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Employer branding, what is the big deal? From graduate students perception of a preferred Employer

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Abstract

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Employer Branding in recent years has become popular, particularly in strategically attracting talents to a company. This research was carried out using potential employees, students recently graduated from college and actively seeking employment. They are looking to choose an employer, and are looking for signals and information from these employers to help them decide. The focus of this research was on the effect of EB on potential employees' perception of employer's employer attractiveness attributes and their intention to apply for a job.

Themes from previous studies on this topic were identified, research questions were based on these themes. Along with the main research question, there were five sub research questions answered. These were related to the five attractiveness dimension identified in the work of Berthon et al (2005). These are interest value, comprising of a company's innovation, employee's creativity and high-quality product/service; social value, a company's work environment and the relationships within it; economic value, a company's above average salary, good benefits, job security and promotions opportunities; development value, a company's career enhancing experiences, recognition, develop self-worth and self-confidence; finally the application value, a company's interaction with its environment and its people, socially responsible, customer-oriented, opportunity to use college degree.

Six participants were interviewed from three different colleges in Dublin. The research found all participants were attracted to innovation, good work environment, compensation, recognition, and good relationship with superiors. However, little interest was displayed towards a company's products/services and its social responsibility features. Overall findings were symbolic attributes had more influence over participants' decision than instrumental attributes.

The research findings suggest new directions for future research in EB as an attraction tool. Implications for employers were identified in the conclusion. The findings of this research are not generalisable across all potential employees.

<u>Abbreviations</u>

EB: Employer Branding

EmpAt: Employer Attractiveness

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland

Research Students Declaration Form

(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

Name: Rosemary Okafor

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Degree for which thesis is submitted: MA HRM

Date which thesis is submitted: 1st September 2015

Supervisor: Orla Thornton

Material submitted for award

(a) I declare that the work has been composed by myself.

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Signature of research student:

_____

Date: _____

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CHAPTER 1 – Introduction

1.0   Introduction/Background

A great concern for many employers in the last two decade is to be able to gain competitive advantage by attracting and hiring the right people in this current era of war for talent (Allen, Van Scotter & Otondo, 2004; Edwards, 2010; Wilden, Gudergan & Lings, 2010 and Elving, Westhof, Meeusen & Schooderbeer 2013). It has become important for organisations' recruitment efforts to be strong enough to influence and attract the best talents to fit into their organisation. Direct recruitment from colleges has become very popular and is highly practiced amongst organisations mainly due to the facts that student recruits are enthusiastic to learn and easily able to adapt into organisations' culture and practices when compared to traditional hires (Vianen, 2000). Student recruits are eager and passionate to contribute in a work place (Loughlin & Barling, 2001). They are also known to be technologically savvy (Burke & Ng, 2006). Therefore it is important for organisations to understand what attracts student recruits by developing strategies that would yield sufficient talents to meet business demands (Wilden, et al., 2010).

An area worth investing is Employer Branding according to Ewing, Pitt, De Bussy, & Berthon (2002); Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) and Berthon, P., Ewing, M., & Hah, L., (2005). In applying the concept of marketing to human resource management, employees are considered customers and the jobs, products (Berthon, et al., 2005). These jobs should meet and satisfy the needs of these customers by being able to attract, develop and motivate them. This all depends on how effectively an organisation can implement marketing and communication activities to finding and retaining quality talents in the market (Allen, et al., 2004). EB concept main focus is identifying and communicating the practical, financial, and psychological benefits and values an employer and a job has to offer to current and future employees (Ambler & Barrow, 1996)

It is important to note here that EB strategies should be aligned to organisation's corporate brand and identity as an employer in order to be unique from its competitors (Ewing, et al., 2002; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Moroko & Uncles, 2008 and Moroko & Uncles, 2009).

There have being a number of studies carried out on EB, its assumptions and effects, the attributes that attract people to work in an organisation. These attributes are sometimes referred to as employer attractiveness (Arachchige & Robertson, 2013). An investigation into

the EB literature showed that previous studies have identified proposed brand attributes that represents symbolic (emotional) value and instrumental (physical) value for people (Lievens & Highhouse, 200; Lievens, 2007 and Moroko & Uncles, 2008); the dimensions of employer attractiveness from the perspective of potential employees (Berthon, et al., 2005; Arachchige & Robertson, 2011 and Arachchige & Robertson, 2013); the relationship between EB and organisational career management (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004); and the values of the individuals aimed to be attracted (Cable & Turban, 2001).

However, the present study seeks to contribute by drawing attention to symbolic and instrumental EmpAt that are likely to affect students' perceptions of a preferred employer in an Irish context. In other words, what attracts a potential job seeker to apply for a job particularly with new graduates? Many employers are yet to fully understand and grasp the worth of engaging in EB strategies and here this study seeks to contribute by highlighting the EmpAt which companies can invest in. This paper did this by addressing the question, EB, what is the big deal? How do potential employees perceive an employer based on its EmpAt? It used a valid and reliable EmpAt scale developed by Berthon et al (2005) and Arachchige & Robertson (2011) as a guide for the interview questions used. This research focused on graduate students in the Irish context, particularly in Dublin with an analysis of data collected from recent graduates and post graduate students in three different colleges located in Dublin, Ireland.

This dissertation is divided into eight chapters. Chapter one is the introduction of the research. Chapter two gives an up-to-date literature review of previous research on the EB literature with its different perspective and a conceptual framework for EB which this research is based on. Chapter three outlines the objectives and the overall research question which was further divided into five sub-questions. Chapter four contains the research method used to investigate the research questions with details of the sample, research instruments, data collection and data analysis. Ethical considerations and limitations of study were also included here. Chapter five outlines the findings of the research. Chapter six gives a detailed analysis of the research, comparing and contrasting with previous literature. Chapter seven contains a summary of dissertation, implications and area of further study.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

2.0   Introduction

This chapter examines the literature on the EB subject. It looks at the instrumental-symbolic conceptual framework for EB, which the research is based on. There are different viewpoints to EB and this literature review looks at these different perspectives, from the viewpoint of the employers, the employees and prospective employees. However, more focus has been given to the viewpoint of potential employees to help understand the main aim of this study, the perception of prospective job applicants of EB and its influence towards choosing a future employer. It looks at terms associated with the EB literature and how this is related to the main concern of this thesis. "Potential employees" in the context of this thesis refers to today's college graduates. "Employer attractiveness" refer to the symbols and information provided by an employer in the employment market to attract employees and retain existing ones. EmpAt from an Irish context that contributes to having an effective EB will hopefully be highlighted from this study. This will help employers focus more on these highlighted EmpAt for EB efforts, hopefully make themselves distinguished and competitive in the employment market.

2.1   Brand

The concept of brand and branding were derived from the marketing literature. They refer to a product or service and according to Keller (1993), sets of associations or components that are linked to a name, mark or symbol associated with a product/service is known as a brand (Keller, 1993). When people link other things (associations) to a name, it's no longer just a name but a brand (Field, Bergiel, Giesen & Fields, 2012). The brand Dom Perignon is a drink but it is also a brand because it has associations of luxury, celebration, France and expensive. Same as Las Vegas, the name brings to mind gambling, showbiz and fun (Tybout & Calkins, 2011). There are some businesses that have developed exceptionally strong brands due to associations like the likes of Goldman Sachs, Toyota, McKinsey, Google and Apple. These names have components associated to them that makes them brands. The appeal of a brand must be strong enough to attract a consumer to avail of what that product/service has to offer, it is a way of differentiation between one or more similar products (Field, et al., 2012).

These attributes and benefits that some products/services have make them stand out, giving them that competitive edge over competitors according to Field et al (2012). Attributes/benefits

could be in the form of packaging, delivery, cost, design and/or features. Brands sends a message about the offering of the product/service to consumers according to Berthon et al (1999) cited in Gardner, et al., (2011). These message is accompanied by an unrealised and unspoken intangible benefits of ownership which this could be status, heritage, prestige, symbolic and emotional meaning. This is related to EB and the focus of this topic.

In addition, Aaker (1997) in her work, identified five dimensions to a brand that is believed to help in attracting consumers to a product/service (Aaker, 1997). This is to some extent similar to the work of Berthon et al (2005) work of the five dimensions of employer brand attributes which will be discussed later on in this review. The present research has employed the five dimensions of Berthon et al. (2005) to understand EB from the perspective of a potential employee. Aaker's work is illustrated in the figure below. She suggested that a brand has the same as human characteristics and as such can serves a symbolic or self-expressive function.
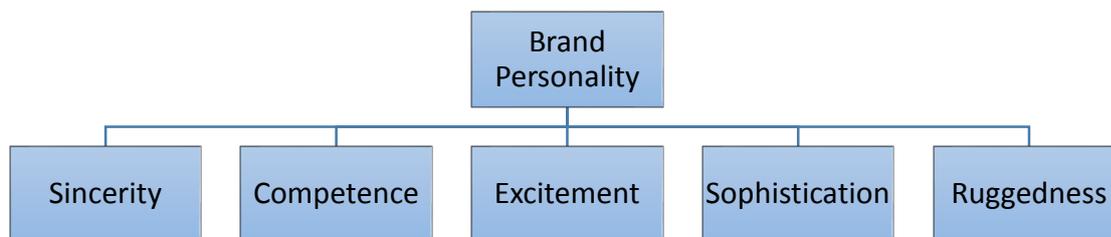
Figure 1: Five Dimensions of a Brand by Aaker (1997)

A brand that is well developed and can convey these five dimensions as suggested by Aaker (1997), will inspire loyalty and confidence from consumers in their choice to buy a product/service. This concept applies to an employer brand, if an employer can develop and convey brand dimensions effectively to potential and existing employees, they will inspire loyalty and confidence in potential employees. There is a mutuality of benefit for both the seller and buyer with a reputable brand, both sellers and buyers benefits from a brand that is of good reputation with positive associations because it can aid the buying decision faster of the buyer and thus increase the seller's profit according to Gardner, Erhardt & Martin-Rios (2011). They argue that brand awareness reduces the consumers' doubt hence increasing confidence in the product/service (Gardner, et al., 2011). When applying the same reasoning to the EB literature, it implies that a strong company brand image creates a good perception on the minds of job applicants and aids the applying decision of the job applicant to be faster and increases the

confidence in the company as a good employer. The findings of this research are that the EB perceptions of potential employees greatly influences their choice of an employer.

2.2   Branding

Branding is simply the process of building a brand. A brand that has a clear positioning in the market is not sufficient enough, it needs to be creative enough to attract attention and stand out, using an out-of-the-box creativity and a strategic focus that differentiates (Field, et al., 2012). Therefore the efforts put into creating this awareness that a product/service has to offer to a target market is called branding. Red Bull did this by employing influential college students to promote its adverts, the product stands for energy and excitement and college students are known to be energetic and full of excitement (Tybout & Calkins, 2011). The aim of branding is to create awareness and attract and retain loyal consumers.

In addition to the messages branding conveys such as symbols and designs, consumers may also perceive and interpret brands through their own experiences with the organisation. These experiences are usually evoked by physical objects and imageries, however the consumer's unconscious relationship with the firm due to their own dealings will add substance to their perception of the brand rather than just the symbols and imagery of the brand (Franca & Pahor, 2012). In the EB literature, employees and/or potential employees also perceive and interpret brands through their own experiences evoked by imageries and physicality. This study uncovered imageries such as fun and happy workplace and career enhancing experiences that are perceived to be good enough to encourage applications.

2.3   Brands and Perceptions

Perceptions are important because how people perceive things is how they see the world around them according to Subramaniam, Mohrr & Kawde (2014). When buying a product/service, the question generally isn't which product is best but which one people think is best. Is the best diamond in the world sold in Tiffany? Is an iPhone the best in the world? This might be true or might not be however most people believe that an iPhone is the best in the market and that the best diamond can be bought in Tiffany, which makes perception very important in branding. Consumers' view of a product/service is shaped by how they perceive the brand. This is because brands have a remarkable ability on people's perception of product/services, the

products/services are not viewed in isolation but with their associations/components (Ramaseshan & Tsao, 2007).

The perception of people faced with a buying choice when they see a premium brand name on a product is one of high quality, expensive and exclusive. While with a discount name it is low quality and cheap. A study was conducted by Tybout & Calkins (2011) using a pair of good-quality 18 carat-gold earrings. The jewellery was first branded with Tiffany and offered to consumers, then branded Walmart and offered to consumers. The results highlighted the power of brand in shaping perception. Good quality and good experience was associated with the Tiffany branded earrings while the Walmart branded ones were the complete opposite (Tybout & Calkins, 2011). This is related to EB where symbolic attributes have huge influence in shaping the perceptions of potential employees (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). This study aimed to highlight these symbolic attributes and also the instrumental attributes. The five dimensions of the EmpAt scale of Berthon et al. (2005) supports this concept of good quality and good experience association with a product brand with the interest value and development value (Berthon, et al., 2005).

2.4   Employer Branding

A paper by Chambers et al (1998) highlighted the difficulties that organisations face in attracting suitable and talented workforce. While these findings were published over a decade ago they are still very much relevant today. In addition, there is a demographic trend of an increasingly ageing population, this will result in organisations finding it difficult to compete for the limited talent of skilled workers according to Franca & Pahor (2012). The concept of EB has become popular in many organisations as a result, this is to enhance corporate image and build an 'Employer of Choice' so as to increase the quantity and quality of applicants in the 'war for talent' employment market (Elving, et al., 2013).

EB have since become a significant addition to the tool-kits of HR practitioners (Edwards, 2010). The concept was derived from the application of brand management in marketing principles to the field of human resource management (Lievens, et al., 2007 and Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The term first came about by Ambler & Barrow (1996) in their article titled 'The Employer Brand'. They united the disciplines of HR management and brand management to create a conceptual framework called 'employer brand'. Ambler & Barrow described the

employer brand as a bundle of functional, economical and psychological benefits that the employer and the job can offer to existing and potential employees.

Currently, the EB literature has a plurality of research and as such different approaches and perspectives to it. But despite that, there is however a consensus on the fact that the EB literature contains some concepts from marketing principles of brand management which was applied to the human resource management (Cable & Turban, 2003). The term EB was summarised by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) in their conceptual paper as the process of creating a recognisable, distinguishable and unique identity as an employer. This can be described as creating an image of a great place to work, an Employer of Choice as some might put in the mind of a targeted pool of candidates.

However, there is little research that that exist that explores the measurements of this EmpAt/employer image from the viewpoint of potential applicants despite the increasingly competition in the employment market. Basically, how do potential employees evaluate prospective employers, which measures do they use? Due to this lack to research that exists in the measurement of EmpAt from the view point of potential employees, this dissertation aimed at the need to identify the instrumental and symbolic attributes most preferred by Irish potential employees.

The diagram below by Backhaus & Tikoo (2004), illustrates and explains the EB process. It shows from the perspective of a potential employee, how brand associates gives a company an employer image hence making it attractive. Then from the viewpoint of current employees, how EB contributes to the organisation culture and identity that leads to an employer brand image and to employee productivity. This concept shows from both the perspectives of the existing employee and from that of the potential employee, which is the perspective the present research has taken.

Figure 2 Employer branding Process by (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004)
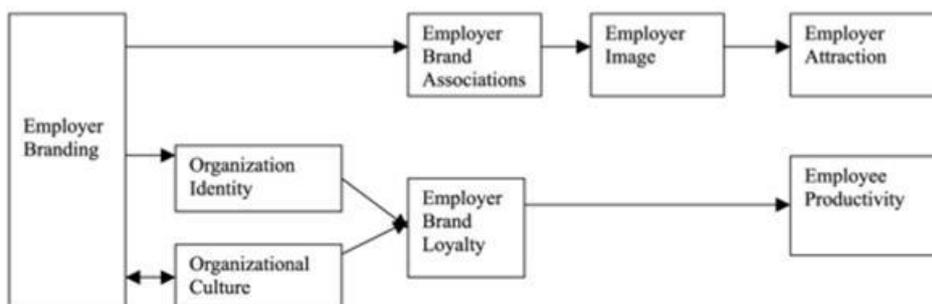
Subsequently, Moroko & Uncles (2009) EB approach was based on segmentation. Demographic, geographic, psychographic and behavioural characteristics of potential employees were segmented into a range of groups as is practiced with consumer branding. They added that this perspective can be of benefit if applied to the recruitment process. Besides, organisations need to determine which attributes are best suited to specific types of potential employees (Moroko & Uncles, 2009)

In addition, the theory of EB branding was expanded to include a long-term relationship between a company and its present and potential employees, with corporate social responsibility achieved through sustainable HRM by (Aggerholm, et al., 2011). The diagram below by Edwards (2010) offer a visual representation of EB and gives a visual insight on how EB encompasses the company, existing and potential employees, the psychological contract contents, organisational identity and its corporate social responsibility (Edwards, 2010). However, the main focus of this research is on the perceptions these brand messages of symbolic and instrumental nature creates in the minds of potential employees and how this affects their decision to apply for a job.
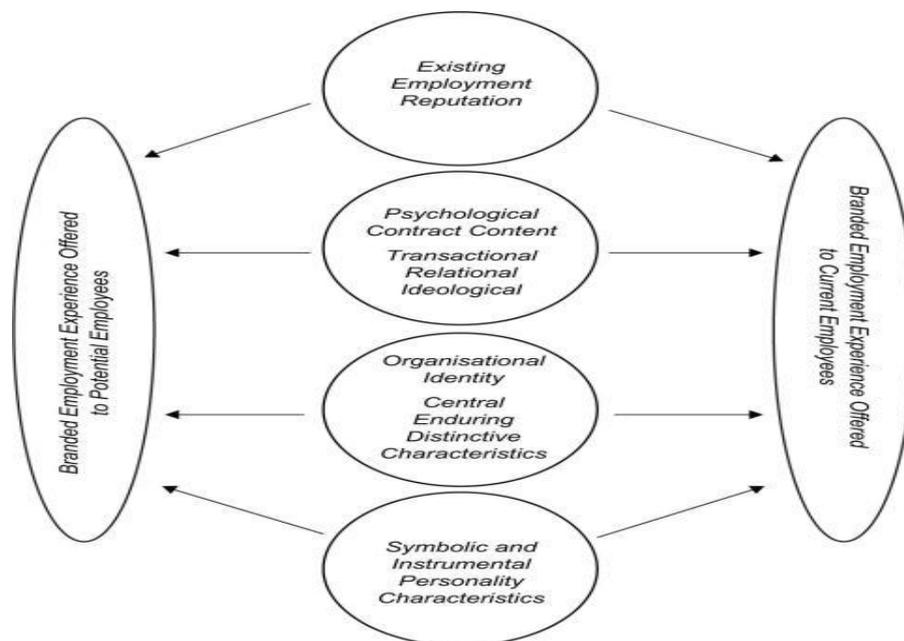
Figure 3 Employer Branding by (Edwards, 2010, p. 19)

2.5　EB Conceptual Framework

In representing the EmpAt measures/attributes, there is a significant question of which framework to use. Some research on EB employed the employee-based brand equity modified from the consumer-based branding research, which make use of signals to give information to potential employees about an employer (Wilden, et al., 2010). However, this research has based its study on the instrumental-symbolic framework taken from the brand management literature (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). The conceptual framework of Ambler & Barrow on the EB literature highlighted similar concepts in the conceptual framework in marketing of Park, Jaworski & Maclnnis (1986) work. They divided branding needs into three categories, functional, symbolic and experiential needs of consumers (Park, et al., 1986). This is consistent with the functional, emotional and psychological benefits of Ambler & Barrow. Ramaseshan & Tsao (2007) in their own paper, added that the three concept of functional, symbolic and experiential can help differentiate brands. The brand with the functional concept is built to satisfy externally generated consumption needs which are problem-solving capability; the symbolic concept is linked to the desired to belong or be associated to a desired group, enhancing ones ego; and the experiential concept seeks to fulfil internally generated needs for variety, providing a sensory simulation (Ramaseshan & Tsao, 2007).

The Instrumental attributes in the instrumental-symbolic framework refers to the functional attributes by Ambler & Barrow (1996) and Park et al (1986), they help consumers maximise benefits and minimise costs (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). However, the symbolic attributes which refers to the psychological benefits by Ambler & Barrow (1996) are subjective and intangible attributes connected to people's need to enhance their self-image or how they express themselves. The experiential dimension has not being transferred to the EB literature because it does not suit the context of the organisation. In analysing the instrumental-symbolic framework, it is hoped that this study will be able to identify the instrumental-symbolic attributes that are likely to cause a positive influence in potential employees, hence the intention to apply for a job. The aim is to highlight symbolic attributes that really influences the intentions to apply for a job. Equally the instrumental attributes that are as important will be identified from this research.

In the EB literature, the instrumental attributes denotes the employer or the job's concrete attributes such as the pay and job, while the symbolic attributes denotes subjective factors such as prestige and innovativeness, that are intangible and nonconcrete aspect of the employer and is related to the perceptions of the employer (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens & Highhouse,

2003). Existing and/or potential employees convey these symbolic or instrument attributes of an employer via imagery and trait inferences which are given to the organisation according to Lievens & Highhouse (2003). Due to the fact that consumers tend to associate human traits with brands, trait inferences are often conceptualised through corporate or brand personality (Aaker, 1997). A scale for symbolic attributes in the recruitment context was developed by Lievens et al. (2005) by adapting Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale in figure 1 above. In a later study, Lievens et al. (2007) confirmed the instrumental-symbolic framework as useful for the conceptualisation of the employer image among potential applicants and outsiders stakeholders (Lievens, et al., 2007).

Therefore, it has been established that the employer image is like a brand that is made up of employer brand associations. These now can be divided into the functional/instrumental attributes and the symbolic attributes of the employer image (Lievens, et al., 2007). However, symbolic attributes of a brand is where much of the strength in branding lies. Elliott & Wattanasuwan (1998) cited in (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) explained that symbolic associations of a brand play a significant role in giving adding meaning to a person's personal and social world. The branding literature according to Backhaus & Tikoo (2004), suggests that when the instrumental differences between brands are limited, the symbolic function increases. So also in the EB literature, where in the same industry, the job factors are similar (instrumental attributes), employers can use symbolic attributes to stand out and be competitive. The findings of Lievens & Highhouse (2003) suggests that symbolic attributes of a firm far more surpasses the instrumental attributes in value, they have incremental value over and above the instrumental attributes of an employer image (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). The aim of this research was to discover the big fuss about EB and its perceptions by potential employees and how this influences decision to apply for jobs. With the results, employers will be in a better position to position these attributes in the labour market and in the process distinguish themselves and getting the desired result of attracting talents to their companies.

