

NATIONAL COLLEGE OF IRELAND

A study into the differences in the importance of values of employer attractiveness among prospective employees and current employees in the ICT sector in Ireland, in respect of organisation X.

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(i)

Abbreviations

Employer Branding = EB

Prospective Employees = PE

Current Employees = CE

(ii)

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(iii)

Abstract

The ICT sector in Ireland is currently experiencing rapid growth. Ireland is the second largest exporter of computer and IT services in the world (Enterprise Ireland, 2015). However, Ireland's improving economy has led to significant skills shortages in a number of sectors including the ICT sector (Buckley, 2015).

Although many strategies have been identified to attract and retain talent, retention and attraction are still two of the biggest challenges facing organisations. EB(EB) emerged in the 1990's as a strategic tool to combat attraction and retention. For organisation's to compete globally in the 'War for Talent', they must focus on incorporating organisation attributes into the employer brand (Berthon, Ewing, and Hah, 2005).

A survey was conducted among prospective and CE in the ICT sector in Ireland. The aim of the survey was to identify if differences existed in relation to employer attractiveness attributes among the two groups in respect of organisation X in the ICT sector in Ireland. The data received from 58 PE and 49 CE found that there was no difference in overall attractiveness between the two groups, however, at a construct level differences did exist.

The implications of this research project are considered, in light of researchers and human resource professionals. From the study, a number of practical recommendations are made. The aim is for organisation X to understand the attributes that CE and PE find attractive, and to develop their EBstrategies to attract and retain talent.

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1. Chapter One – Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this research is to identify the employer attributes deemed to be important to PE and CE in respect of an employer in the ICT sector in Ireland and to determine if any differences exist among the two groups. The opening chapter will provide a brief background on the ICT sector in Ireland and employer branding. The rationale for this research project will be discussed, alongside the aims and objectives of the project. An overview of each chapter to follow will be provided.

1.2 Background

Ireland is emerging as a global technology hub. The country is the second largest exporter of computer and IT services in the world. It has successfully attracted 8 of the top 10 global IT companies to establish a significant presence here (Enterprise Ireland, 2015). However, the labour market is tight with the demand for IT skills growing by 15 per cent in the last year alone (Eardley, 2016).

1.3 Research Focus

EB is a concept that is relatively new in the field of human resources. It is the process of how a firm markets what it has to offer to prospective and existing employees (Walker, 2007). The ICT sector in Ireland is currently in a rapid growth phase, however, the labour market is tight – the demand for IT skills has grown by 15 per cent in the last year alone (Eardley, 2016).

The main focus of this research is to examine if there are differences in the importance of values of employer attractiveness among prospective and CE in the ICT sector in Ireland, in respect

of organisation X. An appropriate literature review, along with empirical data collected from PE and CE is necessary to develop a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

1.4 Overall Research Aims & Objectives

The overall aim of the research is to identify the organisational attributes deemed important to PE and CE in regard to a specific organisation in the ICT sector in Ireland. The research aims to identify if there is a difference between the two groups and their perceptions.

Specifically, the research objectives are;

1. To identify what values are most attractive to PE in the ICT sector in Ireland?
2. What values are most attractive to CE in the ICT sector in Ireland?
3. Are there any similarities between values attractive to PE and CE in the ICT in Ireland?
4. Are there any differences between values attractive to PE and CE in the ICT in Ireland?
5. Can recommendations be made to the employer for developing future EB strategies?

1.5 Overview of Chapters

1.5.1 Chapter Two: Literature Review

The literature review sets out and assesses the current literature existing on the topics of EB and employer attractiveness. Each topic is individually discussed, looking at its origin and relevant research on the topic. The purpose of the literature review is to examine relevant research and theory in order to provide grounding for the research question.

1.5.2 Chapter Three: Methodology

The methodology chapter provides a detailed account of the techniques used in conducting the research. The researcher discusses the chosen research strategy in accordance with the research philosophy and why this strategy was most suited. The instruments used to conduct the research are discussed along with an account of the sample and data analysis. The final element of this chapter includes looking at the ethical considerations that were taken into account throughout the research process.

1.5.3 Chapter Four: Findings

In this chapter the research findings are presented. Analysis of the findings is provided in the form of descriptive analysis.

1.5.4 Chapter Five: Discussion of Findings

This chapter discusses the findings and analyses them with regard to past research and existing literature. This chapter is focused on identifying the results of the findings and providing reasoning that is supported by literature for the emergence of the findings.

1.5.5 Chapter Six: Conclusions & Recommendations

Chapter six provides a number of recommendations for HR practitioners in the chosen organisation in the ICT sector in regard to developing their EB strategies. The chapter also provides recommendations for future research in the area of EB and employer attractiveness.

1.6 Conclusion

This introductory chapter provides the justification for the research project undertaken. It outlines the research aims and objectives. The chapter outlines what is to be expected of the coming chapters throughout the dissertation. The following chapter will provide a comprehensive literature review in relation to concepts and key areas outlined in the research question.

2. Chapter Two – Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive review of the literature that exists around EB and employer attractiveness. This chapter will provide a synopsis of the current ICT sector in Ireland and a description of organisation X. The emergence and development of EB will be discussed. Employer attractiveness will be examined alongside current research in its field. Finally, EB in Ireland will be reviewed, as well as EB on a world wide scale.

2.2 The Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Sector

The ICT sector is considered as a key driving force behind the growth of economies and creation of jobs worldwide. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are being utilised worldwide to enhance the efficiency of public services, to assist in the growth of businesses and to support and develop social networks (World Bank, 2014).

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) estimates spending of \$5 trillion in ICT spending globally within the next four years. This spending is foreseen to come from ‘third platform’ technologies such as cloud computing and big data analytics (IDA Ireland, 2016).

In Ireland, the ICT sector is in a rapid growth phase. Ireland is the second largest exporter of computer and IT services in the world (Enterprise Ireland, 2015). The industry currently employs over 37,000 people and generates €35 billion per annum in exports (IDA Ireland,

2016). Dublin is the hub for the ICT sector with many of the world's largest ICT companies such as Google, Facebook and LinkedIn being located in an area of the city known as 'The Silicon Docks' (Collins McNicholas, 2016).

'Ireland has become the global technology hub of choice when it comes to attracting the strategic business activities of ICT companies. This has earned Ireland the reputation for being the heart of ICT in Europe'

(IDA Ireland, 2016).

Whilst the ICT sector in Ireland is continuously expanding, the improving economy has led to significant skills shortages in the sector (Buckley, 2015). A report produced by the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (Skills and Labour Market Research Unit, 2016) identified a vacancy rate of 2.6% in the sector in quarter three of 2015. This is significant when compared with the 1% vacancy rate in all other sectors. The findings by the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit indicated the sector to account for the highest share of new employment permits issued each year, indicating the difficulty being experienced in sourcing skills in the available labour market.

