followed by any organization. The core idea is to transform employee into brand ambassadors to present the desired image of organization in the best possible light. The proposed model of employee branding helps to find out the projected image of the organization in the minds of employees and also highlights the area for improvement. It helps to align the employees with the vision of organization. Owing to a “War for Talent” every organization is struggling for the best employee status. Thus, attracting, recruiting and retaining talented human capital is the primary focus of every organization.

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