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Branding for Successful Employment: A Practical Approach

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Branding for Successful Employment: A Practical Approach

Abdullah Mohammad Sharif[α] & Md. Tarikul Islam[σ]

Abstract- Considering the employees as valuable asset and investing on them goes a long way to the success of an organization. In this era of stiff competition, employers look for the best talent available, meaning they want to have the people having best things on them. A good image as an employer can stir the rate of recruiting large pool of candidates, like branding attracts consumers in marketing. This employment branding can attract and retain top class employees while ensuring organizational growth. Organizations need to think from vision and mission in order to align its activities with total branding experience. Internal and external branding is of equal importance which can be promoted in a number of ways. Some very easy practices like giving fair benefits, recognizing employee contributions, creating a culture of mutual trust may prove worthy. At the same time organizations need to express their philosophies and practices of this culture to the society they operate in. simple, yet effective channel can be seminars, usage of theme statement highlighting care for employees, participating in job fairs, sponsoring relevant events etc. A company having good consumer branding and employment branding can only expect to achieve its vision.

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I. Introduction

Employees are generally thought of inferior position in respect to employers, although the relations are changing rapidly. When companies want to be competitive on the marketplace, it must fight for the best specialists or for the talents. We see that it is especially in the interest of those companies that try to stand their businesses on the competences of their employees. One of the forms of struggle for talent in today's labor markets is employer branding, that is building a brand of an employer of choice. Recent situation demands that the more communicative, better employer brand the organization possess, the more attractive place to work for employees it is.

Employee branding is relatively new approach borrowed from marketing. It constitutes the heart of HR Marketing. This promising area provides great opportunity for employee premise advancement and organizations positioning as employer brand. Employer brand is the mix of functional, financial, emotional and psychological benefits provided by the employing company (Ambler & Barrow, 2006).

Like a good advertisement attracts a pool of customers, a good employer brand can also attract perfect potential employees too. A compact package of all the benefits an employee looks can certainly lure candidates. Now a day, good candidates not only look for the direct benefits but an organization to believe in. a good employer branding works perfectly in this purpose of attracting and retaining the best candidates in the job market

II. Objectives

The study aims to:

1. Highlight the importance of considering employment branding as a core organizational function.
2. Formulate and describe a system showing practical ways to make and enhance employment branding.

III. Methodology

The study is descriptive in nature. Careful analysis of relevant information from various sources has been made in order to construct theory. Secondary information has been used as important contributor to this study. Articles from journals, magazines, newspaper and online publications contribute primarily for this study. Observing the activities of some multinational firms as well as consulting some experts is also done in order to have more meaningful employment branding concepts. Analysis and interpretation is done using Microsoft Excel.

IV. Literature Review

Business now has become very much competitive. Each of its functions are challenged by a number of factors. Today businesses operate in ultracompetitive and complex landscape. Companies need to meet continuing business challenges and change efforts in knowledge economy hence need for qualified and quality people is increasing (Randy Till, 2004). One of the factors that have contributed to workforce competition is the fluidity of the labor market. Changing view on the work life balance has caused people to frequently change their jobs; phenomenon in surge more than ever before (Talent Talk, 2003).

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Before going to explore the concept of employer branding, let us have a closer look at brand and branding. Brand may be any sign, word, phrase etc. that is used to indicate and represent some other thing. David A Aaker(1991), in his book Managing Brand Equity states: "A brand is a distinguishing name and/or symbol (such as logo, trademark, or package design) intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors. A brand thus signals to the customer the source of the product, and protects both the customer and the producer from competitors who would attempt to provide products that appear to be identical.

Kapferer (2008) believes a brand is not the name of a product. It is the vision that drives the creation of products and services under that name. That vision, the key belief of the brands and its core values is called identity.

Branding is a vast thing. Branding is the practice of taking something more or less generic (be it a product, service, or experience) and making it distinctive, by associating the product with real and imagined qualities that marketers hope will help a customer prefer that brand over others. The brand itself is the social construction that links a material product with a set of beliefs about the product's tangible and intangible attributes. Brands help differentiate a product from similar or competitive others on three dimensions: performance, imagery, and consumer insight (Keller, Sternthal, & Tybout, 2002). Brand performance associations distinguish the product in terms of its functional benefits.

