

Dissertation

Employer branding: current and future employees' perceptions of employer's attractiveness attributes.

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Abstract

Employer branding is still a new concept but has become very popular in recent years and can be used both in attracting the talented and skilled workforce and in retaining current employees as well. Therefore, being an attractive employer, is one of the most favorable features for employer to thrive to become.

This research was done measuring employer attractiveness by five values using EmpAt scale from 2 perspectives: Current employees and potential recruits. EmpAt employer attractiveness scale was developed by Berthon et al (2005) and used in measuring 5 values: interest, social, economic, developmental and application value.

43 students and 52 current employees have taken part in the research survey. The research found that all values were rated highly by both sample groups. Current employees rated the developmental value as the most attractive one. Student sample group found three values to be equally attractive: social, economic and developmental.

Research found similarities and differences amongst the two sample groups and drew recommendations to employers when branding future internal and external branding strategies.

Researcher suggested new directions for future research in employer attractiveness as a tool to attract and retain employees.

The finding of this research are not generable across all potential recruits and across all current employees.

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1 Introduction/Background

Brand management is a most important activity in many organisations and most of them focus their branding strategies in developing new products and enhancing the brand reputation of the existing ones, although branding principles are now often used in employer branding strategies as well (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). Employer branding is still a new concept but in recent years many companies around the world are using employer branding strategies in order to become 'employer of choice' and, as a result, to attract and retain talented and knowledgeable workforce available in the labour market.

Various factors in recent years have affected the labour market picture: worldwide recession, globalisation, increased pressure for speed and innovation, mergers and acquisitions of organisations, advances in technology, restructuring of organisations and constant competition for skilled and talented workforce, therefore it is significantly important for employers not just to select the most capable, hardworking and talented employees but to retain and motivate existing workforce as well (Corte, Mangia, Micera and Zamparelli, 2011). Employees need to be able to attract and retain the most suitable potential candidates for their organisation and provide them with knowledge and motivation so those workers would carry and commit to their employer brand, therefore both internal and external branding strategies are equally important for organisations (King and Grace, 2007).

Research done by CIPD shows that 75 percent of organisations who use employer branding strategies as a tool for recruitment and retention, find them to be highly effective. CIPD used case studies from large organisations such as Lakeland and Orange on how and why they developed their employer brand strategies. Research find that in order to develop a good employer brand employees need to

understand their workforce and what factors make employers to stay and work for that particular organisation rather than just concentrating on new and innovative recruitment strategies (Kelly, 2008). Gaining award as a 'Best Employer of the year', helps in attracting the potential pool of candidates and allows employee in selecting those future recruits the most suitable for organisation. Well-developed employer brand helps organisation to differentiate herself from competition and gain competitive advantage (Backhous and Tikoo, 2004).

In recent years employer branding topic has attracted attention of many researches in the academic literature, especially in measuring employer attractiveness. Backhous and Tikoo (2004) did their research on employer brand associations focused on job seekers. Highhouse, Levens and Sinar (2003) researched three parts of organisation: attractiveness, intention and prestige which was aimed at potential recruits as well. Colin and Stevens (2002) did their research on students on their favouritism towards an organisation while Knox and Freeman (2006) expanded their research which included not just students as potential employees but existing employees as well. Berthon, Ewing and Ha (2005) developed an employer attractiveness scale (EmpAt) to measure how potential employees view organisation as attractive by the five dimensions.

Researcher saw the niche in academic research on employer branding and specifically on employer attractiveness and which would include both students and existing employees as well, especially as this was not done in Ireland yet. The research would be done using Berthon et al (2005) EmpAt scale to measure attractiveness of an employee from students and existing employees as well. Results of the research would show are there any differences and similarities in what attributes of an employer are valued most from a perspective and existing employee side.

The dissertation would explore in detail branding and employer branding concepts and corporate, internal and external branding strategies would be broadly discussed as well. Next it will introduce the concept of employer attractiveness with the examination of previous research done by academics. Branding in an Irish and worldwide context would be explored as well. Following that research questions would be introduced followed by research methodology.

2 Literature review

2.1 Branding

One of the first definitions of the brand was made by Harvard Business Review academic paper in 1995 where the brand was described as a complex symbol and that it represents different ideas and variety of attributes and not just physical but emotional ones as well, in other words, when consumers are becoming loyal to particular product or a brand, they become attached to it not just by physical attributes but emotional ones as well (Fanning 2006). Brands hold a symbolic function because people tend to associate their personality traits with brand (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003). Aaker (1997) did research on brand traits where she asked consumers to rate various brands by 114 traits. Findings of the research were that brand can be represented by five main factors: sincerity which holds traits such as domestic and cheerful; excitement with traits of spirituality and imagination; competence was found as reliable and responsible; sophistication held romantic and charming traits and ruggedness donated such traits as rugged and outdoorsy. Therefore, for a long time, branding for companies was associated with alluring more customers to purchase the product or service and with gaining customer loyalty to the brand (Olapido, Iyamabo and Otubanjo, 2013). Although, Kim, York and Lim (2010) argue that product brands of the company may influence

the decision of the prospective applicants whether or not to work for that organisation. If organisation produces strong brands to the market, they hold a competitive advantage in attracting prospective applicants. Such organisations would benefit from displaying their product brands on the work brochures and on their official web pages as their recruitment strategy. As stated by Davies (2006), the brand's ability to be different, to create and maintain loyalty and satisfaction of the byer and being able to develop an emotional attachment are relevant to an employer brand as well.

2.2 Employer Branding

Employer brand as a term was invented in 1990's by Simon Barrow who specialised in brand management of consumer goods and who realised that the same marketing techniques used on the products and services to attract consumers could be useful when companies are seeking to attract, retain and engage their existing and potential employees (Taylor, 2010). One of the first definitions of employer branding was made by Ambler and Barrow in 1996 (cited in Wilska, 2014. p. 2) as "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by the company and identified with the employing company". Functional benefits refer to the learning development or career advancement opportunities available in the company; economical refer to the rewards packages available for employees while psychological entails employee's feelings of belonging and recognition to the company (Kimpakor and Dimmitt, 2007).

The definitions evolved over time and it became clear that employer branding, indeed, was not just about recruitment campaigns but about its qualities and attributes; about what makes a particular organisation different from others and what kind of working experience it provides to those employees who would thrive to work

for that particular organisation to the best possible ability (Taylor, 2010).

According to Moroko and Uncles (2008) (who have done a research in which characteristics make the employer brand successful), being noticeable, relevant and different from the competitors were the most important features of branding characteristics identified by employers. Employer brand has to have and possess something different to their competitors and, therefore, potential and existing employees would see its growing importance and would want to start and continue to work for that organisation (Corte et al 2011). As stated by Olapido et al. (2013) employer branding motivates an increased desired perceptions amongst current and potential employees and, in the process, helps organisation to become “Employer of the Choice”.

According to Ritson (cited in Pingle and Sodhi, 2011) companies who have developed strong employer brand can significantly increase numbers of potential employees who would want to work for them and even can improve employee and employer relations within the organisation. Through Employer Branding, employees can build their employer identity which can be directed at existing and potential employees to differentiate their organisations from competitors which in turn makes it easier to attract and retain employees (Silvertzen, Nilsen and Olafsen, 2013).

According to Berthon et al (2005), there are five steps in developing a strong employer brand: understand your organisation; create a compelling brand promise; develop standards to measure the fulfilment of the brand promise; ‘ruthlessly align’ all HR practices to reinforce the brand promise and execute and measure” (Berthon et al 2005, p.4).

First stage is to understand the organisation which requires research done by focus groups, interviews or surveys with employees who worked for organisation for at least five years. Research would show what employees value the most in the organisation (Taylor, 2010). Davies (2006) developed five-trait model to measure employee views: “agreeableness; enterprise; competence, chic and ruthlessness” (Davies 2006, p.4). All these traits show intangible associations, although it is important to determine what tangible aspects of their organisation employees appreciate the most. Intangible assets include reputation of the organisation; how meaningful and important is the job provided; whether the organisation is small or big and availability of work-life balance (Taylor, 2010).

Following steps in developing employer brand involves coming up with brand promise, which involves identification of organisations special features as a place of work (Taylor, 2010). Measurement could be done by number of overall job applications; number of employee referrals; retention levels and internal promotions (IDS, cited in Taylor 2010). Equally important step is reinforcing the brand by improving the actual experience for employees who work for organisation. By keeping the good reputation amongst existing employees, there would be much better reputation of the company amongst potential recruits as well (Taylor, 2010). Employers use Glassdoor website to reach potential new hires in order to compete in the talent war, they deliver their employer branding story through “why work for us” videos and social media integration (Glassdoor, 2015). However, potential employees can use the website as well to read reviews posted by existing and former hires and develop their perception about particular organisation’s reputation and their brand before joining the organisation (Glassdoor, 2015). Therefore, it is important for companies to always maintain and reinforce their

employer brand because nowadays it could be visible not just from inside of organisation but come from various social media sites as well. According to Weiss (2014) online reputation would be central for the companies to retain good reputation and maintain their employer branding. Career Support 365 did a research in 2013 in Sydney, LA and Vancouver across 500 people who had lost their jobs and they found that it is more likely for former employees to post negative reviews about their former employers on the website such as Glassdoor. Therefore, such websites have a strong possibility of changing their opinion about the particular company not just in the form of potential employees but existing ones as well.

First of all employer branding is specifically directed towards organisation's identity as a whole and to the employment. It is directed towards internal and external stakeholders while corporate branding mainly directed just towards external ones (Silvertzen et al 2013).

Employers should be aware that branding is not only important for attracting talented and "fit for organisation" potential employees but it is important to brand the company for existing employees as well and, as a result of a branding strategy, the corporate, internal and external branding strategies are equally important for organisations (King and Grace, 2007).