In 2015, the ICT accounted for approximately one quarter of all job announcements with the most frequently mentioned roles including; data analytics, cloud computing and Software as a Service (Skills and Labour Market Research Unit, 2016). In the last year alone, the demand for IT skills in Ireland has grown by 15% (Eardley, 2016). Ireland does not have a sufficient talent pool to satisfy the growing demand and as a result, the sector is experiencing a skills gap.

2.2.1 Organisation X

Organisation X is an organisation that produces and develops software, the organisation specializes in the production of microchips. It is an 'all programmable' organisation that operates in the ICT sector in Ireland and World Wide.

2.3 Brand

A brand is an intangible asset however, it is one of the most valuable assets of an organisation (Elving, Westhoff, Meeusen and Schooderbeek, 2012; Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). The American Marketing Association (cited in Mandhanya and Shah, 2010, pp. 44) define a brand as;

'a name, term, sign, symbol or design or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors'.

Garner, Erhardt and Martin-Rios (2011) identify how both sellers and consumers can gain mutual advantage from the creation of a well reputed brand. The authors argue that brand recognition can enhance profits by increasing both organisation and product awareness which in turn increases the likelihood of purchase/use of service(s). Brand awareness has the ability to reduce consumer doubt according to the authors; it instils confidence in consumers about buying into the brand.

2.4 Branding

The purpose of branding is to develop/align the expectations that underlie the brand experience, creating the impression that a brand associated with a product or service has certain qualities or characteristics that make it special or unique (Elving *et. al.*, 2012).

Branding implies the ongoing ways in which a product or service is being presented to consumers. As well as the physical and standard brand connotations i.e. symbols or designs, branding efforts can be subconsciously understood by consumers through their personal interactions with the organisation (Franca and Pahor, 2011). Personal experiences and interactions with an organisation have a greater ability to impact consumers' perceptions of the brand in comparison to stand alone branding imagery (Franca and Pahor, 2012).

In the study of human resources, branding is a term that can be applied to differentiate people, places and organisations. The application of branding in this sense provides differentiation between organisations i.e. Employer Branding.

2.5 Employer Value Proposition

Towers Watson (2012-2013) identify employer value proposition (EVP) as;

'An implicit contract, or deal, between employer and employee, articulating the nature of the experience the employer offers in exchange for the employee's dedication, productivity and sustainable engagement.'

The employer value proposition of an organisation encompasses all aspects of the employment experience. Organisations that are effective in articulating and executing their EVP can position themselves in a unique way to enhance the engagement of their employees. For organisations competing in a highly competitive global talent market, it is fundamental they have developed a significant and sustainable EVP. Towers Watson (2012-2013) identifies the design of talent management and rewards programs as the most opportune area for employers to differentiate themselves from their competitors. A strategically designed EVP has the ability to attract, retain, motivate and engage employees to help drive the overall success of the business (pp. 6). Eisenberg *et al.* (2001) state that value propositions are the central message of the employer brand.

2.6 Employer Branding

The success of any organisation is dependent on the attraction of talent as well as the retention of existing talent. The demand for talent has increased more rapidly than the availability of supply. Organisations are now notably concerned with becoming an 'Employer of Choice' (Sutherland, Torricelli, and Karg, 2002, cited in Biswas and Suar, 2013). The notion of 'Employer of Choice' is the notion of EB (Tuzuner and Yuksel, 2009, cited in Biswas and Suar, 2013).

Amber and Barrow (1996) were among the first researchers to coin the term EB. In defining EB they identified the factors necessary to create a strong EB;

'the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by the company and identified with the employing company',

(pp. 187).

The functional benefits provided refer to training and career development, whilst economic benefits provided relate to compensation and benefits and psychological benefits are associated with employee engagement and employees feeling a sense of belonging to the organisation (Kimpakor and Dimmitt, 2007). In recent years the term EB has evolved, it has come to include the qualities and attributes of an organisation, how firms differentiate themselves and the experience they have to offer to their employees (Taylor, 2010). Hatfield (1999) identifies EB as a procedure of creating a “Best Workplace” image among potential recruits; it is also a method of resolving talent shortage. (Indian Experience article) Ultimately, EB is the process of how a firm markets what it has to offer to prospective and existing employees (Walker, 2007).

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) explain EB as a three-step process. First, an organisation develops an employer value proposition (EVP) that is to be embodied in the brand. The second step follows once a proposition of value is developed; it then needs to be marketed to PE. The external marketing of the EB is designed with the intention of attracting the target population; however it is also designed to add value to the product or corporate brands. Sullivan (1999) argues that the EB must be consistent with all other branding efforts of the firm. The third and final step of the EB process is the internal marketing of the EB. This is an important step as it carries the brand “promise” made to recruits into the firm and incorporates it as part of the organisational culture (Frook, 2001). Internal marketing aims to develop a workforce that is committed to the set of values and organisational goals established by the firm. In a highly competitive global talent market – a relevant and sustainable EVP is significantly valuable; if strategically designed it has the ability to attract, retain, motivate and engage employees to aid in driving business success (Towers and Watson, 2012-2013).

As well as the three step process identified by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), HR practitioners suggest five steps to develop a strong EB; [1] understand your organisation, [2] create a 'compelling brand promise' for employees that mirrors the brand promise for customers, [3] develop standards to measure the fulfilment of brand promise, [4] ruthlessly align all people practices to support and reinforce the brand promise, and [5] execute the measure (Berthon *et al.*, 2005). A strong EB has the ability to attract better applicants (Collins & Stevens, 2002; Slaughter *et al.*, 2004). A number of advantages of developing a strong EB have been identified by Ritson (2002). An organisation that possesses a strong EB can experience reduced recruitment costs, improved employee relations, increased retention rates and can often offer lower salaries for comparable staff to firms with a weaker EB (Berthon *et al.*, 2005). EB has the ability to contribute as significantly to the sustenance and growth of a firm as corporate branding does, therefore, when senior management are formulating corporate strategies EB should be given equal importance (Neeti and Sharma, 2014).

EB is a valuable tool for recruitment, employee engagement and retention (Barrow and Mosley, 2005). It enables organisations to attract their preferred candidates' who's values align to those of the organisation, while also giving PE an assurance of the standard of work expected by them. (Bhatnagar and Srivastava, 2008).

2.6.1 Internal and External Employer Branding

Internal marketing of the EB is the task of hiring, training and motivating able employees to serve the customer well (Kotler, 1994, cited in Neeti and Sharma, 2014).

