Marketing Meets Human Resources:

A Study of Employer Branding Practices in Canada

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to find out the current Employer Branding Practices being used by a sample of companies in Canada. The goal was to find out how companies were creating awareness of their employer brands, how they influenced their brand consideration and feelings and judgements about that brand; and how it all came together in reflecting the overall employer branding strategy. This was achieved by interviewing the key Human Resource influencers in fifteen companies in Canada who were regarded by external awarding bodies as great employers.

The results of the interviews with a sample of companies in Canada revealed that the employer branding model was split into two separate parts: an internal model and an external model. Internally, the sample companies indeed had very well designed and coordinated strategies for managing and ensuring that their current employees were aware of and considered the attributes of their employer brand, had positive feelings and judgements about their employers. Overall the internal employer branding strategy although not specifically referred to by that name achieved the ultimate goal of creating

brand resonance among current employees. However, noticeably absent was a coordinated effort to project that positive employer brand externally. There was very little collaboration between the Human Resources departments and the Marketing departments to create awareness and consideration of the employer brand among potential applicants. Companies instead heavily relied on their current networks, employees, clients, recruiters and the community to project and sell their employer brand externally.

It is therefore recommended that companies take control of managing their employer brand externally just as they do internally. A model combining the various aspects of the internal employer branding strategy that can be used to influence potential applicants' awareness and consideration of an employer during their job search has been proposed. In order for this model to be successful, Human Resources will have to work with Marketing to devise the best way to accurately and consistently project the internal employer brand image externally using one continuous model.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Background

Google – what thoughts immediately come to your mind when you think of Google as an employer? Have you previously worked at Google? Have you previously spoken to any Google employees? How have you arrived at your evaluation of Google as an employer?

If you thought that Google is '*the'* place to work then you are not alone. Each year "Universum Global reveals the list of organisations that have a competitive edge in employer reputation, surveying over two hundred thousand students in top universities throughout twelve of the world largest economies to determine the World's Most Attractive Employer. Google is at the top of the list this year and has been for the previous four years. (Universum, 2013). That is the power of Employer Branding.

The idea of employer branding was first proposed in the nineties when pioneering researchers such as Tim Ambler and Simon Barrow sought to assess the application of brand management techniques to address the Human Resource Management concerns of the day (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). These researchers were looking for innovative ways for companies to attract and keep the best talent and proposed using a company's existing marketing resources and capabilities to add value to its human resources recruitment and retention efforts. This idea took root among the research community who were eager to explore the application and consequences of combining the two previously separate areas of Marketing and Human Resources. Through the publications of their research articles the idea of employer branding started to gain mainstream consideration.

The mainstream consideration of the idea of employer branding arose from the effects of prevailing labour market conditions and the increasing demand for employee engagement resulting in the need for employers to find innovative ways of attracting and keeping the best talent. While at any given time there are several ideas on employee attraction and retention being proposed, this idea of employer branding specifically took root because it presented companies with a recipe to reorganize current resources, capabilities and their core competency of their brand power to achieve the desired outcome of "winning the war for talent" to ultimately gain above average returns.

All companies have a brand; however it is only the companies who are actively developing and marketing the brand that have control over it. "If the brand is considered to be the net present value of the cumulative trusts that the company's past marketing efforts have earned from customers then a brand may be considered to be a dynamic interface between an organization's actions and the customers' interpretations" (Chernatony, 2006).   Therefore, whether collaborating with existing external partners or building the employer brand from the inside out, the process involves the organization, and the mobilization and communication of the key elements of the company's image and reputation that contribute to creating a desirable and distinctive work environment (Gomes and Neves, 2011).

While the idea of Employer Branding has been studied in the research and it has made its way to mainstream discussions, its practical application has been slow in coming as companies face certain challenges in its implementation. In 2012, Universum conducted a survey of over two thousand professionals who were actively working on building their company's employer brand and the results of that survey revealed certain challenges that

these professionals anticipated they would be facing until 2015. The results of that survey revealed that while thirty nine percent of them were working on building a global employer brand by the year 2015, thirty nine percent of professionals struggled to gain funding and co-operation within their organization to meet their employer branding objectives, forty five percent found it difficult to differentiate their company and forty one percent of them had difficulty defining metrics to measure and follow-up on their employer branding initiatives and (Universum, 2012) .

As more and more companies overcome these challenges and establish their employer brand, it is the companies left without such a strategy who will struggle to attract talent (Kucherov and Zavyalova, 2011). Therefore, as the concept of employer branding moves further along the developmental paradigm from theory to practice, the most successful employer branding strategies as exemplified by Google, Microsoft, Apple, IBM and GE will attract the best talent needed to drive companies innovative successes.

1.1 Need for the study

The previous international research largely centred on identifying the dimensions of and measuring the elements of employer branding from the perspective of the employer and employee (Berthon et al, 2005; Knox and Freeman, 2006; King et al, 2012). However, before employer branding can be measured and assess in the Canadian context, research needs to be conducted to find out it prevalence and stages of development in the Canadian context.

This research will prove valuable to Canadian companies as they seek to cope with the current competitive landscape and changing labour market conditions. *Figure 1* provides a summary of this external environment.

Figure 1: Drivers of Employer Branding

The fundamental nature of competition is changing. More and more it is observed that the most successful companies are the ones who are able to recognize new opportunities and act on them creatively and innovatively (Robert Ployhart, 2006). This ability to recognize and act on new opportunities is facilitated by global trade and by the ubiquity of information technologies resulting from their declining cost and increasing accessibility. In this new environment, not only are traditional sources of competitive advantage such as company size, market share and large marketing budgets more vulnerable but they also erode

rapidly and so are not as effective as they once were in terms of helping companies earn above-average returns (Hitt et al, 2013).   As a resource, the importance of the knowledge that employees contribute to the process of creating shareholder value in a company is increasing in today's competitive landscape (Wilden et al, 2010). "The Brookings Institution estimates that intangible resources contribute approximately eighty five percent of that value. The probability of achieving strategic competitiveness is enhanced for the firms that develop the ability to capture intelligence transform it into usable knowledge and diffuse it rapidly throughout the company. Therefore firms must develop (e.g., through training programs) and acquire (e.g. by hiring educated and experienced employees) knowledge, integrate it into the organization to create capabilities and then apply it to gain competitive advantage" (Hitt et al, 2013).

While the demand for knowledge workers is increasing, the supply of labour in Canada and the country on the whole is decreasing.   The Globe and Mail citing Statistics Canada reports that retiring baby boomers will slow the rate of growth in Canada's labour force to a crawl over the next 20 years (The Globe and Mail, 2012).   As a result it is anticipated that the demand for talented and skilled labour will surpass the supply. As the baby boomers gradually move out of the workforce, the fastest growing segment of the workforce is generation Y. Numbering more than 12 million they represent more than one-third of Canada's population and are the largest demographic cohort to come after the baby boomers. Compared to the previous generations, "generation Y is the most educated and most diverse generation in Canada's history and the first to have more women than men to obtain postsecondary education credentials" (Jowett et al, 2013) Generation Y are highly educated, very comfortable with technology and diversity and

have a strong need for recognition and reward . They have also been described in the literature as being flexible and able to quickly adapt to a rapidly changing environment. While this generation's comfort with change, technology and diversity are ideal characteristic for the highly competitive environment demanding rapid innovation, it also means that these employees will not hesitate to leave the job if they feel that it does not meet their needs and expectations. Therefore, employer branding is a very good way to ensure that the correct match between the needs and expectation of the prospective employee and that of the company from the very beginning of the employment relationship.

1.2 Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to provide a better understanding of employer branding in Canada. Therefore, the following research questions will be addressed:

1. Are Canadian companies currently using employer branding strategies?
2. How are companies creating awareness about their employer brands?
3. How are employers shaping the feelings and judgements associated with their brands among current and potential employees?
4. How are the results of employer branding strategies being measured or tracked?
5. What are the barriers to implementing such a strategy?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Definition and Overview of Employer Branding

The most ubiquitous types of brands are product and service brands. These brands are designed to make a company's product and service stand out in the market place and in the minds of consumers by giving them a unique identity, name, symbol, design or benefits and these bands are usually managed by the Marketing department. Also popular are corporate brands. A corporate branding strategy involves giving a product the name of the company, for example Shell, Apple, Mercedes. This is done in the hopes of having the corporate brand equity translate into product brand equity. However, "the corporate brand is fundamentally different from the product and service brand in terms of disciplinary scope and variety of stakeholders" (Balmer and Gary, 2003).