2.3 Corporate branding

Corporate branding is defined as a promise between various stakeholders in the organisation such as management, employees and customers and that promise needs to be kept at all times by all of the parties involved (Foster, Punjaisri and Cheng, 2010) and should be aligned very closely with the identity of organisation (Maxwell and Knox, 2009). Balmer and Gray (2003) stated that a strong corporate brand can act as a navigation tool

which would include not just existing employees but potential recruits as well. As a result, first of all, corporate brand promise need to be understood internally and the entire organisation needs to be able to deliver on that promise which needs to be visible through all layers of organisation (Foster et al. 2010). Employees who already work in organisation play a very important role for corporate branding, because through them brand values are transmitted to the external and internal environments (Foster et al. 2010). Therefore, good corporate branding helps organisation in recruiting best possible candidates and with the development of existing employees as well (Balmer and Gray,2003), so employer branding in the companies has to be done internally and externally as well. The possible connection between corporate brand, external and internal employer branding was made by Foster et al (2010). They argue, that aligning internal branding with external should lead to much better working relationship amongst HR and marketing departments within the organisation, which, as a result, would increase organisational performance and increase corporate brand image as well.

2.4 Internal and external marketing of the employer brand

In the previous decade, with the emergence of employer branding, the main focus was put on the external employer branding where the employer brand primary objective was to attract potential employees and, as a secondary objective it served in supporting and enhancing the employer brand (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). As a result, employer branding was closely linked with labour market trends and such communication and marketing techniques in recruitment process as advertising and publicity events were used to attract potential candidates (Martin, Gollan and Grigg, 2011).

During the years of economic downturn and high levels of unemployment across the globe, the shift from external branding was put on the existing employees (Martin et al 2011). Employers became increasingly aware that employees can be seen as central in building employer brand image (Berthon et al 2005), therefore, internal branding focuses on current employees who already work in the company (Foster et al. 2010). According to King and Grace (2007), employees who are able to deliver their organisations brand promise back to customers or to potential employees, create much more positive work environment and it is incorporated in to overall organisational culture, although it is very important for organisations to communicate accurate information about organisational culture to potential recruits and keep reinforcing values of the culture to existing ones (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). Research done by Punjaisri, Evanschitzky and Wilson (2009) shows that such internal branding structures as available rewards and opportunity for learning and development in the organisation increases the effect of internal employer branding.

According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) external and internal employer branding intercept with one another in the process. External employer branding strives to make organisation as an employer of the choice so it would be able to attract the best possible potential employees available in the labour market. Nowadays, more and more employees are thriving to be on the list of “Best Employer” in order to stay competitive and to attract and retain the talented workforce for their organisations (Saini, Rai and Chaudhary, 2013). As a result, candidates choose organisations whose brand image appeals most to them and, therefore, developed a certain set of assumptions about the future work in the company. These already made assumptions usually support the organisation’s

culture, value and believes and, as a result, increases organisational commitment.

Therefore, a very important aspect of every organisation is to attract and retain skilled employees, so the attractiveness of the employer is essential in motivating potential recruits to join the company and existing employees to stay and work for the company (Anitha and Madhavkumar, 2012).

2.5 Employer attractiveness

Berthon et al (2005, p.6) defines employer attractiveness “as the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organisation”. It can be measured by such organizational characteristics as pay, career advancement opportunities, although attributes can be intangible as well such as organisational image and the reputation (Anitha and Madhavkumar 2012). According to Gatewood, Gowan and Lautenschlager (1993), job seekers make their initial decisions on the organisations based on the attractiveness of the organisation. As stated by Barber (cited in Highhouse et al 2003) employer attractiveness is reflected in the minds of a potential employees when they are thinking about the companies they would like to work for. It does not imply that any actual decisions would be made towards the company so it is passive in nature. Therefore, it allows individuals to be attracted to more than one company at the time.

Employer attractiveness can be measured internally and externally, although most research was done how to measure employer attractiveness externally in order to recruit potential employees (Pingle and Sodhi, 2011).

Research done by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) suggests that employer brand associations, such as thoughts that brand name arouse for job

seekers, brand image and attraction shape employer image which affects the attractiveness of employer to potential recruits. According to researches, potential employees often compare their own values, beliefs and needs to the organisational brand image. In the case when those values, beliefs and needs fit the organisational ones, it automatically becomes more attractive to potential recruits (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004).

Highhouse et al (2003) investigated three parts of organisation attractiveness: attractiveness, intention and prestige. Company attractiveness was assessed by such features as the organisation a good place to work or seen as the last resort of employment because nothing better is available. Intentions measured whether the potential candidate would recommend this company to a friend, would consider the company as the best employer to work for and would put a big effort and willingness for a chance to work for organisation. Prestige was measured in people's willingness to work for the company and whether company is prestigious or not.

Collins and Stevens (2002) did research on students ratings on how favourable they were towards organisation and their intentions to apply for future work for that particular organisation. Publicity, sponsorship activities, word-of-mouth endorsements and advertising were the measure points. Their findings were that students showed more favouritism towards organisations which were visible to them during university sports events and were sponsors or those who had high perceived corporate profile.

According to Olapido et al (2013) there was a little research done in measuring how employer attractiveness differs from perspective employees and existing ones. Employer branding and employer attractiveness is not just about recruiting the best workforce available in the labour market, but it is about retaining and motivating the employees who work for organisation already. Knox

and Freeman (2006) did their research on the potential recruits amongst students and on the employees working for the organisation already. They used survey with twenty attributes of employer brand image with scales of very important and not important. The results of research showed that there is interaction between the likeliness of applying for a job and employer attractiveness. Results also showed that there is a strong difference among potential and existing employees in what attributes their rate important of the organisation's brand image. Research using similar survey was done by Priyadarshi (2011) where she surveyed existing employees only and found that organisational environment was the most important factor for employees when rating employer brand image. Organisational environment was followed by work settings and variety of work; opportunity in the career advancement and organisational fame and flexibility. Although, farther mentioned researchers used similar survey, Priyadarshi (2011) just surveyed existing employees and factors which are important for employer brand. On the other hand, Knox and Freeman (2006) used their results mostly for recruitment methods and techniques which would help to attract the best potential employees and how existing employees can reinforce the brand message to potential recruits by better communication, shorter application process and innovative graduate recruitment methods. According to Clegg (2004) such graduate recruitment campaigns as providing specialist input during the studies; sponsoring clubs and societies; offering pre-university scholarships and paying students who act as "brand ambassadors" help companies in securing the best potential candidates from the available candidate pool. Therefore, Knox and Freeman (2006) research confirms what Clegg (2004) stated about innovative graduate recruitment processes which help to attract the best future employees from recent graduate pool.

Chhabra and Sharma (2011) did their research in India on potential recruits. They identified 7 organisational attributes (compensation, career prospects and growth, job profile, brand name, corporate culture, employee empowerment and training and development) of employer attractiveness and surveyed final year students. Research found the most attractive employer attributes were compensation, organisational culture and brand name. During one more objective of the research, Chhabra and Sharma (2011) identified that the most preferred channel when looking for a job for prospective employees are social media and web based job portals, which compliments statement made by Clegg (2004) that innovative graduate recruitment channels attract most potential employees.

Maxwell and Knox (2009) conducted research on employer attractiveness just using existing employees of the five companies. Researchers used questioners which were divided in to two parts: first part consisted of four open-ended questions about organisations attributes which employees value the most; second part consisted of three open-ended questions regarding employee and organisation fit and employment experience in the organisation. Their findings were that in each organisation employee's valued different attributes of employer attractiveness and, as a result, they stated that managers in different companies need to understand and find out what they employees value the most. Therefore, this would help to maintain and reinforce the employer brand image and distinctive identity of the organisation.

Berthon et al (2005) developed the employer attractiveness scale (EmpAt) which consisted of 25 employer attractiveness attributes. Those attributes were divided in to 5 factors: interest value; social value; economic value; development value and application value.

First factor, which is interest value, measures the attractiveness of employer in the terms of what kind of work environment employer

provides to an employee; are there any work practices available that are exciting and original and how creative is an employer in order to produce innovative and high quality goods and services (Berthon et al 2005).

Social value factor measures attractiveness of the employer in the terms of whether an employer provides a fun and happy work environment; are there good work relationships in the workplace and is there a team atmosphere provided by an employer (Berthon et al 2005).

Third factor which is economic value, assesses attractiveness of an employer in the terms whether he is providing a good salary; is there a job security in the workplace; is there availability of compensation packages and career advancement options (Berthon et al 2005).

Development value factor measures employer attractiveness in the terms of whether employee provides recognition, self-worth and confidence to his employees; are there opportunities for career development and future employment (Berthon et al 2005).

The last factor, application value, assesses employer attractiveness in the terms of being able to apply the things an employer learned in the workplace to their work and having an opportunity to teach others in a work environment which is customer orientated and humanitarian in nature (Berthon et al 2005). According to Turban and Greening (1997) the organisation who gives back to society and is humanitarian in nature can increase their organisational attractiveness and, as a result, potential employees will expect to feel proud if working for such organisation and existing employees would stay in organisation longer. Research done by Berthon et al. (2005) showed a positive relationship between the five dimensions of the scale and the overall employer attractiveness.

Saini et al. (2013) used the same scale in their research on potential employees. They found that the development and social value were the most important attributes to potential employees. Such attributes as having a fun working environment and feeling good about themselves while working for a particular organisation were more important than innovation, promotional opportunities or whether organisation gives back to society.