2.6   The Functional and Symbolic Employer Attractiveness

There are three employer attractiveness scale identified by Ambler & Barrow (1996), functional/instrumental, psychological/emotional or symbolic attributes and the economical attributes. Most research rely on the functional attributes (instrumental) of EmpAt as a way of

influencing employees (Cable & Graham, 2000). However, the symbolic attributes (emotional) of EmpAt are considered very important (Lievens, et al., 2007).

Lievens & Highhouse (2003) developed a scale for symbolic attributes in the recruitment context by adapting Aaker (1997) original brand personality scale. They put forward a brand symbolic image model as a framework for companies to audit their company image as an employer and serve as benchmarking with competitors. A key finding in their research is that potential employees are likely to be attracted to organisations with a positive corporate reputation.

Lievens & Highhouse (2003) explained instrumental/functional attributes as a concrete, realistic and objective attribute that is associated with a job or company and examples of these include training, pay, location, opportunities for advancement. Researches on traditional recruitment have found experiential support for the importance of instrumental attributes as a way of influencing applicants attraction to organisations (Cable & Graham, 2000); (Cable & Turban, 2001). The instrumental-symbolic framework in marketing literature provides a basis for arguing that these instrument attributes cannot solely explain the variance amongst job seekers' perceptions of an organisation as an employer (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003) and (Lievens, et al., 2007). They argue that potential applicants may also be influence by symbolic attributes which they associate meaning to. However, symbolic attributes are more subjective, they refer to intangible and abstract job and organisational attributes such as innovation, excitement, competence and prestige (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). There has been research on the role of organisational symbolic attributes that confers personality to organisations (Ong, 2011).

Furthermore, other researches have combined both the instrumental and symbolic attributes in describing potential applicants' attraction to an organisation (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Berthon, et al., 2005; Arachchige & Robertson, 2011 and Arachchige & Robertson, 2013). These studies found that the symbolic attributes accounted for more than the instrumental job and organisational attributes in determining an organisations' perceived attractiveness as an employer. This research has combined both the instrumental and symbolic attributes and has applied it to research questions which were asked during interviews. This was to understand the most preferred attributes that have the most influence and attracts potential employees to an organisation. Also to analyse these findings to see if they support or reject previous

researches findings on symbolic attributes as the most influencing attributes to potential employees.

Figure 4 Employer brand experience framework (Mosley, 2007)
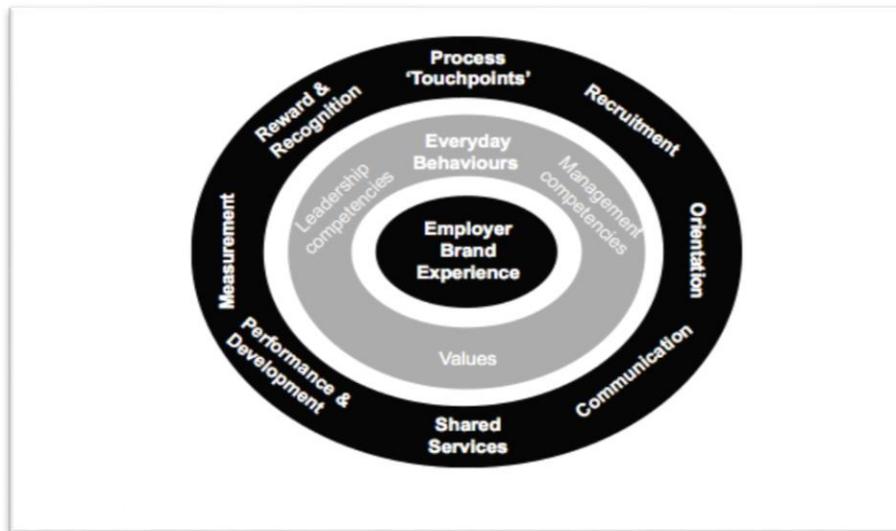
The diagram above by Mosley (2007) illustrates some of these EB symbolic attributes, where they mentioned leadership/management competencies, reward & recognition; development and values, all of which this research has explored with participants (Mosley, 2007). Thorne (2004) cited in (Wilden, et al., 2010) mentions that these instrumental and symbolic benefits are perceived by present and future employees. The act of manipulating these benefits in the minds of employees, future and present through EB, makes an employer 'An Employer of Choice' and a great place to work (Wilden, et al., 2010).

2.7   The Perspectives of EB

There are different viewpoints of EB and this relates to how the efforts of EB would benefit a company and why EB. The present research have investigated EB from the perspective of the potential employee, nevertheless there are other perspectives of this topic in literature.

2.7.1   EB from the perspective of an employer

EB from the perspective an employer suggests that an employer brand has both personality and positioning like a traditional brand (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). It involves creating an image of the greatest place to work in the minds of potential labour market (Ewing, et al., 2002). EB

processes are used by organisations to attain the image of an attractive employer by enhancing their corporate identity and differentiating themselves from competitors (Oladipo, et al., 2013). It is believed that organisations with a strong employer brand can reduce their recruitment cost, increase motivation and retention and even offer lower wage for similar jobs than companies with weaker employer brand (Berthon, et al., 2005). A successful brand increases the amount of applicants (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). Some definitions of EB from this perspective often refer to organisation identity, organisation image, corporate reputation and corporate culture (Arachchige & Robertson, 2013). Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) described EB from this perspective as the development of a unique and recognised employer identity and employer brand that models the organisation and distinguishes it from competitors. Edwards (2010) added here that EB activities that have relevant information pertaining company's image or identity and links in with the perceptions of employees' of the unique characteristics of the company, achieve higher levels of commitment and identification from employees. An organisations with a strong identity have values and characteristics which employees can identify with and this contributes to giving jobs its meaning (Edwards, 2010).

The closely related concept of employer attractiveness is broadly discussed in the areas of applied psychology according to Collins & Stevens (2002). Ambler & Barrow (1996) and Ewing et al (2002) have also discussed this concept in the area of marketing. Employer attractiveness is described as benefits envisaged by potential employees in working for an employer (Berthon, et al., 2005). The brand equity of an organisation becomes stronger as the employer attractiveness grows.

2.7.2   Employer branding from the perspective of potential employees

The aim of EB research from this perspective is to study what attributes or associates really attract a jobseeker to an employer and it is also the viewpoint which this research is based. It suggests that exposure to early recruitment activities influences the job seekers' attitudes and perceived attributes positively (Collins & Stevens, 2002). The main aim of EB in this context is to ensure that organisations are recognised and are able to attract new recruits. A major finding from research on this perspective is that potential employees are likely to apply to organisations with positive attributes or a good company reputation/image (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Cable & Graham (2000) in their research examined factors predicting potential applicants' perception of organisations' reputation and found profitability to be a central importance.

However, other theories have argued that other factors should be included in order to build a company's reputation for EB purposes. Cable & Turban (2003) added to this by demonstrating the importance of a positive company's image as increasing the chance of potential applicant applying for a job. They found two major factors that predict positive perception from a potential applicant. These are external rating of the organisation and degree of familiarity with the organisation. The latter is mostly achieved through advertising. They suggest a brand equity perspective, where EB is attained through the perceptions of the organisation's reputation thereby adding value to both the organisation and to a job beyond the job itself (Cable & Turban, 2003, p. 2244).

The employer brand is all about perception which is similar to the consumer brand (Knox & Freeman, 2006). This they indicated in their recruitment process model which highlighted the importance of internal marketing in an organisation. They also stressed the importance of integrating both external and internal marketing in the recruitment process. An interesting finding in Knox & Freeman (2006) research was the different perceptions of employers and potential employees of an organisation's image. The employers' perceptions of how potential employees see their organisations are very different from the perceptions of the potential applicants, theirs is a much nicer picture they found.

Figure 5 Employer brand recruitment process model (Knox & Freeman, 2006)
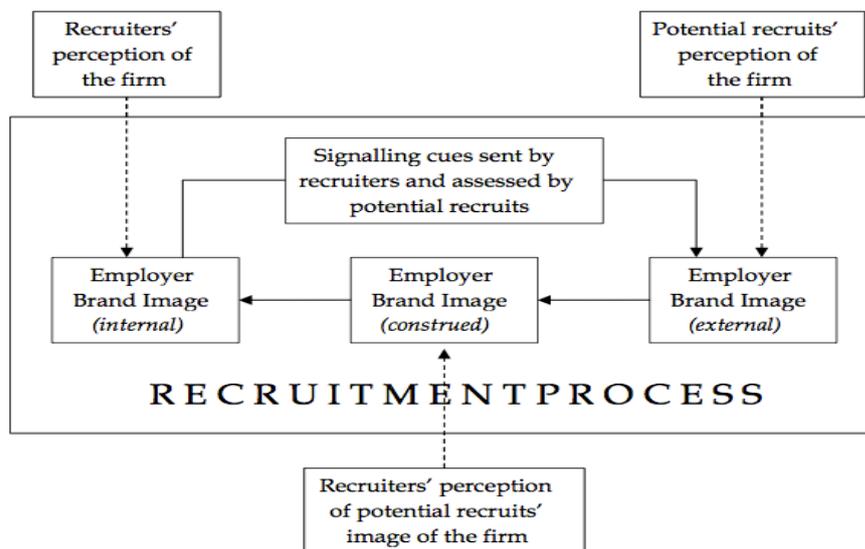
Brand associations are formed by potential employees based on information sources that out of the control of the employer, that is why a proactive and strategic approach to EB is welcomed. The identification of the desired brand associations is vital and their development. In the research of recruitment, the process of identifying and developing brand associations

and brand image is supported. Firstly is that the employer image has been established to influence potential applicants to an organisation, however, the exact trait of the image and the way it is derived have not been understood fully according to Barber (1998) cited in Backhaus & Tikoo (2004). A likely explanation was prsented by Byrne & Neuman (1992), where they suggested person-organisation fit which relates to similarity attraction. This is where the individual compare their needs, values and personalities to the employer brand image and where the match between the values of the organisations matches that of the individual values, they are more likey to be attracted to that organisation (Vianen, 2000). Then there is the social identity theory that supports the attraction of a potential employee due to the employer brand image. Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) suggests people's self-concept are derived from their membership to certain social groups. This is also supported in the marketing literature by the product-brand-equity. The more a brand is perceived to be positive, the more likely a consumer wants to be identified with the brand. Applying this to the EB literature, potential employees identify with an employer brand that has positive aspects to its employer image and would more likely seek membership with the brand for a feel of hightened self-image promised by membership (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). This was supported by the findings from this research where the participants were attracted and wanted to be associated with a well-known company brand/image, as a result had a hightened self-confidence and pride.

2.7.3   Employer branding and the Psychological Contract

There are also researches on the EB topic that have taken the viewpoint of the psychological contract. A distinction was made between relational (emotional) and transactional (functional) aspects of a psychological contract and it being beliefs and perception regarding promises that are subjective (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). One can draw from their arguments in understanding the link between the psychological contract and EB. This is also reflected in Ambler & Barrows definition of EB as a package of functional, psychological and economic benefits offered by an employer. Linking the psychological contract with the EB literature is as a result of putting a sort of structure on the array of employment experiences enjoyed by employees in a particular organisation (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004 and Edwards, 2010). This perspective suggests that the working experience is much more than the explicit terms of a written contract. The psychological contract provides a useful framework when considering an organisation brand equity and the processes involved in building a successful employer brand. In his paper, Edwards (2010) suggested that organisations with a unique employer brand provide distinctive and attractive psychological contract content (transactional, relational or

ideological) .a proposition that organisations that offer. Below, Edwards (2010) offers a diagram to explain the relationship between psychological contract and EB.
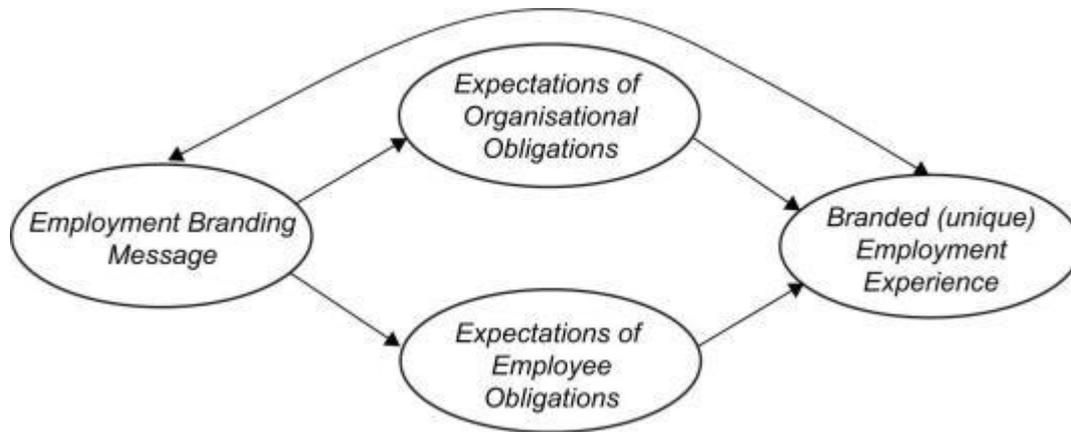
Figure 6 The relationship between Psychological Contracts and Employer Branding by (Edwards, 2010, p. 15).

The psychological contract also refers to the promises in symbolic attributes promised to potential applicants. The organisation propagates statements about the job and its benefits (instrumental and symbolic) during the recruitment process. This serves as a way to attract the right applicants and are interpreted as promises by the potential applicants (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). These initial messages according to Rousseau (2001) possibly will begin to form the psychological contract. When the information contained in this message are accurate and sufficient, it may assist in giving a positive perception of an organisation by a potential employee. Rousseau (2001) went on to suggest that prior notions about an organisation are reduced greatly when the organisation provides accurate and adequate information in general. This is particularly important because it helps to reduce the violation of the psychological contract by new recruits (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). This is particularly related to the present research in the area of creating and channelling attractiveness attributes to potential employees. If these symbolic and instrumental promises are truthful, it helps create positive perception of the company in the minds of potential employees and this would influence applying decision and increase applications.

2.8   Creating an Employer Image
According to HR practitioners, an employer can achieve branding with a three-step process. The value proposition is the first stage of the process where the organisation takes into account its culture, management styles, image, the qualities of its existing employees and qualities of

its product/service. Taking account of all these helps develop a concept value, that attaching a value to the organisation that is offered to future applicants according to Sullivan (2002) cited in (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The second stage is where the organisation then markets this value proposition it has quantified to a targeted audience which could be potential employees and/or recruitment agencies, stakeholders of the organisation. Then the last stage of this process is where this value proposition is then marketed internally to existing employees in the company. Mosley (2007) argues that a distinctive brand of leadership is one that the culture of the organisation is aligned to the desired customer brand experience and that an organisation's people processes are in tune with their brand beliefs (Mosley, 2007). This research has focus on the second stage of this process where employers markets this value propositions/attractiveness attributes to potential employees. It has identified the attributes that are likely to create positive perceptions in the minds of these potential employees and hence influence their applying decisions for a job in a company.

2.9   Conclusion

EB have been discovered by HR practitioners from the marketing literature by applying the same concept used to attract consumers to a brand to the human resources management literature. It has applied this concept into attracting potential employees to a company and retaining the existing ones. The above literature review have looked into the world of EB and seen how it works and how it is applied. With the present research, the literature has explored the EB topic from the perspective of the potential employees. How it can be applied to create imageries in the mind of these potential employees, thereby causing a positive intention to apply for a job in a company.

A conceptual frame work proposed by Lievens & Highhouse (2003) on the symbolic and instrumental brand attributes of EB was explored. This research has based its findings on this framework. The symbolic attributes brought to creating an employer brand and the instrumental attributes were explored too and its benefits discussed. The five dimensions of EmpAt by Berthon was discussed and this research has used its measurement scale in designing questions for this research. This will be discussed fully in the next chapter of the research objectives and questions.

Finally, this literature review has establish that there is a range of dimensions with the employer brand and a variety of influencing factors (Arachchige & Robertson, 2011). The discussion above have highlighted some of this. The brand equity, its strength and value are closely related to the level of EmpAt (Berthon, et al., 2005). Therefore a relationship exists between the EmpAt and its organisational reputation which in turn relates to the degree to which the employer brand attracts potential job applicants and to some extent the quality too. The right dimensions of EmpAt need to be identified as a result if employers desire to exploit the efficiency of their hiring process.

3.0   Introduction

The aim of this research is to investigate the EB perceptions of potential employees on the five dimensions of EmpAt and how this perception influences on their decision to apply for a job in a company.

In the study by Collin & Stevens (2002) carried out on engineering students intention to apply for a job in a company, it found that positive perceptions of a particular company affected the students intentions to apply for a job in that company. Adding to this literature, Berthon et al (2005) developed a five dimension scale which tried to measure this EmpAt adapted from Ambler & Barrow (1996) dimensions of psychological, functional and economic benefits. Building on this literature, the current research has employed the Berthon et al (2005) EmpAt scale and assessed potential employees' perception of EB of the five dimensions, interest, social, economic, development and application value of six recent graduates using interviews.

It is of benefit for employers to know what factors actually brands their companies positively hence making them attractive in the employment market and in the 'war for talents'. Armed with this knowledge, they can come up with EB strategies with the clear purpose of improving their employer's attractiveness. In the Berthon et al (2005) study carried out in Australia, a positive relationship was found between all five dimensions and intentions to apply for a job.

3.1   Overall Research Question

How are the perceptions of Irish graduate students' on the five dimensions of the EmpAt scale as identified by Berthon, Ewing & Hah (2005) related with their intention to apply for a job?

3.2   Sub-Research Questions:

The research question have being further divided into five sub-questions to correlate with the five themes of EmpAt scale by Berthon et al. (2005).

3.2.1 How are potential Employees' perception of an employer with innovative work practices and high quality products / services related with their intention to apply for a job?

This question is derived from the interest value of EmpAt and it's the first theme of this research. This includes the use of innovation and high quality products/services as EmpAt and how this influences the decisions of potential employees. Arachchige & Robertson (2011) study compared their results with the study of Berthon et al (2005) and found that innovation was among the most preferred attributes in Sri Lankan but was not so popular with the study carried out in Australia by Berthon et al. (2005). On using a high-quality product/service offer as an attraction, there was a display of a lack of interest for both groups. The research carried out by Sivertzen et al (2013) on EB supported the findings of Arachchige & Robertson (2011), where it found innovation and an exciting workplace top of the list of most preferred employer attributes for potential employees and it's a factor that attracts them to apply for a job in a company (Sivertzen, et al., 2013).

This research was able to get the perceptions of the Irish students on this value by using the questions on the EmpAt scale developed by Berthon et al. (2205).

3.2.2 How are potential employees' perceptions of an employer's work environment that is fun and happy with good relationships with superiors and colleagues related with their intentions to apply for a job?

The social value in the Berthon et al (2005) framework of EmpAt is related to the second research question. It is concern with the working environment and how this is used as an attraction tool to pull applicants to a company. This value tries to assess the extent which a potential employee is attracted to a company that offers a fun and happy workplace and good relationships with superiors and workmates. In the findings in Bonaiuto et al (2013) research, a positive relationship was found to exist between a fun, happy and exciting workplace and the intention to apply for work (Bonaiuto, et al., 2013). Lievens (2007) describes these attributes as symbolic, having more effect than concrete and physical attributes, they called instrumental attributes (Lievens, 2007).

The interview questions asked here were pertaining the work environment and the relationship preferred in the work environment with supervisors and colleagues. This enabled the participants answer and gave more in-sight to get a better understanding to reach the findings

of this research question. Berthon et al. (2005) supported the findings of this research by listing it high amongst their most preferred attribute would positively influence a decision to apply.

3.2.3 How are potential employees' perceptions of an employer that offers above-average salary, good overall compensation package, job security and promotional opportunities related with their intention to apply for a job?

The third sub-research question stem from the economic value of Berthon et al. (2005) EmpAt dimension. This question seeks to contribute to the EB literature by identifying the economic value that are most attractive to the Irish potential employee. The questions here were adopted from the EmpAt scale developed by Berthon et al. (2005). The offer of an above average salary, good compensation, and job security and promotion opportunities are more related to instrumental attributes. These attributes are more physical than experiential in nature, nonetheless, they are attributes that are capable of invoking a positive applying intention. The questions were asked to extract the answer that would help identify the attributes here that are most likely to cause a positive applying decision. In literature, Berthon et al. (2005) and Chhabra & Sharma (2014) in their research revealed the power of compensation when it came to influencing applying intentions with the both groups that were surveyed prefer a good compensation.

3.2.4 How are potential employees' perceptions of an employer that offers recognition/appreciation, develops self-confidence and offers career-enhancing experiences related with their intention to apply for a job?

This question is derived from the development value of the EmpAt scale developed by Berthon et al. (2005) and it's the fourth theme of this research. This includes the use of recognition/appreciation from management, a good company brand/image, career enhancing experiences and a platform for future prospects as attraction attributes. This research question seek to identify the attributes here that are most attractive to the Irish potential employee. The attributes here are more experiential thus they are more symbolic than instrumental. The literature by Lievens & Highhouse (2003) highlighted that the symbolic attributes had more influence well and above instrumental attributes. However, this research was carried out in a different context and the questions were asked during interviews to invoke answers that would either support this or contradict the literature. The findings of this has been carefully described

in chapter five of this dissertation. Elving et al. (2013) also supported the theory of Lievens & Highhouse (2003), where they held that having career prospects and developmental possibilities in a brand message contributed positively to the attractiveness of an employer.

3.2.5 How are potential employees' perceptions of an employer that provides opportunity to apply degree knowledge and teach others in a socially responsible and customer-oriented environment related with their intention to apply for a job?

This sub-question was derived from the application value of the EmpAt scale developed by Berthon et al. (2005) and it's the fifth theme of this research. This includes the use of socially responsible features, acceptance and belonging, opportunity to apply college knowledge and being customer-oriented as attraction attributes. This research question seek to identify the application attributes that are most attractive to the Irish potential employee. The questions asked were intended to get responses that would identify the attraction here. In literature Turban & Greening (1997) held that by participating in socially responsible features, a company is adding to its EB programmes in a positive way that will look great in the company profile (Turban & Greening, 1997). Edwards (2010) supported this view by adding that employers need to add more value to its EB efforts well and above financial representations, and one way of doing that is by being socially responsible (Edwards, 2010).