Researchers Rucci *et al.*, (1998) suggest that organisations that see their employees as their first customers are more successful in keeping their external customers satisfied as the employees take better care of them. Similarly, Sergion Zymon (2002) (cited in Berthon *et al.*, 2005) argues that before an organisation can attempt to sell their brand to consumers, it must first be sold to employees. Internal branding postulates that the employees are internal customers of an organisation and jobs are internal products. In order to satisfy the customers the organisation needs to first satisfy the employees (George, 1990).

Employee behaviour has the ability to strengthen the brand values of an organisation or to undermine the credibility of its values if their behaviour is inconsistent with the advertised values (Berthon *et al.*, 2005).

The purpose of external EB is to help an employer achieve the status of 'Employer of Choice'. This enhances an employer's ability to attract the highest calibre of talent in the available labour market (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). It is in the interest of employers to achieve this status as markets are becoming globally competitive and tight; leaving potential employees in control of their employment offers (Saini, Rai and Chaudhary, 2013). It is therefore essential that organisations develop their external EB to attract and retain talent.

Internal marketing of the EB leads to employer brand loyalty for CE whilst external marketing of the EB leads to employer attractiveness for PE (Neeti and Sharma, 2014).

2.7 Employer Attractiveness

Berthon *et al.*, (2005) define employer attractiveness as;

'The envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organisation'.

An organisations image as an attractive employer is largely based on the employer value propositions it offers to its PE (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). The closer the attributes desired by PE are to the value propositions offered by the organisation, the more attractive the organisation becomes to the PE.

Many researchers have explored EB and its influence on employee attraction. Sokro (2012) studied the impact of EB on employee attraction, the researcher suggested the need for employers to create an encouraging work environment – where employees could feel comfortable in their conditions and remain with the firm. Sokro's study however only looked at identifying the attributes of employer attractiveness.

Devendorf and Highhouse (2008) looked at workplace attraction and the contribution of existing employees in attracting PE to the talent pool. The study identified three types of information that PE seek from potential employers; [1] people information, [2] employer information, and [3] job information. People information is seen to be the most significant as PE are interested in the attributes of their potential colleagues. Devendorf and Highhouse (2008) argued that the attributes of CE can have a direct impact on the attractiveness of the organisation as an employer.

Berthon *et al.* (2005) developed the Employer Attractiveness (EmpAt) scale based on Ambler and Barrow's (1996) three dimensions – functional, psychological and economic. The researchers developed a scale consisting of five values that could be used to measure employer attractiveness among potential recruits. The scale was developed through the use of focus groups among final year graduate and undergraduate students at a large Australian University.

The five values of employer attractiveness determined by Berthon *et al.* (2005) are outlined;

[1] Interest value; This examines the degree to which a prospective employee is attracted to an employer that provides a stimulating work place, original work practices and that utilises the creativity of employees to develop and produce high-quality, innovative products and services

[2] Social value; This examines the degree to which a prospective employee is attracted to an employer that provides a fun and happy work environment where good collegial relationships exist and there is a sense of team spirit [3] Economic value; This examines the degree to which

a potential employee is attracted to an employer that provided competitive salaries, compensation packages and offers job security and opportunities to climb the career ladder [4]

Development value; This examines the extent to which a potential employee is attracted to an employer that provides acknowledgement, self-esteem and assurance, along with career-

enhancing experience and a platform to future employment [5] Application value; This examines the extent to which a potential employee is attracted to an employer that provides an opportunity for the employee to apply their learning's and to teach others, in a caring, customer orientated environment.

Saini *et al.* (2013) researched employer attractiveness among potential employees using Berthon *et al.* (2005) Employer Attractiveness scale. The researchers found development and social value to be the most important attributes among prospective recruits. A fun working

environment was found to be more important than innovation, promotional opportunities or the humanitarian involvement of the organisation.

Sivertzen, Nilsen and Olafsen (2013) tested the Employer Attractiveness scale and analysed the relationships between the dimensions of the scale and the use of social media in relation to corporate reputation and intentions to apply for a job. The study was conducted among students at three higher level education institutions in Norway. The researchers found that innovation, application and psychological values had a positive relationship to corporate reputation and intentions to apply for the job. There was no significant relationship for economic and social values. Non-monetary values were considered to be more important in employer reputation among PE.

Among the literature research, Biswas and Suar (2013) are the only researchers found to have looked at two groups in a study using the Employer Attractiveness scale. The two groups examined were PE and CE. The objective of the study was to examine the effect of employees' values on EB. Biswas and Suar (2013) used Berthon *et al.* (2005) five value dimensions and developed a hypothesis from each of the five values. Using a five item Likert Scale, Biswas and Suar collected their results. From the findings of their surveys on PE and CE, the researchers identified the priority of the five factors (in descending order) for developing EB strategies; social value, interest value, development value, economic value and application value. In conducting their research, Biswas and Suar used two sample groups, however, they did not attempt to identify any differences in relation to same – this research project aims to identify if differences exist among prospective and CE in the ICT sector in Ireland and to use this information to make recommendations to employers in developing EB strategies to attract and retain same.

There is a gap in the research in relation to EB and employer attractiveness in Ireland. The researcher failed to find any research in relation to same in the ICT sector in Ireland, due to the lack of findings and the skills shortages currently being experienced – the researcher is interested in adding to the literature.

2.8 EB in Irish Context

In 2015, Emporer, Berkley Group and Communicate magazine conducted research to determine how organisations in Ireland are approaching EB and whether their priorities, challenges and strengths differ from the United Kingdom. The research found that 70% of Irish respondents indicated that their organisation is committed to the development and continuous management of its EB. However, respondents admitted their organisations still had a lot of work to do. The research concluded that there is awareness and understanding of the benefits of EB among Irish organisations however, there is a lack of clarity in the implementation (Greenwood, 2015). There is limited research on EB in Ireland, this is part of the researchers' justification for choosing to look at the topic in an Irish context.

2.9 EB in a World Wide Context

'Today's most successful companies are those with the BEST PEOPLE, not just the best products.'

(Minchington, 2014, pp.4).

Minchington (2014) conducted an EB Global Trends Study by surveying 19 countries and regions across the globe; receiving 1,176 responses. Respondents believe that having a clear and structured strategy is the key to achieving their EB objectives.

In conducting his research, Minchington (2014) identified a number of benefits that employers across the globe experience from having an EB program; 35 per cent of respondents find it easier to attract new talent; 32 per cent reported enhanced employee engagement; 28 per cent reported a positive effect in their image as an employer of choice and 22 per cent experienced reduced recruitment costs. This supports Berthon *et al.*, (2005). A survey conducted by LinkedIn research: Talent Trends (2014) supports Minchington's work as LinkedIn interviewed 18,000 professionals across the globe to determine the most important factor that recruits considered when searching for a new employer; 56 per cent responded that EB is the deciding factor for them regardless of the organisations reputation for products and services and prestige.