Olapido et al. (2013) used empAt scale in their research where they analysed what impact personality characteristics have on various values of employer attractiveness. Findings were that people who are conscientious are attracted to nearly all values and would enjoy working in fun environment with novel work practices and products. People who are open to experience were mostly attracted to interest, development and economic values. They would thrive while working for innovative employer who provides good promotional opportunities. People, who process agreeableness personality trait would enjoy to work for organisation where they would be able to apply the skills they learned at the third level institution. Extravert people would prefer to work in a fun, happy environment.

Sivertzen et al. (2013) increased five dimensions of the EmpAt scale by further three: corporate reputation, use of social media and intentions to apply for the job. Research found that innovation, application and psychological values have positive relation with corporate reputation and intentions to apply for the job. While economic and social values did not hold a big significance to it. Therefore, values which are not monetary are more important in employer reputation for potential and existing employees. They prefer organisations to focus on personal growth, innovation, good environment for training and development and ability to adapt knowledge and skills. Results contradict the research done by Saini

et al. (2013) where one of the most important attribute was fun working environment and agreed by Tews, Michel and Bartlett (2012) where they stated that such environment in organisations has a positive impact in attracting perspective employees to join them. Differences could be due to geographical and cultural differences as Silvertzen et al. (2013) did their research in Norway while Saini et al. (2013) did theirs in India. Never the less, both researchers suggest, that employees who use social media in their recruiting and corporate reputation campaigns would be more specific on such values as innovation, opportunities for career growth and development and not just on the monetary aspects of the job.

After extensive literature research just one research was found which used EmpAt scale and included prospective and existing employees as well. Biswas and Suar (2013) found that employer branding is mostly affected by four values: economic, social, interest and development. Although, researchers used two different sample groups, they did not articulate any differences or similarities amongst them, which is the main objective of present dissertation.

2.6 Employer branding in an Irish context

In 20015, Emperor, brand communication agency and Berkley Group, a recruitment and talent management company which is based in Ireland, conducted research to see how companies in Ireland managed their employer brand and whether their strengths, challenges and priorities were different from the same research done in the United Kingdom. The research found that 70% of the participative companies were committed to the management and development of their employer brand, although, most of them admitted that they still have a lot of work to do in the future. This shows, that Irish companies are aware and understand the importance of employer branding but most of them lack clarity while

implementing it. 46% of organisations admitted that HR and corporate team hold the main responsibility for developing the employer brand. The most popular means for measuring the effectiveness of employer brand in Irish organisations was cost and quality of hire, while UK participant companies chose internal surveys. 75% respondents of the Irish survey admitted that they do not develop their brand internally within an existing employees (Andrews, 2015). NewJobRadio in Ireland is the outlet which invites companies for interviews in order to improve their employer brand. The radio web page holds a lot of testimonials from the companies and all of them did not mentioned internal employer branding in them (NewJobRadio,2015).

This further reinforces the niche in Ireland for the research which would be presented in this dissertation that organisations need to be aware and develop their employer brand externally and internally as well.

2.7 Employer branding in a worldwide context

In 2012 LinkedIn conducted a Global Recruiting Trends Survey on-line on more than 3000 companies worldwide in various industries. Research found that employer branding is regarded as important part of corporate strategy all over the world with 83% of the participants agreeing. Over half of the companies who took part in the survey have increased their employer brand investment in 2012 while 40% have maintained the allocated budget for it. However, just half of the respondents have a proactive employer brand strategy and only 37% listening and surveying current employees and not just potential or new hires (LinkedIn, 2012).

Employer Brand International is a company which provides research, leadership and guidance in employer branding via consultations,

events, training and publications in all industry sectors and in more than 30 countries (Employer Brand International, 2006). In 2014 they did Employer Branding Global Trends Survey across 18 countries worldwide. Survey found that although a lot of respondents rank employer branding as one of the main priorities in their leadership agenda, many organisations still lack a clearly defined strategy for it. 35% of the companies have employer branding strategy put in place but they believe that it is still not finished and needs to be developed further. Social media was identified as one of the most important channel of activity in order to communicate and promote their employer brand. For measuring the return of investment companies use wide range of metrics: retention rates, employee engagement, quality and the cost of hire and number of applicants. The main benefits for companies after initiating employer branding programmes varied as well: employee engagement, recognition as an “Employer of Choice”, attraction of potential candidates, higher job acceptance rate, reduced recruitment costs and decrease in staff turnover (Employer Brand International, 2014).

2.8 Companies and Employer Branding

Silicon Valley Company Talend which is based in USA were experiencing a shortage of talented workforce. They recognised the need to increase their employee brand in order to attract the best workforce available in the job market. Company started to use social media campaign called “Team Talend” through channels such as Instagram, Twitter and Google+. Therefore Talend executive team included existing employees in the campaign by encouraging them at being brand’s ambassadors and providing social media training as well. The new position for Talent Ambassador was created in the Company who was responsible in sourcing new talent, delivering thank you notes to every potential candidate who came to

interviews and making sure that all media channels are up-to-date. As a result, the Company saw an increase in employee engagement levels and a lot more interest from potential employees without investing a lot of money in to their branding strategy (LinkedIn Talent Blog, 2015).

Working for a fast food restaurant McDonalds for a long time was associated with low-paid, low-skilled and little or no prospect for further development or career advancement. The Word McJob was even defined in an Oxford English Dictionary in 2001 as low-paid, unstimulating job with no further prospects. McDonalds started employer branding strategies such as advertising where they emphasised positive aspects of working at McDonalds. In their advertisements they used celebrities at the beginning but latter changed their strategy and used real employees who already worked for them. They held internal and external focus groups to find out their employees' perceptions about them as well as their customers. McDonalds also commissioned research from University College in London to find out level of employee satisfaction at the restaurant. After campaign, Restaurant saw an increase of 31% of job applications and won "The best place to work in hospitality" in 2007 (Wallace, Lings, Cameron and Sheldon, 2014).

Barclays bank, which is one of the largest institutions of the world, started their employer branding campaign in order of changing people's perceptions about working for financial services. They focused on workers inventing spirit and developed advertising campaign around Canary Wharf tube station using real life employees. Bank also started internal promotions within the bank and started workshops to reinforce their branding messages. Almost all of the employees at Barclays supported the campaign and it reached the top 20 of Sunday Times "Best Big Companies to Work For" list in 2006 (Personnel Today, 2006).

Fujitsu Services is a Japanese IT service company which operates in Europe, Australia, Middle East and Africa and employs more than 20 thousand employees. In 2006 company started their employer branding strategy and employee communication exercise across all the workforce to ensure that all employees are communicating clearly and working towards the same goal. As a result, Fujitsu Services developed Reputation programme which aligned all employees of the company across 20 countries starting from service desk teleworkers to top management. Programme involved establishing the brand which was called Reputation model and then communicating it through small group sessions across all organisation. 2 thousand managers were trained as Reputation champions to lead and deliver the programme initially. Reputation model was designed with the help of independent surveys of employees and customers. The results of the survey helped to define the Fujitsu Services brand as realistic with core attributes of straight talking, tenacious and in tune with time which aimed to be truthful and pragmatic with its customers. HR and Marketing departments of the company were responsible in delivering coherent external and internal perceptions of the brand. As a result, employees were encouraged to understand how their behaviour affect customers, their colleagues and all the company using shared vocabulary. As a result, every employee in Fujitsu Services was encouraged to act as a key player of the company, because all employees has an impact on how the company is seen by others. Reputation programme helped to open the lines of communication across all layers of Fujitsu Services. Communication sessions were interactive and involves different layers of organisation. Feedback from each session were used to design the next session and, as a result, employee's contributions to each session was one of the most important part of the project. Programme attributes were embedded in HR policies and practices and in all aspects of the

business as well. Every time, before establishing a new policy, HR department would ask if it is realistic and in tune with time and employee expectations. As a result of the Reputation branding model, Fujitsu services saw improved retention rates and was highest new entry in the Time's Top 100 Graduate Recruiters list in 2006 (PM Editorial, 2008). Fujitsu Services recognised the importance of employer branding and that company values are in people, their skills and opinions and not just in profits.

3 Research

3.1 Purpose of the research

Purpose of this research is to assess employer attractiveness most attractive values and attributes using EmpAt scale from the point of view of perspective and existing employees as well, because as was noted by Olapido et al (2013) where is a gap in the research for it and it was never done in Ireland and, as stated by Maxwell and Knox (2009) employer brand can be fully developed if it is considered attractive by its current employees and not just potential recruits. Furthermore, it was suggested by Berthon et al (2005), that EmpAt scale could be used on the existing employee's as well and not just students.

3.2 Research Title

Employer branding: current and future employees' perceptions of employer's attractiveness attributes.

3.3 Research Aim

Research aim is to research employer attractiveness attributes from two perspectives from an Irish context: potential employees and existing employers as well. It will identify which attributes potential

and existing employees value the most in employer which, as a result would help employees in moulding their existing internal and external branding strategies.

3.4 Research Objectives

Research objectives of this study are to identify:

- What employer attractiveness attributes are valued the most by potential recruits?
- What employer attractiveness attributes are valued most by each value in the EmpAt scale by potential recruits?
- What employer attractiveness attributes are valued the most by existing employees? (Existing employees would consist of higher professionals and those who work in managerial positions in the company for more than two years).
- What employer attractiveness attributes are valued most by each value in the EmpAt scale by potential employees?
- Identify any differences between the two groups and draw recommendations for employers for future branding strategies.
- Identify if there are any similarities between the two groups and draw recommendations for employees when structuring future branding strategies.

4 Research Methodology

4.1 Methodological Approach and Justification

After extensive literature research, researcher saw that there was a little research done where both potential and existing employees were researched by values and attributes of what makes an attractive employer. Values and attributes that are found the most

attractive ones can be one of the important factors when developing a strategy for employer branding programmes in organisations.

