



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

European Management Journal

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/emj

Designing brands and managing organizational politics: A qualitative case study of employer brand creation

Andreas Mölk^a, Manfred Auer^{b, *}

^a *UMIT, Private University of Health Sciences, Medical Informatics and Technology, GmbH, Division for Management in Health and Sport Tourism, Eduard-Wallnöfer-Zentrum 1, A-6060, Hall in Tirol, Austria*

^b *University of Innsbruck, Department of Organization and Learning, Universitätsstraße 15, 6020, Innsbruck, Austria*

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 9 December 2016

Received in revised form

18 April 2017

Accepted 7 July 2017

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Employer branding

Practice-based study

Human resource management

Managerial complexity

ABSTRACT

This study explores intra-organizational processes and structures within the creation of an employer brand. Drawing on a practice perspective that analytically differentiates between practitioners, praxis, and practices, we present a qualitative case study of an employer branding project in a large industrial company. Our theorized account of the case demonstrates the managerial complexities and dynamics of employer brand creation. Based on a detailed content analysis, we identify three distinct sets of activities of employer brand creation: (1) defining and demarcating employer branding, (2) developing and maintaining cooperation within employer brand creation, and (3) confirming and contesting management ideas and structures beyond employer branding. Our study contributes to employer branding research by highlighting how employer brand creation is entangled within strategic, functional design of an employer brand and managing organizational power relations and differing interests. Furthermore, this study particularly emphasizes the emerging character of employer branding and the impact of an established social infrastructure within employer brand creation.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Given existing and expected shortages of qualified workers (e.g. [Dögl & Holtbrügge, 2014](#)) and, as a result, increasingly competitive recruitment strategies of organizations (e.g. [Baum & Kabst, 2013](#)), employer branding has become an important and widespread human resource management (HRM) tool (e.g. M. R. [Edwards, 2010](#); [Martin, Gollan, & Grigg, 2011](#)). Differing from employee branding, which aims to ensure employees deliver corporate brand promises (e.g. [Brannan, Parsons, & Priola, 2011](#); [King & Grace, 2008](#)), employer branding comprises management processes to create, implement and communicate an attractive employer image and identity (e.g. [Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004](#)). Employer branding research mainly concentrates on empirical studies investigating perceptions of employer brands of (potential) employees (e.g. M. R. [Edwards & Edwards, 2013](#); [King & Grace, 2012](#); [Lievens, 2007](#); [Van Hoye, Turker, Cromheecke, & Lievens, 2013](#)) and conceptual work on the understanding and management of employer brands (e.g.

[Aggerholm, Andersen, & Thomsen, 2011](#); [Ambler & Barrow, 1996](#); [Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004](#)). Employer brand management is usually conceptualized as a strategic activity of creating, implementing, and communicating a distinct employment experience that motivates and retains current employees, and places employers in a strong position to attract high-quality applicants on relevant labour markets (e.g. [Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004](#); M. R.; [Edwards, 2010](#)). This interpretation usually refers to the idea of a straightforward and widely controlled top-down process of designing an effective employer brand (e.g. [Chhabra & Sharma, 2014](#); [Elving, Westhoff, Meeusen, & Schoonderbeek, 2013](#); [Foster, Punjaisri, & Cheng, 2010](#); [Moroko & Uncles, 2008](#)). The literature on employer branding aims to offer human resource (or brand) managers analytical frameworks, empirical knowledge, and practical tools to establish and communicate employer brands successfully. It largely theorizes employer branding as a controllable management process rather than as a social phenomenon. Consequently, complexities of everyday organizational practice, such as unintended and ambiguous transformations, translations, and reconfigurations occurring along processes and practices of employer branding are widely neglected. Particularly little attention has been paid to struggles within employer branding practices in organizations, which arise

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: andreas.moelk@umit.at (A. Mölk), Manfred.Auer@uibk.ac.at (M. Auer).

from involved agents' different interests and dynamics of power and influence. With a few exceptions (Edlinger, 2015; Martin et al., 2011; Russell & Brannan, 2016), empirical and theoretical explorations of intra-organizational practices of undertaking employer branding are rare and thus, we know relatively little about the actual processes of managing employer brands, particularly employer brand creation.