Minchington (2014) used a Likert Scale (1 = least important, 7 = most important) to identify the most important attributes in attracting new talent to an organisation. The research identified career development (average score 6.07) as the most important attribute; followed by leadership (6.02); work environment (5.97), corporate reputation and culture (5.95) and reward and recognition (5.76). The least important attributes identified were; employee research (4.49); corporate social responsibility (4.81) and communication systems (4.95). The study found that social media participation (11 per cent), defining EVP's (11 per cent), talent development strategies (9 per cent) and career web development (9 per cent) are the most effective strategies employers across the globe use to enhance their EB (Minchington, 2014, pp. 11).

Minchington (2014) argues that as talent shortages intensify across the globe, an organisations EB becomes an increasingly valuable asset to ensure organisation sustainability (pp. 12).

Many organisations in the ICT sector are implementing positive EB strategies across the globe. Microsoft's EB strategy begins with their careers site, as well as advertising new job openings, the website features a JobsBlog with a section of the site dedicated to 'Life at Microsoft'. This section of the site provides prospective recruits with details of the company's values and opportunities for career development (Microsoft, 2016). The JobsBlog contains articles about employee's experiences of working at Microsoft as well as profiling CE. Microsoft has a strong online presence which includes Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. The social media platforms are used to engage potential employees. A separate Facebook page has been set up by Microsoft entitled 'Women at Microsoft', this page's popularity is almost in line with the primary careers page. It provides a unique insight into the women who are employed at Microsoft (Microsoft, n.d.). Microsoft also has a strong presence on YouTube where they have a specific channel for Microsoft Careers which contains over 170 videos. These videos include a 'Day in the Life' series which provides insight to the different aspects of a career within Microsoft. Potential employees can listen to and watch videos from different employee's perspectives ranging from program managers to software development engineers (Microsoft, 2014).

Google are a second example of an organisation in the ICT sector that has a positive global EB strategy. Time and time again, Google tops the ranks as the World's Most Attractive Employer according to a surveys carried out by Universum (2016). Google's reputation globally as a great place to work is seen to be behind their success. The Life at Google G+ page has more than 2.7 million followers (Google+, 2016a). This page provides continuous updates regarding the special events held for employees such as the upcoming Googleween Halloween event. Google have a well known 'work hard, play hard' values incorporated in to their organisation; these values are well known to the public as we regularly see posts on the internet about

employee's perks such as nap pods and free meals. The organisation have implemented a careers tagline 'Do cool things that matter', this promotes Google as a fun, enjoyable working environment. Through their implementation of the gDNA study, Google portray their concern for the wellbeing of their employees. This study aims to identify how their employees differentiate working life and personal life as a means of developing innovative solutions to solve the problem of work-life balance (Google+, 2016b).

3. Chapter Three – Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach of the researcher during the research process. It includes a justification for the chosen methodological approach, an explanation of the sample group, the survey used, data collection and data analysis. The ethical considerations are discussed, and the chapter concludes by looking at the potential limitations of the research.

3.2 Research Title

A study into the differences in the importance of values of employer attractiveness among prospective and CE in the ICT sector in Ireland, in respect of organisation X.

3.3 Research Philosophy

There are a number of factors that impact a researcher's method of data collection and analysis. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) use the metaphor of an onion to illustrate these factors. Each layer of the onion indicates the different factors that need to be considered in developing the most appropriate research strategy.

The methodology of a research project is a vital as it has a significant role in shaping the data. It is important that the approach chosen by the researcher is both appropriate and sufficient in terms of generating precise findings (Saunders *et al.*, 2009).

3.3.1 Deductive Study

For the researcher to answer the research question proposed, a deductive approach has been followed. A deductive approach is whereby;

'A conceptual and theoretical structure is developed and then tested by empirical observation'.

(Collis and Hussey, 2003, pp.8).

3.3.2 Epistemology

Epistemology refers to what constitutes as 'acceptable' knowledge in any area of research (Saunders *et al.*, 2009); it looks at how best to investigate a topic. The philosophy is discussed by researchers Collis and Hussey (2003), they discuss it as being concerned with what we can reasonably accept as being valid and reliable knowledge; this acceptance therefore impacts the approach taken when conducting research. A researcher within epistemology can either be 'resource' or 'feelings' orientated. A 'resource' orientated researcher typically adapts a positivist position while developing knowledge, whereas, a 'feelings' orientated researcher adapts an interpretive position (Saunders *et al.*, 2009, pp. 113).

In this research project the researcher has adapted a positivist position in epistemology. A researcher that adapts a positivist approach i.e. a 'resource' orientated researcher would claim to be external to the data collection process. In contrast, a 'feelings' orientated researcher may become involved in the process in ways such as framing questions to ask and interpret the respondents examples. There is little a positivist researcher can do to change the substance of the data they collect.

'The researcher is independent of and neither affects nor is affected by the subject of the research'.

(Saunders *et al.*, 2009, pp. 114)

A positivist approach looks at how only observable phenomena can provide credible facts and it looks at generalisations. The researcher in this study is only looking at a sample of PE and a sample of CE in the ICT sector in Ireland, therefore, the researcher will be making generalisations on the wider population i.e. adapting a positivist approach.

3.4 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is concerned with determining the perceptions and/or the interpretations of the desired participants. This type of research provides for a deeper insight to the perceptions, understandings, ideas, feelings and behaviours of individuals. Depending on the qualitative methods chosen by a researcher it can allow the researcher a greater element of flexibility in conducting research.

The most frequently used methods of collecting data in qualitative research are through interviews and focus groups. Both of these methods allow the researcher to use questions they have developed in line with the study (Blumberg, Donald and Pamela, 2005). If data analysis of a research project has not been designed to coincide with research objectives that are focused on numerical data then qualitative research can be an advantage.

The researcher noted the opportunity of in depth data to be collected through the use of qualitative research methods, however, overall it was concluded that the research objectives of this study required data that could be represented via quantifiable means.

3.5 Quantitative Research

Quantitative research is identified by Coolican (2009) as '*data in numerical form, the results of measurement*' (pp. 26). Quantitative research is valuable when carrying out a study that is focused on producing statistical data. Methods of quantitative research include questionnaires and surveys (Creswell, 1994).

3.5.1 Quantitative Research Rationale

The researcher chose to use a quantitative method to collect data in this study. This method was chosen as the researcher's hypothesis stated "CE have a perception that is different to PE when it comes to employer attractiveness in respect of organisation X". The most effective way to analyse and represent the findings would be numerically i.e. percentages and statistics.