The research in this paper was done by quantitative research method using an EmpAt survey developed by Berthon et al (2005). Quantitative research methods are especially useful when researcher is looking at relationships, patterns and differences and expressing those relationships, patterns and differences with numbers (Rudestam and Newton, 1992). Researcher wanted to find and identify different and similar perceptions from two different groups of sample groups: potential and existing employees, therefore a quantitative analysis of data where differences can be explained by numbers seemed most appropriate method.

4.2 Research Philosophy

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) different research philosophies do not fall in to the box there one is ranked better as another. They are rather better described as philosophies who seek to achieve different things in research and can depend on research questions what researcher seeks to answer in his or hers research.

Epistemology in research is concerned to what is an acceptable knowledge in the chosen field of study (Saunders et al 2012). Researcher of this paper used the data and resources to reach research objectives, therefore adapted the positivism approach. Positivism approach is used where researches prefer collecting their data about their research topic and search for casual relationships and regularities in the data collected. Strategy for collecting the data may be used earlier by already existing and proven theories by other researchers (Saunders et al 2012). Researcher of this paper used already developed EmpAt scale by Berthon et al (2005) and from the findings was looking for differences and similarities amongst of two

representative samples of the research, therefore research philosophy reflected a positivism approach.

Positivist approach research is undertaken where researcher stays external to the data collection and there is a little that can be done to change the interpretation of the data collected (Saunders et al 2012). Researcher of this paper stayed value-free through the data collection process, no initial interactions with two groups of representative samples were done and just figures of the survey were used for the interpretation of the findings.

4.3 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research usually takes interpretive philosophy approach to the research subject and study things in their natural settings. Interpretive philosophy needs to make the sense of the subjective meanings expressed about the subject which is being studied (Saunders et al 2012). Qualitative research is mostly appropriate where the collection and interpretation of data does not require any numerical interpretation and is usually done through focus groups, face to face or phone interviews and observations (Saunders et al 2012).

4.4 Quantitative Research

Quantitative research usually holds a positivist approach where researcher tests a theory by the specified objectives and by the collection of data in order to support and prove those objectives. The data is collected using various instruments that would measure attitudes, similarities and differences and would be analysed using statistical analysis programmes (Creswell, 2014). Data collection techniques in quantitative research include questionnaires, surveys and experiments which can generate numerical data and later

interpret the findings which would support or defuse proposed research hypothesis and objectives (Saunders et al 2012). Researcher of this paper identified that research objectives required to find similarities and differences amongst two sample groups which would require numerical data, so quantitative research using survey was considered as best approach to this paper.

4.5 Surveys

The purpose of the survey is to produce facts and statistics which is quantitative and numerical to the chosen topic of the research. The main way of collecting information via surveys is to ask questions which would be answered by the sample group and later those answers would be used as data collected from which results would be interpreted according to those answers (Fowler, 2014).

This research survey was already developed by Berthon et al (2002) and many scholars used the EmpAt scale in their research (Saini et al 2013; Olapido et al 2013; Sivertzen et al 2013). This research was partly done using electronic questionnaire by Google Forms internet programme, especially in the potential recruits sample group and as was stated by Sekaran and Bougie (2010) electronic surveys when used for research can reach participants globally if the research requires bigger geographical dimension; they are much more easier to administer because researchers do not need to deliver them in person and many internet programmes nowadays would even interpret the results for the researcher; electronic surveys are very inexpensive and in many cases free; they are delivered back to researcher in the instant someone takes part in the survey and respondents can complete the survey at the time that is convenient for me and do not feel forced in doing so.

4.6 Alternative Considerations

Other research venues were considered by the researcher as well, particularly individual interviews using qualitative research method. A well designed interview could provide more information and could help the participants to elaborate more on the topic. However, researcher felt that this particular research results would be based on the differences and similarities of perceptions of two different sample group representatives, survey research was considered as the most appropriate tool for research.

4.7 Sample Group

Sample group in this proposed research study was divided in two groups. First group consisted of 80 college students, who at the time of research were actively seeking full time employment or gaining work experience by joining internship programs for students in various companies. Some of the students might have been working part-time or as an apprentices for employers already. According to Calder (cited in Berthon et al 2005), students can be acceptable research subjects, because they are active current job seekers and are an excellent candidates for identifying employer attractiveness attributes. Another group of the sample consisted of current employees working for a various companies for more than two years and who hold managerial, higher managerial or higher professional positions in the company to assess what attributes of employer they consider as attractive. Researcher decided to use existing employees from various sectors, because the first sample group of students would be looking for employment in various industries as well. First

sample group would get their survey via e-mail, social media channels or delivered by hand while second group's survey would be distributed by a researcher through e-mail, by hand, social media channels such as Facebook and LinkedIn and by surveying her colleagues at recruitment agency and their candidates because further mentioned recruitment agency provides employment for people who hold higher managerial positions. An accompanied covering note was attached to every survey, which explained the purpose of the study. According to Dilman (cited in Saunders et al 2012) surveys which had a cover letter held much greater response rate to the ones who did not.

4.8 Explanation of Data

Survey for the proposed research study was taken from Berthon et al (2005) with 25 questions which are divided into five categories with a scale from one to five, one being the lowest and five is the highest. The survey questions are presented in the appendix 1.

4.9 Collection of Data

Data was collected through social media channels, such as e-mail, Facebook, LinkedIn and Google+. Researcher also used friends and word-of-mouth referrals where survey was delivered by hand by researcher and collected 2 days later. Results were interpreted using Microsoft Excel programme.

4.10 Limitations to Research

Researcher did not get a response rate she was hoping for. Out of 80 students that were planned, 43 have answered the survey and out of 80 planned existing employees, 52 have taken the part in the survey. Total response rate for first group of sample was 53.75% (43/80) while for the second group the result of response was 65%

(58/80). The reason that first sample representative group got a lower response rate might be explained that research was mostly done during the summer holidays time and not a lot of student are checking their e-mails during it and researcher had a bit more access to the second sample group representatives through personal connections and through her workplace.

4.11 Ethical Considerations

All research which involves human participants hold the greatest ethical concerns and it does not matter if research was conducted face to face or through social media channels (Saunders et al 2015). During the research, researcher followed at all times to the ethical guidelines as dictated by NCI. All participants were informed that survey is anonymous and all data obtained during the research would be destroyed and deleted after research is finished.

5 Results

The results of the research would be presented by each value and each representative group.

5.1 Interest value

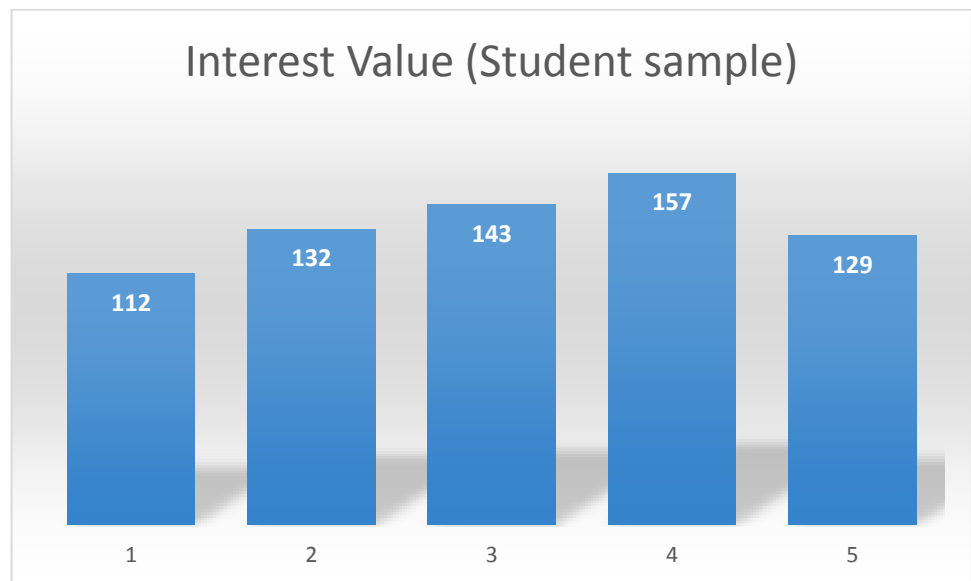


Figure 1. Interest value by student sample

As can be seen from the Figure 1 student sample the fact that employee produces innovative products and services is valued the most while whether an employee is innovative, who adapts forward thinking strategy and offers novel work practices is not that important.

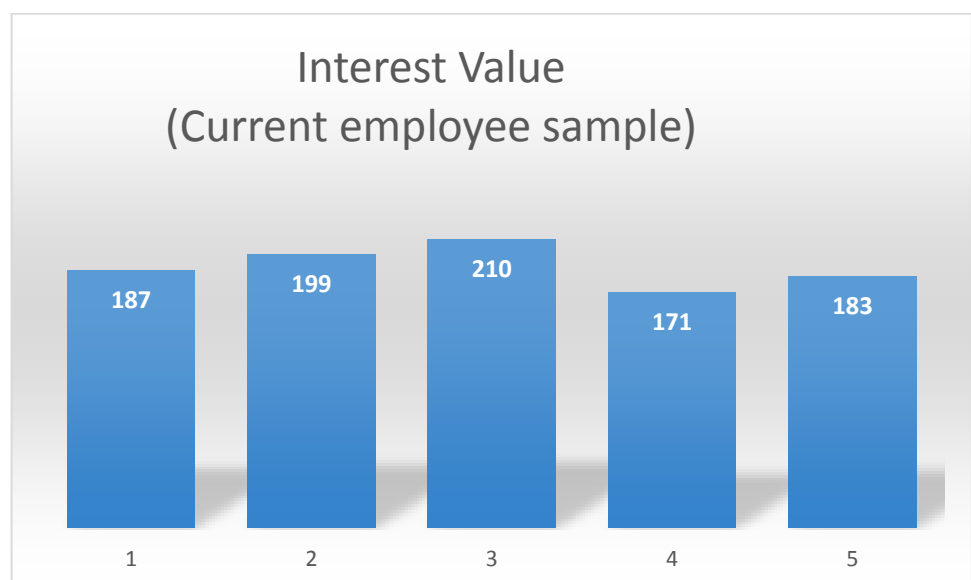


Figure2. Interest value by current employee sample

Figure 2 shows that current employees value if an employee lets them use their creativity at their workplace while the fact if employee produces innovative products or services does not hold much value to them.