However, this attractive attribute did not hold much attraction for the in the finding of the research carried out by Berthon et al. (2005). The student rated this attribute amongst the least preferred attributes. This was the same for customer-oriented attribute. But for acceptance and belonging and the opportunity to apply college degree, this attribute were most preferred attributes in the research of both Arachchige & Robertson (2013) and Sivertzen et al (2013).

3.3   Research Model

The research model of this dissertation is depicting the relationship between the five sub-question which was adapted from the five dimensions of EmpAt by Berthon et al. (2005) and the applying intentions for a job.
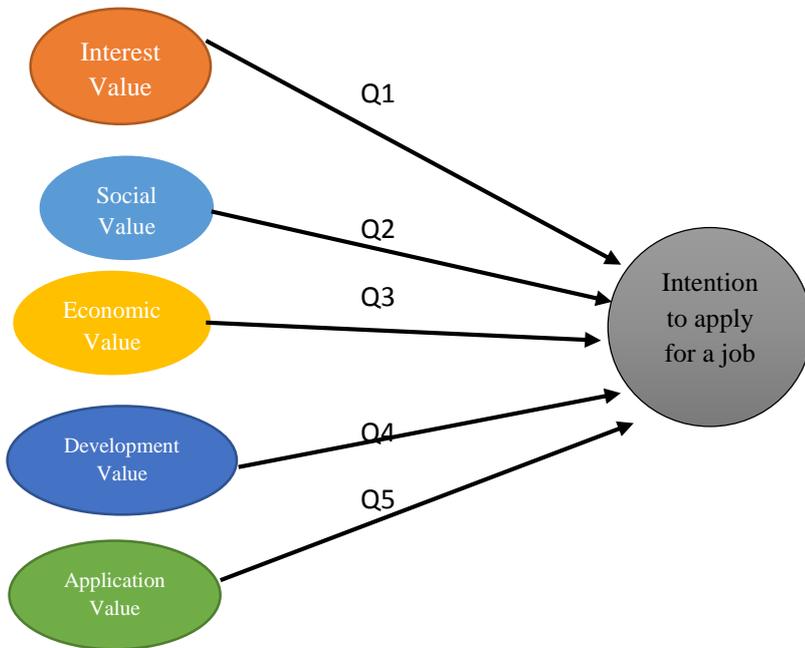
Figure 7: Research Model of Dissertation

4.0   Introduction

Research is undertaken by people in a systematic way to discover things that increases their knowledge. This research is a systematic procedure employed to gain more insights on job applicants' perceptions of EB and its effects towards applying for a job in a company and this section will consider the methodological approaches considered for this study and why the methods and techniques employed were chosen. The methods other scholars used regarding this area of study (EB) will be discussed and related to the methodological approach of present study. The procedure adopted will be deliberated and a justification for selecting the method used. An explanation of the sample group and the data collection method and process will also be provided. Details of the research items/scales will be provided and how the data was treated after collection will be looked at. This section will also include some ethical considerations that this study considered before, during and after the collection and the analysis of the collected data. Finally, the researcher will consider and discuss the limitations encountered in regards to the collection of data and the data sample.

4.1   Research Philosophy

In the process of writing a thesis, the approach chosen for the research methodology process plays an important role in determining the data gathered. With regards to a researcher's choice of method in collecting data and in the analysis of the data, there are a lot of factors that can influence it, however whichever approach is adopted, it will need to be appropriate, sufficient and relevant to the research aims and objectives in order to yield accurate findings and in the process eliminate false claims (Saunders, Lewis & Adrian, 2009).

Furthermore, to look at how best to investigate a research topic, acceptable knowledge on that topic by other scholars will be considered according to Saunders et al. (2009). This is the theory of knowledge or epistemology (Dick, 2013). This concept is mainly concerned with the conceptual analysis of knowledge (Pasanau, 2014). It constitutes what is reasonably accepted to be valid and reliable knowledge in a particular field of study. In this particular study on the perception of job applicants of EB, specifically final year students, in choosing an employer based on the EB attributes, previous studies have found a significant and positive relationship between an employer's strong brand image and applicants' probability to apply (Berthon et al

(2005); Knox & Freeman (2006); Bonaiuto et al (2013) and Chhabra & Sharma (2014)). Turban (2001), equally contributed that the subsequent job choice decisions of applicants were closely related to the early impressions of the firm and this is closely connected to the aims and objectives of the present study.

A researchers' epistemological philosophy can either be based on 'resources' or 'feelings'. The resource-based epistemology is one that is objective and a researcher with this approach embraces a positivist philosophy to the development of knowledge and it is typically seen as an approach to quantitative research. Objects here represent reality and these are considered to be 'real'. Conversely, the feeling-based epistemology is more subjective and considers data based on feelings and attitude of humans towards a particular topic. This approach adopts an interpretivist philosophy to the development of knowledge, which tries to understand people rather than objects and typically a qualitative approach research. Here the researcher enters the social world of the research subjects and tries to understand from their viewpoint on the research topic (Creswell, 2009). The present research question was designed to get a better insight on the viewpoints of participants and understanding the perceptions created by employers' attractiveness attributes.

Likewise, a researchers' can decide to employ an ontology philosophy in the development of knowledge which can be either based on objectivism or subjectivism either way, both are accepted to produce valid knowledge. Objectivism depicts the position that social entities exist independent of social actors while subjectivism portrays that the perceptions and actions of social actors is what give rise to social phenomena and that this social phenomena is in a constant state of revision (Saunders, et al., 2009).

However, the present research was based on an interpretivist philosophy which is very similar to the ontology philosophy of subjectivism. The aims and objectives of this research are based on the perceptions of potential applicants of EB in regards to an employer and its EB attributes, this viewpoint has elements of subjectivity hence this approach. However, the researches done in this area have taken more of a quantitative approach rather than a qualitative approach, therefore, the researcher has added value in the adoption of a qualitative approach. Literature in this area of study have generally indicated that EB efforts greatly enhances the perception of potential employees of EB according to Oladipo et al (2013). This is supported by a report by CIPD in 2008 titled "Employer Branding: a no-nonsense approach", where the report found out that has become a strategic tool in attracting, recruiting, engaging and retaining talent in

this time where it is difficult to compete for talents. EB is a strategic tool used to make a differentiation in the employment market by linking a company's people strategy with its company brand (CIPD, 2008). To get more insight on the subjectivity side of this topic, the viewpoints of the participants, and to equally contribute to the existing EB literature in an Irish context on the attributes of EB that attract final year students job applicants and why this is so, this research have used an interpretivist approach, which suggests a qualitative approach, and more specifically interviews.

4.2   Research Objective

The objective of this research is to assess the relationship between EB on the perceptions of recent graduates and post graduates students who are actively seeking for full-time employment, and their likelihood to apply for jobs in companies.

4.3   Overall Research Question

How are the perceptions of Irish graduate students' on the five dimensions of the EmpAt

scale as identified by Berthon, Ewing & Hah (2005) related with their intention to apply for a

job?

4.4   Sub Questions

The research question was further divided into five sub-question that corresponds with the

five theme of the EmpAt scale developed by Berthon et al. (2005).

4.4.1   Research Sub-Question One:

How are potential Employees' perception of an employer with innovative work practices and high quality products / services related with their intention to apply for a job?

This question stems from the interest value of EmpAt which includes innovation and high quality products/services and how employers use this as an attraction and how this influences the decisions of potential employees. Innovation, excitement and creativity are attributes that were found to be really attractive in the research carried out by Sivertzen et al. (2013), where symbolic attributes held more importance and created an attractive image of a company to potential employees. This research question sought to contribute to this literature by identifying the attributes that are most attractive in the Irish context. Equally find out the attributes here

that are least appealing and why. The study by Arachchige & Robertson (2011) discovered that the offer of a high-quality product as an attraction were least preferred attribute and this was supported by Berthon et al. (2005) in their research too.

4.4.2   Research Sub-Question Two:
How are potential employees' perceptions of an employer's work environment that is fun and happy with good relationships with superiors and colleagues related with their intentions to apply for a job?

The social value in the Berthon et al (2005) EmpAt scale is related to this second sub-question. This is concerned with the working environment and the relationship within that working environment and assesses the extent a job applicant is attracted to an employer that provides a fun and happy work place with good relations with superiors and colleagues as EmpAt attributes. The research questions were designed to get responses that would give an in-depth insight on the attraction or dislike of this value.

Research has revealed that a working environment and its relations are very important attributes a company should have if they want to attract the best talents in the market (Collins & Stevens, 2002). A good management and leadership were amongst the attributes that were found to attract potential employees according to Roy (2008). This was supported by Berthon et al. (2005) in their study. However, the research carried out in Norway by Sivertzen et al. (2013), did not share this view, the social value was amongst the least preferred attributes.

4.4.3   Research Sub-Question Three:
How are potential employees' perceptions of an employer that offers above-average salary, good overall compensation package, job security and promotional opportunities related with their intention to apply for a job?

The economic value in the Berthon et al (2005) EmpAt scale is related to this third sub-question and it's the third theme of the findings. This is concerned with the financial benefits and more concrete benefits such as job security and pay. This value assesses the extent a job applicant is attracted to an employer that provides an above-average starting salary, attractive overall compensation packages, job security and promotional opportunities as EmpAt attributes. The research questions were aimed at getting replies that would give an understanding on what attribute here that are most preferred or least preferred and the reasons for the findings are given in the discussion chapter of findings.

In literature, Cable & Graham (2000), held that one of the effective attribute that attracted applicants was profitability. Chhabra & Sharma (2014) added to this piece of literature when they found compensation to be one of the most preferred attributes amongst commerce students surveyed. However, Sivertzen et al. (2013), did not agree when they discovered that the economic value held no significant influence on the intentions to apply of potential employees.

4.4.4 Research Sub-Question Four:

How are potential employees' perceptions of an employer that offers recognition/appreciation, develops self-confidence and offers career-enhancing experiences related with their intention to apply for a job?

The development value in the Berthon et al (2005) EmpAt scale is related to this fourth sub-question for this research and it represents the third theme of the findings in the next chapter. This is concerned with the development benefits and more emotional benefits such as recognition and career enhancing experiences. This value assesses the extent a job applicant is attracted to an employer that offers recognition/appreciation, self-worth and confidence with career-enhancing experiences as a platform for future employment as employer attractive tools. The research questions were aimed at getting responses that would help the researcher understand the attributes here that are most preferred or least preferred and the reasons for this. A detailed research findings on this value was given in the findings and discussion chapters.

4.4.5 Research Sub-Question Five:

How are potential employees' perceptions of an employer that provides opportunity to apply degree knowledge and teach others in a socially responsible and customer-oriented environment related with their intention to apply for a job?

The application value in the Berthon et al (2005) EmpAt scale is related to this fifth sub-question for this research and it represents the fifth theme of the findings in the next chapter. This is concerned with the application benefits and that incorporates both symbolic and instrumental attributes such as socially responsible features and acceptance and belonging. This value assesses the extent a job applicant is attracted to an employer that provides the opportunity to apply knowledge learnt from college, encourages a knowledge-sharing environment and is socially responsible and customer-orientated as EmpAt attributes to attract potential employees. The research questions were aimed at getting responses that would help the researcher understand the attributes in the application value that are most preferred or least

preferred. A detailed research findings on this value was given in the findings and discussion chapters.

4.5 Methodological Approach

In order to get answers to the stated research question and sub-questions of this research a qualitative approach was used to come to the conclusions of this research. A positivist view employs quantitative research which can be best described as a formal, organised process used in describing associations and used to study the cause and effect interactions existing among various variables (Punch, 2014). Conversely, the interpretivist view uses qualitative research methods and this can be best described as the process of exploring concerns, understanding several phenomena and acquiring knowledge on several issues through analysing and interpreting unstructured data (Silverman, 2014). This qualitative approach is what this study has employed based on understanding why EB efforts contributes in attracting student job applicants to apply to certain companies that is perceived to have strong brands.

Subsequently, it is important to note the contributions of various academicians such as Ambler & Barrow (1996) who first associated the concept of branding in the marketing literature to the Human Resources literature. Also, Berthon et al (2005) extensively researched the EB topic and the dimensions of attractiveness in EB, this they did in an Australian context (Berthon, et al., 2005). Likewise, Bonaiuto et al (2013) contributed to the existing literature in identifying EB attributes in Italy that attracted future leaders (Bonaiuto, et al., 2013). Similarly, in Sri Lankan, Arachchige & Robertson (2011) researched and contributed to the EB literature by identifying determinants of EB from the perceptive of business student (Arachchige & Robertson, 2011). Also Filip Lievens did a research on that distinguished between the symbolic and instrumental EB attributes influence in the Belgian Army (Lievens, 2007). These scholars have all used a quantitative approach in their researches and have closely related strong EB efforts to the enhanced perceptions of potential employees and their likelihood to apply for jobs. However, Berthon et al (2005) initially conducted focus groups which helped them identify items complied in their EmpAt scale, their overall findings were in any case based on a quantitative research carried out on university graduate students in Australia.

Berthon, Ewing & Hah (2005) built on the deductive groundwork of Amber & Barrow's (1996) three dimension namely functional, psychological and economic dimensions. After conducting a focus group, they uncovered a further two dimensions using final year graduate students and undergraduate students at a large Australian university. The analysis of the results of the focus

groups generated a 32 potential scale items of EmpAt. This was then sampled on 683 university students to test its validity. A total of two tests were carried out which resulted in the removal of eight items leaving 25 final items on the EmpAt list this they called the EmpAt scale. This present study had used this final 25-item EmpAt scale in its qualitative research, specifically interviews. The researcher had developed interview questions that probes more based on the five dimensions according to Berthon et al (2005) study. This five dimensions are interest, social, economic, development and application value. It had employed the questions on the EmpAt scale but has modified and narrowed the questions to suit an interview.

Therefore, for the current research, being carried out in an Irish context, to contribute by adding value and richness to the EB topic, the researcher had qualitatively assessed the impact of EB on the perception of prospective student job applicants and their likelihood to apply for a job in a particular company. This paper had also considered current literature by focusing on EB and its influence on prospective job applicants in academic journals, online databases and academic text books.

4.5.1 Alternative Considerations

Initially, the researcher considered only a quantitative approach by carrying out a survey through the use of questionnaires but due to the nature of the research question and its aims and objectives of understanding the perception of EB and the EmpAt attributes that are positively related to the intention to apply, the research chose the route of qualitative research. This enabled the research yield the type of volume and richness of information that the researcher considered in-depth and adequate hence the decision to take the qualitative route and carry out interviews. The researcher also wanted to gain an in-depth findings which interviews would afford.

The other research route that was considered was conducting a focus group. But this did not happen due to the time constraints and some ethical issues such as privacy and participants not willing to share information within a group. Focus group is a type of qualitative research and a group discussion where a group of people are asked about their views, perceptions, ideas, opinions, and outlook on a research topic (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The researcher made the decision to use interviews, with the view that participants will elaborate further if asked questions in person.

4.6   Research Method and Technique

This section describes the research method and technique employed for the present study.

4.6.1   Qualitative Research

This is the approach that this research had chosen because a qualitative research is an exploration and understanding of the perceptions individuals or groups attribute to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2009). The qualitative research provides a deeper insights into feelings, perceptions, ideas, understanding and behaviours of individuals or groups. Techniques mostly adopted in the qualitative research are interviews, observations, narratives, focus groups/group discussions and analysis of documentary evidence (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Some of these techniques allow for the researcher to probe further in order to get better responses so as to understand the subject matter from the participant's perspective.

Some of the key aspects of methodology that defines qualitative research according to Ritchie & Lewis (2003) include more focus on the perspective of the participant; the nature of research design being flexible; the qualitative data having more volume and richness; and approaches to data analysis and interpretation being distinctive. This research has particularly benefited from some of these key aspects of a qualitative research such as giving more focus on the participants' viewpoints, and having the flexibility in the structure of the interviews that allowed the researcher follow the lead of the participant and asked more questions where necessary to get a clearer understanding of the situation. All these added volume and richness to the data gathered.

The concept of validity in qualitative research due to its subjectivity can be quite challenging and could be interpreted as biased. Although this may be true, however, in the development of validity in qualitative research, there are certain guiding principles that contributes to it. Wittemore, Chase & Mandle (2001) pointed out primary criteria of integrity, credibility, authenticity and criticality; and a secondary criteria of vividness, explicitness, thoroughness, creativity, sensitivity and congruence that all contributes to the validity of qualitative research (Wittemore, et al., 2001). They explained that the primary conditions are essential but deficient in and of themselves, the secondary conditions are considered more flexible and they provide a further standard of quality and validity. The researcher in this study had incorporated these criteria to the qualitative research in order to make findings valid and has tried to remain as neutral as possible.

4.6.2 Qualitative Research Rationale

Qualitative is advantageous if the collection and analysis of data is not designed to concur with numerically focused objectives for example examining the number of participants that votes yes or no in an opinion poll. This type of research gives the researcher the opportunity to capture more complex aspects such as subtle body language and at the same time allows the researcher to interpret data as offered by the participant's own view point (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Again it is important to note that to present a valid and quality data, interpretations should ideally be unbiased.

Furthermore, the entire social situation is appreciated with this method rather than quantifiable parts of a research which is why it was of particular value to the present study, it was able to capture aspects that quantitative research in previous studies didn't. The data presented through a qualitative research approach is often descriptive, therefore possibly extending the depth, and increasing the value of data.

For this research, interviews were employed to collate data from the participants offering their own perceptions with regards to EB and EmpAt attributes as identified in the Berthon et al (2005) study and it afforded the researcher flexibility to tailor and/or expand questions during interviews yielding the findings of this research.

4.7 Sample

In order to obtain the information required to meet the objectives of this dissertation, six participants were interviewed for this research. All participants were recent college graduates in Dublin and were actively looking for full time employment. The six participants attended three different colleges in Dublin. Two of the participants were in part-time employment but were also looking to get full-time jobs. This position gives some of the participants an exposure to work and a knowledge of the characteristics of types of employers. This was considered an idea group for this research from which to gain a better understanding and more insights on job applicants' particularly student graduates' perceptions of EB and its effects towards applying for jobs in companies. These students just completed their undergraduate and post graduate degrees and as such are actively considering their employment prospects.

The selection of participants were both by convenience and snowball sampling. They were either known to the interviewer in college or introduced by other participants to the interviewer. Snowball sampling according to Punch (2014) can be referred to as chain effect sample, where

new participants are identified from existing participants. Also, participants were selected based on their availability for work. It was important that they were actively looking for employment and were looking at choosing a future employer. The participants ranged in age from 22 to 35. Four out of the six respondents were female while two were male.

Age, gender or course of study were irrelevant to the research provided the participants were finished or just finished college and were actively looking for employment. The aim was to get participants from various schools in Dublin in order to gain a deeper insight into the subject under investigation.

4.8   Interview Questions

The interview questions were all grounded in literature based on the 25 items of EmpAt developed by Berthon et al (2005) and also used by Arachchige & Robertson (2011). The questions were divided into five themes that were linked to the five research questions of this research which also corresponded with the five deductive dimensions by Berthon et al (2005). The questions were mostly open-ended to encourage more elaboration.
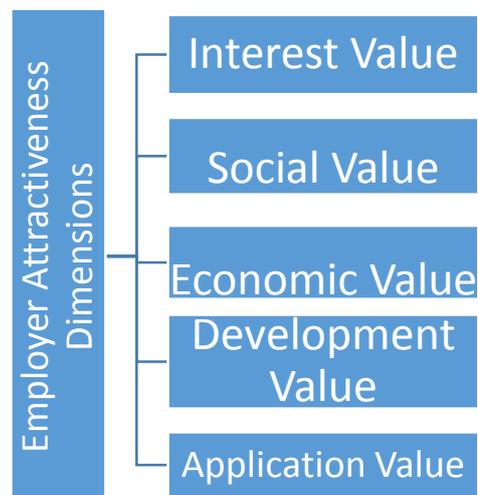
Figure 8: Employer Attractiveness Dimensions by Berthon, Ewing & Hah (2005).

The dimension of the EmpAt scale are in five dimensions according to Berthon, Ewing & Hah (2005) validated scale as illustrated above. The first theme for the interview corresponds to Berthon et al (2005) Interest Value and this links into the first research objective of the present study. This assessed the extent to which a jobseeker is attracted to an employer that provides an exciting work environment whilst using its employee's creativity to produce high-quality,

innovative products and services. Questions were asked about innovative work practices as an attraction and an exciting working environment.

The second theme that the interview was based on was the Social Value in Berthon et al EmApt scale, this was connected to the second research objective of this dissertation. This assessed the extent to which a jobseeker is attracted to an employer that provides a fun and happy working environment with good mutual relationships and a team atmosphere. Questions were asked around the working relationships in the company that would influence decision to apply for a job.

The Economic Value by Berthon et al (2005) is the third theme and is closely linked to the third research objective. This focused on the extent which a jobseeker is attracted to an employer that provides above-average salary compensation package, job security and promotional opportunities. The questions asked here were related to salary, compensation, security in the job and promotional opportunities. It focused on these attributes as an attraction to apply for a job.

The fourth dimension is the Development Value, this corresponded with the fourth research objective of this study. This assessed the extent which a jobseeker is attracted to an employer that provides recognition, self-worth and confidence, coupled with a career-enhancing experience as a platform for future employment.

Finally, the last dimension which is the Application Value linked in with the fifth research objective of this study. This assessed the extent which a jobseeker is attracted to an employer that provides opportunity for its employee to apply knowledge learned from college and to teach others, in an environment that is both customer orientated and caring.

This five-factor structure by Berthon et al (2005) is basically a refinement and extension of the three dimensions put forward by Ambler & Barrow (1996). The dimensions one in (Interest value) and two (Social value) captures Ambler & Barrow's 'psychological benefits'; the dimension four (Development value) and five (Application value) develops Ambler & Barrow's 'functional benefits'; and, the economic value in dimension three also reflects their economic dimension too. This present research had employed the use of this scale and had applied it in a qualitative manner.

At the conclusion of the interview, participants were asked if they had any further contribution that they felt was not covered. This was done to encourage participants summarise their

thoughts on the topic in their own words and this should not be overlooked as it may help participants add something new and of use to the research (Quinlan, 2011). The six participants were thanked at the end for their participation and the researcher expressed appreciation for their contribution and time. Please see appendix A for a full list of interview questions and transcribes.