3.5.2 Alternative Considerations

For this research the researcher considered alternative methods of data collection. The researcher was aware that the use of a qualitative method such as interviews could provide a deeper insight to the field of study, where perceptions of interviewees could be analysed. However, the researcher's hypothesis was to determine if there is a difference between the perceptions of PE to CE when it comes to employer attractiveness in relation to organisation

X. The most effective way of analysing this data is via quantifiable means. The researcher was also very aware of the time constraints and felt the process of constructing interview questions, identifying a sample, meeting participants, conducting and transcribing interviews would be extremely time consuming in comparison to sending surveys to participants and giving them a three week window to complete the survey.

3.6 Research Instrument

3.6.1 Survey

Surveys are an effective way of collecting large quantities of data from a sizeable population in a highly economic way (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). The data collected using a survey strategy can be used to suggest possible reasons for particular relationships between variables and to produce models of these relationships.

The researcher chose to use a research survey i.e. Employer Attractiveness Scale that has previously been developed by researchers Berthon *et al.*, (2005). The researcher chose this survey as it has been proven to be a valid and reliable scale for measuring employer attractiveness. The survey has been used by many researchers such as Oladipo *et al.* (2013) however, it has not been used to look at employer attributes in the ICT sector in Ireland. The survey identifies employer attributes that are useful for the researcher to meet the research objectives. In the survey, 25 employer attributes are categorised under five headings; [1] Interest value, [2] Social Value, [3] Economic Value, [4] Development Value, and [5] Application Value. Prospective and CE were given a series of employer attributes under each value i.e. ‘A springboard for future employment’, ‘An above average basic salary’ and were

asked to answer using a Likert Scale with responses labelled ‘not important, slightly important, moderately important, important and very important’. The survey was entered in to Google Forms in a format that required all questions to be answered before submission. The survey was then duplicated as PE and CE required separate surveys to ensure accurate data analysis. The survey link was then sent to PE i.e. final year students enrolled in an unnamed course in an unnamed University in Ireland and CE in an IT department in an unnamed organisation in the ICT sector in Ireland. A cover note was included as part of the survey to inform participants of the anonymity of their responses, and to provide a means of contact should participants have any queries. Participants are reminded of the anonymity of the survey to ensure participants answer truthfully and remove any of their concerns around identification. The survey link was left open for a period of three weeks to allow participants enough opportunity to submit their responses.

3.6.2 Survey Distribution

The surveys were distributed to a class of students studying towards an IT qualification in an unnamed college in Ireland i.e. PE. They were also distributed to an IT department in an unnamed organisation in the ICT sector in Ireland i.e. CE. Before the surveys were sent to the participants, the survey was piloted by three individuals from each group. Following the pilot study, there were no amendments to be made with all participants agreeing the survey was relevant to their groups. The survey was then sent to all participants via email which contained

a link to the survey on Google Forms. Each survey was accompanied by a cover letter explaining the nature of the research and confirming anonymity of all participants.

3.7 Hypothesis

CE have a perception that is different to PE when it comes to employer attractiveness in a specific organisation in the ICT sector in Ireland.

3.8 Sampling

Due to time constraints, costs and access, it is not possible for the researcher to survey the whole population of PE nor the whole population of CE in the ICT sector. It is therefore necessary for the researcher to use samples of both populations. The researcher is using probability sampling as it makes it possible to make inferences from a sample about a population (Saunders *et al.*, 2009).

A sampling frame is a complete list of all the cases in the population from which your sample will be drawn (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). For the purpose of this research, the researcher had to identify two sampling frames. The sample frame for PE in the ICT sector was a list of names and email addresses of students enrolled in final year of an unnamed course in an unnamed University in Ireland. The sample frame for CE was a list of names and email addresses of employees in an IT department in an unnamed organisation in the ICT in Ireland.

3.9 Data Analysis

The data will be collected from the surveys distributed to the sample. A computer based software package called SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) will be used to analyse the data. Each answer will be assigned a code for the use of the software. Firstly, the survey and its constructs will be tested for reliability. Burns and Burns (2008) identify reliability as:

'The consistency and stability of findings that enable findings to be replicated'

pp. 410

Researchers use reliability analysis to determine how much the items being measured relate to one another. Cronbach's Alpha is the method of testing reliability. It measures the internal consistency of scales; this is based on the average inter-item correlation of the items that make up the scales. In order for variables to be deemed reliable, the Cronbach's Alpha result must be greater than .70. An alpha result that is greater than .80 is deemed highly acceptable (Burns and Burns, 2008). The researcher will then run tests of normality on overall attractiveness and the five constructs that determine it. These tests will determine if the groups are normal, if either group presents as non normal then a Mann Whitney U Test will be conducted to determine if there is a difference between the two groups. If both groups present as non normal, an Independent Samples Ttest will be conducted to determine difference.

3.10 Ethical Consideration

Throughout all aspects of the research and data collection, the NCI research ethics guidelines and code of conduct were strictly considered and adhered to. The surveys used to gather data were done so with strict confidence and all participants including the organisation remained anonymous. Anonymity was ensured as the survey did not require participants to include any personal information. An accompanying cover letter was attached to the survey link explaining the reason for the research and what participating involved. The cover letter also informed participants that it was at their free will to participate and they could decline to take part in the survey without experiencing any negative repercussions. Consent was implied by all participants who completed the survey.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter set out the research philosophy. The quantitative research strategy has been discussed as well as the instruments being used to collect the data. The sample population that received the survey was explained with a justification for doing so. To ensure all participants were protected from identification in the research process, all ethical considerations were considered. The following chapter will present the findings from data collection.

4. Chapter Four – Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discloses the results of the quantitative survey method outlined by the researcher in the previous chapter. The research examines employer attractiveness attributes in relation to organisation X, from the perspective of CE and PE to identify if differences exist. Participants responded to a survey made up of 25 employer attributes categorised under 5 headings. To ensure reliability of the survey and its measures, a Cronbach's Alpha test of reliability will be conducted. Finally, the variables will be tested for normality and where one subgroup appears

to be non-normal a Mann's Whitney U Test will be used to test for difference between the two groups.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

4.2.1 Scale Reliability Results

This subsection presents the results of reliability tests that were used to determine reliability of the scale (Employer Attractiveness) used in the study.

In this study, all scale measures tested using Cronbach's Alpha exceeded .70 as seen outlined below.

4.2.1.1 Employer Attractiveness Scale Reliability Results

Table 1 and 2 outlined below portray the results of a reliability analysis for the Employer Attractiveness scale. There were 107 valid responses across 25 items that contributed to the overall Employer Attractiveness scale composite score. A Cronbach reliability value of .918 is reported.

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	107	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	107	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.918	25

Table 1: EmpAt Scale Case Summary

Table 2: EmpAt Scale Reliability Results

4.2.1.2 Interest Value Reliability Results

Table 1 and 2 outlined below portray the results of a reliability analysis for the variable: Interest Value. There were 107 valid responses across 5 items that contributed to the overall Interest Value composite score. A Cronbach reliability value of .747 is reported.