5.2 Social Value

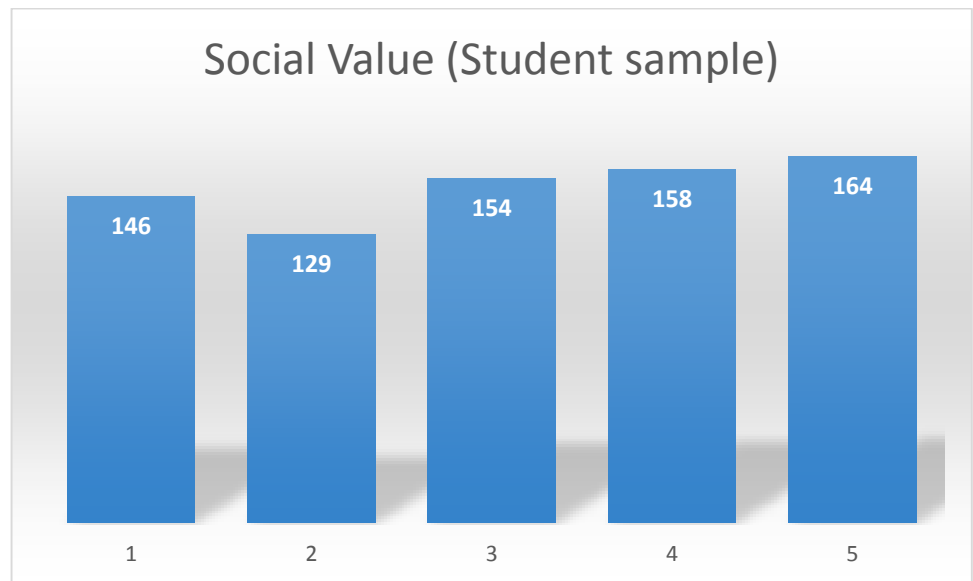


Figure 3. Social value by student sample

From the social value results it could be seen from figure 3 that the most attractive values for students in employer attractiveness were happy and fun work environment and supportive and encouraging colleagues while having a good relationship with superiors hold much lesser significance when considering employee for students.

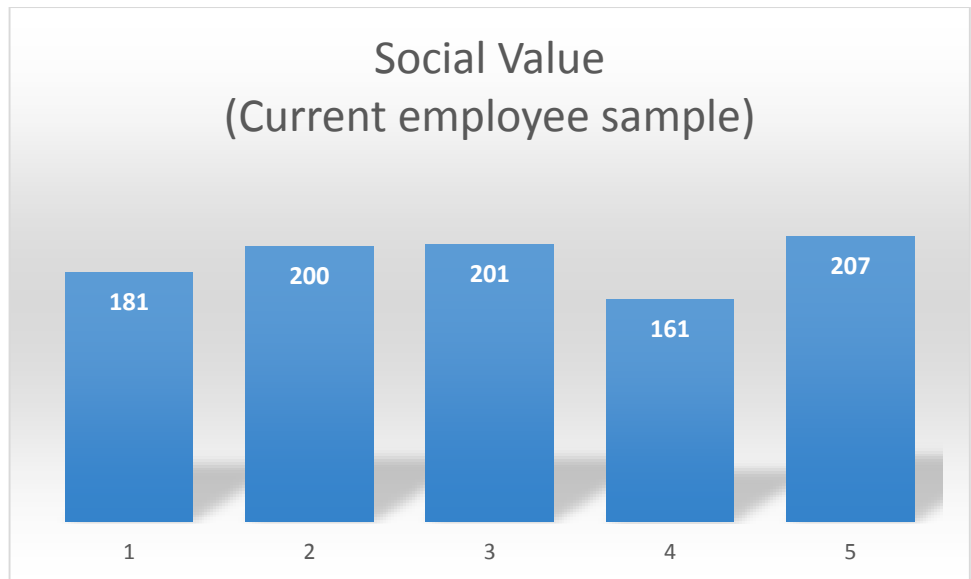


Figure 4. Social value by current employee sample.

In the terms of social value from the perspective of current employees results contradict each other as can be seen from figure 4. Current employees value the most happy work environment while fun working environment is valued the least. Although, having a good relationship with superiors and supportive and encouraging colleagues are important to current employees as well.

5.3 Economic Value

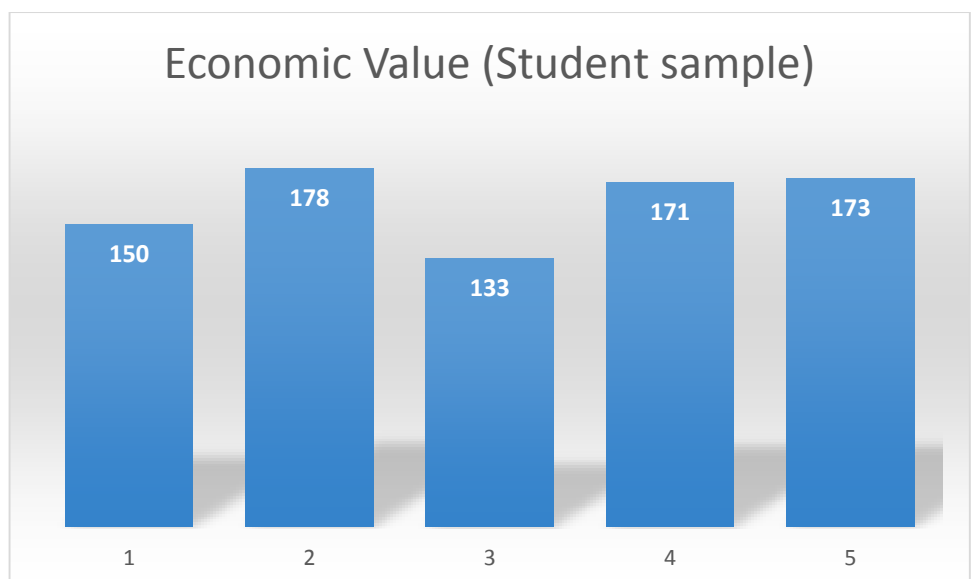


Figure 5. Economic value by student sample.

Student sample representative nearly equally the same value job security in the organisation, an above average salary and attractive overall compensation package as can be seen from figure 5. Hands-on-inter departmental experience valued the least.

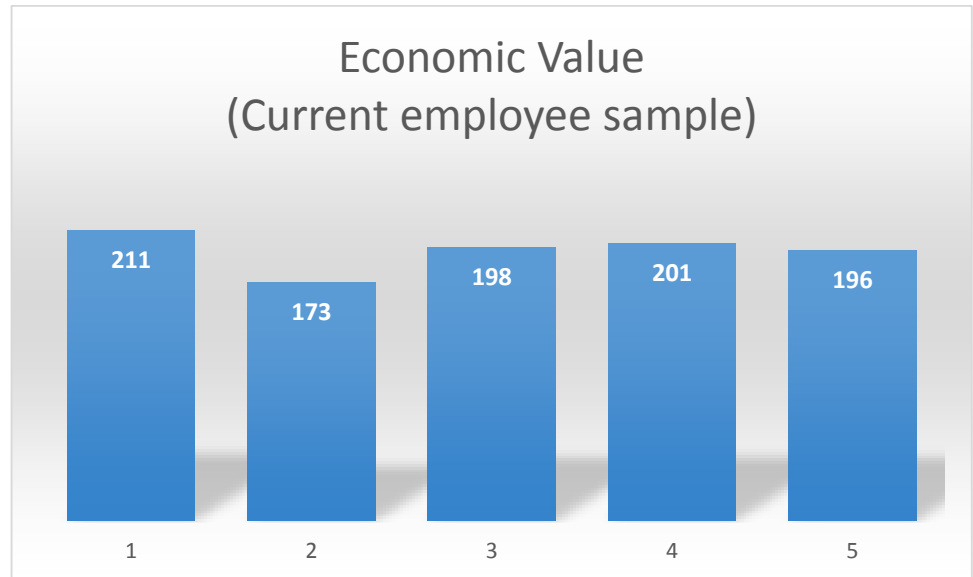


Figure 6. Economic value by current employee sample.

By economic value current employees prefer promotional opportunities within the organisation followed closely by above average basic salary, hand-on inter-departmental experience and attractive overall compensation package as can be seen from figure 6. On the other hand, job security within organisation was valued the least.