Unlike product, service and corporate brands, the employer brand is a relatively new concept. As such researchers have presented several different perspectives on this definition. The most obvious is to liken the employer brand to that to the product brand and corporate brand. As one would imagine, a company's employer brand should be consistent with its product and corporate brand. "The employer brand is employment-specific, characterizing the firm's identity as an employer and it is directed at both internal and external audiences whereas product and corporate branding efforts are primarily directed at an external audience" (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). "The benefits the employer brand offers employees parallel those that a conventional (product) brand offers to consumers: (1) developmental and/or useful activities (functional); (2) material

or monetary rewards (economic); and (3) feelings such as belonging, direction and purpose (psychological). (Ambler and Barrow, 1996) However, while one of the goals of product and service branding is to increase sales volume, the purpose of employer branding is to increase the quality of applicants.

Some of the many definitions of employer brand are as follows:

"The package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company" (Ambler and Barrow, 1996).

"Creating an employer brand is a targeted, long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm" (Sullivan, 2004).

"An employer brand is an articulation of your company culture and as such should be a carefully crafted message which can be delivered in several modalities which preserve the authenticity and modality of the message as this message could be spread virally through technology, dialogue and employee interaction" Lizz Pellet (2006).

"The employer brand is a combination of what your business values, offers and rewards, marrying what your brand promises outside with what your experience demands inside because your employer brand is a promise to your employees to provide an experience that in return will motivate their commitment to deliver your customer brand. Essentially it is about a relationship, between your business and your people" (Sartain and Schumann, 2006). A review of the definitions of the employer brand would reveal a

common trend in the interpretation of the concept. Most of the researchers believe that a successful employer brand has both a functional and psychological or emotional dimension. The employer brand is developed from business strategy and reflects the company's image. The degree of attractiveness of the company's image can in turn be leveraged as brand equity to drive recruitment, retention and the overall productivity efforts of the company. However it is observed that some of the definitions are more internally focused such as Sullivan and Chernatony and others are more externally focused such Ambler and Barrow and Backhaus and Tikoo's definitions.

In order to fully capture the various stages of development of employer branding in Canada, the researcher has decided to take a more comprehensive view of the definition of employer branding, choosing to investigate what companies are doing to create and influence that brand both internally and externally.

Kevin Keller, in describing how to build a strong brand, created the brand resonance model which includes four sequential steps: brand identity, brand meaning, brand responses, brand relationships (Keller, 2013).

Figure 2: Keller's Brand Resonance Model (Keller, 2013)

Each of these steps in figure 2 is dependent on successfully completing the previous step. Although Keller devised these steps to guide the development of the product/consumer brand, in keeping with the focus of this study, the researcher will use the essence of this model to guide the investigation into the Canadian companies' employer branding efforts.

While the previous research has explored the various aspects of these four steps, no one has yet put the pieces together to assess the development of the whole process of employer branding. The rest of the literature review will present an overview of each of the four steps and some of the related research relevant to each step.

2.1 Brand Identity

<u>Who are you as an employer?</u>

The first stage of developing the employer brand is clearly defining your identity – who you are as an employer - as this plays a critical role in both anchoring and differentiating the brand in the mind of the consumer (Barrow and Mosley, 2005). The brand identity can be defined by addressing the brands points of difference when compared to competitors, company history, culture and values and how it communicates these to its stakeholders. (Chernatony, 2006; Kapferer, 2012). The purpose of establishing a brand identity is to specify the brand's meaning, aim and personality so as to target the right audiences with the right brand messages. Having a brand identity creates clarity of direction, shining the spot light on the aspects of the brand that must stay and those that need to be changed or realigned.

The employees are responsible for delivering on the brand promise, bringing to reality the external brand perception and conveying the brand's persona , yet, "internal branding doesn't always receive as much time, money or efforts as external branding programs receive" (Keller, 2013). The development of an accurate brand identity involves a lot of introspective analysis on the part of the company, in the form of input from all of its internal stakeholders. The employees are the internal customers who directly influence the external customers' experience with the brand. Employees play a crucial role in brand building because all sources of brand identity are based on the decisions and actions of employees. They have a major direct or indirect influence on the customer brand experience through their responsibility for the quality of the organizations products and services and through their role as internal supplier/service provider (Burmann and Zeplin, 2004; Keller, 2013). Only when there is unified internal consensus on the nature of the employer brand identity can it be confidently and successfully presented to external stakeholders.

The employer brand identity is reflected to external stakeholders in the form of the employer image. In terms of brand management, identity comes first followed by image (Kapferer, 2012). Therefore, before projecting an image to the public the company must know exactly what it wants to project. Externally, this presents a challenge for organizations within the same industry because they often have the same job related factors and as such are not able to define a unique identity based on these factors.

 An effective company identity will reflect the brand, will be liked by customers, will meet customers' needs for self-expression, will be consistent with customers'

expectations of the brand, and will define the spirit with which the company will approach future actions (Parker, 2002).   This view is shared by Lievens and Highhouse (2003) who discovered that "it is easier for applicants to differentiate among companies on the basis of trait descriptors such as innovative, competent, prestigious and outdoorsy versus traditional job and company attributes." It is important for companies to create an identity that stands out from the competition because what people know or think they know about a company influences to a great extent how they respond to the given employer in the various recruitment phases (Cable and Turban, 2001).

An employer brand identity that is clearly developed and understood internally will provide a compelling brand promise to both current and potential employees' that mirrors the brand promise to customers. The result of delivering a consistently positive image surrounding management and business practices would make a company an attractive, 'good place to work'.   The company may choose to leverage its employer brand identity as it would a product to ensure that it attracts the right people.

2.2 Brand Meaning

What are you?

- Performance: How is your employer brand experience meeting your employees' needs?

- Imagery: What are some of the most notable intangible descriptors associated with your employer brand?

Performance

A brand is a perceptual entity rooted in reality (Keller, 2013). This means that a consumer will create a perception of a product, service or company based on how they interact with the brand promise, the brand elements, the brand expectations and the brand persona. At the heart of employer branding is the employment experience. When employees think about the employer brand they think about how they experience the brand on a daily basis through their work activities. This experience shapes their perception and behaviour in delivering the brand promise during their service encounters. A strong brand requires efficient employees who work seamlessly to actualize the brand's vision. As such organizations need to attract and engage employees who believe in that company's goals and aspirations (Oladipo et al, 2013). They also need to invest in, promote and align their training, motivation, rewards and recognition and performance management systems to help and encourage their current employees to deliver on service promise.

Brand performance transcends the products ingredients and features to include dimensions that differentiate the brand. Five important types of attributes and benefits often underlie product brand performance: primary ingredients and supplementary features; product reliability, durability and serviceability; Service effectiveness, efficiency and empathy; Style and design; price (Keller, 2013). In the same way several researchers have sought to explore the various dimensions that differentiate the employer brand. Potential employees compare the perceived functional, economic and psychological

benefits stated or implied in the brand promise with their own needs to ascertain whether they 'fit' with the organisation (Foster et al. 2010).

Drawing from the employer branding frameworks developed by Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004, Mosley, 2007, Maxwell and Knox, 2008 and Wilden et al, 2010, and arranged under Keller's five attributes of brand performance, the key employer branding dimensions are listed in the table below:

Table 1: Dimensions of the Employer Brand

Primary Ingredients and Supplementary Features	*Reliability, Durability and Serviceability*	*Effectiveness, Efficiency, Empathy*	*Style and Design*	*Rewards*
Organizational Identity	Past Successes	Interpersonal relationships	Type of work	Employee, compensation, rewards and recognition
Organizational culture	Current Standing	Manager-workforce relations	Work Environment	
Organizational values	Expected Future Successes	Opportunities for growth and development	Attributes of workforce	Work life balance
Company and job profile	Perceived employment risks	Opportunities for upward mobility	Management style	
Employment conditions	Employer credibility	Performance measures		

Imagery

The way in which an organization defines the various dimensions of its employer brand will ultimately define the image of that brand. The various dimensions of the employer

brand experience in table 1 are intended to shape current and potential employee' brand attitude, generate distinctive brand behaviours and ultimately reinforce the kind of distinctive employment branding style that will add value to employees' work experience and differentiate the organization from its competitors.