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	107	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	107	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.747	5

Table 1: Interest Value Case Summary

Table 2:

Value Reliability Results

Interest

4.2.1.3 Social Value Reliability Results

Table 1 and 2 outlined below portray the results of a reliability analysis for the variable: Social Value. There were 107 valid responses across 5 items that contributed to the overall Social Value composite score. A Cronbach reliability value of .866 is reported.

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	107	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	107	100.0

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.866	5

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Table 1: Social Value Case Summary

Table 2: Social Value Reliability Results

4.2.1.4 Economic Value Reliability Results

Table 1 and 2 outlined below portray the results of a reliability analysis for the variable: Economic Value. There were 107 valid responses across 5 items that contributed to the overall Economic Value composite score. A Cronbach reliability value of .817 is reported.

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	107	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	107	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Table 1: Economic Value Case Summary

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.817	5

Table 2: Economic Value Reliability Results

4.2.1.5 Development Value Reliability Results

Table 1 and 2 outlined below portray the results of a reliability analysis for the variable: Development Value. There were 107 valid responses across 5 items that contributed to the overall Development Value composite score. A Cronbach reliability value of .819 is reported.

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	107	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	107	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.819	5

Table 1: Development Value Case Summary Table 2:

Development Value Reliability Results

4.2.1.6 Application Value Reliability Results

Table 1 and 2 outlined below portray the results of a reliability analysis for the variable: Application Value. There were 107 valid responses across 5 items that contributed to the overall Application Value composite score. A Cronbach reliability value of .771 is reported.

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	107	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	107	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.771	5

Table 1: Application Value Case Summary Table 2: Application Value Reliability Results

4.3 Overall Attractiveness

4.3.1 Test of normality

A test of normality was performed to ascertain if the subgroups of CE and PE of overall attractiveness were normally distributed. The Shapiro Wilk test statistic showed that PE were non normal ($W = .831$, $df = 58$, $p < .0005$) and as such the non-parametric Mann Whitney test of difference was relied upon to identify statistical differences.

Tests of Normality

	Status	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
OverallAttractiveness	CE	.066	49	.200 [*]	.985	49	.801
	PE	.117	58	.048	.831	58	.000

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

4.3.2 Mann-Whitney U Test

A Mann-Whitney U test was undertaken to assess whether there were differences in CE overall attractiveness compared to PE overall attractiveness to organisation X.

The results indicate that there were no statistical differences between CE attractiveness (Mdn = 49.02) compared to PE employer attractiveness (Mdn = 58.21), ($u = 1177$, $z = -1.526$, $p = .127$).

The results are shown in tables 2 and 3.

Table 2:

Ranks

	Status	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
OverallAttractiveness	CE	49	49.02	2402.00
	PE	58	58.21	3376.00
	Total	107		

Table 3:

Test Statistics^a

	Overall Attractiveness
Mann-Whitney U	1177.000
Wilcoxon W	2402.000
Z	-1.526
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.127

a. Grouping Variable: Status

Examining an employees (current, prospective) attractiveness to organisation X in more detail, we consider attractiveness as defined by five constructs and examine if differences exist at the construct level.

4.4 Interest Value Attractiveness

4.4.1 Test of normality

A test of normality was performed to ascertain if the subgroups of CE and PE of overall attractiveness were normally distributed. The Shapiro Wilk test statistic showed that PE were non normal ($W = .853$, $df = 58$, $p < .0005$) and as such the non-parametric Mann Whitney test of difference was relied upon to identify statistical differences.

Tests of Normality

	Status	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
IVMain	CE	.104	49	.200 [*]	.970	49	.247
	PE	.131	58	.014	.853	58	.000

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

4.4.2 Mann-Whitney U Test

A Mann-Whitney U test was undertaken to assess whether there were differences in CE interest value attractiveness compared to PE interest value attractiveness to organisation X.

The results indicate that there were statistical differences between CE interest value attractiveness (Mdn = 47.33) compared to PE interest value attractiveness (Mdn = 59.64), ($U = 1094$, $z = -2.058$, $p = .040$).

The results are shown in tables 2 and 3.

Table 2:

		Ranks		
	Status	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
IVMain	CE	49	47.33	2319.00
	PE	58	59.64	3459.00
	Total	107		

Table 3:

Test Statistics ^a	
	IVMain
Mann-Whitney U	1094.000
Wilcoxon W	2319.000

Z	-2.058
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.040

a. Grouping Variable: Status

4.5 Social Value Attractiveness

4.5.1 Test of normality

A test of normality was performed to ascertain if the subgroups of CE and PE of the construct social value attractiveness were normally distributed. The Shapiro Wilk test statistic showed that both CE ($W = .897$, $df = 49$, $p < .0005$) and PE ($W = .787$, $df = 58$, $p < .0005$) were non normal and as such the non-parametric Mann Whitney test of difference was relied upon to identify statistical differences.

Tests of Normality

	Status	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
SVMain	CE	.153	49	.006	.897	49	.000
	PE	.159	58	.001	.787	58	.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

4.5.2 Mann-Whitney U Test

A Mann-Whitney U test was undertaken to assess whether there were differences in CE social value attractiveness compared to PE social value attractiveness to organisation X.

The results indicate that there was no statistical difference between CE social value attractiveness (Mdn = 48.87) compared to PE social value attractiveness (Mdn = 58.34), (U = 1169, z = -1.585, p = .113).

The results are shown in tables 2 and 3.

Table 2:

		Ranks		
	Status	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
SVMain	CE	49	48.87	2394.50
	PE	58	58.34	3383.50
	Total	107		

Table 3:

Test Statistics ^a	
	SVMain
Mann-Whitney U	1169.500
Wilcoxon W	2394.500
Z	-1.585
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.113

4.6 Economic Value Attractiveness

4.6.1 Test of normality

A test of normality was performed to ascertain if the subgroups of CE and PE of the construct economic value attractiveness were normally distributed. The Shapiro Wilk test statistic showed that CE ($W = .939$, $df = 49$, $p = .013$) and PE ($W = .942$, $df = 58$, $p = .008$) were non normal and as such the non-parametric Mann Whitney test of difference was relied upon to identify statistical differences.

	Status	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
EVMain	CE	.156	49	.004	.939	49	.013
	PE	.116	58	.048	.942	58	.008

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

4.6.2 Mann-Whitney U Test

A Mann-Whitney U test was undertaken to assess whether there were differences in CE economic value attractiveness compared to PE economic value attractiveness to organisation X.

The results indicate that there was no statistical difference between CE economic value attractiveness ($Mdn = 58.16$) compared to PE economic value attractiveness ($Mdn = 50.48$), ($U = 1217$, $z = -1.284$, $p = .199$).