5.4 Developmental Value

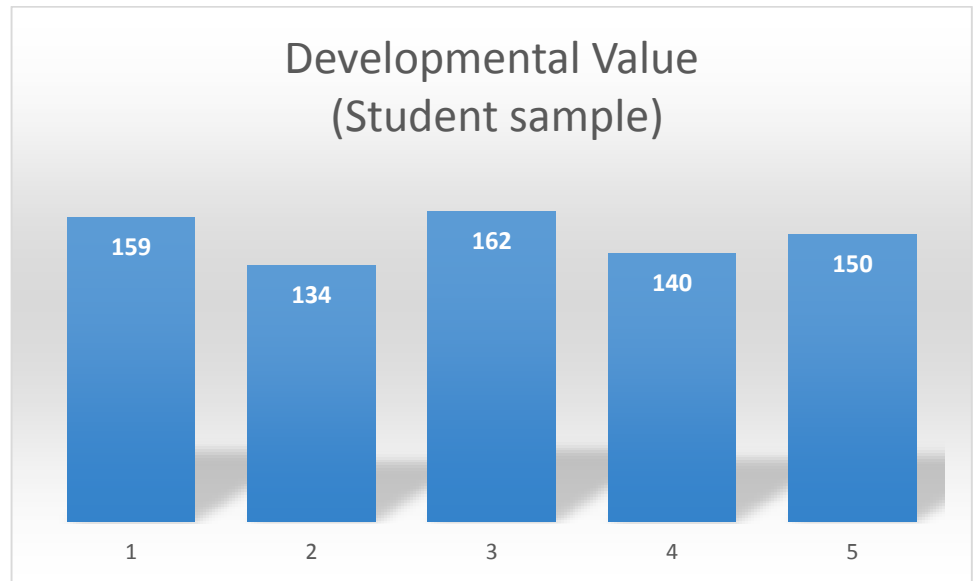


Figure 7. Developmental value by student sample

As can be seen from figure 7 students want to work for an employee or an organisation where they can feel good about themselves and receive recognition and appreciation from management. On the other hand, such developmental value as being employee who provides a springboard for future employment is valued the least.

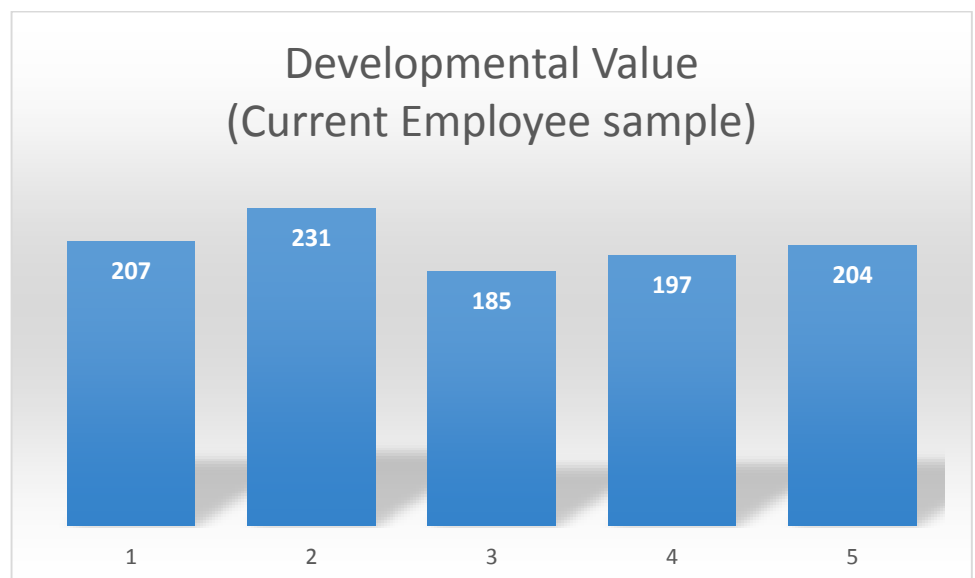


Figure 8. Developmental value by current employee sample.

Figure 8 shows that current employees prefer to work for an employee who would be a springboard for future employment and, like student sample, where they would receive recognition and appreciation from management. One of the values which student sample valued the most was feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular organisation, while, on the other hand, current employees rated this attribute as the least attractive.

5.5 Application Value

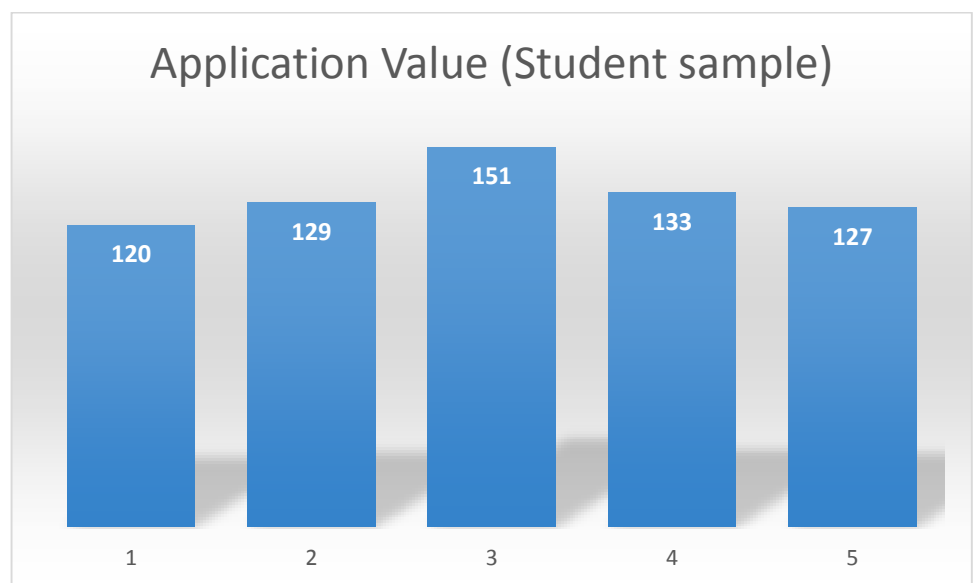


Figure 9. Application value by student sample

In the application value the attribute which students found the most attractive was when an employee gives an opportunity to employees to teach others using skills and knowledge they learned while working for that particular organisation. The fact that an employee is a humanitarian organisation and gives back to society was least attractive attribute rated by student sample as can be seen from figure 9.

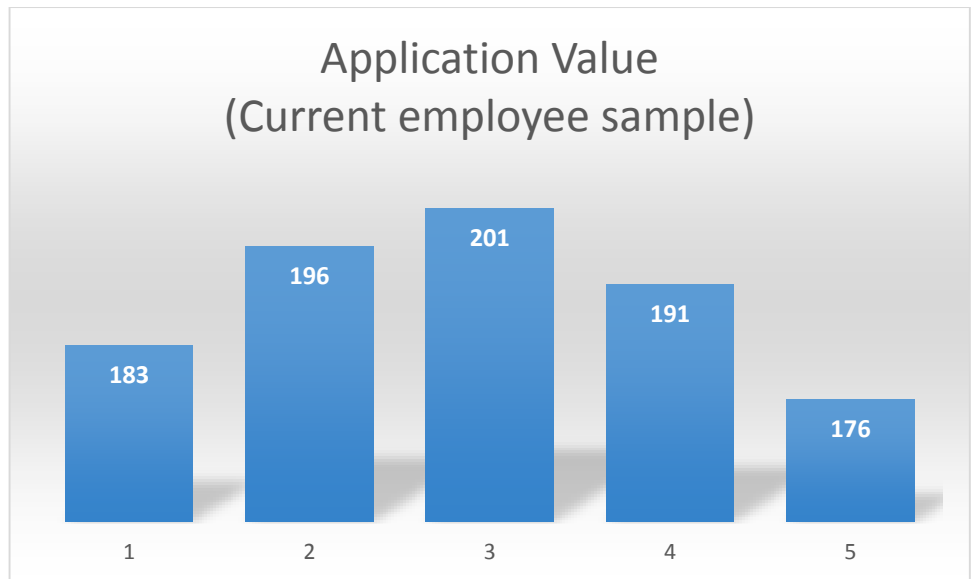


Figure 10. Application value by current employee sample

Current employees the same as students felt that the most attractive attribute in employer by application value is the opportunity to teach others the skills and knowledge gained while working in that particular organisation. The fact that organisation is customer orientated was found the least attractive attribute as can be seen from figure 10.

5.6 Overall Results

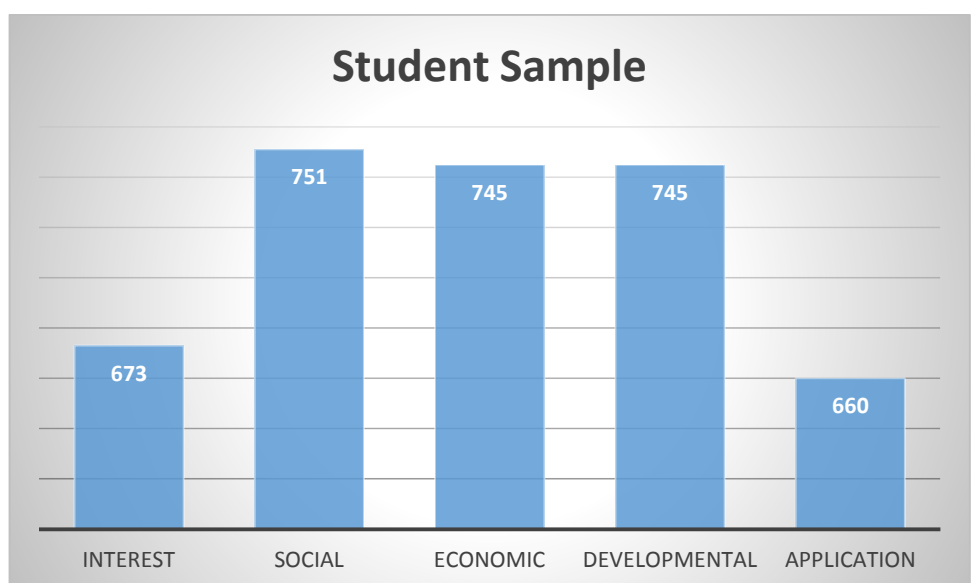


Figure 11. Overall results by students

On the overall student sample result, the value that they found the most attractive in employer was social followed closely by economic and developmental. Interest and application value was rated as the two least attractive ones as can be seen from figure11.