A potential employee's appraisal of an employer brand is prompted by factors including their awareness and perceptions of the employer brand which may be developed through word of mouth, personal experience and marketing strategies (Wallace et al, 2014). Therefore, an organization needs to ensure that the information communicated about its employer brand is unambiguous, instantly recognisable, consistently reinforced across all information sources and that it credibly reflects the realistic employment promise. It is interesting to note that when formulating an image of a potential employer, information based on firsthand experience and from personal sources and impartial commentators is viewed as more credible by potential employees than company-generated information (Wallace et al, 2014)

Employer brand awareness refers to the extent to which the brand is recognized in the market. This recognition may be either positive or negative based on the employment experience which is shaped by several factors including how the brand is represented throughout the employment life cycle. Some various touch points that influence brand perception include career websites, social networks, and word-of-mouth and community involvement. Employer brand associations are also influenced by the functional aspects of employment, such as compensation and benefits, training and career development opportunities and emotional aspects of employment, such as the reputation of the

company and CEO, management culture and current staff relations. Employer brand loyalty is demonstrated through the behaviours of current employees in terms of their word–or –mouth or social media promotions of the employer brand along with the willingness to remain employed with the company.

2.3 Brand Feelings and Judgements

<u>"How do your current and potential employees evaluate you as an employer?</u>

Going back to the example of Google in the introduction, what comes to mind when you think of that employer brand; what are some of the positive aspects of that employer brand; what makes it unique as an employer? Your answers to these questions are the judgements (opinions) and feelings (emotional responses) about Google's employer brand that are associated with that brand's strengths, favourability and uniqueness. Just like Google all companies have an employer brand that has developed over time and is a reflection of the interaction of the company with its stakeholders. However, unlike Google many companies do not actively manage their employer brand.

Making an employer brand promise is only the first step. Companies have to ensure that the actual experience of employees and potential employees are consistent with the brand promise. Since brand reputation is built on perceptions "a successful and structured brand assimilation program will ensure that employees understand the meaning of your brand how their contribution to the brand promise can translate into observable, actionable behavior" (Prophet, 2002). Failure to deliver on the brand promise will result in lower

retention rates and higher recruitment costs. Therefore it is important that a clear consistent message is delivered throughout the employee's recruitment and employment life cycle.

The best way to discover how current and potential employees feel about your employer brand is to ask them. Depending on the timeline, company size and budget, this may be done through a series of focus groups or questionnaires. In addition, " traditional Human Resource Management measures such as employee satisfaction, turnover rates, response to recruitment advertisements and tenure are all sound indicators to assess the success of communicating and delivering on the promise that the organization is a great place to work" (King et al, 2011).

2.4 Brand Resonance

<u>What is your relationship like with your current and potential employees?</u>
The ultimate goal of employer branding is to engender in current and potential employees a sense of loyalty, attachment, community and active engagement with the company. The result of these combined outputs is brand resonance which may be characterized by the intensity or the depth of the psychological bond that people have with the employer brand, as well as the level of activity directly associated to this loyalty (Keller 2013). Not only can brand resonance be a goal that can be aspired to, but it can also be used to assess the success of the employer branding strategy providing the answer to the question: How have our employer branding activities influenced employee loyalty, attachment, engagement and building a sense of community here at our company.

Critical to achieving brand resonance, is creating meaningful relationships. Just as people have identities and personalities that influence their relationships with others and vice versa, so does the employer brand. "In 2012 employed Canadian spent an average of 36.6 hours per week at work" (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2013). With such a large amount a time spent with an employer on a weekly basis, it is important that a good relationship be established right from the start. Strong, positive relationships are created when the employment relationship helps the employee achieve both practical and emotional goals. "It is therefore important that once a relationship has been identified research is undertaken with employees to evaluate their views about the desired relationship. A thorough understanding of what employees want from the employment relationship along with a revision of the current relationship strategy would result in a greater likelihood of employer brand success" (Chernatony, 2006).

A successful employer branding strategy will result in a loyal, committed employment relationship that will be manifested by high levels of engagement and the creation of a sense of community. Some examples of employee brand resonance behaviours include willingness to invest time, energy and resources in the employer brand, going above and beyond what is expected; formally and informally representing the employer brand; proactively telling stories to increase potential candidate awareness of best practices; continuously developing brand related skills; creating brand centric language to reflect kinship and affiliation with others in the company; employees positive desire to maintain a working relationship with the brand in the future; demonstrating overall brand citizenship behaviours (Burmann and Zeplin, 2004; John Sullivan, 2004; Bolemer and Schroder, 2006; Shaari et al, 2011; Keller, 2013).

2.5 Implications of Employer Branding for Human Resources

The adoption, development and application of an employer branding strategy by Human Resources will lead to a change in business as usual with regard to recruiting new talent into the company. This is because the application of a branding strategy would lead the Human Resources Department to "reach out to potential applicants just as they would reach out to consumers by focusing on what 'the applicants' want in terms of jobs and careers as opposed to their current strategy of "selling" the vacant job to them" (Belcourt, 2014).

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is an outcome-driven concept. An engaged employee experiences a combination of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job involvement and feelings of empowerment. Management can have a direct positive influence in this area through clear and honest communication, the results of which are directly measurable and correlated with employee performance (David Macleod, 2013; David L.V. Rooy and Ken Oehler, 2013)

One of the best ways of obtaining feedback about current employee engagement levels is through a survey. "By using rigorously designed surveys to score the company on the range of human resource management practices, it's possible to benchmark human resource management, capabilities, identify strengths and weakness, and link improvements or backsliding in specific areas with improvements or shortcomings in organizational performance (Laurie Bassi and Daniel McMurrer, 2007). As such, companies that do not survey their employees to assess their levels of engagement are at a

competitive disadvantage because " these surveys can be a powerful tool to provide management with insight into what is going well, what needs improvement in order to drive employee motivation, retention, and productivity" (David L.V. Rooy and Ken Oehler, 2013).

Employee Attraction

The key to attracting desired potential candidates is to present them with the attributes of the employer brand that most clearly and honestly exemplify the strengths of the company along with the qualities that will make those candidates successful in that working environment. This would require the Human Resource Department to review its current job descriptions and advertisements to include not only the functional, experiential and skill requirements but also to include a personality dimension that is aligned to that of the company. Not only must this personality dimension be aligned with that of the company, but careful thought has to be placed into identifying and matching the right personality to the right job so that it does not result in the adverse effect discrimination or other violation of current and potential employees' human rights. While a well-designed employer branding strategy can increase attraction to the company, if such a strategy has even the smallest hint of trying to exclude members of a protected class it will repel applicants in general. In addition, the negative press generated will irreparably damage the reputation of the company not only as an employer but this will adversely affect the product, service, and corporate brand.

2.6 Is Employer branding the same as Corporate Reputation Management?

As suggested by the last sentence in section 2.5 above, a poorly developed employer brand can negatively affect the reputation of a company. However, employer branding and corporate reputation management are not the same thing. Corporate reputation is a

value judgement about the company's attributes that has typically, developed over time as a result of the company's consistent performance, reinforced by effective communication. "The principal stakeholders with whom most large corporations must be concerned are: customers, distributors and retailers, suppliers, joint venture partners, financial institutions and analysts, shareholders, government regulatory agencies, social action organizations, the general public, and employees" (Gray and Balmer, 1998). Employer branding on the other hand is focused on helping current and potential employees understand why the company is a great place to work. While it will have an impact on the reputation of the corporation, it is much narrower in scope and more focused on a subset of the corporate brand's stakeholders.

2.7 Unique Contribution to the Literature

Figure 3: Positioning of Current Research

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                          │   Employer Branding     │
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Research                  └─────────────────────────┘
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         │Dimensions of │  │Branding          │  │Branding            │
         │attractiveness│  │                  │  │                    │
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This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge in the area of employer
branding by providing a Canadian perspective on employer branding practices of locally
based national and multi-national companies.

As the top executives in a company are the key influencers and champions of new initiatives such as employer branding, it is believed that they would be the best resources to provide early insight on the conceptualization and development of their employer brand.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Research Design

Exploratory research is often conducted to investigate an area that is currently not very well understood and unclear in scope (Marshall and Rossman, 1989). Currently in the Canadian context, there has not been an in depth study to investigate the degree and extent of the adoption of employer branding strategies in Canada. The factors that drive or impede employer branding in the Canadian context are also not known. Furthermore, a literature search did not reveal any previous studies that have applied the Keller's brand resonance model to assess the various stages of employer brand development. Given these factors, an exploratory design study using a qualitative methodology was deemed appropriate to explore the stages of employer brand development in Canada.