4.8.1 Pilot Study

After finalising the interview questions, a pilot interview was conducted with two individuals who were not part of the participants being interviewed for this research. This was to ensure that the interview questions were easy to understand and interpret when read out to participants. This was done in order to get good replies and to further improve the interviews questions reliability before administering them. The researcher equally used the pilot interviews to become familiar with the questions and to become comfortable asking them. This also enabled the researcher practise interview techniques like listening and asking probing questions during interviews. After the pilot study, some few minor changes were made to the interview questions, after which the actual interviews were conducted on the six participants.

4.9 Data Collection Method and Process

Data was gathered from these six students through a semi-structured interviews where five were conducted in person and the sixth one was over the phone. In advance of the interview, the background and nature of the study was provided and explained to the participants and a basic overview of what the interview would entailed was provided. The participants were provided with a written consent form and by signing it, indicated consent to voluntarily participate in the research. It was explained to them that their personal information would be kept private and confidential and that their names would be kept anonymous. Participation was completely voluntary and the participants were not compensated for their time.

The interviews took place in a quiet place where distractions and noise levels were kept very low, drinking water was provided for the face-to-face interviews. The researcher recorded the interviews on a digital media player with the consent of the participants. The researcher also took down some notes and the participants were made aware of the fact that they could withdraw at any time from the study.

4.9.1   Treatment of Data after Collection

The treatment of the data collected in the interviews were carried out by the researcher by transcribing each interview as soon as it was possible into a word document. The procedure of doing transcripts by the researcher increased a familiarity with the data. Once this process was completed, the next stage that followed was the reading of each of the interview several times so as to highlight important words and meaningful sentences. This was done in order to attach meaning to the data that were highlighted. The researcher after this process, went back to the data and read it particularly slowly and carefully. This process produced some summaries of data by pulling together themes and identifying a pattern. Initially, the researcher used descriptive codes as described by Punch (2014), as it was particularly helpful to start-up the data analysis and get familiar with the data. At the later stage, inferential or pattern coding was employed, this helped to pull together data into smaller sections that made it more meaningful.

The descriptive and inferential codes were given different colour and initials based on their meaning and this was then done to all the transcripts, looking for similar codes. Codes were then developed into themes. A spreadsheet was developed by putting in the key themes to make it easy for the researcher to develop patterns and commonalities of certain themes and to establish the non-existence of others. Please see appendix B for complete spreadsheet.

4.10   Ethical Consideration

In writing a thesis, research participants need to be protected and researchers have to be aware of this and how to develop trust with them whilst promoting the integrity of the research (Creswell, 2009). Ethical issues arises in all sections of a research, in the research purpose and question, it should be clear and not misleading. In the collection of data, that the data subject is not put at risk and an informed consent form is supplied to the participant to sign before they participate in the research. This research considered all these and provided participants with information sheet and a consent form which is attached in Appendix (i) and (ii) of this thesis. The information sheet included the purpose of the study and why the participant was chosen. Then there was a consent form which the participant had to sign but since some of the responses were administered online via emails, there was a consent form attached which stated that continuing the survey indicated consent.

The researcher adhered at all times to the ethical guidelines as dictated by NCI. All data collected were purely used for the reasons stated in the research. For the interviews, the

researcher offered to send a completed copy of the Dissertation to interested participants as a gesture of appreciation which none of the interviewees accepted. This was to reassure participants that information used were only the ones they approved for the research.

4.11   Limitations of Data Collection

Initially, the researcher considered only a quantitative approach by carrying out a survey through the use of questionnaires but while conducting the survey, the response rate were quite low and the type of responses were not yielding the type of volume and richness that the researcher considered adequate to work with, hence one of the decisions to take the qualitative route and carry out interviews.

Another limitation was in getting a time that was both suitable for the researcher and the participants to meet hence two of the interviews were conducted over the phone. It was not the intention of the researcher to conduct the interviews over the phone but due to the time constraints, the two participants agreed to be interviewed over the phone.

5.0   Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to organise and present the key research findings of this dissertation. A first table was created, it showed the profile of the respondents. All six interviews were transcribed and an analytical summary was made with the key findings linking back to the research questions as stated in chapter three. A thematic analysis was employed in this aspect to help the researcher with findings.

The themes were explored through the interview questions (see Appendix iii) using thematic analysis to investigate the data. The findings from respondents were grouped under the thematic headings of the five dimensions by Berthon et al (2005) study of EB. The interviews contained a lot of information, so it was important to reduce the data in order to draw the conclusions. This Saunders et al (2009) describes as a compression of longer versions of transcripts into briefer versions (Saunders, et al., 2009). The reason for this is to present the data obtained from the six interviews in a more organised way and to reduce the amount of transcribed data. A cross reference for commonalities was carried out by identifying, examining and recording themes within the data. These themes are important patterns through the data sets that are associated to the research questions, from which understanding and conclusions were drawn.

5.1   Presentation of Findings

Below outline the findings of the interviews carried out by the researcher for the purpose of this dissertation. The responses are categorised under the five dimension themes identified in chapter 3 with table one showing the biography of research participants. For more detailed information on all the findings see (Appendix iv) for the transcripts.

Table 1: Biography of Research Participants

PARTICIPANTS						
	A	B	C	D	E	F
GENDER	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female	Female
AGE RANGE	20-30 yrs.	30-40 yrs.	20-30 yrs.	20-30 yrs.	30-40 yrs.	20-30 yrs.
Graduating College	Independent College Dublin	National College of Ireland	National College of Ireland	National College of Ireland	National College of Ireland	Trinity College Dublin
Course of Study	BA (Hons) Accountancy	MSc Finance	MA HRM	MA HRM	MA HRM	MSc Finance
Current Job	Receptionist	-	Part-time Manager	Work Placement	-	-
Company	Hospitality	-	Retail	Recruitment Agency	-	-
Month Graduating	November 2015	September 2015	September 2015	September 2015	September 2015	September
Interview Time in minutes	22	24	21	22	25	20
Interview Mode	Person	Person	Phone	Person	Person	Phone

5.2 Findings

The following is the findings of this research under each of the identified five themes which corresponds with the stated research questions of this dissertation in chapter three.

5.2.1 Theme One Interest Value

Research Question One: **How are potential Employees' perception of an employer with innovative work practices and high quality products / services related with their intention to apply for a job?**

The perception of potential employees of an employer with innovative work practices and high-quality products/services is one that has been classified under the interest value by Berthon et al (2005) framework of EmpAt measurement. How does this influence the intention of these applicants to apply for a job in a company that exhibits this value?

The interest value consists of an exciting workplace, innovative work practices, valuing employees' creativity and the offer of high-quality products/services as EmpAt attributes. The questions asked here helped to assess how potential employees are drawn to a company based on these attributes and how it affected their intentions to apply for a job.

In the findings here, all respondents acknowledged similarities when it came to being attracted to an employer that offered an exciting and innovative workplace however all six participants had slightly different reasons why. Four of the six participants admitted a challenging workplace to be exciting, respondent B and C also added that doing repetitive work was not exciting, interesting and challenging. But innovation to all respondent was interesting and challenging and a reason to apply because according to respondent E, it keeps her skills upgraded and she learns better way of doing things. When asked about innovation, respondent C said:

> *I would rather be involved in an innovative and exciting environment that brings new challenges every day, rather than coming into a boring workplace that involves doing the same boring task over and over.*

Respondent C is attracted to a workplace that offers experiences that are challenging and are much more than tangible attributes. According to Lievens & Highhouse (2003) and Lievens et al (2007), the difference in the perception of potential employees towards a company is not only accounted for by instrumental attributes but by symbolic attributes also, this they attach meaning to.

However when it came to the products/services the company offered, three of the respondents had no interest whatsoever in the products/services a company offered. They were not attracted to apply for a job based on that attribute, they were happy to be paid for their services. Conversely, the rest three respondents, A,D and E found this aspect quite attractive, with respondent A stating that it was a reflection of her own image and of her skills if the company she wants to work for had high-quality products. While respondent E and D, felt proud to be associated with a company with high-quality products/services. These findings differ slightly from that of Arachchige & Robertson (2011) but agrees with that of Berthon et al (2005). In the latter study, the group surveyed showed interest of applying for jobs in a company that offered high-quality products/services (Berthon, et al., 2005). While the in the former group surveyed, there was a display of a lack of interest in the products/services of the company they wish to work for (Arachchige & Robertson, 2011).

According to this research findings, this suggests that symbolic attributes influence account for more than the instrument attributes as suggested by Lievens & Highhouse (2003), who included symbolic organisational attributes to be innovation, excitement, competence and prestige. In our findings innovation and excitement accounted for more influence than the actual products/services a company offers. This gives an explanation to the first research question, potential employees are more drawn to work for a company that offers them innovative work practices that is exciting and challenging than one that has high-quality products/services as an attraction.

5.2.2 Theme Two – Social Value

Research Question Two: – **How are potential employees' perceptions of an employer's work environment that is fun and happy with good relationships with superiors and colleagues related with their intentions to apply for a job?**

The attractiveness of a fun and happy work environment and the promise of good working relationship with colleagues and management are the attributes the social value dimension tries to measure. This is taken from Berthon et al (2005) framework for EB (Berthon, et al., 2005). This value tries to assess how the work environment is used as an attraction to attract potential employees to apply for a job.

When asked regarding their views on a company's working environment, all respondents acknowledged that it did matter a lot. Respondent A noted that she was attracted to a sociable workplace where colleagues are happy and there is a free flow of communication. The attraction to a happy workplace seem to be a criteria that ticked all respondents' boxes. When asked too about having a good relationship with superiors, all respondents noted that it was a big attraction. Respondent F revealed it would be good for her wellbeing and a good relationship with superiors contributed to a happy workplace. In her words:

> *Having good relations with my superiors will contribute to a happy working environment.*

She said she was an emotional person and would want to be happy in her workplace so as not to affect her emotionally and bringing any bad feelings home with her.

Having a good relationship with management contributed to making a company attractive thereby increasing the possibility of potential employees applying for a job (Backhaus & Tikoo,

2004). This supports the findings in this research where the participants were very attracted to the perception of a good working relationship with superiors.

However when asked about having good relations with colleagues, four out of the six respondents acknowledged it mattered to them. Respondent A said it did not matter much and F said it depended on the closeness of the working relationship. The rest four that said it mattered pointed out how it would improve productivity, promote learning and how the job would be easier with good communication. Respondent D particularly mentioned team effort was the attraction here. She said:

> *When I get along with my workmates, we can share the job evenly and it gets done on time, this becomes team effort.*

In the Sri Lankan study by Arachchige & Robertson (2011), they found having good relationship with both colleagues and superiors were amongst the most preferred attributes with it ranking sixth and seventh place. While in the Australian study by Berthon et al (2005), having good relationship with colleagues ranked fourth amongst the most preferred attributes. These findings are in agreement with the present research findings, where all respondents valued good relations with superiors although only four out of the six preferred good relations with colleagues. Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) in their conceptualisation paper of EB suggested that people's impression of themselves are derived from their relationship with certain social groups.

In the findings of this research, it suggests that people prefer a good work relations with management and/or colleagues as this is an impression of themselves. All respondent wanted a happy workplace where they can be happy and productive and having good relations with superiors and colleagues contributed to a happy workplace. This gives some clarification to the second research question that potential employees are more enticed by a work environment that is fun and happy and they would prefer to have good relations with their superiors and colleagues. This is an attribute that is most appealing to potential employees and would have a positive effect to their decision to apply.

5.2.3   Theme Three – Economic Value

Research Question Three – **How are potential employees' perceptions of an employer that offers above-average salary, good overall compensation package, job security and promotional opportunities related with their intention to apply for a job?**

The economic value tries to understand the influence of a high starting salary, compensations, and job security with promotion opportunities on potential employees' behaviour when it comes to choosing an employer. The questions asked under this theme were adapted from the questions used to assess the economic value dimension in Berthon et al (2005) study. It is important for companies to understand the effects of these economic value attributes (and other attributes) before they decide what type of investments/intervention they will use for their recruitment strategies that will yield optimal results.

In the findings, when asked whether promotion opportunities in a workplace was an attraction, all respondents found this attribute attractive except for respondent D. She held that her decision to apply for a job will not be based on future job offers rather on the present offer she is getting. According to her;

> *I wouldn't say that my decision will be affected by that because maybe if I apply for a position that I have being looking for, it will be something I want to do and maybe I don't want to get promoted.*

However, respondent A, C and E all agreed it was something that would help them think of their future and plan. Respondent B went further to add that this attribute will aid his career and personal growth with respondent E agreeing. She said:

> *I will like to grow in my career and position, this will show that I am advancing in my knowledge, skills and experiences and not just being in the same place I was when I join a company. There is no motivation there.*

When asked about job security, there were mixed replies. Respondent A and F found this attribute a positive when choosing an employer while respondent B, D and E felt it didn't really matter and C said he wouldn't mind either way. Respondent B said it mattered to get a job now but good to also look for better opportunities. Moreover, respondent E felt it was the experience that matter most and that companies do not offer permanent positions straight away these days. Respondent C agreed with E on this, by adding that it was common practice nowadays for companies not to offer permanent positions straight away and he wasn't looking to get one immediately. He said:

Getting a permanent employment / contract straight away from college has become a lot harder. It is now the common to receive a 6 month contract and have it renewed once or twice before you are let go or made permanent. So I wouldn't really mind either way, job security or not, I will still apply for the job.

The findings from this attribute suggests that even though job security is an attraction, not all graduate recruits are quite motivated by it to start the process of applying for a job. In his study of EB in the Belgian Army, Filip Lievens found that symbolic attributes accounted for more influence when it came to forming perceptions about an employer than instrumental attributes such as job security for potential employees (Lievens, 2007). His findings correlates with the present research findings on job security attribute, not having as much influence as innovation or exciting workplace would. However some of the respondents, A and F, did agreed that they found having the assurance of a secured job to depend on attractive.

When asked about getting above average salary, respondent B found this attribute a great motivator to want to apply for a job. He started his interview by giving reasons why he would consider a job:

Personally I feel the first thing I will consider before applying for a job in a company is the popularity of the company, if the company is well known. The second I will seriously consider is the salary.

He went on to explain that been fresh out of college, he had a lot of financial worries and would love a good salary for a start to meet those needs.

With an above average salary, all respondent except A found this attractive, she put it to a fifty percent attraction. She explained that if she had other great attributes such as a fun and learning environment, it would make up for a salary that is not so great. For respondent D, even though she found it an attraction, she said her present circumstance of having to finish paying for her college fees would make her apply for a job with average salary. Respondents B, C, E and F had financial needs and having a high starting salary was very attractive. Respondent C explained that been straight out of college, he would like to own a house and start a family, and with a good salary, these things are possible.

When asked if an attractive overall compensation package was an attraction to a job, five out of the six respondents found it an attraction. Although respondent A mentioned specifically that a good health benefit package is most attractive. However, respondent D was not so

attracted to this attribute, she pointed out that it didn't matter as long as she gets her salary. The findings here suggests that potential employees' decision to apply for a job is somewhat affected positively by an attractive overall compensation package. Respondent F mentioned that it was amongst the first things she look for in a job offer.

In the EB literature, symbolic attributes accounted for more influence in the decision to apply for a job than instrumental attributes did according to Lievens & Highhouse (2003). They found out that these symbolic attributes such as innovation added incremental variance well above instrumental attributes such as pay. However, this research findings suggests that a high starting salary and an attractive overall compensation (instrumental attributes) are preferred attributes with five out of the six respondents. The instrumental attributes are related to an individual's basic needs to take full advantage of benefits and reduce costs (Lievens, 2007). With reference to the sample group of this research, student graduates starting their first jobs with lot of basic financial needs, it would suggests that an above average salary would be a motivator to apply for a job. These findings contradicts that of Filip Lievens in his study of the Belgian Army, where he found that actual concrete attributes (instrumental), accounted for more variance in actual applicants than potential applicants. Actual applicants when compared to potential applicants ascribe a lot of consideration to detailed, concrete and realistic information about the instrumental attributes of an employer in a job offer he explained while potential applicants lean more towards the symbolic attributes (Lievens, 2007).

This gives some explanations to the question three of this research, that potential employees are more drawn to the perception of an above average salary and good compensation packages. Potential employees are also drawn to a company that offers promotion opportunities although with job security, respondents would not mind whether it was offered or not. Therefore, potential employees are likely to apply for a job in a company that offers an above average salary, good compensation benefits and promotion opportunities but are not so affected by the idea of a job security.

5.3.4 Theme Four – Development Value
Research Question Four – **How are potential employees' perceptions of an employer that offers recognition/appreciation, develops self-confidence and offers career-enhancing experiences related with their intention to apply for a job?**
The development value assesses the extent potential employees are attracted to an employer that provides recognition, self-worth and confidence, career-enhancing experiences with a

platform for future employment. These attributes are more symbolic and they are linked to people's need to express themselves, maintain self-identity and enhance self-confidence (Lievens, 2007).

When asked if recognition/appreciation from management is what they value when considering a job, all six respondents said it was something that they would consider. Respondent A explained that it would boost her confidence more, motivate her to be more productive and learn more. All respondents agreed it was a motivator to work harder. Respondent F mentioned though that she doesn't think companies would promise this when you are applying for a job.

As a platform for future employment, all respondents saw this attribute as desirable. Respondent B described further that jobs were not for life, network, gain experience and move on to a next challenge and if a job offers one that opportunity, it was great. Respondents C and E added that it's a way to help them think longer term for their career to grow and advance. Respondent F said it would help her career but she will actually love a company where she can stay a long time and build a career there. In her words:

> I will immediately like to find a job where I can stay long and probably build a career in.

Respondent A explained in her interview that she would want to learn in a current job and take the experiences to a future job for challenges and she felt being ambitious was a good thing.

When it came to a company having a good brand name, five out of the six saw this as a positive. Respondent C noted that it will not affect his decision to apply for a job, saying some of the largest companies in the world were amongst the most hated. A good brand name is prestigious said B and it's a thing of pride added respondents A, E and F. A said it would add to her confidence positively because a good brand stands out and builds a company image positively. D added that it would give her a great feeling of belonging to a company with a good brand. E added how it would make her feel more her self-confident and proud to be a part of a good brand:

> I want to be associated with success and high quality and if I am part of the team that produces such high quality, this will make me proud.

A good company's image have a positive relationship to intentions to apply for a job by potential employees (Edwards, 2010). This is because potential employees have very little information to go by when applying to a company, they rely heavily on the image of the

company and its reputation (Elving, et al., 2013). When asked if a company's image mattered and if it would make when applying for a job and if this would make them more self-confident, all respondents except for C said yes. C explained that it was the job that mattered most to him and not the company image. E noted that working for a company that is prestigious like Citibank would boost her self-confidence. Respondent A added a company that presents itself well to the outside world creates a good image and would give her self-confidence. Respondent B said if a company offered a reward package that suits his lifestyle, he would feel more comfortable and hence have more self-confident and that a company that has a good image will also add to this self-confidence. Responded D added that it would look great on a CV and boost her self-confidence, she said:

> *I think it is good to work for well-recognised company with a great image, it would give me more self-confidence knowing I have worked in such a company and that I have met such people in it and also it would look good in my CV for future prospects.*

This finding indicates that potential employees, who believe if they work for a certain company, are going to feel better about themselves and feel more self-confident, are more likely to apply for jobs in a that company. This finding adds to the importance of the development value in attracting and retaining employees as suggested by Sivertzen et al (2013) in their research of EB (Sivertzen, et al., 2013).

Having career-enhancing experiences as a motivator to apply is an attribute that all respondents found quite attractive. Respondent B, C and E said it would educate them more and add to their knowledge, skills and experiences. Respondent D said she would develop more which implies growth prospects. Respondent A and F pointed out that it would boost their career and A added it would offer her many opportunities.

5.3.5   Theme Five – Application Value
Research Question Five – **How are potential employees' perceptions of an employer that provides opportunity to apply degree knowledge and teach others in a socially responsible and customer-oriented environment related with their intention to apply for a job?**
The application value tries to assess the extent a potential employee is attracted to a company that offers opportunity to apply their knowledge from college, teach others in an environment that is socially responsible and customer-oriented.

When asked if a company that gives back to the society will affect decision to apply for a job, four out of the six participants said it wouldn't. However two responded that it was an attraction. A explained that a company that does this, cares and will treat employees same. She said

> *This shows that they care and that they will equally treat employees likewise too. They are involved in other people's burden, it's not just all about the commercial side of things.*

Respondent D liked the fact that such a company values society and values peoples' perspectives and that they will value employees too. On the other hand, the four respondents pointed out that a company that gives back to the society will not affect their intention to apply for a job. Respondent C said:

> *It wouldn't bother me if they didn't. If that was the case I will join a charity organisation if it's what appeals to me. My decision to apply for a job will not be affected by this fact.*

This results does not correlate with the findings of Bonaiuto et al (2013) where is was discovered that to become an ideal employer and attract the best talents, companies have to have a socially responsible profile. However, our findings suggest that student graduates do not really care about this attribute as much. They want a job that can pay them and value their work.

Concerning the opportunity to apply degree knowledge, five out of the six acknowledged they would like to. E revealed that given the opportunity, she would but if not will add new knowledge to her existing ones. The other respondents said it would afford them opportunities to use what they learnt, D added it would help develop her career and F said she would be expected to learn everything if she cannot use her degree knowledge.

In the research carried out by Sivertzen et al (2013), it found that a good learning environment where application of skills occurs is favoured highly by potential employees (Sivertzen, et al., 2013). Berthon et al (2005) also in their research agreed to this. This is similar to the present research findings, where five of the respondents found this attribute an attraction and as such have positive intentions to apply for a job.

On the issue of customer-oriented, four out of the six respondent said it didn't matter. D said as long as she fit the job description, she doesn't mind if the company was customer-oriented or not. F particularly didn't want a customer-oriented company because according to her, customers are very difficult to satisfy.

> *I will not like to work for a company where I will be dealing with customers. I will prefer to avoid customer- oriented company to work for, because it can be very difficult dealing with people especially difficult customers.*

The study by Arachchige & Robertson (2011) found that with customer-oriented attributes, most students did not care much and this findings corresponds with this research findings where most of the respondents felt this will not have an effect on their decision to apply for a job.

Regarding acceptance and belonging, all respondents found this attribute quite attractive that they would apply for a job in a company. Respondent D and E added that it will make them feel comfortable and learn more while respondents A, C and F said it will make them feel part of the company and A and B agreed that it promoted communication in and out of the company. B added that it will make her productive:

> *I will say it will make me more productive knowing that I am accepted in a place I work for or want to work for.*

The findings of this research suggests that acceptance and belonging in a workplace is valued and symbolic meanings are attached to them. In their research findings, Sivertzen et al (2013) suggests that potential employees seem to value an employer with psychological and application values more and they associate positive intentions towards such companies. This is in agreement with the present research findings.