To contribute to this research, we draw on a practice perspective to explore intra-organizational activities, processes, and structures of creating an employer brand. Practice studies explore details and complexities of organizational life and stress human and non-human agency as constitutive elements of the social phenomena studied (e.g. Reckwitz, 2002; Vaara & Whittington, 2012, Whittington, 2003). We concentrate on the social constitution of employer branding and the ways in which agents shape and use this managerial field. Therefore, this study contributes to employer branding theory by stressing the roles and power relations of involved employer branding practitioners, the relevance of established structures of cooperation and decision making, the influence of pre-existing management concepts and routines, as well as the actual doing of employer branding within the intra-organizational making of an employer brand. We emphasize the interplay of strategic, functional processes of creating an employer brand and the political dimensions of such an undertaking, characterized by different interests, power relations, organizational interdependence, and questions of legitimation (e.g. Carter, Clegg, & Kornberger, 2008; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2003). Our study explains the emerging character of employer branding within an established structural framework and the role of forming and organizing a powerful social infrastructure of creating an employer brand. In addition, we introduce employer brand management as a political instrument for agents to improve their social and political standing within the organization.

To investigate employer branding practice, we report and discuss findings from a qualitative case study of an employer brand-creation project in a large multinational company. The presented empirical study focuses on the early stages of the creation of an employer brand in a company affected by limited employer attractiveness. This restricted capacity to attract qualified employees is due to all subsidiaries of this company being in rural areas, the existence of partly physically challenging workplaces, and the lack of a strong corporate brand or well-known product brand. The last reason makes the case particularly interesting for branding research, because this manufacturer does not produce for consumers and, thus, branding does not have a strong tradition within this firm. Russell and Brannan (2016) encourage researchers to explore processes of (employer) branding within these contexts, which are hardly the subject of branding research. Therefore, this study contributes to empirical employer branding research by examining an organizational context in which a real sense of branding is relatively absent. Moreover, our study provides a detailed case study based on perspectives of different involved agents, (participant) observations, and documents, which is valuable on its own terms. We explore how employer brand creation was performed and enacted in the multinational company and how its managerial complexities and dynamics evolved through individual activities as well as trans-subjective practices.

2. Practice-based perspectives on employer branding

Martin et al. (2011) relate employer branding to a practice perspective, emphasizing the influence of power relations, different

perspectives, and values of involved agents in employer branding. The authors refer to the proposed analytical distinction between praxis, practices, and practitioners (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007; Whittington, 2006). Jarzabkowski et al. (2007, p. 9) define praxis as 'the interconnection between the actions of different, dispersed individuals and groups and those, socially, politically, and economically embedded institutions within which individuals act and to which they contribute'. Employer branding praxis emphasizes the 'doing' of employer branding, particularly interconnected situated activities. In this context, Martin et al. (2011) stress the problem of participation of line managers and local human resource (HR) managers in developing and implementing employer branding strategies. Praxis is essentially connected to practices, which provide cognitive, behavioural, procedural, discursive, and physical resources that allow multiple actors to interact in order to achieve collective activity (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). Practices capture routines, norms, analytical frameworks, procedures, and tools of employer branding practice. Routines and behavioural patterns might play a limited role in the situation of creating a formal employer brand from scratch. Nevertheless, praxis of employer branding refers to cognitive, procedural, and discursive resources deriving from the specific organization and the larger socio-cultural and economic context in which a specific organization is embedded (Whittington, 2006). Employer branding practices particularly include constructions of core concepts, like strategic marketing (Foster et al., 2010), brand co-creation (Aggerholm et al., 2011), and talent (Martin et al., 2011), and refer to the routines of recruitment, selection, and integration (Russell & Brannan, 2016). Practitioners are actors 'who draw upon practices to act' (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007, p. 10) and, thus, are interconnected to practices and praxis. Employer branding includes activities of practitioners from different departments, HR people from diverse countries, line managers, and top-managers who can use their formal and social positions, their knowledge, and their experience to influence employer brand management. Their relative and contextual power, their different values and experiences, and partially existing physical distance make the creation and implementation of employer brands a contested terrain (Martin et al., 2011). Edlinger (2015) empirically analyses the employer branding work of one group of practitioners, that is, employer brand managers, and discusses their views from the perspective of boundary work. Boundary work refers to struggles for cultural authority and in the context of employer branding, answers questions about constructions and concepts that are acknowledged as valid and appropriate (Edlinger, 2015).

This literature on employer branding practice provides valuable insights into intra-organizational management of employer brands, particularly taking into account questions of legitimation, demarcation, organizational context, and multi-functional as well as transnational cooperation (Russell & Brannan, 2016; Edlinger, 2015; M. R.; Edwards, 2005; Martin et al., 2011). However, the work of Martin et al. (2011) largely remains conceptual and includes only anecdotal evidence on employer branding practice. Russell and Brannan (2016) include a variety of empirical data and explore employer branding embedded in organizational HR practices but do not investigate the management processes of employer brand creation. The latter topic forms part of Edlinger's (2015) study but her empirical material is based solely on interview accounts of employer brand managers and does not explore actual activities of designing employer brands. Thus, we conducted a qualitative case study that concentrates on management processes of creating an employer brand and allows us to include the views of different

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7423469>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7423469>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)