The research will rely on structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. The purpose of the interviews will be to ask top executives base in Atlantic Canada and operating within a National or Multi-National company to reflect on their company's employer brand with particular interest in the brand identity, brand meaning, company influence on brand feelings and judgements and the overall degree of current and potential employee connection with their employer brand.

The interview method of data collection has the advantage of obtaining large amounts of in depth, detailed information in a short space of time. The telephone interview in particular, provides the advantage of being economical and giving access to hard- to - reach executives.

The participants in this study comprised of fifteen executives with key responsibility and decision making authority within the Human Resources management function of their private sector company. While these companies had an office in Atlantic Canada, they also had a national and multinational presence.

The executives were sent an email invitation requesting their participation in the research. Upon the expression of interest to take part in the interview for this research project, the Informed Consent form was emailed to them. Then following their email agreement to take part in the research, the managers selected the day and time that they would be available for the interview and the interview was scheduled. In the interest of time, geographic locations and the busy schedules of these executives, telephone interview method was selected over the face- to-face interview method.

The interviews were conducted during the period of November 15th to December 16th 2013, with each lasting between twenty minutes and one hour. Following each interview, the manager was thanked for their participation

3.1 Sampling Design

A random selection of award winning companies operating in Canada was selected and contacted from the services, manufacturing and natural resources industries. Of the sixteen companies contacted fifteen took part in the research. As the focus of this study was to identify best practices, companies that had recently been recognized by an external awards agency for their employment best practices were targeted.

According to Statistics Canada, a small business has 0 to 99 employees, a medium-sized business has 100 to 499 employees, and a large business has 500 or more employees.

This sample was made up of ten large, three medium and two small employers who had

operations in Atlantic Canada in addition to either a national or multi- national presence.

Together these companies employed over a hundred thousand full time employees in

Canada. The length of operations of the sample companies in the region range from ten

years to over one hundred years. A more detailed profile of the sample appears in table 2.

Table 2: Profile of Companies Interviewed

Scope of Operations	Job Title of Interviewee	Company Size	Industry
Multi -National	Senior Manager Staffing and Planning	Large	Services
Multi-National	Human Resource Manager	Large	Manufacturing
Multi-National	Human Resource Manager	Large	Natural Resources
Multi-National	Human Resources Director	Large	Natural Resources
Multi-National	Consultant - Recruitment	Medium	Service
Multi-National	Recruitment Manager – Canada	Large	Manufacturing
Multi-National	Human Resource Manager	Large	Service
Multi-National	Consultant - Recruitment	Large	Service
Multi- National	Executive Vice President	Large	Natural Resources
National	Human Resources Manager	Medium	Service
National	Vice President- Human Resources	Large	Service
National	Vice President	Small	Service
National	Senior Associate Relations Advisor	Large	Service
National	Vice President	Small	Service
National	President	Medium	Service

3.2 Interview Question Design

The topics selected for the interview were based on the research questions. A total of fourteen interview questions were developed and arranged in an interview schedule. This schedule ensured that the same questions were asked of all the participants so that consistent data were generated and comparisons could be drawn across a number of participants.

3.3 Data Preparation for Analysis

Each participating company received an alphabetic code name. After the interview, every answer given by the participant was entered into the computer next to the number that corresponded to the questions on the interview script. Following the entry of the final interview, all of the data received were reviewed to ensure accurate content and placement. Then, the fifteen separate interview transcripts were inputted into QDA Miner, the data analysis software. This software was used to analyse the data to determine, patterns, word frequency and word co-occurrence.

Following this general software analysis, the data was rearranged into subsets of data with the answers being organized according to their corresponding question on the interview transcript with each respondents answer appearing in its own separate paragraph under the question asked. For example all the participants' answers for question one were grouped under question one in fifteen separate paragraphs. Then all of the answers were further reviewed. The details of the themes and patterns for the answers to each of the questions asked appear in the next section on data analysis.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Data

This chapter contains the results of the analysis of the data from the fifteen interview transcripts. It begins with the results of the general analysis of word frequency from QDA Miner and then continues with the more specific analysis of the responses to the individual interview questions.

General Analysis of Interview Transcripts

A general computer generated analysis of the words used by the respondents during the interview revealed that the words most frequently used during the conversation were company, people, work and employee. These words were used by one hundred percent of the respondents in answering the interview questions.

Table 3: Interview Transcript Word Frequency – Most Common Words Used

	FREQUENCY	% SHOWN	% PROCESSED	% TOTAL	NO. CASES	% CASES	TF • IDF
COMPANY	249	6.2%	3.0%	1.1%	15	100.0%	0.0
PEOPLE	153	3.8%	1.9%	0.7%	15	100.0%	0.0
WORK	126	3.1%	1.5%	0.5%	15	100.0%	0.0
EMPLOYEE	93	2.3%	1.1%	0.4%	15	100.0%	0.0
JOB	62	1.5%	0.8%	0.3%	15	100.0%	0.0
EMPLOYEES	112	2.8%	1.4%	0.5%	14	93.3%	3.4
CAREER	56	1.4%	0.7%	0.2%	14	93.3%	1.7
BUSINESS	51	1.3%	0.6%	0.2%	14	93.3%	1.5
STAFF	62	1.5%	0.8%	0.3%	13	86.7%	3.9
PROCESS	48	1.2%	0.6%	0.2%	13	86.7%	3.0
WORKING	40	1.0%	0.5%	0.2%	13	86.7%	2.5
PROGRAM	33	0.8%	0.4%	0.1%	13	86.7%	2.1
CULTURE	63	1.6%	0.8%	0.3%	12	80.0%	6.1
SURVEY	38	0.9%	0.5%	0.2%	12	80.0%	3.7
ORIENTATION	33	0.8%	0.4%	0.1%	12	80.0%	3.2
RECRUITMENT	29	0.7%	0.4%	0.1%	12	80.0%	2.8

TF-IDF in column eight of tables 3 and 4 is a computer generated frequency of the words used in the entire body of the document. In this case the document was the collection of all the interview transcripts. This number is higher for words that occur infrequently. The higher the frequency of a word, the closer the TF-IDF gets to 0.

Table 4: Interview Transcript Word Frequency – words least commonly used

	FREQUENCY	% SHOWN	% PROCESSED	% TOTAL	NO. CASES	% CASES	TF • IDF
STUDENTS	16	0.4%	0.2%	0.1%	4	26.7%	9.2
AWARD	15	0.4%	0.2%	0.1%	4	26.7%	8.6
INDIVIDUALS	13	0.3%	0.2%	0.1%	4	26.7%	7.5
UNIVERSITY	12	0.3%	0.1%	0.1%	6	40.0%	4.8
BRANDING	11	0.3%	0.1%	0.0%	6	40.0%	4.4
COMPETITORS	11	0.3%	0.1%	0.0%	6	40.0%	4.4
REFERRALS	11	0.3%	0.1%	0.0%	6	40.0%	4.4
FIT	16	0.4%	0.2%	0.1%	7	46.7%	5.3
PERSONALITY	13	0.3%	0.2%	0.1%	7	46.7%	4.3
COMMUNICATION	12	0.3%	0.1%	0.1%	7	46.7%	4.0
COMMUNICATE	18	0.4%	0.2%	0.1%	8	53.3%	4.9
BRAND	24	0.6%	0.3%	0.1%	9	60.0%	5.3
CORPORATE	19	0.5%	0.2%	0.1%	9	60.0%	4.2
ENGAGEMENT	17	0.4%	0.2%	0.1%	9	60.0%	3.8
COMPETITOR	16	0.4%	0.2%	0.1%	9	60.0%	3.5
EXPECTATIONS	16	0.4%	0.2%	0.1%	9	60.0%	3.5
MARKETING	25	0.6%	0.3%	0.1%	10	66.7%	4.4

When compared to the high frequency words, the words marketing, brand and engagement featured a lot less prominently in the conversations, with marketing being used in sixty six percent of the interviews and brand and engagement being used in sixty percent of the cases. This analysis suggested that the general tone of the conversation was more broadly focused on a management theme rather than a specific marketing theme.

The participants, who specifically spoke about their employer brand, correlated it to marketing and did so in the following contexts:

- *"Our employer branding is very similar from a marketing standpoint to our whole produce and service branding in terms of look and feel so that there is consistency in the branding."*

- "*As the Director of HR, I am on the branding team with Marketing. We are working closely to develop an employer brand.*"

- "*Our brand is more of an employer brand and not a product brand because we do not have any products in Canada. The only brand that our staff lives and breathes is the employer brand.*"

Specific Analysis

The following section provides a detailed analysis of the answers given to each of the questions asked. Excerpts from the interviews are provided along with the underlying themes and the similarities and differences between the answers given. The data analysis will be organized under the four main headings of Keller's brand resonance model.