Employment branding is all about getting the "talents"-candidates having best quality, experience, skill and potential. Rosethorn(2009) defines it as the two-way deal between an organization and its people – the reason they choose to join and the reasons they choose – and are permitted – to stay. Mosley (2009) believes it is a sum of the key qualities current and prospective employees identify with organization as an employer, such as: economic (compensation and benefits), functional (e.g. learning new skills) or psychological (e.g. sense of identity and status).

Employment branding has two components-internal and external. Chong (2007) identifies internal branding as a set of strategic processes, to coordinate, and empowerment as methodical, to create a good experience from the brand in customers. Gapp and Merrilees (2006) have a different opinion. They say internal branding process is a tool that tries to influence the motivation and performance of employees to ensure compliance and customer experience at all touch points customers and employees. By involving HR in internal branding projects, firms can better use internal communications to give employees a deeper understanding of the brand and the role that they play in enhancing the brand promise Aurand et al (2005). However, external employer branding is addressed to active professionals, students, graduates and other stakeholders and is implemented by means of effective use of modern communication channels, relations with the academic community, co-operation with opinion-leading media, image-enhancing recruitment projects etc.

At the very beginning, the strategy of management is development and communication of the organization's culture as an employer in the marketplace. For this, Sullivan (2004) emphasizes on targeted long term strategy to manage awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees and related stakeholders. Perhaps the definition by Jenner & Taylor (2008) is best suited for our purpose. They say, employment branding is the efforts of the organization in communicating internal and external stakeholders of what makes it both desirable and distinctive employer. Any organization pursuing an employer branding strategy needs to be very clear about what it means by employer branding and how far it wishes to apply the strategy. Employer branding is now seen as a targeted, long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders with regard to a particular organization based on the creation of an image. All the Human Resource Management (HRM) functions need to be aligned in line of employment branding. This will enable the organization to operate smoothly.

V. Prime Benefits

Employment Employment branding works silently to fasten organizational profitability. It has lots of benefits. Employee motivation, confidence, morale etc all increases through this. People around are also influenced by this good practices performed by organization concerned. We can analyze the advantages in two ways:

- Internal
- External

Internal benefit means the gains in respect to employee performance, company profitability, growth etc. These can be categorized as follows:

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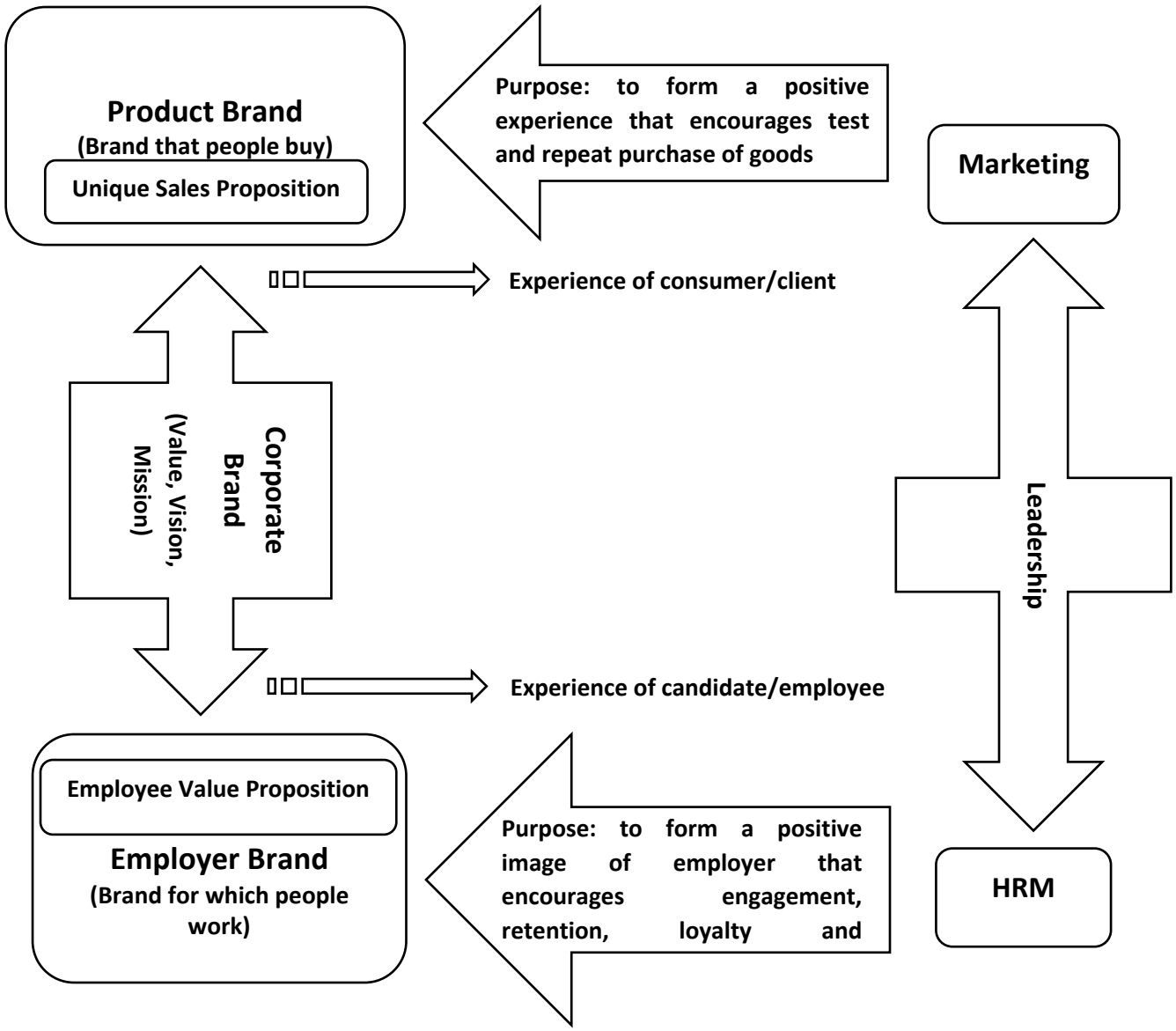

Fig.1: Relationship between Corporate brand, product Brand and Employer Brand

Source: Mokina (2014)

a) *Faster time to fill:* Whenever there is a vacancy, it takes less time to fill in the position. There is always a queue for expert and qualified candidates willing to join. So, organization has nothing to worry about filling the vacancy.

b) *More staff referrals:* Satisfied employees are brand ambassadors. They talk about and expect the best for their organization. So whenever they find any chance, they step in. Filling up vacancy is an area they feel interest. They refer best people they know. As a result, there is no need for background check of those new employees.

c) *Increased quality of hire:* As there is a good name of the brand, people feel interested to apply. Candidates having best quality are first to apply in those companies. So, there is a good chance of having quality employees.

d) *Lower cost per hire:* Cost of hiring is lowest if the employment branding is good. The time, workforce, money etc. all are required in minimum level. With a little effort, companies can ensure staffing the best.

e) *Increased employee retention:* If there is a good corporate culture, employees expectations are met. Things that satisfy them, can also force them to stay. Thus, effort in employment branding can surely raise the retention rate and bringing stability on business operations.

f) *Increased Sales:* This one is surely caused by branding. Enthusiasm, motivation, hard works etc.

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all are the result of good branding. Brand clarity and delivery spurs employee engagement and motivation. Whenever employees see the logo, theme, activity of the company they work in is praised, discussed, they become pumped up. This affects their performance and company sales.

g) *Absenteeism:* Perhaps the most direct benefit of employment branding is decrease of absenteeism. As they feel proud, employees become regular and perform their duties properly.

h) *Loyalty:* Last, but not the least internal benefit of employment branding is the increased loyalty of the employees. People work for, believe in and are ready to give full effort for their company. Commitment becomes high and loyalty is clearly visible.