Basically, from the findings of this research, it seem that an employer that provides an opportunity to apply skills from college and to teach others is an attractive employer according to the perceptions of potential employees but when it comes to being socially responsible and customer-oriented, it didn't seem to matter hence had no effect on decisions to apply for a job.

5.5   Conclusion

A detailed description had been given in this chapter on how the participants responded to the interview questions with some extracts of what they actually said put into it. Overall, the

positive effect of EB had been evident in all six interviews. There were notably commonalities in some answers like the preference of an employer with innovative work practices and the use of employees' creativity. This was a general view when it came to the interest values of an employer, however, the use of high-quality products/services as an attraction for these potential employees held little influence.

The social value was something all participant really valued in a workplace according to the findings from the interviews. A fun and happy working was an attribute that all participants found to be attractive and would affect positively any decision to apply for work in a company. When it came to the relationship within the workplace, especially with superiors, participants were all in agreement that it was an essential for their career, wellbeing and stay in a job. Only one participant expresses that having supportive and encouraging colleagues would not affect her decision to apply to company. Although, her reasons were quite understandable as she said she could predict her future colleagues. This is an area that employers should concentrate on, getting branding messages across effectively to targeted audience.

Majority of the participants found the economic value attractive in a workplace with one or two admitting it would not affect their decision to apply for employment in an establishment. Overall, pay, compensation and promotion were highly favoured attributes when compared to job security. With job security there were mixed replies on it being attractive enough to influence applying intentions.

All the participants valued the concept of the development value noting it was a source of pride and would contribute to self-confidence. Recognition/appreciation is an attribute all participants seem to like. Career enhancing experiences and the idea of having future prospects were preferred attributes too. Company brand/image that's is reputable and well-known was noted to look good on the CV and boost self-confidence. Overall, it is a value worth exploiting by employer because participants rated it highly in an employer and would be influenced by it.

The findings also revealed that participants were more inclined to an employer that gave the opportunity to apply college knowledge in an environment that accepted them and gave them a sense of belonging. The application value however got mixed answers, where a company that possess socially responsible features and customer-oriented were not so preferred. Majority of participants did not see the relevance or effect it would have in their decision to apply for a job.

The next chapter will give an in-depth analysis of the findings by trying to compare and contrast findings with existing literature, how these findings differ, are similar or highlighted new information.

6.0   Introduction

In the Human Resource literature, EB has recently emerged as a concept that helps a company distinguish itself and make it competitive in the labour market with regards to recruiting and retaining employees. To date, there have been limited studies on this topic that examines EB's assumptions and effects. Therefore, this study seeks to add to this concept of the EB literature and the employer brand as a package of symbolic and instrumental attributes by identifying those attributes that appeals to potential employees and affects positively their decision to apply for jobs in a company.

The findings of this research was compared with existing literature for similarities and differences and discussed under each of the five sub research questions. This chapter aimed to critically analyse the research results and explain the implications for this study and further EB research studies. As the main purpose of this study, it examined the relationship between the intention to apply for a job and potential employees' perception of an employer who offers symbolic and instrumental attributes as an attraction.

Generally, the findings of this research showed a positive relationship between a strong employer brand and the applying decision of a potential employee. Although, the participants varied in some of the attributes. The five sub research questions centre on symbolic and instrumental EmpAt as a tool for attraction. Each sub question was discussed in the context of each theme and applicable literatures.

6.1   Interest Values

The interest value comprises of innovation, the use employee's creativity and interest in high-quality product/services as EmpAt attributes according to Berthon et al 2005. The first research sub-question is how this influences the applying decision of potential employees. The participants seemed to value the intangible attributes of this interest value more than the tangible attributes, Lievens & Highhouse (2003) supported this view in their study, where they suggested that symbolic attributes (intangible) accounted for more influence than instrumental attributes (tangible).

Innovation, exciting and creativity were attributes that participants really found attractive in an employer. These findings were also supported by Sivertzen et al. (2013) in their study where

non-materialist attributes of work held more importance and attraction that created a positive image of a company for potential employees. Lievens & Highhouse (2003) identified these symbolic attributes to include innovation, excitement, competence and prestige. Innovation and excitement accounted for more attraction than the actual products/services a company offers in this research findings. Participants were particularly drawn to innovation because it kept their skills updated, contributed to their productivity, helped creativity and offered the opportunity to learn more. A consistent value that was consistent in all responses was the idea of having a challenging job. They all seem to want a workplace that will challenge them and excite them. A few of the participants gave an example of the company Google as a company that is innovative, creative, challenging and exciting.

However, product/services offered by companies were found not to be really attractive by most of our participants. This attribute were also among the three attributes that were rated lowest in the attributes that appealed to the Sri Lankan business students surveyed according to Arachchige & Robertson (2011). This view supports the findings of this research, however they contradict with that of Berthon et al. (2005) carried out in an Australian context, where they found that a high-quality product/service was actually an attraction to applicants. This could be attributed to difference in cultural and economic factors as suggested by Arachchige & Robertson (2011) and Sivertzen et al (2013). Another reason for the differences could be the type of methodology used in the present research, while all the other researches had employed a quantitative approach, the present research have approached this with qualitative method. The research have contributed to the EB literature by identifying interest values that are most attractive in the Irish context. In the research carried out by Wilden et al. (2010), product brands of prospective employers had a positive influence as regarding applying decisions of potential employees. This does not correlate with this research discoveries.

6.2 Social Values

The social value comprises of the work environment and the working relations within this environment as EmpAt attribute. The second question sought to find explanations for the relationship between the perceptions of a work place and its environment and the applying intention of a potential employee. The findings of this research revealed a positive relationship exists between these two, where a fun, happy workplace, good relations with

superior/colleagues were really attractive attributes for a company to possess if they wanted attract student graduates to their company.

Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) suggested that potential employees are likely to be attracted to companies where the image and values of the company are similar to theirs. Taking this perspective, a company's workplace that reflects what an employee wants will be attractive. All the participants revealed that a good working environment was a very important consideration when choosing an employer. They wanted a sociable workplace that was fun, happy, corporate, good locations and where they can feel comfortable hence be more productive. Smart presentation of a company was a big attraction, this suggested that these potential employees would want to be seen as smart people, hence the attraction to smart surroundings. In the research carried out by Collins & Steven (2002), they found out that students tend to have favourable attitudes towards companies that had a perceived higher profile and that sponsored events in the schools, hence they are attracted more to apply to such companies. This suggested that these companies are fun and sociable which agrees with the findings of this research that these recent graduates and post graduate students are attracted to an employer that is fun and sociable.

The findings also revealed a preference for a good working relationship with superiors. The reasons for this were that it helped productivity, increases retention, learn better and helps communication. These findings are supported in literature by Backhaus & Tikoo (2004), Berthon et al (2005) and Roy (2008), where they all agreed that one of the attributes that contributed to making a company attractive to potential employees was having a good management/leadership. The review of the present literature highlighted the importance of a strong employer brand and its potential of attracting applicants and increasing possibility of applying. The working environment contributes to this strong employer brand and the working relationship make up part of the working environment (Roy, 2008). This is an attribute that is most appealing to potential employees and would have a positive effect on their decision to apply according to the findings. Equally Elving et al. (2013) held that a supportive working environment contributed to an EmpAt attribute (Elving, et al., 2013)

Overall, this research found a positive relationship between the social values of a company and the intentions to apply for a job in that company. This findings was in agreement with the research carried out in Australia by Berthon et al. (2005), where the students surveyed most preferred attributes were the work environment and the social values of a company (Berthon,

et al., 2005). A company's corporate reputation is really important because it can increase the chance of potential employees' applying for a job. A company's work environment and how it manages employees are all part of its reputation. However, according to Sivertzen et al. (2013), in their findings, the social value did not have significant influence on corporate reputation. This they found controversial as usually a company's working environment was very important to employees and potential employees as it was the case in the outcome of this research. Their findings therefore contradicted with the present research findings that found the social value attractive to the potential employee. The reasons for this however could be down to the context in which both researches were carried out. Sivertzen et al. (2013) carried out their findings in three Norway universities using only engineering graduates while the present research was carried out in an Irish context and with business graduates.

6.3   Economic Values

The economic value includes financial benefits that an employer use as an attraction such as salary, benefits, job security and promotion opportunities. These attributes are regarded as instrumental attributes. The research question seek to understand if potential employees are attracted to apply to a company that offers these attributes. In the research by Cable & Graham (2000), one of the major and central attribute that predicted potential applicants' perception of a company was found to be profitability. In the findings of this research, although profitability was not mentioned, majority of the participants found an above average starting salary quite attractive. It will suggest that a company that can afford to pay a salary that is above average should be a profitable one to afford it. This research findings suggests that a high starting salary and an attractive overall compensation (instrumental attributes) are preferred attributes with five out of the six respondents. The research carried out by Chhabra & Sharma (2014) supported this finding, where it was found that compensation ranked highest amongst the commerce students surveyed. The instrumental attributes are related to an individual's basic needs to take full advantage of benefits and reduce costs (Lievens, 2007).

The research carried out by Sivertzen et al. (2013), revealed that the economic dimension had no significant influence on a company's reputation, hence reducing the applying possibilities. However they mentioned that this was surprising since compensation was usually the most attractive attribute employers' use in attracting talents (Sivertzen, et al., 2013). Also in the research carried out by Elving et al (2013), EB efforts as regarding compensation did not

improve the estimates of potential employees. These findings contradicted with the present research findings, where the participants favoured a high wage and was likely to apply for a job based a great compensation package. However, these findings was supported in literature by Berthon et al. (2005), they found out that compensation were among potential applicants most preferred attributes. A likely explanation for this attribute ranking amongst the most preferred could be that the students surveyed and interviewed are eager to get into employment and earn money. Recent graduates and post graduate students, fresh out of college and all have basic financial needs and getting a salary that is above average will help in meeting his need. Maybe, in a few months or years, a high salary might not hold as much of an attraction any longer.

The findings of Filip Lievens in his study of the Belgian Army, found that actual concrete attributes (instrumental) such as pay and compensation, accounted for more variance in actual applicants than potential applicants. Actual applicants when compared to potential applicants ascribe a lot of consideration to detailed, concrete and realistic information about the instrumental attributes of an employer in a job offer he explained while potential applicants lean more towards the symbolic attributes since they are still considering the possibility to apply for a job (Lievens, 2007). It can be argued here that the participants interviewed for this research falls into Lievens (2007) actual applicants, category. These students are actually applying hence the researcher labelled them potential employees. If that is the case, then it is safe to suggest that the findings from Lievens (2007) actually supports the findings of this research. These participants put a lot of consideration into the realistic and concrete attributes of a job such as the wage and compensation benefits.

Potential employees were equally drawn to a company that offered promotion opportunities although with job security, respondents showed a divided attraction and would not mind whether it was offered or not. Therefore, the likelihood to apply for a job based on the offer of a job security as an attraction might not have the same effect as the offer of promotion opportunities to advance career and the offer of an above average salary, participants found this to be very attractive.

In the EB literature, symbolic attributes are viewed as attributes that can influence potential employees positively more than instrumental attributes did in their applying decision for a job according to Lievens & Highhouse (2003). They found out that these symbolic attributes such

as innovation and excitement added incremental variance well above instrumental attributes such as pay.

6.4   Development Values

The development value is the fourth dimensions of EmpAt by Berthon et al. (2005). This value comprises of recognition and appreciation, feeling good and self-confidence for working for a reputable company, career enhancing experiences and a springboard for future prospects. These attributes are more related to experiences and feelings felt by the potential employee, suggests that these attributes are more symbolic than instrumental. We have already establish that symbolic attributes have more positive influence when choosing an employer by a potential employee than the instrumental attributes (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003); (Lievens, 2007) and (Edwards, 2010).

Research question four seek to understand the perceptions created by these development value and its influences on an applicant's decision to apply for a job. A positive relationship was found to exist between these attributes and the decision to apply for a job in this research findings. These findings are supported in literature by Elving et al. (2013), where they maintained that career prospects and developmental possibilities contributed to the attractiveness of an employer. All participants found career prospects and developmental opportunities attractive attributes that will positively influence their applying decision.

The participants also valued when recognition and appreciation are given from management, they said it would increase their likelihood to apply for a job in a company where it is practiced. The recruitment process of an employer that focus on its employer brand should extend to include recognition and orientation to have the desired effect (Foster, et al., 2010). Here, they noted the importance of including this aspect of recognition and appreciation from management in the branding message sent out during recruitment instead of just focusing on the brand itself in order to have effective outcomes. In the research carried out in Sri Lankan by Arachchige & Robertson (2013) on undergraduate and postgraduate students, the results found appreciation from management were amongst the most preferred attributes, ranking in number three. This findings supports the findings of this research. Appreciation is a symbolic attribute where meaning are attached to attributes. It's a way of creating a good image in the minds of these potential employees. It was an item that was highly preferred in this research by the participants.

A key finding in research work in the area of EB and potential recruits is that these recruits are likely to apply for a job in companies that have an existing positive company reputation according to Edwards (2010). This particular literature supports the findings of this research where majority of participants were attracted to a positive company's image that is reputable and well known, causing a positive effect to applying intentions. Self-confidence was something that all participants agreed that a reputable company image would boost, this piece of finding was supported in literature by Arachchige & Robertson (2011) where their research found that development values in companies contributed to potential employees' self-confidence. As for career enhancing experiences, this research found this attribute to be very attractive according to the responses of the participants. All participant expressed positives about a company that offered career enhancing experiences. This group were eager to use their college acquired knowledge and were concerned about the future of their career. Arachchige & Robertson (2013) supported these findings in their own research carried out in Sri Lankan, where students surveyed expresses great enthusiasm for personal and career growth opportunities and it was top of their most preferred attributes. However in Australia, graduates students surveyed most preferred attributes were compensation, work environment and the social aspect of work that were surveyed (Berthon, et al., 2005).

6.5   Application Values

The application value is the fifth dimension of EmpAt by Berthon et al. (2005). This value comprises of socially responsible features, opportunity to apply college knowledge, acceptance and belonging and customer-oriented, all as EmpAt attributes to build a brand image and hopefully attract quality and talented workforce to a company. The fifth research sub-question is how all these influence the applying decision of potential employees.

In the analysis of the findings, majority of participants interviewed did not see the relevance of a company's social responsible features with their intentions to apply for a job. It did not appear to make companies more attractive. This finding was in agreement to Berthon et al. (2005). They found that social responsibility were amongst the lowest appeal. Anyway, contrary to some findings in literature, socially responsible features did not account for much attraction within the participants of this study. Individuals did not see this as an important attraction to want to work for a company. This finding is different from the literature by Edwards (2010), where he held that for employers to be more attractive, they need to communicate more than

their financial success by going well and above. One of the ways of doing this suggested Turban & Greening (1997), is by engaging in EB programmes that included socially responsible features such as environmental friendly projects, regards for minority groups, giving back to the community (Turban & Greening, 1997). It is held that this attribute looks great in the profile of companies, hence contributing to its brand image.

Opportunity to apply knowledge from college is an attribute that was popular with the participants of this research. It found out that they would all love to apply whatever knowledge they had acquired from school and a company that would offer them that opportunity was top of their list to apply to. This outcomes was

The findings further revealed that acceptance and belonging in a workplace is very valued and with it being a symbolic attribute, often than not meanings and emotions are attached to them. In their research findings, Sivertzen et al (2013) held that potential employees seem to value an employer with psychological and application values more and they associate positive applying intentions towards such companies. This is in agreement with the present research findings.

On the customer-oriented attribute, participants were not too keen on the attribute. The findings suggests that the decision to apply to a company is not affected in any way by the fact that that company is customer-oriented. This finding is supported in literature by Berthon et al. (2005). Here, they found that this attribute held less appeal for the graduating students surveyed. Earlier on in the literature review, it was mentioned how symbolic attributes had more influence than instrumental attribute in creating perceptions in the minds of potential employees about an employer, this could explain why the customer-oriented attribute was amongst the least preferred attribute with participants interviewed.

Basically, from the findings of this research, it seem that an employer that provides an opportunity to apply skills from college and to teach others is an attractive employer according to the perceptions of potential employees but when it comes to being socially responsible and customer-oriented, it didn't seem to matter hence will not affect decision to apply for a job.

6.6   Implications of Findings

Potential employees form brand associations mainly based on information sources that is not in the control of employers, so in order to be proactive and strategic in their approach to EB it

is important to identify and develop desired brand associates to help create positive perceptions in the minds of potential employees.

The implications of this findings on the interest value of this study suggests that for companies to stand out and build a good brand capable of attracting the best talents in the labour market, they should look more into novel work practices that will engage employees and increase productivity as the same time. Innovativeness was one of the attributes here that was highly preferred in an employer and was seen as an attribute that would alter positively participants' intentions to apply for a job. Conversely, the products/services companies offered were amongst the least preferred attributes. However, this aspect should not be totally ignored. Wilden et al. (2010) suggested an alignment of the company, product brand and the employer, a way of enhancing this attribute and make it more an attractive attribute in the EB process. Equally Channels on how to communicate this attribute effectively to potential employees should be exploited such as social media as suggested by Sivertzen et al (2013) in their research conducted in three universities in Norway.

The social value implication suggests that for a company to effectively use this attribute as an attraction tool, it would have to have a working and social environment that is both fun, happy and sociable. This was very important for the wellbeing of participants and they were found to be particularly attractive. Employers should create a fun and happy workplace where there are team binding efforts so that employees would relate more. Good relationship with superiors was seen as a vital attribute and one that will contribute in retaining the potential employee when hired (Sivertzen, et al., 2013).

The implication of the economic value on EB efforts are that salary and compensations and promotion opportunity which are instrumental attribute still have influence in attracting student recruits. In as much as symbolic attributes account for more influence than the instrumental attribute such as pay and promotion, the latter still account for some influence. According to Backhaus & Tikoo (2004), symbolic attributes is where the strength in branding lies, however, when the instrumental differences between brands are limited, the symbolic attribute is used to create a differentiation.

Personal growth and career advancement were amongst the attributes found attractive in the development value. The implication of this is that people are emotional beings and tend to attach or ascribe meaning to situations and things. Recognition/appreciation are valued a lot by potential employees, career enhancing experiences and a clear career path for the future are

valued amongst the participants interviewed. These attributes are symbolic and have a huge influence in creating perceptions in the minds of potential employees. Branding efforts that incorporate this aspect should be exploited more in order to achieve greatest results from EB efforts.

Students are eager to use the knowledge acquired from college and as such are looking for companies that would afford them that opportunity. The application value implications for EB by HR professionals is to match skills with job requirements so as to afford these student recruit an opportunity to apply knowledge from college. Acceptance and belonging message should be embedded in the EB messages of companies because this is something that potential employees find to be attractive in an employer. However, the attributes of socially responsible and customer-oriented were least preferred, this should not be ignored but rather exploited. There were studies that supported the attribute as an attraction, so companies should not communicate these attribute in isolation but rather align with company brand.

6.7 Limitation of Study

There were a number of limitation encountered in the research. The main limitation of this study is on the generalisation of the results to a larger population. Due to the small sample size of six and the length of each interview at an average of twenty two minutes, this has limited the scope of this research and made it difficult to generalise the findings to a larger population. Conversely, this could be deemed a strength too, interviewing in a more in-depth basis a small sample.

Furthermore, due to the fact that the selection of participants were done conveniently, most of them were known to the research, this can contribute to bias and may have affected the results. Having a good personal relationship with most of the participants, this may influence or bias the replies from the participants. While consideration was taken to avoid this bias, it can still be viewed as a potential limitation, it can enter at any stage of a research according to (Wittemore, et al., 2001).

6.8 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to compare and contrast the findings of this research with previous literature on the topic EB. This was achieved and comparisions were made under each of the

five sub-question of the research. The differences and similarities were hightlighted between previous literature and this research.

These findings made some contributions to the EB literature. Firstly, it highlighted some of the major EmpAt attributes that were crucial in attracting student graduate in the Irish context (i) innovation, (ii) fun/happy workplace, (iii) good relations with superiors and colleagues, (iv) above average salary, (v) good compensations, (vi) promotion opportunity, (vii) recognition/appreciation (viii) company image, (ix) career enhancing experience, (x) opportunity to apply degree knowlegde and (xi) acceptance and belonging.

Furthermore, it revealed that instrumental attributes eventhough had a lesser influence than symbolic attributes, are still a base on which companies can build on with symbolic attributes in order to have competitive advantage in the labour market. Also that it was very important to get these messages of EB across to potentail employees for it to have any effects, therefore we discovered that the channel in which this is done is really important. The next chapter will conclude and make recommendations based on this dicussion of findings.

7.0 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore the effects of EB on the perception of potential employees and their intentions to apply for a job. The concern for many employers of being able to gain competitive advantage in the employment market and attract and hire possibly the best talents in the market gave birth to the idea of EB. This area is a worthwhile investment according to these scholars Ewing, Pitt, De Bussy, & Berthon (2002); Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) and Berthon, P., Ewing, M., & Hah, L., (2005). The literature review has explored the concept from many perspectives especially from that of the potential employee which was the focus of this research.

This research had set out to identify the most preferred attractiveness attributes and its influences on the intentions to apply for a job. It has adopted a conceptual framework for this purpose, the instrumental-symbolic framework adapted from the brand management literature (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). According to this framework, these EmpAt attributes are divided into instrumental and symbolic attributes. The instrumental attributes are designed to satisfy external needs, maximise benefits and minimise cost whereas the symbolic attributes are designed to satisfy a desire to belong or be associated to a desired group, enhancing self- confidence and self-worth (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). The instrumental attributes signifies the employer or the job's concrete attributes such as pay and job security while the symbolic attributes signifies nonconcrete aspects of the employer or the job such as innovation and prestige. Lievens et al. (2007) established the instrumental-symbolic framework as a useful framework for conceptualising an employer's attractiveness among potential applicants and outsiders stakeholders (Lievens, et al., 2007).

By establishing potential employee's perceptions on EB and employers' attractiveness attributes the study was better placed to identify the most preferred attributes and its reasons for this. As the use of EB increases in popularity amongst employers and is relatively a new topic in the Human Resources literature, research aimed at understanding its uses and effects can only be valuable.