4.0 Brand Awareness

If your company could be a celebrity, sports figure, Movie/TV character, historical figure, superhero or fictional character, which one would it be and why?

The purpose of this question was to find out to what extent the personality of the company embodied by its vision and mission were at the top of the mind of the interviewee. Of the fifteen participants, only one declined to answer this question. Of the fourteen who answered, only two gave very similar answers that could be group under the same personality trait.

Although some of the respondents were caught off guard by this question, all of those who answered the question had a clear concise view of the personality traits and the accompanying values and rewards of their company. Some of the sample answers given appear below and the complete summary of personality traits, values and emotional rewards that the respondents used to characterize their employer brand appears in the table that follows:

- *"We would be Sidney Crosby because he embodies a work ethic and a discipline that is rarely seen amongst his peer group. Fundamentally he works harder and he is disciplined and professional and that makes him exceptional. These are the characteristic that we aspire towards."*

- *"If the company were a person it would be someone who has aged but is able to keep up to date with current trends, keeping to its original roots but dominating its current environment. Somewhat like Madonna in the sense that she has longevity in the music industry because she is constantly able to reinvent herself to keep up-to-date on trends and remain relevant."*

- *"I would say it was Green Lantern, because he is a superhero, he saves the day all the time in ways that are surprising. Superman is a bit more predictable, he has more straightforward powers but Green lantern wears a ring and he is a fun loving character, he is goofy and eccentric. He always saves the day but often in an unpredictable fashion."*

- *"It would be an individual who cares about the client and the employee and people in general. It would be Jimmy Stewart in the movie it's A Wonderful Life. His character in the movie was a thoughtful individual, kind, genuinely concerned about people."*

This simple exercise of personifying the employer brand has revealed four distinct

personalities. Each of these personalities would appeal to a different type of employee.

If these companies above were in the same industry and had similar job openings, by

simply looking at the employer brand identities above potential applicants interests would

be peaked towards the company personality that best matched their own. The company

would intern benefit from receiving a greater number of applicants who shared the

company's passion. The complete list of personality traits, values and emotional rewards

appear in the table 5.

Two companies had caring personalities and two companies described their personalities as multi-leveled. The results reveal ten unique company personalities.

Table 5: Summary of Personality Traits, Values and Emotional Rewards

Company	Personality Trait	Values	Emotional Rewards
A	Visionary	Innovation and competition	Dynamic work environment
B & J	Caring	Thoughtfulness	Family centred work environment
C	Methodical	Careful Planning	Reliable and Stable work environment
D	Hard Working	Discipline and Strong Work Ethic	Exceptional Performance
E	Passionate	Peek Attitudes	Fun and Excitement
F	Supportive	Lean business model	Incredible results with limited resources
G & I	Multi-Leveled	Diversity and Flexibility	Challenging work, diverse, global opportunities
H	Confident	Being the best at what we do	Top Performance
K	No response given		
L	Serious	Diligence and hard work	Professionalism
M	Mature	Quality, Safety, Trust, Reliability	Experience, wisdom
N	Unconventional	Flexibility and creativity	Freedom and Fun
O	Enduring	Reinvention and innovation	Growth and Development

How do you communicate your company's personality internally and externally?

Figure 4: Word Co-occurrence Matrix of Participants Answers Concerning

Communication of Company Personality
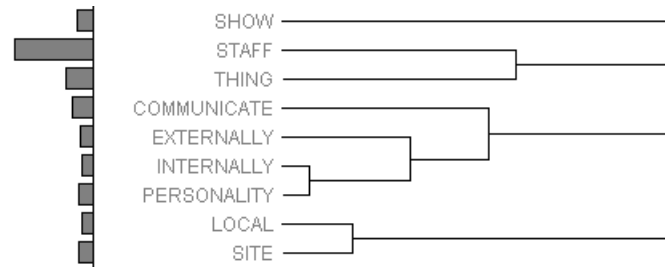
There was no significant difference between the modes of communications used and the size of the companies. However, the large companies had more frequent and organized opportunities to communicate their company personality to current and potential employees.

Company personalities were directly communicated to current staff either, one-on-one, in small groups and through mass communications at throughout the various stages of employment with the company. As can be seen from the word co-occurrence matrix above, the majority of the answers given to this question were focused on staff communications. This is supported by the following interview excerpts below which revealed that the companies were more internally focused on the development and communication of their company personality.

- *"We have a lot of internal meetings that help us ensure that our employees are extremely well versed in the corporate strategy, branding strategy, any changes in the business, on any new products that we have. Marketing developed our orientation*
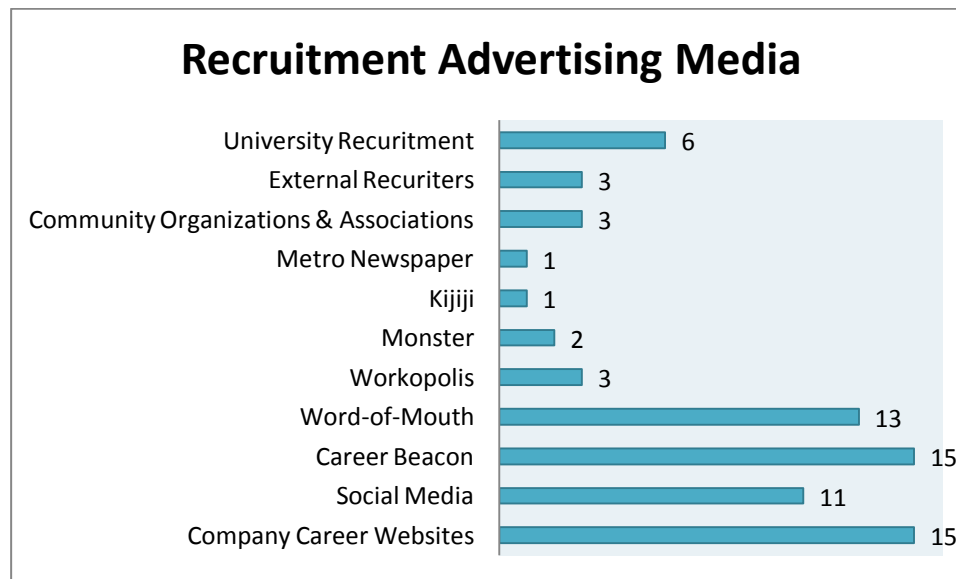
program from a brand messaging perspective. We spend a lot of time in front of our employees making sure they understand what our brand is all about."

- *"Every site has a newsletter; we have an Employee Magazine in Canada where we put in general interest stories. There are a lot of social things that we do and business things that we do to communicate our personality internally. Externally, the company does not do a lot of the promotion of the things that I just mentioned."*

- *"Internally we do have a very good intranet that we use to communicate with staff. The newest ideas and company developments are shared through this site. Example what other departments have done or are currently working on. We also have no communication barriers within the company. Externally: We are currently not satisfied with our current careers page. Right now it only allows for one way communication – I post a job, you see it, you apply. We want to have a more interactive webpage where people can really come and experience what our company is all about   so we are also rebranding our careers page."*

- *"We try to live our passion. So our employees represent our company through the passion for their job and by becoming involved in the community.   We are hoping that this is reflected externally as being refreshing, energetic, lively and passionate."*

- *"The employees within your company are critical so it would make more sense to spend money on things that would help better manage our employees rather than spending on advertising. In this way our employees can be advocates for the company."*

This internal focus on communicating the employer brand personality goes contrary to some of the literature that suggests that companies are more focused on developing their external employer brand image with little focus on internal brand development.

Where does your company promote your employment opportunities in order to get people to think of your company as a place to work? How often is this done?

Figure 5: Advertising Media for Promoting Employment Opportunities

Recruitment Advertising Media

Media	Count
University Recuritment	6
External Recuriters	3
Community Organizations & Associations	3
Metro Newspaper	1
Kijiji	1
Monster	2
Workopolis	3
Word-of-Mouth	13
Career Beacon	15
Social Media	11
Company Career Websites	15

Of the fifteen companies interviewed, four did not use social media. Three of those companies had not found it to be a particularly fruitful recruitment tool and while the other company was considering it for future use. LinkedIn was most popularly used social media among the sample of companies. This site was most often used to fill higher level professional positions that were harder to recruit via the normal channels. Facebook and Twitter were more often used for lower level and administrative positions. Overall social media was more popularly used for non-unionized positions.