External benefit of employment branding means the advantages an organization receives in terms of customers, outside stakeholders, communities etc. Common benefits include:

a) *Stronger consumer brand:* The total brand experience increases rapidly if we consider employment issues. A person, who purchases a product and considers himself as future employee, is sure to experience different. Value of the brand seems different to him and has a stronger effect.

b) *Value of the company increases over time:* Not only the share price, but the value of the company itself increases over time for the reason. Day by day, perception about the company grows higher and higher. This creates a strong customer base.

c) *Brand works 24/7/365:* As the image of the company takes its position to the mind of both those who purchases and those who doesn't purchase the product/ service, people of all stages are affected. This image is long lasting, works with and without much advertisement.

d) *Saves money on future design and advertising costs:* Although this is hard to prove, but is understood that additional costs are not required if focus is kept on employment branding.

e) *Establishment as employer of choice:* Perhaps the best benefit we get is the establishment as an employer of choice, meaning the company tops the list of best sought place to work for. People look for and are always full of passion to work for the company.

VI. Elements of Employment Branding

Although there are a number of components that make up employment branding, we consider the following four most essential.

1. Brand identity: it denotes the way potential candidates recognize the brand. The name or logo represent a differentiated image which is easily recognizable among its competitors. There must be some attributes that make the brand stand aside. Whenever they talk about a company, there should be core attributes regarding its effort related to employment branding.
2. Brand personality: Brand personality is just like the personality of human beings. Openness, Extraversion, youthful, idle etc. denote a person. Same way a brand must have some distinguished personality. A company may be open for its employees to come up with ideas, suggestions etc.; likewise it may be reluctant to respond to employee needs. All these together create a personality of the brand.
3. Brand experience: Brand experience is a mixture of all that a consumer goes through while buying and using that brand. For example, how does an employee feel while working and performing his duties? How does the organization behave and how fast do it respond to employee needs? These are experiences gathered by existing employees who tell others and create a word of mouth advertisement about the company concerned.
4. Brand extension: the idea is of going beyond ones origins and discovering newer arenas. This is how companies can extend the image of the brand while performing in a manner so that the existing operations complement the newer initiatives. Taking newer initiatives keeping employees in mind enhances employment brand.

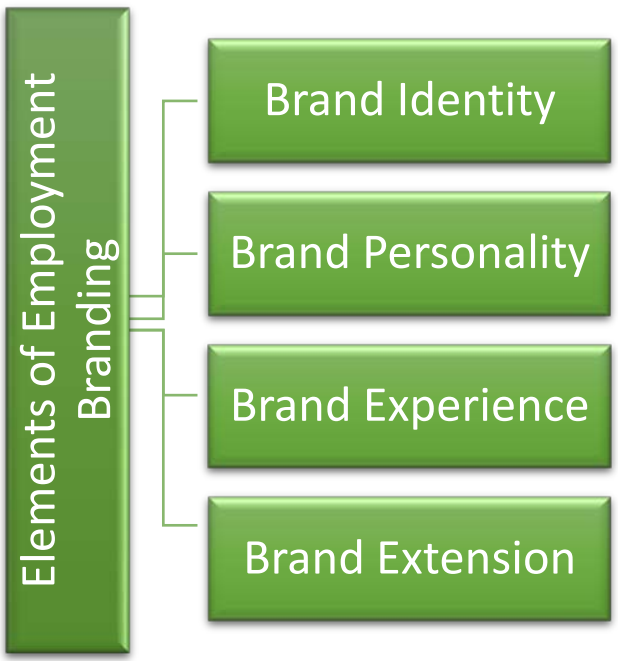

Fig. 2: Elements of Employment Branding

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VII. Employment Branding Model

Our proposed model encompasses 4 stages, namely assessment, development, engagement, establishment. Assessment consists of analyzing current condition, both internal and external related to employment branding. Development means finding suitable strategies and prioritizing them. Engagement entails communication and feedback. Lastly, establishment denotes control and set up relevant practices as organizational culture.