7.1   Implications

The findings of this research are relevant to employers and HR managers, as the search and competition for talents requires strategic investment of resources in the relevant and targeted EmpAt attributes. Employers and HR managers who may potentially want to attract huge pool and possibly high quality talents to their organisation in this time of 'war for talents' may be keen to know that majority of the participants were attracted to an innovative, exciting, sociable work environment and value recognition and appreciation from management. However, participants in this research did not see the relevance of an employer's product/services, socially responsible features and customer-oriented to their intentions to apply for a job in a company. This study has shown that participants were more influenced in their intentions positively to apply for a job by symbolic attributes than instrumental ones. Although they were particularly drawn to an above average salary and attractive compensation which are instrumental in nature. It should be noted anyway that the potential employees used for this research were all recent graduates and post graduates students looking to start their first jobs and hoping to build a future, therefore would find an initial high starting salary quite attractive. Therefore the results may somewhat be biased. Nonetheless, the findings revealed some interesting results which may enrich understanding overall of the most preferred EmpAt attributes. A summary of the key findings are below.

Furthermore, searching for symbolic EmpAt that is related to experience and trust characteristics such as career development and work climate, is very difficult for a potential employee, brand signals are used for information substitutes for these symbolic attributes. So it is very important for employers and HR managers to convey these brand signals clearly in the labour market. This can be achieved by using these symbolic attributes in creating an organisational culture. Conversely, instrumental attributes that are observable information such as salary and location, this information can be conveyed by including them in written policies and practices (Elving, et al., 2013)

Moreover, according to Backhaus & Tikoo (2004), symbolic attributes is where the strength in branding lies, they argue when the instrumental differences between employer brands are limited, the symbolic role increases to add differentiation. Employers can actually differentiate their brand by using these symbolic attributes and create a competitive advantage (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). So where in the same industry, the job factors are similar (instrumental attributes), employers can use these symbolic attributes to stand out. The symbolic attributes

of an employer exceeds the instrumental attributes in value and their value is incremental over and above the instrumental attributes of an employer image (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003)

7.2   Cost Implication of Recommendations

Since instrumental attributes of EmpAt are more concrete and tangible attributes, it will be fairly easy to convey this brand message to potential employees for it to have desired outcomes. This information can be included in policies and practices documents and included in actual job advertisements using different media. But the most cost effective medium to convey these attributes is through social media, having all social media accounts. The cost associated with this would be the hiring of an employee that would be maintain these accounts and following up with information on the internet about the company.

On the other hand, the symbolic attributes are not so easy to convey directly and this is where the power in branding lies according to Backhaus & Tikoo (2004). This can be achieved by pushing organisational values in designing policies which should be clear in the formation and operation stages. Another way to obtain symbolic information that will help the company understand potentail employees perspectives thereby formulate strategies and effectively convey them would be through surveys in schools or job centers.

The power of word of mouth should not be over looked also and it costs nothing. Referrals is a credible source of employer brand information and employers and HR managers should exploit this area by setting up referral programs.

7.3   Summary of Main Findings and Discussion

In summary, this research has found overall that a positive relationship exists between a strong employer brand and a potential employees' intention to apply for a job. The positive effect of EB on intentions to apply had been evident in all six interviews. There were notably commonalities in some of the answers.

7.3.1 *Research Question One:* How are potential Employees' perception of an employer with innovative work practices and high quality products / services related with their intention to apply for a job?

When it came to the interest value of Berthon et al. (2005) EmpAt scale, which was what the first research question was based, there was a preference for an innovative employer who use the creativity of employees in an exciting work environment. This was a general view when it came to the interest values of an employer, however, the use of high-quality products/services as an attraction for these potential employees held little attraction. A summary of the findings for research question one are outlined in the table 2 below.

Table 2 Summary of Research Question One Based on Interest Value

Interest Value		Exciting	Innovative	Creativity	Product/Services
Participants	**Gender**				
A	F	attractive	Attractive	love creativity	Attractive
B	M	challenging	Attractive	not really	Will not affect decision
C	M	new challenges	Attractive	feel valued	will not affect decision
D	F	attractive	Attractive	love creativity	Attractive
E	F	attractive	Attractive	love creativity	will not affect decision
F	F	attractive	Attractive	feel valued	will not affect decision

7.3.2 *Research Question Two: –* How are potential employees' perceptions of an employer's work environment that is fun and happy with good relationships with superiors and colleagues related with their intentions to apply for a job?

For the social value by Berthon et al. (2005) EmpAt scale, which was what the second research question was based on, the general view of all participants of the research were that a workplace environment and its relationships that exists within it are very important for wellbeing. A fun environment and a happy environment were attributes all participants found attractive and would affect positively any decision to apply for work in a company. On the attributes of the relationships within the work environment, especially with superiors, participants were all in agreement that it was an essential for their career, learning and stay on in a job. Only one participant expresses that having supportive and encouraging colleagues would not affect her decision to apply for a job in a company. Although, her reasons were quite understandable as she said she could not predict her future colleagues. The social value are more symbolic in nature and this supports the conceptual framework that symbolic attributes have more influence

than instrumental attributes. This is an area that employers should focus more on and design brand signals that can convey these messages effectively across to potential employees.

Table 3 Summary of Research Question Two Based on Social Value

Social Value		Fun Workplace	Happy Workplace	Relations with Superiors	Relations with Colleagues
Participants	**Gender**				
A	F	sociable	Attractive	important	not totally
B	M	attractive	Attractive	important	Important
C	M	attractive	Attractive	important	Important
D	F	attractive	Attractive	important	Important
E	F	attractive	Attractive	important	Important
F	F	attractive	Attractive	important	it depends

7.3.3   *Research Question Three –* **How are potential employees' perceptions of an employer that offers above-average salary, good overall compensation package, job security and promotional opportunities related with their intention to apply for a job?**

The economic value by Berthon et al. (2005) EmpAt scale, was what the third research question was based on and there were mixed responses on this value. On promotional opportunities, majority of participants found this attractive to influence intentions to apply for a job in a company.

Having an attractive overall benefit was equally found to be an attractive attribute for except on participant that said her decision would not be affected by it. An above average salary was equally an attractive attribute to most of the participants. However when it came to job security, only two out of the four participant found it attractive and the rest felt it was irrelevant to their decision to apply for a job. A summary of the findings for research question three are outlined in the table 4 below.

Table 4 Summary of Research Question Three Based on Economic Value

Economic Value		promotions	job security	above average wage	Benefits
Participants	**Gender**				
A	F	attractive	Attractive	doesn't really matter	health important
B	M	attractive	not so attractive	very attractive	Attractive
C	M	attractive	Irrelevant	very attractive	Attractive
D	F	will not affect decision	Irrelevant	it depends	will not affect decision
E	F	Attractive	Irrelevant	very attractive	Attractive
F	F	Attractive	Attractive	very attractive	very attractive

7.3.4 *Research Question Four* – How are potential employees' perceptions of an employer that offers recognition/appreciation, develops self-confidence and offers career-enhancing experiences related with their intention to apply for a job?

The development value by Berthon et al. (2005) EmpAt scale, was what the fourth research question was based on and the responses by participants were more of a positive nature. All participants valued the development value attributes of recognition, spring board for future prospects, a reputable company brand and company image and having career enhancing opportunities. These were a source of pride and would boost self-confidence. Recognition/appreciation is an attribute all participants valued. Career enhancing experiences and a springboard for future prospects were attractive attributes too. Company brand/image that's is reputable and well-known was noted to look good on the CV and boost self-confidence. Overall, it is a value worth exploiting by employer because participants rated it highly and would be influenced by it positively. A summary of the findings for research question four are outlined in the table 4 below.

Table 5 Summary of Research Question Four Based on Development Value

Development Value		recognition	future prospects	company brand	company image	Career Enhancing Experience
Participants	**Gender**					
A	F	Attractive	attractive	attractive	boost self-confidence	Attractive
B	M	value it	attractive	attractive	boost self-confidence	Attractive
C	M	value it	attractive	Irrelevant	doesn't really matter	Attractive
D	F	value it	attractive	Attractive	boost self-confidence	Attractive
E	F	value it	attractive	Attractive	boost self-confidence	Attractive
F	F	value it	attractive	Attractive	boost self-confidence	Attractive

7.3.5 *Research Question Five* – **How are potential employees' perceptions of an employer that provides opportunity to apply degree knowledge and teach others in a socially responsible and customer-oriented environment related with their intention to apply for a job?**

For the application value by Berthon et al. (2005) EmpAt scale, which was what the fifth research question was based on, the findings revealed that participants were more inclined to an employer that gave the opportunity to apply college knowledge in an environment that accepted them and gave them a sense of belonging. The application value however got mixed answers, on a company that has socially responsible features and was customer-oriented. These attributes were not so attractive and were found to be irrelevant to the applying decisions of the participants.

Table 6 Summary of Research Question Five Based on Application Value

Application Value		socially responsible	apply degree skill	acceptance/ belonging	customer-oriented
Participants	**Gender**				
A	F	attractive	prefer	important	attraction
B	M	doesn't matter	prefer	important	not relevant
C	M	not relevant	prefer	important	not relevant
D	F	Attractive	prefer	important	not relevant
E	F	not relevant	not necessarily	important	not relevant
F	F	will not affect decision	prefer	important	not an attraction

7.4   Recommendation for Future Research

In view of the findings of this research, and literature that supports the findings, which is that symbolic attributes have more influence on potential employees for the purpose of attracting them to apply for jobs in companies (Sivertzen, et al., 2013; Lievens, 2007; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003), there is little knowledge on how these symbolic attributes develop in the minds of potentail employees (Lauzier & Roy, 2011). Researches in this area have used available representations of symbolism in order to capture its ideal. However, there is still a lack of understanding as to what truly constitute symbolism and how employers can manage their symbolic brand image. So therefore, the researcher suggests that more research should be carried out in this area to clarify each of these symbolic dimensions in the EB literature for employers to fully and better reap its benefits in attracting talents to their companies.

Personal Reflective Journal

Introduction

Completing a personal reflective journal as part of my dissertation for a MA in Human Resources Management in the National College of Ireland has been a challenge and a motivating experience. This journal contains the learning process, knowledge and skills that I had acquired both personally and professionally in this journey of writing a dissertation and finishing a masters in HRM.

This journal contains the learning experiences and my development as a researcher as a result of writing this dissertation. The contents are divided into three main parts: the first main theme is divided into two, the development of both my secondary and primary research skills; and the enhancement of my self-confidence and the improvement of my time-management skills.

Part One: The Development of Research Skills

A. Secondary Research Skills Development

Before writing this dissertation, I didn't really understand what it entailed or what I would hope to get from it. I just knew it was a requirement for a MA in HRM and I had to do it. I didn't really take the research classes seriously because I thought it was something that I could manage when the time came. I didn't quite grasp the meaning and didn't see the relevance of completing one. But coming to the end of this dissertation, it all made sense and it was educating and rewarding.

I had some basic skills in writing up an academic paper and some basic secondary research skills before I undertook to write this dissertation, however, those skills were greatly enhance as a result of conducting the research for this dissertation. Need to say that these skills will be of great use to me in the outside world where there are so many information and acquiring the ability to shift through this information and analyse it to make it relevant is priceless. This will contribute immensely to my career in Human Resources Management.

Due to the large amount of secondary data available in the area of research I undertook, employer branding and how it affects potential employees' intentions to apply for jobs in companies, I learnt how to prioritise these secondary data that included books, journals, eBooks, internet etc. The experience of reading through this secondary data and extracting

information has taught me that it is not physically possible to examine all available data pertaining to my area of research hence I learnt to prioritise.

This experience I gained during the literature review stage, I had to select secondary literature in order of academic source of data, date of publication, relevance to current research etc. For example in the literature review there were a vast of secondary information on employer branding but as a result of prioritising of the work only the most substantial contribution was added to my work. This abetted me to save time and increase the validity of findings in my literature review.

I was able to develop a critical mind-set in the analysis of secondary research as a result of the experience I gained doing one. The fact that an author has written a journal does not infer that the individual has a deep understanding of the topic discussed in the journal. I am now able to criticise and search for other viewpoints on a topic as was conducted in this research literature review. This will particularly help me going forward in my career and personal life to be able to identify shortcomings with secondary source of data and offer contributions to improve the contents of such information.

B. Primary Research Skills Development

I have developed valuable primary research skills during the process of conducting the qualitative research through interviews with the six participants I interviewed for this dissertation. Before now I had not carried out a research of this magnitude that involved primary collection of data, transcription of individual data, and the analysis of individual data set. I had previously carried out one in a marketing module in my first year as an undergraduate but even at that I was part of a group. I have learnt a lot form this experience because I initially started with a quantitative approach, then a mixed approach and finally a qualitative approach. So I had covered the whole research methodology methods during the process of this research.

I had the practical experiences of both administering questionnaires and conducting a one-on-one interviews. I had experienced the advantages and disadvantages of conducting both methods of research. The most beneficial experience in this whole process of my primary research process was my involvement in the data collection and the analysis of this data, this has added immerse knowledge to me and has greatly improved my skills as a researcher. This would not have occurred without the help and support of my supervisor. She has offered valuable and practical advice throughout the different stages of this dissertation. I really

struggled in my methodology section and it took me a long while to fully understand but with her help I go there in the end.

Part Two: The Enhancement of my Self-Confidence

My self-confidence has been affected positively by this experience. It has increased significantly as a result of conducting and writing up this research. The research stage that contributed immensely to this was the data collection stage. Overcoming my insecurities and approaching my sample data confidently. Explaining to them my research topic, what the aims were and how I will be contributing to literature with the results.

I struggled initially with the choice of my primary source of data collection because it would involve me approaching people I wasn't familiar with. Before now I always thought what a nuisance people that approach people physically or over the internet (emails) for information for a research was, until I had to do same. It takes a lot of confidence and the thought of being viewed in that manner of being a nuisance was not so welcoming. I was able to overcome that and after the first two interviews the rest were a breeze. I became more confident asking the questions and comfortable with the whole process. I have greatly acquire a lot of knowledge along the way that has increase my confidence in this topic too. I will benefit from this increased level of my self-confidence in the future as an individual, a researcher and a professional.

Part Three: The Improvement of Time Management Skills

I have benefited both on a personal and professional level from this research the importance of time management. This experience has greatly improved my time-management skills, specifically in the preparation and planning of each stage of the research.

At first I had faced a lot of challenges when it came to my data collection through the administered questionnaires to my research sample and due to this I struggled with meeting up the my timeframes. Then with the interviews conducted, it was really a difficult one to match my time availability with that of my participants, which again affected my time schedule. This was dealt with by re-adjusting the timeframe as well as increasing my level of personal discipline and commitment in meeting these set times.

Provisions were made for study and it affected my personal life a lot but I had to be discipline and commitment. A lot of late study went into this dissertation too. I avoided all unnecessary activities during the process of this research and had daily plans in order to do a precise amount of the research every day. I also made provisions to take time out and spend some time with my family in order not to be too stressed out from the process. Of which if I didn't do would have negatively impacted on my research. So overall, it has being a rewarding experience and has greatly improved my time-management skills which will be of benefit to me in my professional career.

Overall, I was able to overcome all and put in incredible efforts by spending many hours to get to the completion of this dissertation. The encouragement I received along the way from my supervisor, family, friends and classmates have given me the courage and zeal to push forward even in times when I felt I couldn't continue. In addition, my written and communication skills have greatly benefited from carrying out this research and writing the dissertation, not to mention improvement in my typing skills.

Conclusion

In conclusion to my journal, completing this dissertation has increased my self-belief and given me a confidence that I never thought I could have. I don't see limits in ventures now, rather I see opportunities and with the belief that the sky is the limit for me. My mind has broaden out and ideas keep generating in my head for different projects that I find it hard to keep up. Even the possibility of starting my own business is something I now believe can actually happen. Armed with all the experiences and knowledge acquired in the secondary and primary research, my time-management skills I feel more confident in bracing that decision.

However, I will love to gain practical experience first by working with establishments first. The idea of going into consultancy is very appealing to me also. The consideration of going further in my studies part-time though to do a doctorate is something I would love to also consider, even studying further if my finances would allow me. Before now, I lacked the self-belief and confidence that I could actually exceed in education and even consider doing a doctorate degree but after this whole experience of the MA in Human Resources Management and the completion of a dissertation and the college as a whole, this is just the beginning for me.

CHAPTER 8 – Reference List

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<u>Appendix i</u>

NATIONAL COLLEGE OF IRELAND

Information for Participant

This information leaflet is designed to make you aware of your involvement in my dissertation and willingly agree or disagree to participate in the study.

Purpose

As part of the requirement for my masters in Human Resource Management in National College of Ireland, I am required to do a dissertation. The dissertation is designed to examine the topic employer branding from the perspectives of future applicants, in particular recent graduate students. It sought to find out the perception of these applicants decision in applying for a job based on their employer attractiveness attributes i.e. employer branding in an Irish context. The questions are divided into five themes and it will take approximately 20-30 minutes to conduct the interview.

Why you have been chosen

You have been approached to take part because as recent graduates you are actively seeking for employment which makes you suitable and fall within the category of participant that will be suitable to provide data needed for my dissertation.

You do not have to take part if you do not want to because you are not under any obligation and participation is voluntary. Your participation will be kept anonymous and your identity will not appear in the thesis if you do not want it to. All data collected will be kept for a period of the study and six months after the study and then destroyed.

In general I do not envisage any negative consequences in your taking part but your time that you will give during the interview.

For any further information later on you can contact me:

Name: Rosemary Okafor

College: National College of Ireland, IFSC, Mayor Street, Dublin 1.

Email: rosemary.okafor@student.ncirl.ie

Appendix ii

NATIONAL COLLEGE OF IRELAND

CONSENT FORM

PLEASE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE INTERVIEW YOU MUST AGREE TO THE FOLLOWING TERMS:

I understand that the following statements for consent for participation and that all participation is anonymous and voluntary

- I am being asked to voluntarily participate in an interview administered as part of this research study.
- The purpose and nature of the dissertation has been explained to me in writing
- By participating in this interview, I will be contributing to the greater body of research and I give Rosemary the permission to use results from my interview for the study.
- The interview I have been asked to take part in will take approximately 20 to 30 minutes.
- Those 20-30 minutes will comprise my total time investment.
- I will not be compensated for my involvement.
- My participation in the interview will be totally anonymous if I want it to.

By agreeing to these terms and conditions, I grant permission for the voluntarily participation in the stated research project by way of being part of an interview on the topic of employer branding.

For any further information on the study you can contact me:

Name: Rosemary Okafor

College: National College of Ireland, IFSC, Mayor Street, Dublin 1.

Email: rosemary.okafor@student.ncirl.ie

Appendix iii

Interview Questions

What influence does Employer branding have on potential employees' perception / decision to join a company?

Theme One – Interest Value

- Will you perceive an exciting working environment as an attraction to work for a company?
- Will a company with innovative work practices be attractive as an employer?
- Will you want to apply for a job in a company that you feel will value and make use of your creativity?
- Will a company that produces high standard products and/or services be an attraction in applying for a job?

Theme Two – Social Value

- Does a company working environment matter in your decision to apply for a job? Do you value a fun and/or happy working environment?
- Will a good working relationship with your superior matter when you are considering a job.
- Will you say a good interpersonal relationship with your colleagues is an important factor when applying for a job? Why?
- Is having supportive and encouraging colleagues in a company affect your decision to apply for a job there?

Theme Three – Economic Value

- Will you say that your decision to apply for a job will be affected by the company's promotion opportunities?
- Do you perceive job security as a condition for applying for a job?
- Will you perceive an above average salary a condition that will affect your decision to apply for a job?
- Will an attractive overall compensation package affect your applying decision for a job?

Theme Four – Development Value

- In a company you want to work for, will you value recognition / appreciation from management? Will you see it as something that will affect your applying for a job decision?

- Will you want to apply to a company that you perceive as a springboard for future employment?
- Will you prefer to work for a company with a brand that you perceive makes you feel good about yourself because you are working there?
- Does a company's image matter when it comes to applying for a job and will that make you feel more self-confident?
- Do you feel that a company with better career enhancing experience is more attractive to work for? And will this in any way affect your decision to apply for a job?

Theme Five – Application Value

- Will you prefer to apply for a job in a company that gives back to the society i.e. corporate social responsibility?
- Will you prefer to work for a company that gives you that opportunity to apply what you have learnt in college?
- Is acceptance and belonging in a company an important attribute when applying for a job?
- Will your decision to apply for a job be affected by a company who is customer-orientated?

Interviews Transcript

Participant One: Female 20-30years old

BA (Hons) Accountancy recent graduate from Independent College Dublin

The interview took place in person and it lasted about 22 minutes

Interest Value

Interviewer: Will you perceive an exciting working environment as an attraction to work for a company?

Respondent: I think that a company that offers an exciting working environment can attract me to work there because it will be exciting.

Interviewer: Name a company that you feel has an exciting working environment and why are they exciting?

Respondent: There are few companies that I know of and just think they are exciting to work with like Google. I think it has a very exciting working environment because of its innovation and it will be exciting and fun working there. Given a chance to work there I wouldn't mind.

Interviewer: Will a company with innovative work practices be attractive as an employer?

Respondent: I Think I will be attracted to apply for a job in such a company because innovation is all about changes and keeping up with present work systems and practices. One will definitely benefit from that because it keeps your skills updated and helps you seek better opportunities in other places.

Interviewer: Will you want to apply for a job in a company that you feel will value and make use of your creativity?

Respondent: Yes. I love creativity and I love to be creative as well in a work place where you have ideas and you want to put them to practice. I think that will be something that will really make me stay in a workplace or knowing a company that creativity takes place a lot, that will be an attraction enough to want to work there for me.

Interviewer: Will a company that produces high standard products and/or services be an attraction in applying for a job?

Respondent: Yes. This will be an attraction to apply because it is a reflection of their image. High quality goods and services are something that brands a company in a good way and I will want to be associated with such qualities. When you hear of a company that produces high quality products and services, you think good of the company, this quality contributes in defining that company's image and it's a reflection on you if you work there. When people

see you working in a place, they will want to define you as your workplace and with high quality products/services, your skills will be considered high quality too.

Social Value

Interviewer: Does a company working environment matter in your decision to apply for a job? Do you value a fun and/or happy working environment?

Respondent: Yes, I think environment matters to me when it comes to a working place because you wouldn't expect to work in a dull environment where your workmates are grumpy, some people would prefer to just come in and do the job seriously and go while others will want to talk and share experiences. I Think I will love work in a sociable environment, where you know you are free to talk about the job. Environment mostly matters to me when it comes to work.