In addition to having their own career websites, all the companies used external recruitment websites. The site used by all participants was Career Beacon, followed by Workopolis and Monster. One company also used Kijiji.

One company advertised through industry magazines and one other company advertised in the local Metro newspaper.

Three of the companies recruited through outreach organizations such as OWL (Older, Wiser, Labour Force) and designated group associations such as African Nova Scotian Association.

An additional three of the fifteen companies used external recruiters to fill higher level specialized positions.

Six of the fifteen companies directly recruited through the local college and universities. Of these six, three of them had co-operative educational programs at local universities, three posted vacancies on university career websites. Two of the six companies had an established scholarship programs and one had a comprehensive university recruitment strategy.

All companies posted the jobs internally before they did so externally and the majority of companies relied on word of mouth advertising in the form of referrals from staff or clients and relationships established through community and networking events.

How do you introduce your new employee to your company's personality and culture during the orientation process?

One of the participants explained that new hire is at times a considerable financial investment so you want that person to be successful.

All the companies in the sample with the exception one had an orientation for new staff in place. The orientations were described as having both a structured component with a formal checklist of tasks to be accomplished over a set period of time and a casual component.

The formal orientation involved going through a prepared PowerPoint presentation or video that covered the company history, general mission, vision and values of the company usually in a classroom style setting. Management representatives of the various departments would come in to address the new staff. Further presentations on workplace safety and getting oriented with their new environment would be given followed by a company tour. Also as part of the orientation, seven of the fifteen companies required new employees to take addition training courses either delivered online or with a company trainer so that they would learn their job specific skills.

In addition to the new employee's manager, two of the fifteen companies assigned every new employee with a coach/mentor who would not only be available to them during the orientation phase but rather throughout their employment with the company.

One of the comments made by a participant during the interview was their company culture was not taught directly but rather new employees got immersed in it overtime through the informal aspects of the orientation. Some of the informal aspects of the

orientation included a going out to lunch with the direct supervisor to discussing how the new employee, having an open door policy and regular staff socials.

Does the Marketing Department work with Human Resources to ensure that the brand message communicated externally is also communicated internally to existing employees?

The general consensus was that the Marketing department did not currently work with the Human Resource department to ensure consistency between the corporate and employer brand. While the participants saw the value in the two departments working together, one company did not have a marketing department and only two of the fourteen that did had, had recent collaborations with their marketing departments. These collaborations included a redesign of the careers website, providing content for the social media feed and a review of the corporate branding used in the orientation program.

Three of the participants identified barriers to such a collaboration which included, that the departments historically operated separately and were comfortable in their roles and the structure of the company did not facilitate such collaboration for example one participant pointed out that " our Marketing department is in our international office." Some of excerpts from the interview responses to this question are as follows:

- *"This is one of the strategies that I am currently proposing however, currently we work more so with public relations in terms of branding. To answer your question, it is in the works but we are not there yet."*

- *"I would work with them for things like setting up job ad templates, any print material any advertising material we would take to schools and career fairs."*

- *"This is all done at our central office. All of our recruitment efforts are always aligned with our corporate persona and this is driven by our Marketing and Communications group."*

- *"Our Marketing department is primarily focused externally. I collaborate with the director of marketing off and on but I spend more time with the communications department."*

- *"Our social media feeds which are technically owned by Marketing, I contribute by regularly providing content for those feeds as well."*

- *"Currently we do not have as close a working relationship as we probably could or should have. I think it should be a little more symbiotic. However we collaborate more recently on the redesign of our career web pages."*

The general theme of the responses shows that there is definitely consideration of future ongoing collaborations between the two departments, however this still appears to be a work in progress as no significant progress towards such a collaboration was identified.

4.1 Brand Consideration

Why do your employees say that they like working for your company?

The purpose of this question was to determine the reason behind the consideration of a particular employer brand. The responses are arranged according to the dimensions of employer branding that appeared earlier in the literature review.

An interesting observation is that the majority reasons given by managers for why employee enjoyed working for a company centered around two dimensions of the employer brand specifically style and design of work, opportunities for growth and development and employer credibility.

Table 6: Style and Design Dimension of Employer Branding

Style and Design			
Type of work	*Work Environment*	*Attributes of the work force*	*Rewards*
Opportunities to live their passion and do what interests them	Great place to work Respectful, family oriented, caring, empathetic Fun, professional, energetic, enthusiastic Flexible Challenging work Relaxed environment	Employee goals are aligned with company goals	Great Benefits

Table 7: Reliability, Durability and Serviceability Dimension of Employer Branding

Reliability, Durability and Serviceability	
Employer Credibility	*Expected Future Successes*
Trusted, transparent management practices A place where you can work for the rest of your life Stable employment	Growth organization

Table 8: Effectiveness, Efficiency and Empathy Dimension of Employer Branding

Effectiveness, Efficiency, Empathy	
Manager workforce relations	*Opportunities for growth and development*
Empowered employees	Employee development Rapid skill development Career development opportunities

How are you like you closest competitor and how are you different from your closest competitor?

This question served the purpose of establishing what differentiates the employer brand from that of its competitors.

Table 9: Competitor Similarities and Differences

Competitor Comparison	
Similarities	*Differences*
Products	Resource availability
Services	Standards of performance
Business	Scale of operations, nature and approach to work, business partners, company history
Need for talent	Compensation and benefits

Some of the specific comments appear below:

- *Our employees are able to work with some really exciting clients globally on some really exciting projects all while working right here in Atlantic Canada*
- *Ours has been voted as the most recognizable brand in our industry*
- *They produce similar types of products but they are for instance much smaller than we are.*
- *We are different in terms of the quality of facilities that we offer and the level of care.*
- *We have a lot of career growth opportunities and training and development*

Five of the fifteen interviewees stated that they did not have a direct competitor in Canada. The remaining ten interviewees stated that they offered similar products, services and were in a similar business. Of the ten interviewees, two mentioned that when it comes to talent acquisition, any other company with similar talent needs would be considered a competitor. Of these two interviewees only one company conducts annual

research to gain an understanding of its applicants' perspective of the recruitment process and to determine its top competitors for talent.

- *We do some research on applicant perspective to find out who our top competitors for talent are and year after year.*

The purpose of differentiating your employer brand from that of you competitor is to increase your chances of being the number one choice for top candidates. The first step in creating that differentiation is identifying who your competitors for talent are and what you do better than them.

If a potential candidate was comparing potential employers based on the sample of comments given above, which comments would be most persuasive in attracting that candidate to that company?

What practices do you currently have in place to ensure that talented people consider your company first when looking for a job? How do you ensure that the best potential employees know about you?

All of the interviewees expressed the opinion that relationship building was the best way to ensure that talented people consider their company first when looking for a job. The number one way in which they went about doing this was as follows through relationships with professional networks and clients:

- *We do a lot of relationship building. We use our networks from within.*
- *We rely on staff referrals*
- *We rely on the feedback of our employees, customers and partners to present the company in a positive light.*
- *We have an internal referral program where existing team members are often providing us with good leads on other individuals we might want to interview .*
- *About 50% of job postings get employee referrals. We also get referrals from our customers as well.*

Some other ways in which a handful of other companies choose to build those relationships were potential talent were as follows:

- *"What it comes down to is that we really like to build relationships with our best schools."*
- *"We are very active in the community, we have a good reputation in the community as an employer of choice and we work closely with organizations for designated groups."*

  "We put all our fun activities and fun culture on our Facebook page."

"We encourage people to look at our website, talk to our current staff to see if our company is a right fit."

All of the companies in the sample also used generic advertisements.

- *"We use generic ads and we do not do social media well."*
- *"Right now we are taking a classical approach to recruiting. We advertise for a position and we expect people to apply."*

4.2 Brand Judgements and Feelings

How do you ensure that the promises made during the recruitment process remain consistent with the actual working experience of the employee?