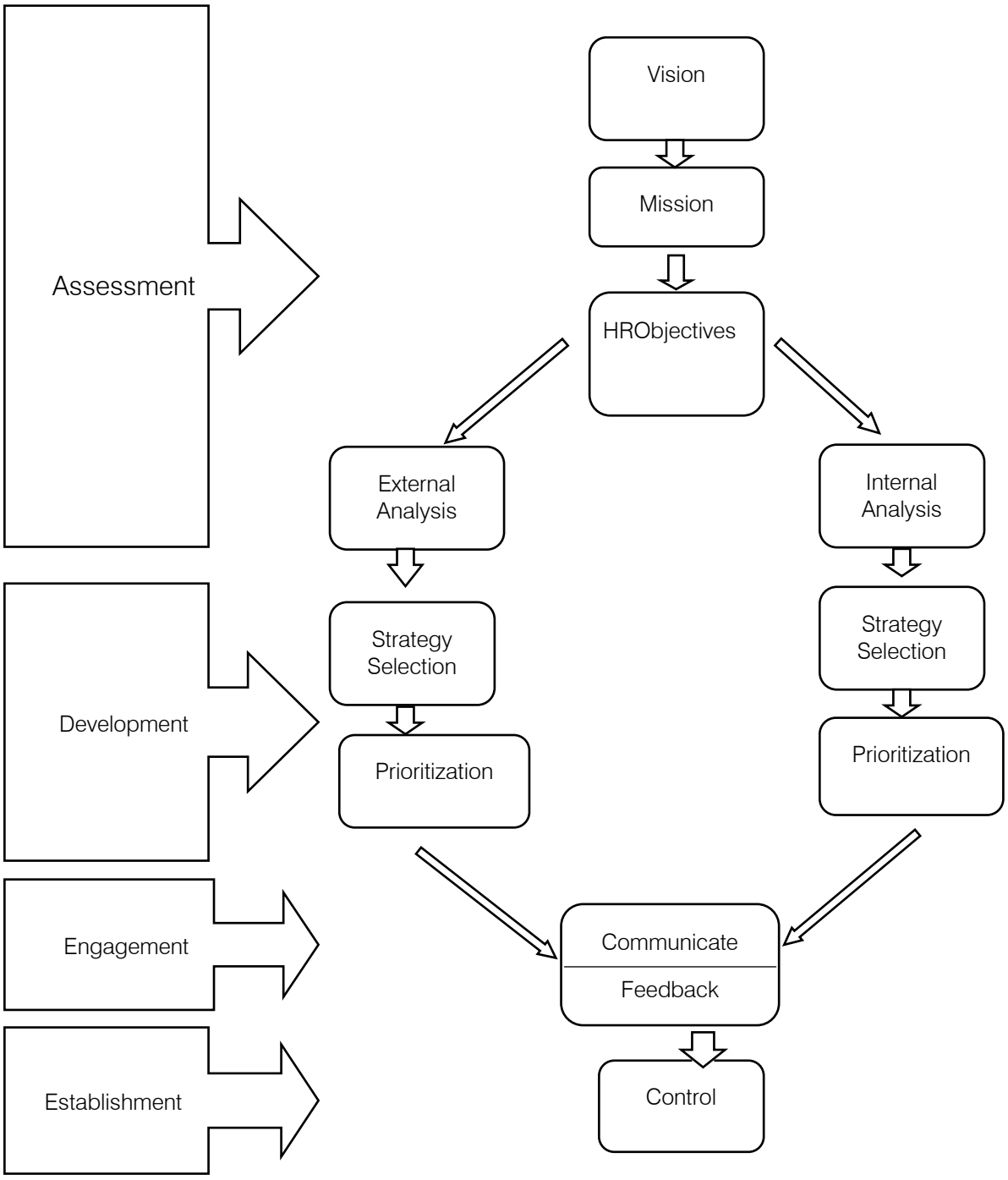

Fig. 3: Employment Branding Model

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A. Assessment

A good employment branding should start considering vision and mission of the corporation concerned. The HR objectives need to be consistent with corporate vision and mission. A clear, concise objective setting is primary requisite. HR objectives like human resource or manpower planning, recruitment, selection and placement, training and development of employees, developing and maintaining motivation for workers must come after the issues of considering employees as brand element.

Internal analysis can be done in order to get the real picture. If the organization is new one, then this step can be omitted. However, in other cases this is a must. How the employees are treated, what affects negatively, what they think of the environment, culture etc.3 should be analyzed.

External analysis is about checking the activities being performed for increasing employment branding. If a concise effort is there, then this process is easy to conduct. Like the internal analysis, this process is redundant for a new enterprise. Some such activities include finding community engagement, position of brand, customer awareness, perception, activities of rival firms etc.

