

Employer attractiveness from a generational perspective: Implications for employer branding

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RESUMO

Atratividade do empregador na perspectiva geracional: implicações para o employer branding

Este estudo teve por objetivo identificar os fatores de atratividade do empregador priorizados por diferentes gerações: *Baby Boomers*, Geração X e Geração Y. A pesquisa foi realizada com uma amostra de 937 profissionais, atuantes em diversas áreas e empresas, em sua maioria gestores e com alto nível de instrução. Foi adotada a Escala de Atratividade do Empregador de Berthon et al. (2005) e os resultados indicam que, ao escolher uma empresa, as gerações estudadas apresentam especificidades em relação aos atributos de atratividade que priorizam. Também se observou que a geração Y é a que mais nitidamente discrimina e hierarquiza tais atributos. Possíveis implicações para o *employer branding* e limites da pesquisa são discutidos ao final do artigo.

Palavras-chaves: atratividade do empregador, recrutamento, gerações, *employer branding*.

Recebido em 09/dezembro/2014

Aprovado em 25/novembro/2015

Sistema de Avaliação: *Double Blind Review*

Editor Científico: Nicolau Reinhard

DOI: 10.5700/rausp1226

1. INTRODUCTION

Attracting potential candidates is a significant issue in the recruitment process, since it involves how companies compete for often scarce skills in the labor market (Collins & Kanar, 2013; Fernandez-Araoz, Groyberg & Nohria, 2009; Hewlett & Rashid, 2010). In this context, organizations may attain differentiation and become more competitive in attracting talent through Employer Branding (EB) initiatives. By effectively communicating an employer's unique and positive aspects and the corresponding employment value proposition, EB strategies contribute to increase employer attractiveness in the labor market as a whole and, more specifically, among potential skilled candidates (Backaus & Tikoo, 2004; Collins & Kanar, 2013; Edwards &

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Edwards, 2013; Pingle & Sharma, 2013). Nevertheless, despite this increasing visibility and relevance for companies, there are few academic studies on the EB subject (Sokro, 2012). Moreover, literature has been mainly focused on concepts and results obtained through EB; research on the employer attractiveness dimensions used in EB strategies is still scarce (Biswas & Suar, 2014). Thus, one of the contributions of this paper is to investigate the employer attractiveness dimensions.

The arrival of new generations of professionals in organizations has the potential to promote challenges to the policies and practices related to the management of people. Preferences and motivations concerning work may be different for each generation, and would require adjustments in people management practices (Amaral, 2004; Cennamo & Gardner, 2008), especially in the recruitment and retention processes. Indeed, literature has reported that different generations tend to prioritize different elements in the workplace (Terjesen, Vinnicombe & Freeman, 2007; Twenge, 2010). This seems to be valid for Generation Y, for example, who have shown quite peculiar characteristics when compared to previous generations, such as, for instance, greater interest in new technologies, the fact they were already born “digital” (Prensky, 2001) and their wish for fast career development (Tapscott, 2010; Smola & Sutton, 2002). Besides, other generations (such as the Baby Boomers and Generation X) may also have peculiarities (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Jurkiewicz, 2000) and, therefore, different expectations regarding potential employers. Identifying these specificities can contribute to set EB strategies. However, most studies on generations have focused on aspects such as personality traits (Twenge & Campbell, 2008), values (Parry & Urwin, 2011), career expectations (Ng, Schweitzer & Lyons, 2010), among others. Very little research has investigated the employer attractiveness factors’ preferences by the various generations. Therefore, we tried to address this shortcoming by conducting a research with the purpose of answering the question: “Which are the employer attractiveness attributes prioritized by different generations: Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y?”

Although authors have defined generations differently in terms of birth years, we chose to define generations as in Miller (2011), Brosdahl and Carpenter (2011), and Bolton et al. (2013): Baby Boomers refer to people born between 1946 and 1960; Generation X, those born between 1961 and 1981; and Generation Y comprises those born between 1982 and 2000. A survey was conducted with a sample of 937 professionals working in various areas and companies, from different age groups, most of them managers and having a high education level. Among the contributions of this paper, it is worth mentioning a better understanding of the EB and the attractiveness attributes concepts, and their usefulness in attracting desired candidates in recruitment processes.

This article contains six sections, besides this introduction. In the literature review, the generational issue, the concepts of

employer attractiveness, attractiveness attributes, and EB are reviewed and discussed. Next, the methodological procedures are presented. Then, results are shown and discussed and limitations and suggestions for further studies are presented.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews and discusses the literature considered relevant for the proposed research – the studies on the generational issue and the concepts of employer attractiveness and employer branding.

Studies about the generational issue have increased substantially in the academic and managerial literature (Ansoorian, Good & Samuelson, 2003; Benson & Brown, 2011; Constanza et al., 2012; Lyons & Kuron, 2014). The key premise that guides most of these works is that there might be significant differences between generations currently in the labor market, which could cause not only a greater degree of conflict in the workplace, but could also bring the need for rethinking people management practices, such as recruitment, compensation, development, performance assessment, and feedback, among others.

In fact, the generational issue has been the research subject in different areas, such as the study of social movements and families and, even more frequently, in consumer segmentation studies (Parry & Urwin, 2010). In general, these works depart from the definition of generation proposed by Mannheim (1993), who emphasizes the importance of social location, i.e. a generation would comprise individuals who have experienced the same facts or relevant historical events during their socialization process, which will influence their perceptions, values, and ways of thinking (Mannheim, 1993). Parry and Urwin (2010) remind us that generations end up forming bonds and recognizing themselves through shared cultural symbols, such as music, fashion, movies, etc.

Studies point out that at least three generations interact in the workplace today, the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y. Most of these studies, however, have been conducted in countries such as the United States (Constanza et al., 2012; Mencl & Lester, 2014) and Canada (Ng et al., 2010), in Europe (Parry & Urwin, 2010) and in Australia and New Zealand (Benson & Brown, 2011; Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Treuren & Anderson, 2010), among others. Thus, some authors have emphasized that the existing literature may not adequately reflect specificities of other contexts, such as the Brazil (see, for instance, Rocha-de-Oliveira, Piccinini & Bittencourt, 2012).

Research results have shown that Baby Boomers grew up within a positive and optimistic period (Kupperschmidt, 2000); they appreciate learning new skills, personal development, and creativity; they work hard and seek extrinsic rewards and status, in exchange for their loyalty and commitment (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). In Brazil, this generation experienced the oppression of the military dictatorship and a

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