Respondents believed that a clearly structured recruitment process ensured consistency. The most comprehensive way in which this was done was by creating the recruitment message around the company's core values, familiarizing all employees involved in the recruitment process with the competencies being assessed and then and consistently communicating that message among all recruitment channels. Specifically mentioned were:

- *Consistent recruitment message across all channels, Create employee development plans and a career path.*
- *Formal checklist of milestones to be completed, Structured orientation and onboarding process, formal job related training, open door policy.*
- *Structured interviews designed to assess required competencies; we give honest answers, training and development opportunities and a career path.*

All of the companies albeit in varying degrees, used realistic job previews to present an honest view of the job. Some of the realistic job previews mentioned are as follows:

- *We tell the truth, we paint an accurate picture of what it is like to work for the company, both the upsides and the downsides.*

- *We very clearly explain what our expectations are and what we are offering and we live up to that commitment.*

- *We conduct stay interviews, before candidates are interviewed there is a meet and greet, they get to shadow the person doing the role that they are applying for, we let them know that we have fun, but we also have a job to do.*

Some companies used profiling software as one of the tool to determine candidate, job and candidate manager fit during the recruitment process. When an employee is hired, all companies conducted an orientation process the duration of which was one week to one year.

How do you know that you are meeting your employees' expectations?

Figure 6: Word Co Occurrence Matrix : Meeting Employees Expectations
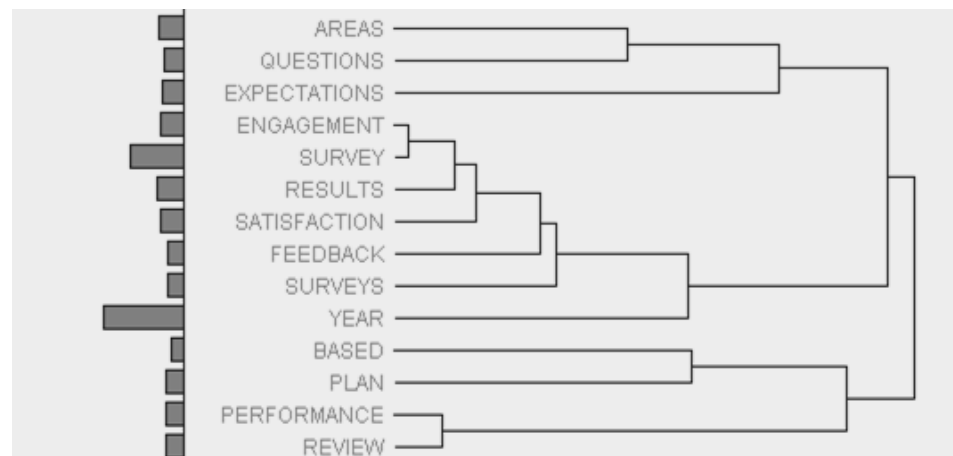
In answering the various questions, the words that the participants consistently used together and as such considered to be similar or related in meaning to the overall theme of the question asked appears in the clusters in figure 6. As revealed by the chart, yearly surveys were the most frequently occurring answer.

The respondents had various methods of ensuring that the company was living up to the employees' expectations during their employment with the company. Thirteen of the companies in the sample surveyed their employees to determine the extent to which they were meeting their expectations. Eleven of these companies conducted the survey once a year, one company did this survey twice a year and the remaining company did this survey every two years.

The other two companies were in the process of developing their surveys.

The most popular type of survey used was the Employee Engagement Survey mentioned by nine participants, followed by the Employee Satisfaction survey mentioned by four of the participants. Of the companies who surveyed their employees, eleven developed and administered their surveys in-house while the other two outsourced this function to an external company who provided summarized results at the end of the process.

Despite the difference in the names of the surveys, the content tested appeared to be the same.

The responses all had a common theme. A sample of these responses appears below:

- *We have one survey done once a year with a lot of questions on satisfaction, diversity and engagement for example: how engaged are you with the company, have you applied for a job within the company in the last year, would you recommend this*

company to a friend.

- *We have regular engagement survey done twice a year. If the results show that the engagement levels are skewing and are not where we want them to be we have one on one meeting with our employees in those businesses to talk about why they choose to stay with the company and ask how we can better engage them as an employee.*

- *We run an employee satisfaction survey every year and we track the results year over year. Some of the questions we ask are: do you find satisfaction in your job? Would you recommend this company as a great place to come to work? We use this average score every year and track our progress.*

- *We have employee engagement surveys done every year and they show very high levels of employee engagement. The questions fall under the areas of leadership, growth and development, compensation, benefits and we grew in all of our metrics in the past* year.

In addition to surveying all employees, two of the companies in the sample had their employees to also rate their managers and they had their business partners rate their company's overall performance.

The consensus surrounding administering such surveys was the importance of and the high expectation that there would be feedback and follow-up on the results. One company that facilitated the surveys in-house, explained that they had a designated team of employees, made up of volunteers from various department or business units who were assigned sections of the survey for review. One representative of each of these groups would then forward the results to a survey action team.

All companies reported openly sharing the results with employees either through the company intranet or a general meeting. They celebrated areas of outstanding performance on the survey being cognisant not to become complacent in these areas and

they followed up on any negative themes detected. For example, one company required every manager to create goals and action plans around the results of that survey as reflected by their department's performance. Another company carried more in-depth one-on-one interviews with employees in business units that had negatively skewed engagement scores.

4.3 Brand Resonance

How do your employees express pride and a strong sense of commitment to your company?

Figure 7: Frequency of Answers to the question above
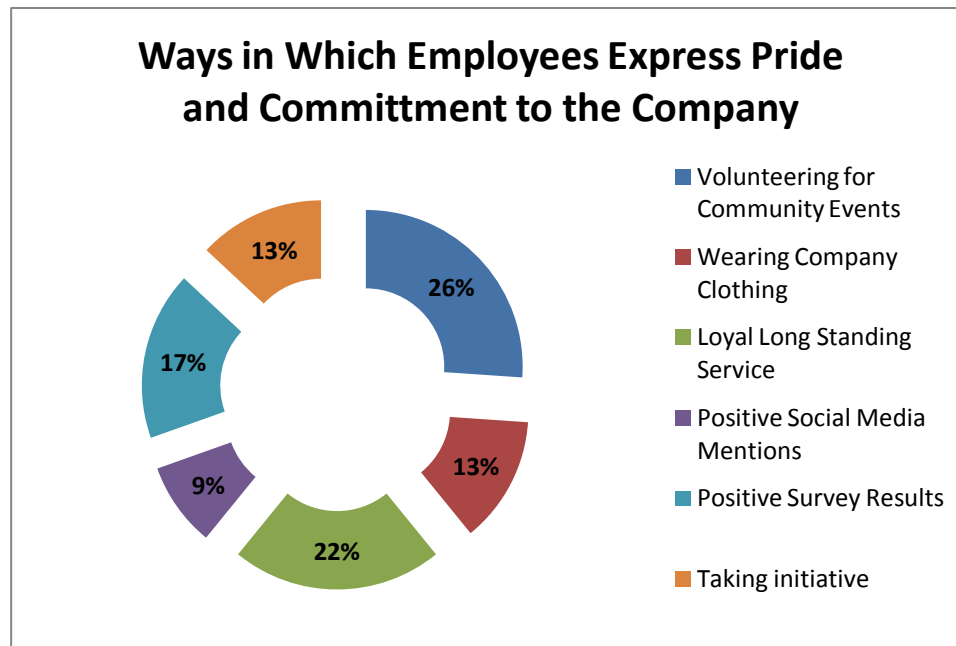
When talking about the ways in which their employees demonstrated their pride and commitment to the company volunteering in company sponsored community events was the most often mentioned.

- *We have a number of staff who jump at the opportunity to volunteer in community events*

- *Through their participation in some 'crazy' company events They can easily take their breaks to do their own thing but they are all happy and willing participants in company activities. We have a great attendance at our Christmas parties*

The next most popular answer was longevity of service with the company. Longevity of service was defined by the participants as an employment term of 20 to 40 years with the company.

- *We have been very fortunate with the longevity and loyalty of our employees. Some people have been here for 30 to 35 years and some beyond*

- *Some of the employees came to us from high school and are now retiring. Some of the employees have spent basically their whole lives with the company.*

The third most mentioned way in which employees showed their pride and commitment to the company was through the feedback that they give on the employment satisfaction and engagement surveys.

- *They express their pride through their positive feedback on the external best managed company's survey and the internal employee satisfaction survey*

Taking initiative, going above and beyond without this being required and wearing company clothing to represent the company outside the workplace got an equal number of mentions.

- *We have stories that are legend in our company where a team working on a project ended up working throughout a weekend to make it happen for a client. We do not ask our people to do that. It is not part of someone's job that they have to come in and work on a weekend but people kind of rally together*

- *We have large groups of employee volunteers representing the company in their various communities. If we gave them T Shirts with the company name on them they would proudly wear them because they are very, very proud of the company*

This was followed by positive mentions by staff on the company social media page and also on their personal social media pages.