B. Development

Choosing a suitable strategy is the next step. In internal analysis, organizations may have a number of easy to implement yet very effective strategy. These not only expresses a positive attitude of the company but ensures a number of satisfied, enthusiastic employees. Some of such strategy includes,

a. Include employees in mission statement: a well thought mission statement containing and expressing a clear philosophy regarding employees indicates value for them. Whenever a group is formally recognized, they are ensured certain rights and privileges. Same way, if mission statement states something about employees, they are ensured a number of advantages, explicitly or implicitly.

b. Theme statement stating how important employees really are matters. If there is a theme statement or slogan of the company that tell offer value of employees, it works faster. Not only can the internal but external stakeholders view this. This, in turn creates a positive image.

c. Fair benefits: major component of employee satisfaction is equipped by the return they get, mostly monetary. A compensation package including standard offers for each individual employee is must. In fact, we call this staple component, meaning without this all the initiatives of branding is fruitless. So, if there is any scope of adjusting existing benefits, it should be made immediately.

d. Recognition: certifying the good performing employees is another strategy to be followed. Where there is recognition of efforts, there is enthusiasm. Each effort to better the company is valuable. If these little efforts are recognized, then they are valued.

e. Clear career path: career path is an important fact employees consider as valuable. The clearer the career ladder is, the less will be the ambiguity. People want to develop himself for professional and personal matters. His efforts are fruitful when organization promotes him. So, criteria, qualification along with benefits of next position etc need to be specific.

f. Supportive Culture: there is a great impact of organizational culture on employee mind. Interpersonal relation, decision making and implementing process, feedback mechanism etc. all constitute culture. If these are supportive, employees efforts increases. Culture of trust, mutual cooperation and sharing is essential in creating positive employment branding.

There are some other strategies that focus on increasing mass awareness. Different stakeholders, community people and public in general has to be informed about the activities of the organization. Some of such strategies include,

a. Arranging seminars: now a day skill improvement, awareness rising etc. seminars are on demand. People are concerned about their professional life. A one daylong seminar on a specific topic can attract attention. Advertising in mass media about the seminar arranged on recent topic raises brand name. Moreover, if it is on career related topic, popularity will go up. Thus, arranging seminars on a regular basis in burning issues of career development and skill development is a good technique.

b. Inviting popular figure: presence of a popular, expert, experienced figure in seminars can strengthen brand image. Experts, who are successful in their field are icons. New employees can be motivated by their presence. Famous writer, CEOs of large corporations, entrepreneurs can be invited in those seminars.

c. Organizing special events: Unlike seminars attract specific group of people, special events attract general crowd. National awareness rising may be done through these programs. Events like free resume writing tips, marathon race for health, tree plantation, rally for peace etc. are very common activity. General people becomes involved and creates a very good image on them.

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d. Sponsoring relevant events: Different universities, gov't organizations, private companies arrange various types of events. Sponsoring those can be very effective. Just like marketing works, these can be useful for employment too.

e. Participating in job fairs: Another easy way is to participate is job fairs. Throughout the year, many universities organize job fairs. Those are easy to reach potential employees. Delivering them what the organization is and want can trigger better employment branding.

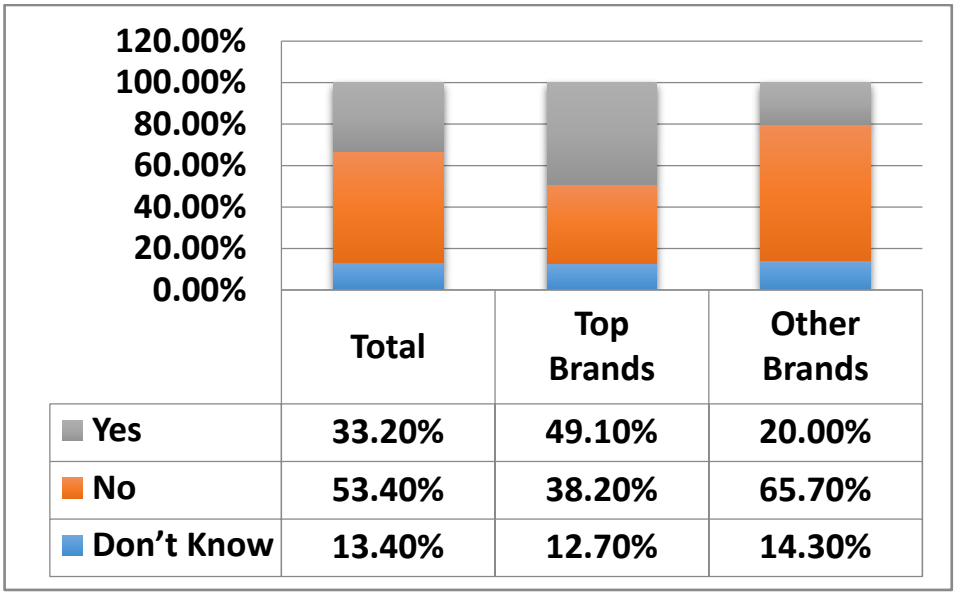
f. Contract signing with public and private organizations: Strong tie with local, international firms, gov't enterprises means the acceptance of the company by a number of people. This indicates authenticity and willingness to go further.