The results are shown in tables 2 and 3.

Table 2:

		Ranks		
	Status	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
EVMain	CE	49	58.16	2850.00
	PE	58	50.48	2928.00
	Total	107		

Table 3:

Test Statistics ^a	
	EVMain
Mann-Whitney U	1217.000
Wilcoxon W	2928.000
Z	-1.284
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.199

a. Grouping Variable: Status

4.7 Development Value Attractiveness

4.7.1 Test of normality

A test of normality was performed to ascertain if the subgroups of CE and PE of the construct development value attractiveness were normally distributed. The Shapiro Wilk test statistic showed that PE ($W = .898$, $df = 58$, $p < .0005$) were non normal and as such the non-parametric Mann Whitney test of difference was relied upon to identify statistical differences.

Tests of Normality

	Status	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
DVMain	CE	.131	49	.034	.955	49	.057
	PE	.145	58	.004	.898	58	.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

4.7.2 Mann-Whitney U Test

A Mann-Whitney U test was undertaken to assess whether there were differences in CE development value attractiveness compared to PE development value attractiveness to organisation X.

The results indicate that there was no statistical difference between CE economic value attractiveness (Mdn = 50.8) compared to PE economic value attractiveness (Mdn = 56.7), ($U = 1264.50$, $z = -.984$, $p = .325$).

The results are shown in tables 2 and 3.

Table 2:

Ranks				
	Status	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
DVMain	CE	49	50.81	2489.50
	PE	58	56.70	3288.50
	Total	107		

Table 3:

	DVMain
Mann-Whitney U	1264.500
Wilcoxon W	2489.500
Z	-.984
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.325

a. Grouping Variable: Status

4.8 Application Value Attractiveness

4.8.1 Test of normality

A test of normality was performed to ascertain if the subgroups of CE and PE of the construct application value attractiveness were normally distributed. The Shapiro Wilk test statistic showed that CE ($W = .988$, $df = 49$, $p = .881$) and PE ($W = .972$, $df = 58$, $p = .210$) were normal.

	Status	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
AVMain	CE	.052	49	.200*	.988	49	.881
	PE	.107	58	.096	.972	58	.210

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

4.8.2 Independent Samples T-test

An independent samples T-test was performed to conducted to compare application value attractiveness between prospective and CE in relation to organisation X.

Group Statistics

	Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
AVMain	CE	49	15.6122	4.65840	.66549
	PE	58	16.6552	3.61552	.47474

Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
AVMain Equal variances assumed	3.380	.069	1.303	105	.195	-1.04293	.80042	-2.63000	.54415
AVMain Equal variances not assumed			1.276	89.719	.205	-1.04293	.81747	-2.66704	.58118

The T-test found that there was no significant difference in the scores for application value attractiveness between PE (M= 16.65, SD = 3.61) and CE (M= 15.61, SD = 4.65); $t(89.7) = 1.27, p = .205$.

This means that there was no difference in application value attractiveness between PE and CE in relation to organisation X.

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of the quantitative research undertaken in the study. The analysis tested the hypothesis for an overall difference in employer attractiveness in relation to

organisation X, between CE and PE. The analysis also measured for differences at a construct level. Although there was no difference in overall attractiveness, differences were identified at a construct level. The following chapter will discuss the findings further with the support of literature.

5. Chapter Five – Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss the findings in the previous chapter and put them into context with reference to literature. The limitations of the research project are discussed.

5.2 Overview of Research & Findings

This section contains the key findings from the research conducted on organisation X in the ICT sector.

Overall Attractiveness

The research conducted found that there was no difference in overall attractiveness to organisation X between PE and CE, this finding surprised the researcher. Prior to conducting the research, the researcher had assumed that the data collected would show significant differences in overall attractiveness and attractiveness at a construct level between PE and CE. The reason for this was that the researcher believed that the 'ideals' PE would have about employment would be different to the actual reality of the jobs of CE.

Interest Value

From the data collected and analysed, it was noted that there was a statistical difference in interest value attractiveness between PE and CE. PE found interest value to be more attractive than did CE. Researchers Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) outline how the closer the attributes desired by PE are to the value propositions offered by an organisation, the more attractive the organisation becomes to PE. In the case of organisation X, PE scored interest value as the most attractive proposition of the organisation. It is very useful for organisation X to have this information especially in a time of significant talent shortages. This result can be used by the organisation to align their value propositions and increase their ability to attract desired talent.

Saini *et al.*, (2013) used Berthon *et al.*, (2005) employer attractiveness scale among PE, however, the researchers found a different outcome in relation to the most important attributes. In their study, PE scored development value and social value as the most important. In this study, the researcher found that PE scored interest value as the most important. There are many

reasons that could have contributed to the difference in results such as; Saini *et al.*, (2013) surveying a wider population consisting of 191 students from a number of schools. Their questionnaire related to a number of organisations across a number of sectors

Economic Value

The research reported no difference in economic value attractiveness between PE and CE. Towers Watson (2012-2013) identified that the design of a rewards programme is the most opportune way an organisation can stand out from their competitors. A strategically designed EVP is capable of attracting, retaining, motivating and engaging employees and driving the overall success of a business. Organisation X can use this information the design and develop their EVP and retention policies. Rucci *et al.*, (1998) suggest that organisations that see their employees as their first customers are more successful in keeping their external customers satisfied as the employee's take better care of them. As noted by Berthon *et al.*, (2005) employee behaviour can both positively and negatively affect the brand values of an organisation if their behaviour is inconsistent with advertised values. Once employers are aware of what is important to their staff they can incorporate the elements into their EB strategy, therefore, satisfying their internal customers and the knock on effect resulting in their external customers being satisfied. From the findings of the research project, it is possible to see how each group ranked the importance of values. In descending order, CE rated; economic value, development value and application value, social value, interest value. By contrast, PE rated; interest value, social value and application value, development value, economic value. The findings of this study relate to Sivertzen *et al.*, (2013), which found that non-monetary values were more important among PE.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

This section looks at the limitations of the study, providing methods of improvement to further research this study.

The main limitation to this study is that it only looked at one organisation in the ICT sector in Ireland and as a result, the sample size population was small. The use of a larger sample, across a variety of organisations in the ICT sector in Ireland would provide more robust findings that could be reflected on the ICT sector as a whole. This study can only discuss the ICT sector in relation to organisation X.

A second limitation to the study is the methodology. In this study, the researcher used quantitative methods of research only. Quantitative methods of research can only assume that participants are answering the questions truthfully. There is the possibility that potential and CE may answer the survey the way they think it should be answered. It is also difficult to determine how engaged participants are as they may have fears regarding confidentiality. For further research, the researcher recommends using a mixed methods approach. A mixed methods approach provides a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative methods would allow for more questions to be asked and opinions to be shared.