Interviewer: Will fun and happy be classified under a good working environment

Respondent: I will like a happy working environment. You might be stressed at home and you would not also want to be stressed at work too. I will like to find that relief to say thank God I am at work and forget any worries at home because the working environment is a happy and fun one.

Interviewer: Will a good working relationship with your superior matter when you are considering a job.

Respondent: It does. I think the supervisor is someone you are looking up to and someone that corrects your mistakes in a workplace. If you make a mistake, you should be able to ask them for assistance so that the job will not suffer. One need to build a good relationship with a supervisor just in case there is something you are doing wrong or you are not sure of, he is the person you can talk to.

Interviewer: Will you say having a good interpersonal relationship with your colleagues is an important factor when applying for a job? Why?

Respondent: Well I will put this one on a 50/50 basis.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Respondent: I don't know if it really should matter but then in some cases it will matter but personally I think as long as you are ok with your workmates its fine. Just build that ok relationship and that just fine and when you are confident enough to work with your colleagues it should be ok.

Interviewer: Is having supportive and encouraging colleagues in a company affect your decision to apply for a job there?

Respondent: Yes it will. Sometimes in work you might have a down moment and you might just need a little push and encouragement from people around you to perk up. Sometimes

issues out of work can be affecting you but with supportive and encouraging colleagues, that kind of motivates you to work.

Economic Value

Interviewer: Will you say that your decision to apply for a job will be affected by the company's promotion opportunities?

Respondent: That's an attraction if there are opportunities for promotion, I think it helps you build up as well. It makes you see the bigger picture that you not just stuck in one place if there are promotions you can take up.

Interviewer: Do you perceive job security as a condition for applying for a job?

Respondent: Yes the prospect of job security would make want to apply for a job in a company because any place you are applying to, you need that sense of security so that's why it is important when you are filling in the forms when you are getting hired to carefully read through them so you what they have stated on them just in case. I think that job security will definitely attract me in a workplace to apply for a job because I want to know how secured I am in the role.

Interviewer: Would you say it's like getting reassured that the job is for life?

Respondent: Yes, I will put it that way if you say so.

Interviewer: Will you perceive an above average salary a condition that will affect your decision to apply for a job?

Respondent: To me I don't think salary would really be an issue. Sometimes you just get into a workplace because you want to learn so for me I would put it on a 50/50 but for me it's just for the experience, because I think the more you learn and the workplace is fun and you are enjoying the work, you forget that the salary is not so great. You will be doing the job for your career and doing it for you as well and not just for the salary. I would put on a 50/50 and I wouldn't say it's about the money, I would say it's more about the experience.

Interviewer: Will an attractive overall compensation package affect your applying decision for a job?

Respondent: I would say it would in some circumstances and not all the packages that would matter when I am applying. I would say my health package would matter though if I am applying for a job, work goes well and good if you are healthy. If anything you happen to you, you want to be sure that you will be well looked after. I would say about 70% of my vote will go for the compensation packages.

Development Value

Interviewer: In a company you want to work for, will you value recognition / appreciation from management?

Respondent: Basically, I think that recognition and appreciation matters to me and would make me want to apply for a job in a company. In a place where you are well recognised and the recognition is being valued, it will boost your confidence in working towards getting employed there. In most places where are seeking employment and you know that management appreciates its employees and recognition is being valued, I think that's motivation enough. It will boost your confidence in working towards getting the job knowing also it's like a career path. It's a work and place where you know you can learn more as well.

Interviewer: Will you want to apply to a company that you perceive as a springboard for future employment?

Respondent: I think that an employer that is perceived as a springboard for future employment is very desirable and I will definitely want to work for such a company. Obviously, you when you are in an employment, you will want to learn and take it to other places and want to learn to get to other challenges. You will first take it as a learning period or just a starting point and as the work goes you see how you are working and then be promoted to another place or maybe you looking for another place of motivation than the one you are sticking on to. You can get promoted to another section or you might be looking for another place to motivate you. But if you feel highly motivated in the position and company you might decide to stay on but if you see there are other opportunities out there, I think it's good to move on to another stage to see.

Interviewer: So are you saying that a company that you perceive as a springboard for future employment is desirable?

Respondent: Yes, it's quite of an attraction for me to apply for a job

Interviewer: Will you prefer to work for a company with a brand that you perceive makes you feel good about yourself because you are working there?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Why do you say yes?

Respondent: There are big brand that are in the market and knowing that you work for such a brand give you that pride to be part of something successful. Take for example Marks and Spencer, they are known for high quality products, when you talk of M&S you know it's of high quality. The brand itself talks and I think that stands out. If you mention the place you are working, it should give you pride and confidence to be working there.

Interviewer: Does a company's image matter when it comes to applying for a job and will that make you feel more self-confident?

Respondent: I think self-confidence builds with where you are working. If the place you are working for has a good image, it will affect your self-confidence positively likewise if my workplace has a bad image, it will affect my self-confidence negatively. I would say working for a company with a good company image and good working colleagues builds up ones self-

confidence. Sometimes it's what you do at a workplace and how people perceive the brand of the company that matters this helps with self-confidence. It all about presentation as well, how a company presents itself to the outside world.

Interviewer: What do you see in a company's image that will affect your self-confidence and make you apply for a job?

Respondent: I think it will be the smart presentation of the company itself. If it's something good and people are talking about the company and brand in a positive manner, it will make me want to be part of it.

Interviewer: Do you feel that a company with better career enhancing experience is more attractive to work for? And will this in any way affect your decision to apply for a job?

Respondent: I think a company that offers a career path is very attractive to work for. I think it gives you many opportunities as well and it's good for a starting point. For example, I am just graduating in November, I will be looking for a company that will boost my career and a job that will go hand in hand with what I have studied. That way, you are building your career and yourself into the person you want to be.

Interviewer: So Career enhancing prospects will definitely affect your decision to apply for a job?

Respondent: Yes it definitely would.

Application Value

Interviewer: Will you prefer to apply for a job in a company that gives back to the society i.e. corporate social responsibility?

Respondent: I think I will like to work for a company that does charitable works and is environmentally friendly. A company that is sociable to the community is quite attractive, it is not just concentrating on the company itself but also showing that it is engaging in the society and giving back to the society. This shows that they care and that they will equally treat employees likewise too. They are involved in other people's burden, it's not just all about the commercial side of things and the company itself but who is around the company as well.

Interviewer: Will you prefer to work for a company that gives you that opportunity to apply what you have learnt in college?

Respondent: Well I would, there are things you have learnt and you just want to put them in practice. I think I would prefer to work for a company like that if it gives me an opportunity to apply the skills and knowledge I have acquired in college that will be so good.

Interviewer: Would you say that it will make want to apply for a job in such a company?

Respondent: I would say 80% I would say yes. I will go for that because I just want to show that I learnt skills in college by putting it in practice, it's quite challenging but I will love that because it will give me an opportunity to see was I really learning or not. It's quite challenging but I think is good.

Interviewer: Is acceptance and belonging in a company an important attribute when applying for a job?

Respondent: Yes. A workplace shouldn't be somewhere you will be reprimanded on things you do. It should be somewhere you are comfortable with, you should have people there that you can count on when something goes wrong. It should be like a family to you. There is this saying that says 'make a good bond with your workmates, so if anything goes wrong you know you have got workmates'. I think I will prefer to apply for a job in a company like that.

Interviewer: When you say make a good bond, what do you mean?

Respondent: What it means is that how you communicate in a workplace and how you build your relationship in the workplace. Although are people you just can't bond with, it's on a hello basis with these people, all the same, there are people you can communicate properly with that are genuinely interested in your wellbeing. You can talk with such people of things even outside work.

Interviewer: Will your decision to apply for a job be affected by a company who is customer-orientated?

Respondent: Yes this will be an attraction too. I personally think it will be attractive to work for a company that is customer-orientated. It will imply competition and targets and I thrive in a competitive environment.

Interviewer: Anything else you will want to add?

Respondent: For me, I will love to work where my creativity will be utilised and I will get along with everyone. A place that is quite presentable and offers great experiences.

Participant Two: Male 30-40years old

MSc Finance recent graduate from National College of Ireland

The interview took place in person and it lasted about 24 minutes

Respondent: After explaining what employer branding comprise, the participant went straight to give me his own view on the attributes that will attract him to a company to apply for a job.

Personally I feel the first thing I will consider before applying for a job in a company is the popularity of the company, if the company is well known. The second I will seriously consider is the salary.

Interviewer: Why will you consider the salary as an attraction?

Respondent: The salary will motivate me temporarily even though it is not a long term thing. But it will motivate me temporarily, being someone just leaving college, I need money to do a lot of things. Personally I will be looking at the salary because I have a lot of financial needs at present and I feel the money will motivate me.

Interviewer: When you mentioned popularity earlier on, how will this influence your decision to apply for a job?

Respondent: When I said popularity I meant how well known the company is. When you mention JP Morgan, everyone know them and it's a good addition to ones CV and as a result gives you opportunities when you have the company in your CV that you have worked there which also implies you have a good background and understanding.

Interest Value

Interviewer: Will you perceive an exciting working environment as an attraction to work for a company?

Respondent: A jobs that entails doing the same thing every day will not be something I will like to do, there is no challenge there. So I will be attracted to a place that is really challenging, fun and exciting that will afford me to learn new things and feel very motivated. But if the job is temporary, say like two months, I wouldn't mind applying for the job and working there even though the environment is not that exciting but if it is a job that is long term, I will not be inclined to apply for the job.

Interviewer: Will a company with innovative work practices be attractive as an employer?

Respondent: Yes I will be attracted to a company with innovative work practices because it will help you think and be more creative on your own. It will push you to the limits whereby you start thinking of better ways to do your job and contribute in the productivity of the company. So I will say innovative work practices matters a lot.

Interviewer: Will you want to apply for a job in a company that you feel will value and make use of your creativity?

Respondent: I will say a company that depends on your creativity will be too challenging now to apply to. There is this tendency that you can easily be replace if you don't come up with creative ideas. But that still doesn't mean that if I have any creative ideas that I will not share them. I will also appreciate if I am valued, for this will motivate me more to be productive regardless of whether I am creative or not.

Interviewer: Will a company that produces high standard products and/or services be an attraction in applying for a job?

Respondent: I don't think this will matter so much to me as long as I am being paid well. To be honest with you, it doesn't really matter what the company produces or what services they offer, I will apply for a job.

Social Value

Interviewer: Does a company working environment matter in your decision to apply for a job? Do you value a fun and/or happy working environment?

Respondent: Yes a working environment will matter to me when I want to apply for a job. For example, IFSC environment is very corporate and has nice views, in the mornings you see people that are going to their various jobs looking smartly dressed, all these will motivate me to want to belong in such a community. Whereas if the company is located in a run-down place one wouldn't feel happy going to work because, firstly you will be scared of the safety of your car, and your own safety. But with a company located in the IFSC, like JP Morgan, you feel happy going into work.

Interviewer: Will fun and happy be classified under a good working environment

Respondent: Yes, they will be also included in a good working environment. You want to go to a place where the working environment is cheerful and not gloomy so that if will help you relate better with others and have better work outputs.

Interviewer: Will a good working relationship with your superior matter when you are considering a job.

Respondent: It does matter. It makes the communication to be a two way thing when you have good relationship and it equally helps in productivity. But where there is no such communication, a communication barrier occurs that could even affect your wellbeing and the job.

Interviewer: Would you say that this will affect your decision to apply for a job?

Respondent: You wouldn't know about it till you get employed. But I will prefer to have a good working relationship with my supervisor as this will affect the job and me personally if there is none.

Interviewer: Will you say having a good interpersonal relationship with your colleagues is an important factor when applying for a job? Why?

Respondent: Yes. In a team, you cannot perform very well where you cannot bond with people very well in the team. The good bond will make it easier to share knowledge and learn from each other but in a situation where communication is missing and there is no friendship amongst you and your colleagues, this will affect the company and yourself negatively. For me it will motivate me to join a company where I know there is a friendly atmosphere.

Interviewer: Is having supportive and encouraging colleagues in a company affect your decision to apply for a job there?

Respondent: Yes. As I mentioned before, having supportive and encouraging colleagues is good for both the company's productivity and for your own wellbeing. This will make me want to join a company, knowing I will have workmates that are there for me.

Economic Value

Interviewer: Will you say that your decision to apply for a job will be affected by the company's promotion opportunities?

Respondent: Most people want to move from one level to another and for me personally I appreciate growth and where I know there are promotion opportunities, I feel I will want to apply for a job there. Because I want to move up in position to say like a team leader, and where gives me that opportunity will surely attract me to apply.

Interviewer: Do you perceive job security as a condition for applying for a job?

Respondent: Job security doesn't really matter to me. If there are better offers outside the company I will want to apply for them and not remain in the present one. So regardless whether a company offers job security or not, I will apply for the job. It doesn't matter to me.

Interviewer: Will you perceive an above average salary a condition that will affect your decision to apply for a job?

Respondent: Like I mentioned earlier on, a main attraction for me to apply for a job is the salary package. I will be attracted to a job that offers well above average salary because of financial commitment I have.

Interviewer: Will an attractive overall compensation package affect your applying decision for a job?

Respondent: Yes it will. For example where there are two job adverts and in their packages they have pension, holidays, sick pay etc. I will be attracted to the one that offers more like longer holiday period and this will make me apply for the job.

Development Value

Interviewer: In a company you want to work for, will you value recognition / appreciation from management?

Respondent: Yes I think so because it's another way of motivating employees when you recognise the efforts they put in their jobs and it motivates them to work more. Yeah I think this will definitely encourage me want to apply for a job in a company.

Interviewer: Will you want to apply to a company that you perceive as a springboard for future employment?

Respondent: Yes it will. Presently, there is no such thing as a permanent job or a job for life. Formerly most people spend 20 or more years in a particular job but that's not so much the case now. People network and gain experience by changing jobs. What is mostly important is the experience you are getting, so basically need experience to start up with and when you gain that you can use that to get something better.

Interviewer: So personally are you not looking for a long term job for say 20 years?

Respondent: I don't think there is such a job that is for 20 years now. Personally I feel the more you change jobs the more experience you gain. Specialising in one thing is not creative so I would be attracted to a company that I see as a springboard for other future jobs.

Interviewer: Will you prefer to work for a company with a brand that you perceive makes you feel good about yourself because you are working there?

Respondent: Yes I think so. When you are employed in a company that you know has a good image and brand it is quite prestigious. You will want to tell people where you are working with pride.

Interviewer: So will you want to apply to company based on this?

Respondent: Yes I will but note that this feeling might be temporary too. You may feel good today because you don't have that job now but when you get the job you will now be looking for something else to motivate you and make you feel good.

Interviewer: Does a company's image matter when it comes to applying for a job and will that make you feel more self-confident?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Why do you say yes?

Respondent: I said yes based on what the company is offering you and if this is align to your life style you will feel comfortable and hence more self-confident. Also its image will boost this self-confidence too if the company is well known to be good and reputable.

Interviewer: What do you see in a company's image that will affect your self-confidence and make you apply for a job?

Respondent: Like I mentioned before, this feeling is all temporary, at a point these things will not motivate you anymore. For example now, if my aim is to work for JP Morgan and I get in there, after a while I might find myself lacking that initial motivation which will make me start aiming higher maybe at the likes of Goldman Sachs.

Interviewer: Do you feel that a company with better career enhancing experience is more attractive to work for? And will this in any way affect your decision to apply for a job?

Respondent: Yes I think so. For example a company that has growth opportunity for me is very attractive and I will like to work in such a place because it will educate me more and help me achieve my goals in my career. Not to just still have the same level of skills and knowledge as I had when I first joined the business. Something new is also exciting and challenging.

Application Value

Interviewer: Will you prefer to apply for a job in a company that gives back to the society i.e. corporate social responsibility?

Respondent: Personally, this would not affect my decision to apply for a job because it doesn't matter to me. The company can choose to give back or not or be environmentally friendly. It still irrelevant to me and my decision to apply for a job.

Interviewer: Will you prefer to work for a company that gives you that opportunity to apply what you have learnt in college?

Respondent: Yes I will like that and will want to apply to such a company. I will like to work for a company that will allow me showcase what I have learnt in school because it will be a kind of practice for me.

Interviewer: Is acceptance and belonging in a company an important attribute when applying for a job?

Respondent: Yes this is a quality that will be attractive to me and make me want to apply for a job. A lot of things motivate people especially when you feel that sense of belonging within the company and your workmates.

Interviewer: Will your decision to apply for a job be affected by a company who is customer-orientated?

Respondent: This is not a thing that would really affect my decision. If the company chooses to focus on customers, it's really up to them so it will not affect my decision. As long as I am being paid for the job I do. It's really the company's decision.

Interviewer: Anything else you will want to add?

Respondent: There are different qualities in a company that attracts individual to apply for a job. For me as I mentioned earlier is a good salary and the popularity of the company. Companies that are well -known are usually competitive with their salaries and overall packages and they tend to be innovative in their work practices. These companies are great to include in your CV and help in adding value to you. This qualities will definitely attract me to applying for a job.

Participant Three: Male 20-30years old

MA Human Resources Management recent graduate from National College of Ireland

The interview took place over the phone and it lasted about 21 minutes

<u>Interest Value</u>

Interviewer: Will you perceive an exciting working environment as an attraction to work for a company?

Respondent: Yes of course. When asked about which company you would be interested in working for, the likes of Google, Facebook, etc. spring to mind. In this day and age, money is becoming less of a factor in attracting people to jobs. I would rather be involved in an innovative and exciting environment that brings new challenges every day, rather than coming into a boring workplace that involves doing the same boring task over and over.

Interviewer: Will a company with innovative work practices be attractive as an employer?

Respondent: As mentioned before, the era of the boring company is coming to an end. A company that has innovative work practices are always going to come out on top, and these are not just technological companies that are embracing this, retail giants Penneys are also among these companies making changes.

Interviewer: Will you want to apply for a job in a company that you feel will value and make use of your creativity?

Respondent: Currently, I'm in a job in retail, I work part-time and go to college full-time. I have been part of the company for 6 years and still feel like I have only joined yesterday. I have worked nearly full time hours for those 6 years and have also gone to college, yet it feels like the company always want more from you. I will now have 2 degrees including a masters but yet you are only a number. So yes, I feel being valued and respected is a top priority in my decision to apply for a job now.

Interviewer: Will a company that produces high standard products and/or services be an attraction in applying for a job?

Respondent: This is not as important. The workplace environment and how you are treated would be more important to me, than what the company produced.

Social Value

Interviewer: Does a company working environment matter in your decision to apply for a job? Do you value a fun and/or happy working environment?

Respondent: At first, you may have little insight into the company unless you have friends within the company. Of course everyone would love to work in a happy environment and I will want to as well.

Interviewer: Will a good working relationship with your superior matter when you are considering a job.

Respondent: Yes of course. There is enough theory to suggest that an employee leaves their job not because of the company, but because of their superior/manager. This I would agree with. So having a good relationship with your superiors will most certainly matter to me.

Interviewer: Will you say a good interpersonal relationship with your colleagues is an important factor when applying for a job? Why?

Respondent: This is amongst the top priorities of any employee. I don't want to work in a job where I am shunned or disliked by their colleagues. Positive relationships are key to productivity. This will be an attraction for me to apply because I want to work where I am liked and I like everyone.

Interviewer: Is having supportive and encouraging colleagues in a company affect your decision to apply for a job there?

Respondent: I think I have answered that before. Friendship, support and encouragement are all attributes I will really appreciate and find attractive when I want to apply for a job.

Economic Value

Interviewer: Will you say that your decision to apply for a job will be affected by the company's promotion opportunities?

Respondent: Yes, I don't want to stay in the same position for the rest of my life. If i cannot be promoted in a current job then maybe it's time to look elsewhere. Knowing a company offer promotion opportunities is a great attraction for me and I will want to apply for a job in that company.

Interviewer: Do you perceive job security as a condition for applying for a job?

Respondent: Maybe a few years ago I would, but now getting a permanent employment / contract straight away from college has become a lot harder. It is now the common to receive a 6 month contract and have it renewed once or twice before you are let go or made permanent. So I wouldn't really mind either way, job security or not, I will still apply for the job.

Interviewer: Will you perceive an above average salary a condition that will affect your decision to apply for a job?

Respondent: Regardless of what people believe, your decision to apply for a job is always crucial, especially if you are young with the vision of owning a house, paying a mortgage, having and raising kids. So it salary will affect my decision to some extent, when applying for a job.

Interviewer: Will an attractive overall compensation package affect your applying decision for a job?

Respondent: Yes of course. This again is an attraction, having an attractive reward system will surely affect my decision to apply for a job in a company.

Development Value

Interviewer: In a company you want to work for, will you value recognition / appreciation from management? Will you see it as something that will affect your applying for a job decision?

Respondent: It's always good to feel like you've done a good job. Sure why would I be bothered to work hard if i don't get appreciated, I might as well just do an average work. In a place that values recognition and appreciation and gives it when hard work being done it's a place I will definitely be attracted to and will apply for a job there.

Interviewer: Will you want to apply to a company that you perceive as a springboard for future employment?

Respondent: Yes, it's important to think long term as well as short term, so a company that you see as a platform or a springboard will be attractive to work for hence the decision to apply.

Interviewer: Will you prefer to work for a company with a brand that you perceive makes you feel good about yourself because you are working there?

Respondent: It wouldn't really affect my decision. Some of the largest companies in the world are also amongst the most hated. So regardless, I will apply for a job and this would

Interviewer: Does a company's image matter when it comes to applying for a job and will that make you feel more self-confident?

Respondent: Not really, it's the job that really matters to me

Interviewer: Do you feel that a company with better career enhancing experience is more attractive to work for? And will this in any way affect your decision to apply for a job?

Respondent: Yes as mentioned before, it's very important to think long term as well as short term.

Application Value

Interviewer: Will you prefer to apply for a job in a company that gives back to the society i.e. corporate social responsibility?

Respondent: It wouldn't bother me if they didn't. If that was the case I will join a charity organisation if it's what appeals to me. My decision to apply for a job will not be affected by this fact.

Interviewer: Will you prefer to work for a company that gives you that opportunity to apply what you have learnt in college?

Respondent: Yes. You go through the grind and effort to complete your degree, in some cases masters. Why would I want do HR to end up working in accounts, I will rather apply for the job in a company that will allow me put what I have learnt in college into practice.