g. Getting certificates: Certification is very important. Signs of certifying authorities has a strong impact on customers. A package having numerous certificates indicates purity and trust. Same way, existing and potential employees become sure of their job, career and profession.

We see that core elements of employment branding is the impression of the organization as a 'great place to work' in the minds of current and perspective employees, as well as other key stakeholders. People look for specific return from the company. Things they look for can be called employee value. Employees' perception about their organization's effort in making that a good workplace is called employee value proposition. There are six key values that construct employee value proposition.

- Interest value – the extent to which an individual is attracted to an employer that provides an exciting work environment, has novel work practices, and makes use of its employees' creativity.
- Social value – assesses the extent to which an individual is attracted to an employer that provides a working environment that is fun, happy, and provides a supportive team atmosphere.
- Economic value – assesses the extent to which an individual is attracted to an employer that provides above average salary, an attractive overall compensation package, and job security and promotion opportunities.
- Development value – assesses the extent to which an individual is attracted to an employer that provides recognition, self-worth, and confidence coupled with career-enhancing experiences and a base for future employability.
- Application value – assesses the extent to which the employer provides an opportunity for the employee to apply what they have leaned and to develop others in a customer orientated and humanitarian environment
- Relative Value: it denotes comparison of values of an individual with his or her friends, relatives etc.

In recent years companies are emphasizing more on employment branding. A survey by HRO Today Magazine finds that top brands are more concerns about their employment branding. They work together with employees and make them aware of those activities. Other brands are not that much concerns about this issue. The study tells 12.7% employees of top brands does not know anything about employee value proposition, 38.2% said they have nothing like this whereas 49.1% of them know very well about their companies efforts. In case of other brands the rate is 14.3%, 65.7% and 20.0% respectively. In total 13.4% employees are totally unware, 53.4% said they don't have and 33.2% said they have employee value proposition.



	Total	Top Brands	Other Brands
Yes	33.20%	49.10%	20.00%
No	53.40%	38.20%	65.70%
Don't Know	13.40%	12.70%	14.30%

Fig. 4: Companies with an EVP

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Not all the strategies are of equal value, importance and necessity. Some are time consuming, some require funds. In this case well thought decision is needed. Choosing the best strategy is crucial here. The more strategy taken, the more chance of having better employment branding is there. Though those are a little time consuming and requires special effort, for the sake of long term benefit, actions should be taken. But if there are noticeable constraints, strategies should be prioritized. For both internal actions and external actions this step is needed. Listing the best ones and prioritization is desired.

C. Engagement

Communication and feedback is needed for engaging current employees in this process is very fruitful. They may be asked to suggest for better branding while informing them about the actions taken. Regular meeting, both formal and informal emphasizing corporate culture, expansion, problems etc. makes them more concerned. Feedback from them is also useful. Some strategy may not be effective for the time being. If feedback mechanism is there, employees may be willing to inform about the wrong decision. So, open door policy regarding this is suggested.

D. Establishment

Feedback of current strategy and experience of previous one may tell to change or update. If such happens, necessary actions need to be taken immediately. A wrong event, media or activity may hamper negatively. But the strategies that are best suited must be established as culture. Successful tactics are to be continued o regular basis. This control and continue mechanism is the last stage of the process.