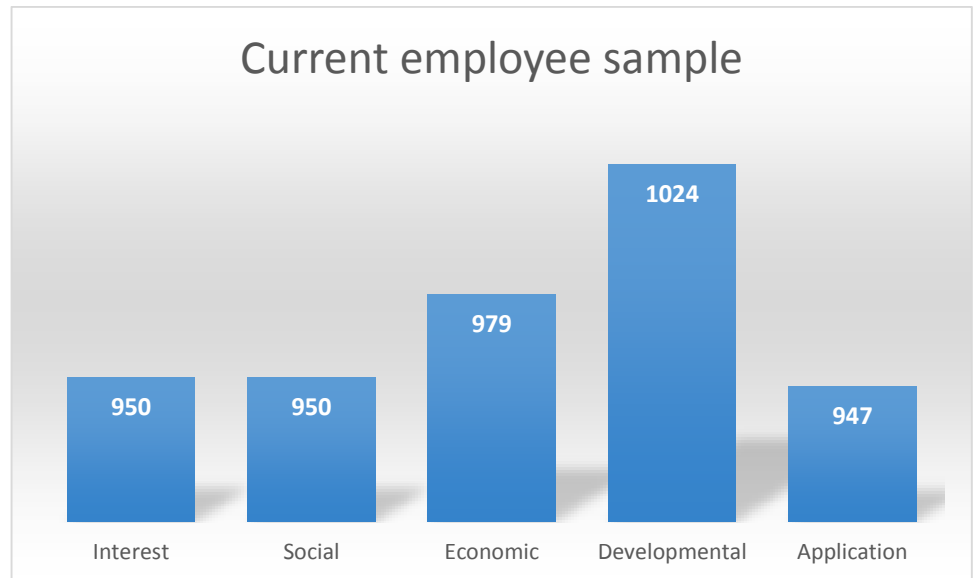


Figure 12. Overall results by current employees.

Current employees rated developmental value as the most attractive one to be held by employer in the overall results as can be seen from figure 12. Application, interest and social values the rated as the least attractive ones.

6 Discussion

This research paper investigated employer attractiveness attributes from two different perspectives: current and potential employees using EmpAt scale in order to identify important branding strategy factors employers should focus then designing their branding campaigns for potential employees in external branding and for current employees in internal branding strategies. The results of

research showed that two sample groups valued different attributes in nearly each value, therefore employees should use different branding strategies when attracting potential than the ones they use if they want to retain current employees in the organisation. Although, as would be noted later in the chapter, some differences can complement each other, therefore branding strategies can be similar.

The most attractive attribute of innovation value for potential employees was if employee is allowing to use their creativity in the workplace. According to Marks and Huzzard (2008) creativity and the satisfaction that the needs for creativity were satisfied in the workplace is and remains one of the important factors which makes an organisation an attractive employer. Organisations today need to be innovative and foster creativity in order to stay ahead of its competitors and as was stated by Dickson (2003) one of the ways to encourage and foster creativity in the workplace is to create such working environment where employees can come up with any ideas and whether those ideas are clever or crazy should not matter. Employers need to pick up the best ideas and build on them, but, they also need to revisit those rejected crazy ideas regularly as well. Sometimes those ideas which seemed crazy in the past might be a fantastic opportunity for employer to stay ahead of the competition. Another important factor of fostering and encouraging creativity in the workplace is that it should be nurtured within organisations by providing incentives, opportunities and facilities to employees. Organisational culture comes from leaders, therefore leaders of organisations first of all need to support and encourage creativity in the workplace by providing positive working climate for it (Nair and Gopal, 2011). Employers, as part of their internal branding strategy, need to provide supportive and open work environment where there are no bad ideas are ever put aside and all ideas are communicated

in a group environment. Employers need to encourage open communication by setting up example themselves and talk to employees regularly in order to get to know them and their strengths and ask for their input then making key decisions.

Current employees rated that the fact that they can use their creativity in the workplace as the most attractive attribute in employer and which was different to students who rated the fact that employer produces innovative products and services as their most attractive attribute. Although both results are different, they can complement each other. Employers need to encourage and foster creativity in the workplace in order for employees to come up with new ideas and, thus, develop those innovative products and services. When organisation holds a portfolio of innovative products and services which they offer to the market, potential employees would be more attracted to that organisation and, as a result, that particular organisation would find it easier to attract new talent.

The results of social value contradict themselves where students rated happy and fun working environment as the most attractive attribute while results from current employees found that fun working environment was the least attractive attribute while fun working environment was the most important. These different results might be from the age difference of the sample group as most students surveyed were in their twenties and current employees were employed individuals working in the company for more than two years. Research done by Lam and Meeks (2009) found that different generations consider what the workplace fun is differently. Generation Y or millennials (those born between early 80s and early 2000s) tend to like workplace fun more than older generations. They usually start working straight after college and consider their co-workers as group to socialise with, so social aspect of the job is important to them during work hours and after work as

well. Employees who are older and have families tend to socialise less and return home instead of socialising after work. Employers need not to forget that work is not only about fun, they need to find a balance how to keep the both generations happy at their organisations. Such activities as family day out once a month and having staff canteen and rest areas makes workplace and employer both fun and happy place to work.

In economic value results it was found by the student sample that the most attractive attribute was when employee provides job security in the organisation. Providing job security allows employer saving money when there is no need for hiring and training costs associated with new hires; it provides a lot less distractions at work; a public sees that employer as an attractive organisation which attracts a wider pool of potential applicants; organisation holds an image as socially responsible employer and profitability in most cases is higher than those organisations which do not provide job security to their employees (Allan, 1996). Negative effects of the job insecurity can have influence on employees and employers as well. Employees can become overly stressed at work which would lead to job dissatisfaction and desire to leave organisation. Employers, on the other hand, can see reduced commitment levels, resistance to change, an increased retention levels and reduced work efforts from employees which would leave to lower productivity and loss of competitive advantage (Han and Zhao, 2012).

In these hard economic times, employers can't always promise life-long employment back to employees especially those in the small businesses and those in the private sector, but they can't ignore it as well. By the results of Global Workforce study in 2014, job security was second the most attractive factor out of 27 and fourth factor in helping the companies with retention levels and it has been noted that job security factor in organisations was one of the important

elements in attracting and retaining employees since 2008. Not only this, but desire for job security is no longer limited to the older generation and those with less promising jobs, employees of all ages and throughout wide range of sectors are seeking to work for an employer who offers job security (Carrera and Luss, 2014). But how can employees offer job security without actually giving their employees a job for life option? They can offer them perks and benefits which would make them feel needed and valuable to the organisation: training and development; rewards for good performance; attractive overall salary package; health insurance and pension plans. Economic value results in the research showed that in contrast current employees rated job security as the least attractive attribute in employer attractiveness scale. The reason for this could be that current employee sample were those who worked in the organisation for more than two years and who held higher professional or managerial profession and are ready for change. On the other hand, students might not be that confident in themselves especially those who haven't done any work experience or did not take part in internship programmes, therefore such attribute as job security seems the most attractive to them.

In the results of the developmental value both samples, potential and current employees, rated highest the attribute that they feel good about themselves while working for a particular employer. Employees thrive to work for an organisations who are regularly on the 'Best Employer' or 'Best Place to Work' lists. Being on those lists helps employers to attract and retain the best available talent and employees who work for them choose to stay with an organisation even if they are regularly headhunted by competition (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Saini et al. 2013). But employers can't forget that being on those lists means staying there and maintaining that status,

therefore it is important to maintain the same if not better work culture and values and deliver the promised perks to employees.

McDonalds was voted as one of the best places to work since 2007. In 2006 they launched an apprenticeship programme and, since then, more than 35 thousand qualifications were awarded to employees and giving them a chance to gain a various nationally recognised academic qualifications while they work. Every week six full classes of employees gain credentials in maths and English and every day twenty more employees are receiving apprenticeship qualification. McDonalds not only has an extensive executive and management training programmes, they provide training restaurant, department and shift managers as well where they can develop their communication and coaching skills (Goffee and Jones, 2013).

PepsiCo was voted as the best place to work in Ireland in 2014. The company offers their employees not just salary but a package of total rewards such as: health insurance where employees can pick plans every year which would be the most suitable for them and their families; healthy living programme where employees can receive information and all available resources to main a healthy living; healthy money programme provides employees with financial plan to help them to save and manage their money in the most resourceful way; company funded and saving plans for retirement; adoption assistance; employee assistance; car discounts; parental leave; paid travel expenses; education assistance; employee discounts on phones, various electronic goods and entertainment tickets. PepsiCo also offer graduate development programme to source for new talent, new employees are provided with mentors and with early responsibility and 80% of their executive team is promoted from within the company (PepsiCo, 2015). It is important for employers to thrive to be a best company they can be where people would feel good about themselves by developing them, by

providing assistance to further their education, by giving employees that was promised during the recruitment process and by delivering on those promises so all employees would respect an organisation they work for and feel proud being a part of such organisation.