Interviewer: Is acceptance and belonging in a company an important attribute when applying for a job?

Respondent: Yes, I will not want to feel like an outsider in a workplace and will value acceptance and belonging and these are characteristics that will positively affect my decision to apply for a job.

Interviewer: Will your decision to apply for a job be affected by a company who is customer-orientated?

Respondent: Not really.

Participant Four: Female 20-30years old

MA Human Resources Management recent graduate from National College of Ireland

The interview took place in person and it lasted about 22 minutes

Participant is actively seeking full time employment but at the moment is doing an unpaid work placement in a recruitment agency.

Interviewer: So given what I have explained employer branding to be, what did you understand by it

Respondent: For me I think is all about a company building its own brand name and once the company has a brand name, its uses it to attract employees and help in retaining existing employees.

Interest Value

Interviewer: Will you perceive an exciting working environment as an attraction to work for a company?

Respondent: Yes, I think I would.

Interviewer: Why?

Respondent: If a company is well structured and has good management, everybody will want to work there and I personally will like that. This is because they will appear organised and offer great reward packages and there are huge opportunities for developing yourself in such a company.

Interviewer: What does exciting mean to you in a working environment?

Respondent: I see an exciting working environment as a great place to work in. The environment that makes you feel good to come to work and it having that sense of family. So I think having such a thing in a company is a good thing because it is attractive because you will want to be in a company that makes you feel good and the working environment is great.

Interviewer: Will a company with innovative work practices be attractive as an employer?

Respondent: Yes to me.

Interviewer: Why would you say that?

Respondent: As an employee, working in a company that has innovative work practices is an advantage for me because it will help you be more innovative and if given the opportunity, you can suggest your ideas to the company. Its will benefit both the company and myself. It's an advantages because they can get ideas from me that might be helpful to them as well.

Interviewer: Will you want to apply for a job in a company that you feel will value and make use of your creativity?

Respondent: Yes I would. I will like to work for a company that values my ideas and consider them. Diversity is a huge thing that helps creativity and innovation. A workforce that is diverse will all contribute their own creativity to the benefit of the company.

Interviewer: Will a company that produces high standard products and/or services be an attraction in applying for a job?

Respondent: Yes it would for me. For example if I am working for Microsoft or Dell, both of whom have high standard products, I feel very proud and good to be associated with such high standard products and be a part of the team that produces such high quality. In addition,

these companies are well known and they have built their employer name in their industry with the production of high quality products.

Social Value

Interviewer: Does a company working environment matter in your decision to apply for a job? Do you value a fun and/or happy working environment?

Respondent: Yes I definitely value a working environment that is fun and happy and this will affect my decision to apply for a job in a company. In a happy environment, you feel comfortable working and you don't even notice the time passing by, you sometimes don't look forward going home because you are in an environment that you feel comfortable in than working in an environment that you just feel you want to get out of there. I feel to me it matters most because you feel motivated to continue working and work harder and being productive for the company.

Interviewer: Will a good working relationship with your superior matter when you are considering a job.

Respondent: Yes it would matter because I like being in a good relationships with my managers, supervisors or my team leader. This is because if I have a good working relationship they will be able to explain to me what is expected of me and I will understand them better but if the relationship is not so good they will just throw me in the deep end and expect me to be productive, so it does matter for me.

Interviewer: Will you say having a good interpersonal relationship with your colleagues is an important factor when applying for a job? Why?

Respondent: Yes it is important, the reason why is because working with a colleague that you get along with can make the job easier and done on time. But working with someone you don't get along with can bring about being stuck on the job or workload. But if you get along with the person , you can share the job evenly and it gets done on time, it becomes a teamwork. Personally I think its good to work with people you get along with.

Interviewer: And this will affect your decision in applying for a job?

Respondent: Yes it would.

Interviewer: Is having supportive and encouraging colleagues in a company affect your decision to apply for a job there?

Respondent: Ahh…It depends on what kind of what kind of relationship you have with your colleagues. But before coming to apply for a job, I will keep my personal relationship behind. I will apply for a position because its going to be me and the company and not my colleagues.

But in matters relating to the work, I will appreciate the support and encouragement from my colleagues.

Economic Value

Interviewer: Will you say that your decision to apply for a job will be affected by the company's promotion opportunities?

Respondent: Not really, I wouldn't say that it will be affected by that because maybe if I apply for a position that you have being looking for, its something I want to do, maybe I don't want to get promotion at that time, so I will go ahead and apply for the job and not basing it on the future.

Interviewer: Do you perceive job security as a condition for applying for a job?

Respondent: I think everyone would love job security but it is not just a reality now. So either way I would not mind. It is irrelevant to me making a decision to apply for a job.

Interviewer: Will you perceive an above average salary a condition that will affect your decision to apply for a job?

Respondent: Humm…….. I think so, with the salary I think it depends on what my personal circumstance when I am applying for a job. I would apply for a job even if its on minimum wage if I am in need……. maybe of money. But if I really want a job that will pay me good, I will look for one that the salary is above average and apply. Salary will depend on the situation of life I am in (*she laughs*) and presently, I am trying to finish paying for my college fees, so I am looking for a job and above salary is not a condition that will affect my decision to apply for a job.

Interviewer: Will an attractive overall compensation package affect your applying decision for a job?

Respondent: No it wouldn't at all, because it depends as well as I said on the situation I am in. I am looking for a job and will apply because I just want to finish paying for my fees and as long as I am paying my fees, the compensation they have there wouldn't matter to me as long as I am getting my wage. So it depends on what situation I am in that will affect my decision to apply for a job.

Development Value

Interviewer: In a company you want to work for, will you value recognition / appreciation from management?

Respondent: I would value the recognition because if you work or do a favour for someone, you will like to get something in return and that thing may just be a simple thank you. So that

would really matter because there is no need of you doing work and nobody is appreciating what you have done. That for me would matter, to motivate me more, if I know I do something and my manager acknowledges that I have done a good job. So for me it would matter when it comes to working for a place.

Interviewer: Will you want to apply to a company that you perceive as a springboard for future employment?

Respondent: Humm… Yes I would. In that area, it would imply that there seem to be a future for my career, so at the end of the day I would be achieving one of my desired goals. So I would apply for employment where I know I can grow and get better opportunities.

Interviewer: Will you prefer to work for a company with a brand that you perceive makes you feel good about yourself because you are working there?

Respondent: Ehmm there comes a time in life that you want to work in a well-recognised company and honestly I would love to work in a well-recognised company. When I mention the name of the company I work for anywhere people will immediately know the company and associate it with positive things. This will give me a great feeling of belonging to a place that good. Well-recognised company are very desirable in the eyes of applicants and they try to maintain that brand name they have built. Some of the ways they do this is by giving good salary and compensation benefits, basically they have a good reward system. I think it's a good thing and a good place to work in if the company has a good brand.

Interviewer: Does a company's image matter when it comes to applying for a job and will that make you feel more self-confident?

Respondent: Yes it does matter for me. I have noticed that on CVs if you put down that you have worked in large recognised companies, it implies that you know your job. Sometimes if you present a CV and a well-known company is amongst your experience even if you had worked there for six months, that's great. I think it is good to work for well-recognised company with a great image, it would give me more self-confidence knowing I have worked in such a company and that I have met such people in it and also it would look good in my CV for future prospects.

Interviewer: Do you feel that a company with better career enhancing experience is more attractive to work for? And will this in any way affect your decision to apply for a job?

Respondent: I will definitely apply for a job in a company I know that I will go forward and I will develop more. If I am to apply for a job in company A and I know that at the end of the day the way I went in is not the way I will be in the next three or four months, I will definitely want to apply and stay there knowing there is growth prospects for me in such a place.

<u>Application Value</u>

Interviewer: Will you like to apply for a job in a company that gives back to the society i.e. corporate social responsibility policy?

Respondent: Yes I would.

Interviewer: Why would you say yes?

Respondent: I would say yes because a company that give back to the society and have a corporate social responsibility policy shows that it values the society, it values people perspectives and ideas.

Interviewer: Will you prefer to work for a company that gives you that opportunity to apply what you have learnt in college?

Respondent: Yes I would love to apply to such a company. Because that means all the years I spent in college I will have them in practice and all that I have learnt, I will put them in practice and this will help me develop my career.

Interviewer: Is acceptance and belonging in a company an important attribute when applying for a job?

Respondent: Yes it is.

Interviewer: Would you say it will make you more productive?

Respondent: I will say it will make me more productive knowing that I am accepted in a place I work for or want to work for. This in a way shows that I am being valued in that company so I think it is for me important to be accepted and made to feel part of a workforce if you are working in a company.

Interviewer: Will your decision to apply for a job be affected by a company who is customer-orientated?

Respondent: Not really. At the end of the day it is just about me applying for a job and the knowledge I bring to the job so whether the company is customer focus or has a different way of dealing with its business doesn't really matter and I will still apply as long as I fit the job description and if I have more opportunities in learning from the job.

Interviewer: Any other thing you would like to add?

Respondent: Based on what we have spoken so far I will like a company where I want to apply for a job or the place I am currently doing a work placement, I would suggest that they should be more innovative. Maybe conduct an employee survey with open questions on what they will like to see more in their company and that will make them attractive to the outside world in order to enhance their employer brand. I think this will be a good employer branding idea to do if they don't have it already.

Participant Five: Female 30-40years old

MA Human Resources Management recent graduate from National College of Ireland

The interview took place in person and it lasted about 24 minutes

<u>Interest Value</u>

Interviewer: Will you perceive an exciting working environment as an attraction to work for a company?

Respondent: Yes I would definitely see an exciting working environment attractive to work for. This is because you will be affected by the excitement which will make you love your job and happy to go into work every day.

Interviewer: Name a company that you feel has an exciting working environment and why are they exciting?

Respondent: I will say Google will be exciting place to work for because of the way the employees talk highly of the place, their innovative ways of doing things and most of all their causal dress code.

Interviewer: Will a company with innovative work practices be attractive as an employer?

Respondent: Yes it would. Innovation is all about better ways of doing things. So if I have a choice of applying to such a company I would. This will afford me the opportunity to learn more and upgrade my skills.

Interviewer: Will you want to apply for a job in a company that you feel will value and make use of your creativity?

Respondent: This again will be yes. I will love to apply to such a company. This will motivate me more to use my creativity knowing I am being valued and not just a number.

Interviewer: Will a company that produces high standard products and/or services be an attraction in applying for a job?

Respondent: This does not really matter. It depends in some cases on the type of product/service the company engages in. A company with high-quality products/service might mean good and successful but not necessarily so. So it doesn't really matter

Social Value

Interviewer: Does a company working environment matter in your decision to apply for a job? Do you value a fun and/or happy working environment?

Respondent: A working environment matters to me. I will like to feel comfortable and most especially happy in a workplace so I will want to work in a place where in I know this exists. When you feel unhappy in a workplace, it will affect your productive ability. I personally will not be very productive in an environment where I don't feel happy, loved and appreciated.

Interviewer: Will fun and happy be classified under a good working environment

Respondent: It would definitely.

Interviewer: Will a good working relationship with your superior matter when you are considering a job.

Respondent: This I will say yes. A good working relationship with your superiors is the one thing I will consider when joining a workforce. You learn more from supervisors and they are the ones that appraise your performance. If you don't have a good understanding with them you will always be clashing and this will contribute to you not being happy and productive.

Interviewer: Will you say having a good interpersonal relationship with your colleagues is an important factor when applying for a job? Why?

Respondent: This is yes not necessarily all your colleagues. As long as you get on well with the people you work directly with, its ok. I will apply for a job in a company where I know I will have a good relationship with my co-workers. This for me will promote knowledge and information sharing and in the process you learn new things and improve yourself.

Interviewer: Is having supportive and encouraging colleagues in a company affect your decision to apply for a job there?

Respondent: I think the question I answered before answers this one. Work colleagues that are supportive and encouraging are good but it might not necessarily be all of them. Having a few is ok, you can share things outside work with them and go for drinks with them too.

Economic Value

Interviewer: Will you say that your decision to apply for a job will be affected by the company's promotion opportunities?

Respondent: Promotion opportunities means growth in your career so yes I will be attracted to apply for a job where I know there are promotion opportunities. I will like to grow in my career and position, this will show that I am advancing in my knowledge, skills and experience and not just being in the same place I was when I join a company. There is no motivation there.

Interviewer: Do you perceive job security as a condition for applying for a job?

Respondent: To be honest with you, job security is not so my top priority in applying for a job. I just want to get a job and get the experience, if it comes with security, fine. If it does not, that is still ok. In any case, most companies do not offer a secured job immediately, so I will not say I will be considering that now when applying for a job.

Interviewer: Will you perceive an above average salary a condition that will affect your decision to apply for a job?

Respondent: Yes it would. In as much as I want the experience, I will also love to be paid well. The reason I completed a Masters in HRM is to get a well-paid job, this will make me better off and be able to start planning for my future.

Interviewer: Will an attractive overall compensation package affect your applying decision for a job?

Respondent: Yes it will affect my decision to apply for a job. Yes experience is good and having a salary is good too. But there are other attractive perks like free parking, health packages, canteen that will make like life a bit easier. If given the choice, I will go for a job that will offer me that bit extra.

Development Value

Interviewer: In a company you want to work for, will you value recognition / appreciation from management?

Respondent: I value appreciation and recognition as I mention earlier and yes it will affect my decision to apply for a job. A little 'thank you' or 'well done' goes a long way they say. This can be the little push someone needs to be motivated.

Interviewer: Will you want to apply to a company that you perceive as a springboard for future employment?

Respondent: As I mentioned earlier, I will love a place that will offer me the opportunity to grow and advance and if I see a company as such I will be attracted to apply for work there. So yes.

Interviewer: Will you prefer to work for a company with a brand that you perceive makes you feel good about yourself because you are working there?

Respondent: Yes that will be a nice addition to working there. I want to be associated with success and high quality and if I am part of the team that produces such high quality, this will make me proud. A good brand name is associated with positives like quality, success, value, superiority, excellence and good reputation. Adds to my self-confidence and pride.

Interviewer: Does a company's image matter when it comes to applying for a job and will that make you feel more self-confident?

Respondent: A company that has successfully built its brand image and its well-known is an attraction, you already know what they do and where they are located. I will still apply to a company that does not have a well-recognised company image, only that I will have to look up information on the company to know what they do and where they are located.

Interviewer: What do you see in a company's image that will affect your self-confidence and make you apply for a job?

Respondent: A company that has a good reputation, produces high quality products, and is well respected in their sector will boost my self-confidence and encourage me to apply for a job.

Interviewer: Do you feel that a company with better career enhancing experience is more attractive to work for? And will this in any way affect your decision to apply for a job?

Respondent: Yes it would. As I mentioned earlier, I will like a place that can afford me the opportunity to improve my skills and advance my career.

Application Value

Interviewer: Will you prefer to apply for a job in a company that gives back to the society i.e. corporate social responsibility?

Respondent: That will not affect my decision to apply. But it will be good to know that the company you want to work for cares for the society and the environment in which it operates and as such you know it will care for its employees.

Interviewer: Will you prefer to work for a company that gives you that opportunity to apply what you have learnt in college?

Respondent: Not necessarily. If given the opportunity, yes I will apply what I learnt in college but if not, I will just add to the skills I already have. So it will not affect my decision to apply for a job.

Interviewer: Is acceptance and belonging in a company an important attribute when applying for a job?

Respondent: Acceptance and belonging in a company is something that I will consider when applying for a job. This will make me feel more comfortable to talk with workmate and share experiences. Also this will make the workplace a happy one.

Interviewer: Will your decision to apply for a job be affected by a company who is customer-orientated?

Respondent: Not really. So far as I meet the job criteria and it can pay my salary.

<u>Participant Six: Female 20-30years old</u>

MA Human Resources Management recent graduate from Trinity College Dublin

The interview was over the phone and it lasted about 22 minutes

<u>Interest Value</u>

Interviewer: Will you perceive an exciting working environment as an attraction to work for a company?

Respondent: I think yes. Environment is very important.

Interviewer: Why is it an attraction?

Respondent: Because it creates a positive feeling, it may make people happy that I will want to come to work every day to experience those feelings which were influenced by the exciting environment. I would really love to apply to a place that has exciting working environment for it will make me happy and create challenges for me also.

Interviewer: Will a company with innovative work practices be attractive as an employer?

Respondent: I think it depends on the age of a person. I think older people will not like innovation or innovative work practices. I think its because it might lead to some difficulties especially technical ones. Innovation is more attractive to younger people.

Interviewer: Will you be attracted to innovation?

Respondent: I will say yes I am attracted to innovation in an employer. I think I am still quite young (*she laughs*).

Interviewer: Will you want to apply for a job in a company that you feel will value and make use of your creativity?

Respondent: Yes……….I think yes. But it depends on how my creativity is being used in the company. I would love a place that allows me come up with ideas and actually consider them. This will make me feel more valued and good that they listen to me and take my ideas on board. It is important to feel significant in a company and be part of the company.

Interviewer: Will a company that produces high standard products and/or services be an attraction in applying for a job?

Respondent: I will not put this down as one of the most important attraction in a company. I will like the company I apply for a job to have high standard products but it will not be a basic requirement for me. It is more like half important.

Social Value

Interviewer: Does a company working environment matter in your decision to apply for a job? Do you value a fun and/or happy working environment?

Respondent: I would say yes. Already in my mind its kind of repeating to feel very well in my workplace. I have always wanted a very happy working environment. This is very important for my wellbeing. An unhappy working place might give me a bad mood and I might transfer it to my family at home. So it is important to be happy at a workplace.

Interviewer: Will a good working relationship with your superior matter when you are considering a job.

Respondent: Yes it is important very much. You have to be in a good relationship with your supervisor.

Interviewer: Why do you think this will matter?

Respondent: Ahhh……….I will be working with him/her every day and because I am an emotional person and I love to create good relations with people around me. This is definitely part of my working environment where I want to be happy. So having good relations with my superior will contribute to a good working environment.

Interviewer: Will you say having a good interpersonal relationship with your colleagues is an important factor when applying for a job?

Respondent: It depends. If it's a small group of people that I have to come into contact day to day and not an individual work, the relationship matters. If I have to work with people closely it has to be a very good relationship. If its just perhaps once a week I come in contact with them for a meeting or something, then it really doesn't matter to me and will not affect my decision.

Interviewer: Is having supportive and encouraging colleagues in a company affect your decision to apply for a job there?

Respondent: I don't think this will affect my decision to apply for a job but it will be a bonus for me if I have supportive and encouraging workmates. I don't think I can predict if I will meet workmates who will support me so this will not affect my decision.

Economic Value

Interviewer: Will you say that your decision to apply for a job will be affected by the company's promotion opportunities?

Respondent: Yes it will affect my decision in applying for a job. If the company has prospective of me having a good career, getting good salary, I would love to work for that company.

Interviewer: Do you perceive job security as a condition for applying for a job?

Respondent: Yes definitely it will affect my decision in applying for a job. I would like to be secured in my workplace, having the security that I will not be fired at any time. I like to be assured that I will have the job for a long time.

Interviewer: Will you perceive an above average salary a condition that will affect your decision to apply for a job?

Respondent: Yes definitely. Everyone have needs that money can help solve, so yes.

Interviewer: So will this affect your decision in applying for a job?

Respondent: Yes, I would decide to apply to a company that will offer me that bit more in terms of pay.

Interviewer: Will an attractive overall compensation package affect your applying decision for a job?

Respondent: Yes. It will be important to know how many days I get for holiday, if the company has a pension scheme, insurance. This is really important. When I am looking at a job offer, I look at this too cause it is important to me

Development Value

Interviewer: In a company you want to work for, will you value recognition / appreciation from management?

Respondent: I would love to be recognised but I don't really know that when I am applying for a job. If a company will recognise what you do for them, your successes. I will not see it as that important at the stage of applying for a job. I don't really think companies promise this.

Interviewer: Will you want to apply to a company that you perceive as a springboard for future employment?

Respondent: Yes if this will help me create a career. But I will love to apply to a company where I can stay a long time. I will immediately like to find a job where I can stay long and probably build a career in.

Interviewer: Will you prefer to work for a company with a brand that you perceive makes you feel good about yourself because you are working there?

Respondent: Yes it will be probably something attractive and positive for me. You can be proud of yourself being a part of a well-known brand that is significant.

Interviewer: Does a company's image matter when it comes to applying for a job and will that make you feel more self-confident?

Respondent: If it is a big company and well-known, I think the image will include many other aspect too. I think it will probably affect my decision.

Interviewer: Will you want to work in such a place?

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: Will that make you feel more self-confident?

Respondent: Yes. This will make me more self-confident because the image of the company is good and I will be proud to be part of something that good.

Interviewer: What do you see in a company's image that will affect your self-confidence and make you apply for a job?

Respondent: Their reputation with employees and their customers. If they treat these people with regards then it has a good company image.

Interviewer: Do you feel that a company with better career enhancing experience is more attractive to work for?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Why and will this in any way affect your decision to apply for a job?

Respondent: As I just graduated from college and looking for employment. If I start in a workplace at level zero, I will be looking forward to developing my career and move forward. And if a company can offer me this with some support, it will be an amazing opportunity and I will find that company really attractive to work for.

Application Value

Interviewer: Will you prefer to apply for a job in a company that gives back to the society?

Respondent: I don't think this will be an important factor for me. This does not affect me in anyway so I don't see it relevant. Its good to give back to the society where you do business but when considering a job I don't see it as important.

Interviewer: Will you prefer to work for a company that gives you that opportunity to apply what you have learnt in college?

Respondent: Yes. Because if I don't apply some of these knowledge, I will be expected to learn everything again in the workplace. It is good to use your knowledge from before and then build on in at the workplace. I will be more attracted to the company that will allow me use my knowledge from college.

Interviewer: Is acceptance and belonging in a company an important attribute when applying for a job?

Respondent: Yes! Yes!! Yes it will be important because I will see myself as a part of the company and I will worry for its success. Yes this will be important for me.

Interviewer: Will your decision to apply for a job be affected by a company who is customer-orientated?

Respondent: I will not like to work for a company where I will be dealing with customers. I will prefer to avoid customer- orientated company to work for, because it can be very difficult dealing with people especially difficult customers.

Interviewer: Do you have any other contribution to the topic?

Respondent: I will really love to be appreciated in a company and feel part of its successes and failures too. To be valued and be attractively paid. To have a really good and happy environment with good relations with my supervisors. These are the things that will attractive to a company.