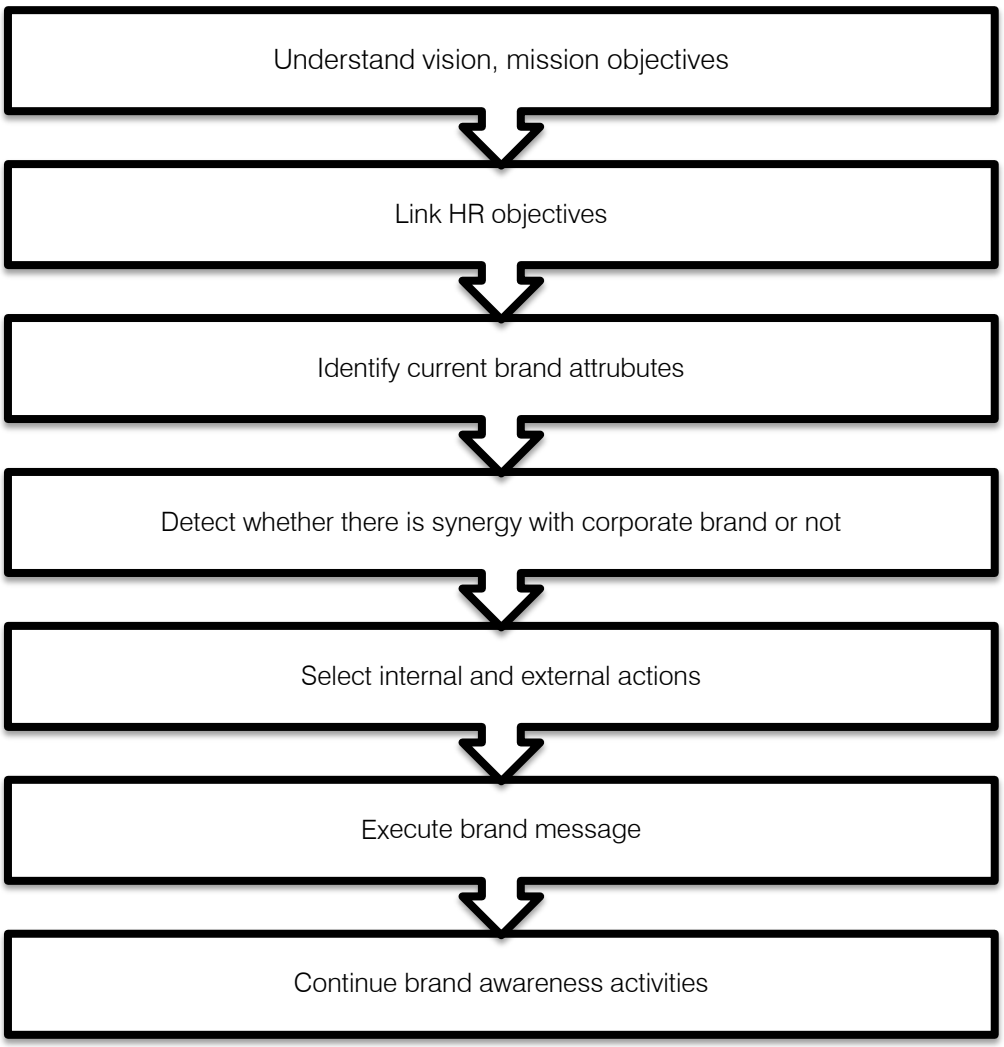

Fig. 4: C Tips to create an employment brand

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VIII. Conclusion

There is no doubt that employment branding is becoming increasingly important. The concept should be central to all HRM activities. Companies who are caring about their employees have a strong employee as well as customer base. Satisfied employees brings satisfied customers- this is well known. Fight for best employees has begun. Proactive strategies can serve best in this situation. Talent recruitment and retention becomes possible through well planned efforts like employment branding. It is not like that only employees are gainer, but organization too. Smooth operation, sales, profitability, reputation all are ever rise. Good care of employees just like care of the product ensures industrial harmony. Emphasis on this issue is a key to success in this knowledge-based economy.

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