By the application value results both, students and current employees, rated the opportunity to teach others what they have learned in the organisation as the most attractive attribute in employer. In today's world where knowledge and learning are one of the important elements of a successful organisation, to become a learning organisation can give an organisation a competitive advantage over competitors. Learning organisation is such organisation where learning is continuous, where employees would always thrive to enhance their skills and capabilities, where learning is happening at the whole organisational level and where organisation continuously provides learning tools to all its employees across organisation (Gupta, 2009). One of the most important key element in the organisational learning is that it should not be just formal learning but a lot of informal on the job training of employees, mentoring programmes, coaching and graduate internships. Employers need to recognise the key experts in their organisations and facilitate them with tools so they can share their expertise with others and, as a result, all employees would gain those expert skills as well. Food chain company Cheese Factory created a You Tube like learning portal which allows all employees to upload videos of the work they are performing well (Bersin, 2012). Internet media company Facebook began training its employees in 2007. They identify a good potential leaders who are good at teaching within company, pairing employees with mentors and letting them learn on the job (Nilsen, 2014). Organisations need to provide opportunity for their employees to train new entrants and by doing it, they would be able to save money, and new entrants

would be trained by skilled and knowledgeable employees who would be able to transfer their skills and capabilities to others. By facilitating on the job training to current employees and new entrants, employers would have a contented workforce who would feel that they are needed in the organisation and, as a result, they would want to stay with that employer for longer and there would be an increased interest from potential recruits as well.

By the overall results, current employees rated developmental value as the most attractive one while by the student survey results, three values were found to be equally attractive: social, economic and developmental. Developmental value might be important to current employees, because they already have been working for their current employer for more than two years and want to be developed further to increase their knowledge and skillset. Other values did not hold much significance to current employees, so employers, when developing their branding strategies internally within an organisation should mostly turn their attention to being an employer of choice and deliver on promises about benefits, perks of the job, work-life balance and training and development opportunities. Employees need to get recognition and appreciation from management and get rewarded if they are good at the job they are performing. It should not be just monetary rewards, but non-monetary rewards as well. Letters of appreciation; nights out or family picnics; providing them with childcare and health insurance options and employee discounts. These simple perks at the workplace could increase current employee's motivation and desire to stay and work for current employer for longer.

By the overall results, students found three values the most attractive ones: social, economic and developmental. Students are young people, usually single so social life is more important to them than to current employees who already have families to go home

after work. Students who are just starting their employment careers want existing social life at the work as well and economic perks of the job are more important to them as well than to current employees. By results of an economic value the most attractive attribute was job security at the top, followed by attractive compensation package and above average salary. Employers should turn their attention, when devising their external branding strategies to attract potential, talented workforce by letting them know on company websites, at student recruitment campaigns in universities, that they are not only offering their employees attractive salary and bonuses, but their offer another benefits as well: like on the job training, career enhancement opportunities, work-life balance. It should be noted, that a simple promises is not enough, those promises have to be delivered all the time, so those perspective employees would want and thrive to work for an organisation, would feel good about themselves while working there and would want to work there for a longer period of time.

The results of this study show a positive relationship by all five values of an employer attractiveness as was found in research by Berthon et al (2005). Some values are not rated as high as others, but overall results show a high rating percentage in each value by both current and perspective employees. The results of the research could be further increased by interviews using a qualitative research methods like focus groups and interviews. Research was also not restricted to one or few particular sectors so further research could be done where one particular sector is surveyed to help employers when designing their branding strategies in the future.

7 Conclusion

Employer branding is relatively a new concept and was invented in 1990's by Simon Barrow who realised that the same marketing

techniques which are used on products and services every day to attract customers and consumers can be used on the potential and current employees to attract and retain employees in the organisations (Taylor, 2010). According to Moroco and Uncles (2008) being relevant, noticeable and different from the competitors in the labour market are one of the most important characteristics which employer can hold so potential and current employees could see those features and would want to work and stay with that employer for longer. Olapido et al. (2013) stated that good employer branding strategies motivates an increased desired opinions amongst current and potential employees and helps organisations to become “Employer of the Choice” and to appear and stay on the coveted “Best Employer” and “Great Place to Work” lists.

Employer branding has to be directed not just on the recruitment campaigns by attracting potential recruits but on the existing employees as well. Employer brand has to be reinforced by improving working conditions to current employees as they can be seen as central when building an employer brand image (Berthon et al 2005). Therefore, it is equally important to build and develop not just external marketing strategies but to focus on the internal employer branding as well and employers need to communicate accurate information about their organisational culture, believes and values to potential recruits and reinforce that culture, believes and values to the current employees as well (Grace, 2007). Therefore, one of the most important factor for every organisation is to be able to attract and retain valuable, talented and skilled employees and to become an attractive employer so the potential recruits would desire to work for them and current employees would be proud while working there and would stay in the organisation for longer periods of time (Anitha and Madhavkuma, 2012).

Employer attractiveness was measured by a lot of researches using various methods. Berthon et al (2005) developed EmpAt employer attractiveness scale where it was measured using five values: interest, social, economic, developmental and application value. Saini et al. (2013) and Olapido et al. (2013) used the same scale in their researches. Sivertzen et al. (2013) increased EmpAt scale by three more values: corporate reputation, use of social media and intention to apply for the job.

Researcher of this paper used the same EmpAt scale developed by Berthon et al (2005) to measure which employer attractiveness attributes are valued the most from two perspective: potential recruits and current employees. After extensive literature review, researcher did not found any evidence of such scale being used in Ireland and found just one research which used EmpAt scale and included prospective and current employees as well, although there were no differences or similarities amongst two groups identified (Biswas and Suar, 2013).

Results of this paper investigated employer attractiveness attributes from two different perspectives: current and potential employees and used EmpAt scale developed by Berton et al. (2005). Results of the survey showed a positive relationship amongst all five values as was proved by other researches who used the same EmpAt scale in their research (Berthon et al 2005; Saini et al 2013; Olapido et al 2013; Sivertzen et al 2013; Biswas and Suar, 2013).

Although there were some differences identified by the results of each value from two different perspectives, employers can build their branding strategies using similar or nearly similar in external and external employer branding.

By the result of interest value, the two perspectives results were different. Current employees rated the fact that employer lets them

use creativity in the workplace while students rated the fact when employer produces innovative products and services as the most attractive attribute. Results are different, but they can complement each other. If employer lets its employees to use their creativity and they will foster and encourage it, current employees would be able to come up with innovative ideas which in turn would turn to innovative products and services. By giving its current employees the chance of being creative in the workplace, prospective applicants would be attracted more to the organisation.

Social value results were different from both samples, but they could be due age difference of the participants and as was found by research done by Lam and Meeks (2009) that different generations consider what the workplace fun is differently. Students are younger who start working straight after college while current employees worked for the same employer for more than two years already and might have families of their own. Therefore, employers need to find a balance how to keep different generations happy at the workplace. Prospective employees would enjoy such activities as regular nights out with co-workers or having a pool table to play on lunch breaks, while current employees would prefer family picnics, canteen and childcare facilities at the workplace.

Economic value results were different as well. Students rated job security attribute in employer attractiveness as the most attractive one while current employees rated the same attribute as the least attractive. These differences, again, could be explained by the generation and work status differences. Current employees have worked for the same employer for more than two years and might be ready to change the employer or might want a career change, so job security is not that important to them. Students who are just starting their careers could be not that confident starting their jobs and such option as job security is the most attractive to them.

Employers should focus their external branding strategies aimed at prospective employees by offering benefits which in turn would make them feel valued and needed to the organisation.

Being “Employer of Choice” would help employers to attract and retain employees and the results of the developmental value proves it. Both sample groups rated the fact that they want to feel good while working for a particular employer as the most attractive attribute. Being an “Employer of Choice” helps organisations to attract and retain the best available workforce and current employees choose to stay with those organisations even if they receive job offers from competition (Bqackhous and Tikoo, 2004; Saini et al. 2013). Therefore it is important for employers to desire and be the best employer they can be so that current employees would feel good about themselves while working there and potential recruits would desire to work for such organisation. It is important for employees to always deliver on promises which was promised during recruitment process and by continuously training and developing their current workforce.

The opportunity to teach others at the organisation was voted as the most attractive attribute by both: current and potential employees as well. It is important for employers to show that they are a learning organisation and there are an opportunities for employees to develop their own skills further and to be able to teach others. Employers need to provide new entrants with mentors and on-the-job training so new recruits would be able to learn faster and current employees would have an opportunity to transfer their skills and knowledge to their new colleagues.

By the overall results current employees rated developmental value as the most attractive one. This shows that being able to develop further is the most attractive attribute found by current employees, so employers need to turn their focus when designing internal

branding strategies to training and development, further education assistance and career enhancement opportunities.

Student survey overall results showed that three values are equally important to students: social, economic and developmental. Employers need to focus on the benefits and perks of the job when designing and delivering their recruiting campaigns. They need to highlight the fun factors of the job; what benefits are offered to employees and opportunities for further development and training.

There are a lot of opportunities for further research. The same EmpAt scale could be used in researching a particular sector or further research can be done by using qualitative research methods and digging deeper in to each value.

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Appendix 1. Survey questions

How important are the following attributes held by employer?

Less important 1 2 3 4 5 Not important

Interest Value

- Innovative employer – novel work practices/forward-thinking
- The organisation produces high-quality products and services
- The organisation both values and makes use of your creativity
- The organisation produces innovative products and services
- Working in an exciting environment

Social Value

- Having a good relationship with your colleagues
- Having a good relationship with your superiors
- Supportive and encouraging colleagues
- A fun working environment
- Happy work environment

Economic Value

- Good promotion opportunities within the organisation
- Job security within the organisation
- Hands-on inter-departmental experience
- An above average basic salary
- An attractive *overall* compensation package

Developmental Value

- Recognition/appreciation from management
- A springboard for future employment
- Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular organisation
- Feeling more self-confident as a result of working for a particular organisation
- Gaining career-enhancing experience

Application Value

- Humanitarian organisation - gives back to society
- Opportunity to *apply* what was learned at a tertiary institution
- Opportunity to teach others what you have learned
- Acceptance and belonging
- The organisation is customer-orientated