Thirdly, the time frame of the study is considered a limitation. As EB is a long term strategy for organisations, the researcher would recommend carrying out a longitudinal study to conduct more in depth research.

Finally, for future research it would be valuable to conduct a similar analysis, however, this time to include the variable 'Gender'. This would be useful for researchers to identify the

organisational attributes that attract males versus females to organisations in the ICT sector in Ireland. Currently the ICT sector is experiencing a significant gender gap and by having this information, HR practitioners could develop strategies to combat the issue.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter provided a discussion of the findings in light of the literature. Overall, it was noted that there is no difference in employer attraction between PE and CE in light of organisation X. On a construct level, differences are evident; interest value scored most important to PE. The chapter discussed how employers can use this information to align and develop their EB strategies. The limitations of the study were acknowledged, and methods of improvement for further research discussed. The following chapter provides an overall conclusion for the study and its findings. It will also look at recommendations for HR professionals to implement the findings of the study.

6. Chapter Six – Conclusion & Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

The aim of this research was to determine if differences existed in employer attractiveness between PE and CE in the ICT sector in Ireland, in relation to organisation X. The ICT sector in Ireland is currently experiencing rapid growth. Ireland has become the second largest exporter of computer and IT services in the world and has attracted 8 out of the top 10 global IT companies (Enterprise Ireland, 2015). As a result of the rapid growth, the demand for IT skills has grown by 15 per cent in the last year alone (Eardley, 2016). A combination of the factors outlined means that organisations need to position themselves competitively to attract and retain talent. EB is a relatively new concept in the area of human resource management. It is the process of how a firm markets what it has to offer to prospective and existing employees

(Walker, 2007). Minchington (2014) suggests that as talent shortages increase globally, organisations need to focus on their EB strategies. The researcher was interested in determining if differences existed between PE and CE in relation to employer attractiveness in the ICT sector in Ireland. The researcher believed this data would be useful to HR practitioners, as they could develop EB strategies that incorporated the different elements each group found attractive. This would in turn, enhance the attraction and retention within the organisation.

The research conducted found that overall; there is no difference in the importance of values of employer attractiveness between PE and CE in relation to organisation X. However, when employer attractiveness was broken down into the values that determine attractiveness, one difference was noted. PE found interest value attributes more attractive than CE. This information is useful for HR practitioners developing EB strategies. It shows employers that there is no need to develop complex strategies to incorporate different elements that will attract different groups.

Although no significant differences were found between the two groups in this study, the findings cannot be implied on the ICT sector in Ireland as a whole. The researcher only gathered data from a sample of PE and a sample of CE and conducted the study in relation to one organisation in the ICT sector in Ireland.

6.2 Recommendations

The findings of this research reported that overall there is no difference in the importance of values of employer attractiveness between PE and CE in relation to organisation X. However, on a construct level, PE did find interest values more attractive than CE. As a result, it is

recommended that HR practitioners develop their EB strategies so that they combine elements of each of the values of attractiveness. The researcher has identified cost effective examples for each of the values:

Interest Value

The organisation both values and makes use of your creativity - the organisation could allow a specific amount of time per week for employees to work on their own ideas individually and within a team. By doing so, employees will feel valued, and at the same time the organisation has the ability to benefit as new ways of doing things may emerge.

Social Value

A fun working environment – set up a sports and social committee, made up of elected members of staff who can organise after work events and team bonding. Google's event Googleween is an example of a social event that contributes to the fun environment.

Economic Value

Job security within the organisation – provide job security to valuable employees. Instead of offering short term contracts, offer permanent contracts with probationary periods of up to 11 months. Within this time frame, an employee's ability should be evident and there is still significant time to terminate employment without legal and cost implications.

Development Value

Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular organisation – ensure there is a corporate social responsibility committee within the organisation who are responsible for organising voluntary activities within the local community.

Application Value

Provides opportunity to teach others what you have learned – after employees attend any training courses, advise management to encourage employees to share this knowledge with their teams.

6.3 Personal Learning Statement

I found the dissertation process to be a challenging experience; however, I feel I have gained beneficial skills that I will carry forward to my professional career.

Two of the skills I feel I have development significantly are my research skills and my academic writing skills. I have developed my methods of research as prior to the dissertation I had never completed a research methodology. I acquired many new skills from this.

From the dissertation process I was introduced to a new software package; SPSS. Initially I found the programme difficult to use and to navigate, however, I figured it out with the aid of books and resources available in NCI and I overcame this difficulty. As a result, I would be confident using SPSS in the future.

Overall, I am very happy with my performance throughout the dissertation process. Whilst I did experience challenges, I managed to overcome them. The experience of encountering challenges forced me to learn new skills and further enhance my problem solving skills.

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2. Chapter Eight – Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1: Cover letter provided with the Survey

Dear Sir/Madame,

My name is Aimée Crowe. I am currently studying a master's degree in human resource management at the National College of Ireland. I am researching the similarities/differences in the importance of values of employer attractiveness among prospective and CE in the ICT sector in Ireland, in respect of organisation X.

This is a short survey and all responses will remain anonymous. If you have any questions, please contact me by sending an email to aimee.crowe@student.ncirl.ie.

Thank you for your response.

Aimée Crowe.

9.2 Appendix 2: The Employer Attractiveness Scale (Berthon *et al.*, 2005)

How important are the following attributes held by an employer?

Instructions

Listed below is a series of statements in relation to employer attributes. There are five employer attribute values, each with five statements related to them. With respect to organisation X, please indicate the degree of importance of each value to you by selecting a number from 1 to 5 using the scale below.

1 = Not important

2 = Slightly important

3 = Moderately important

4 = Important

5 = Very important

Interest Value

1. Working in an exciting environment
2. Innovative employer – novel work practices/forward-thinking
3. The organisation both values and makes use of your creativity

4. The organisation produces high-quality products and services
5. The organisation produces innovative products and services

Social Value

1. A fun working environment
2. Having a good relationship with your superiors
3. Having a good relationship with your colleagues
4. Supportive and encouraging colleagues
5. A happy working environment

Economic Value

1. Good promotion opportunities within the organisation
2. Job security within the organisation
3. Hands-on interdepartmental experience
4. An above average basic salary
5. An attractive overall compensation package

Development Value

1. Recognition/appreciation from management
2. A springboard for future employment
3. Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular organisation

4. Feeling more self-confident as a result of working for a particular organisation
5. Gaining career-enhancing experience

Application Value

1. A humanitarian organisation – gives back to society
2. Provides opportunity to apply what was learned at a tertiary institution
3. Provides opportunity to teach others what you have learned
4. Acceptance and belonging
5. The organisation is customer-orientated