- *From a social media perspective, our employees communicate a very positive view of our company*

Do your hiring practices include employee referrals?

Figure 8: Word Co Occurrence Matrix: Employee Referrals
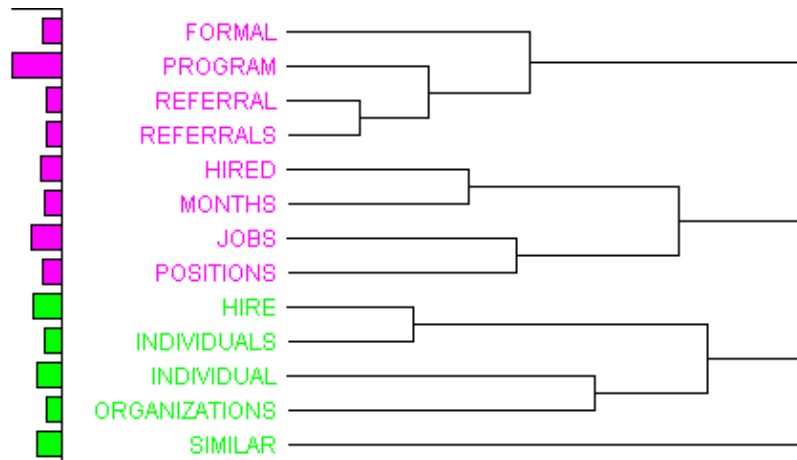
The most frequently occurring word clusters with regard to the response to this question appear in figure 8. The general theme of this answer was that the formal employee referral program enabled them to hire new employees who were similar to existing employees.

Of the fifteen companies interviewed, ten of them had formal employee referral programs in place. Of those then six of them mentioned this program as 'the best' method of getting new talent citing the following reasons:

- *"We think the people who work for us are the best conduits for future talent"*

- *"60% of our most recent hires were from employee referrals"*

- *"This is the best way to recruit people into our corporate culture, because the employees making the referrals are already part of the family and they would have a good understanding of the kinds of people who would fit our culture."*

- *"We rely on employee referrals because many of our people have individuals in their network who are similar to them."*

Of the ten companies who had formal employee referral programs in place, only six of them offered an incentive for a referral.

What is your approximate staff turnover?

Not all of the participants had this information readily available; however those who did reported a staff turnover percentage that was between 1% and 5% below their industry norm.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

An analysis of the data revealed that the Canadian Employer Brand did not exist in one continuous model but rather was divided into an internal model focused on managing existing employees' perceptions, judgements and feelings and a loosely defined external model managed and influenced by external stakeholders.

The findings will be discussed under each of the following headings:

- Brand Awareness

- Brand Consideration

- Brand Judgements and Feelings

- Brand Resonance

Brand Awareness

All respondents who answered this question were able give a distinctive personality trait to their company along with the related values and rewards. This showed that companies are definitely knowledgeable about the categories of associations that they either believed or hoped that they projected as an employer. The personality traits however were more targeted at how the companies approached work and how they treated their current employees.

There was greater frequency and involvement of current employees with the employer brand personality through a rich variety of communication media than that used for external potential employees. The most common way that the employer brand personality was communicated externally was through recruitment advertising in the form of a

company designed standard job posting that was communicated on through internal and external job websites.

While internally the current employees had two way access to the employer brand communications externally the employer brand communications were only accessible if the external participants choose to initiate that communication, either by visiting the website, applying for a job or co-op opportunity or requesting an informational interview with a current employee.

The role that the Marketing department played in the process of developing the employer brand was either nonexistent or limited to only providing guidance for and sharing already developed corporate or product brand materials.

Brand Consideration

The respondents identified the work environment and the psychological benefits derived from that environment as the primary reason why their employees choose to maintain their employment relationship with the company.

Little consideration was given to other companies who may act as competition for talent. This was reflected in the number of respondents who definitively stated that they did not have a competitor and also by the categories of answers given by the other respondents when talking about their competitors. In describing their competitors, the majority of respondents considered them from the service and product point of view by not from a Human Resources and talent acquisition point of view.

All of the interviewees were of the general consensus that relationship building was the best way to ensure that talented people consider their company first when looking for a job. However, few companies had a primary strategy to proactively initiate a relationship with new talent. Rather the majority of companies in the sample relied on referrals from their current networks. Overall this process was not managed, but rather left to the discretion of the employee, client or partner who formed part of the network and made the referral. This view was supported by the use of and the value placed on formal employee referral programs.

Brand Judgement and Feelings

While there was currently no strategy to management potential employees' employer brand judgement and feelings during the pre-employment search period, there was significant effort made to manage brand judgement and feelings during the recruitment, selection, onboarding, orientation and throughout the employment lifecycle. This took the form of realistic job previews, job shadowing , opportunities to socialize with current staff, working with mentors and coaches and regular employee satisfaction and engagement surveys complete with follow up, feedback and the development of action plans to address deficiencies and build on competencies.

Brand Resonance

The ultimate goal of any branding strategy is to achieve brand resonance. This is the point at which the customer, in this case the employee feels a sense of loyalty, community, attachment and engagement with the employer. Table 10 below shows the cumulative effect of the sample's internal employer branding efforts.
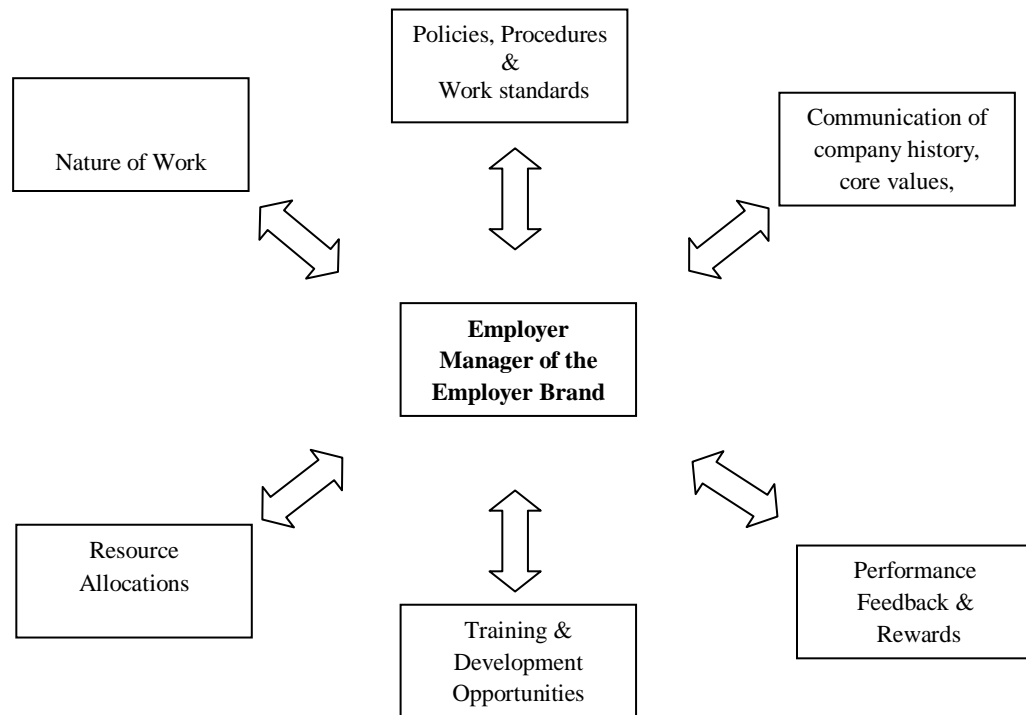
Table 10: Internal Employer Brand Resonance Chart

Brand Resonance
Low Employee Turnover Longevity of individual Employee's stay with the company Active engagement: willingness of employees to go above and beyond Sense of community: expressions of feelings of kinship with other employees Levels of employee participation and representation in voluntary company and community events Creation of Brand Centric language to express camaraderie

Judgements and Feelings
Positive results on Employee Satisfaction Surveys Positive Employee Evaluations of direct supervisor Employees vote employer as a best place to work Number of employee referrals

**Brand Consideration**

Type of work Attributes of the Workforce Employer Credibility Manager Workforce Relations	Work environment Compensation and benefits Expected future success Opportunities for Growth and Development

Brand Awareness

Company History and Philosophy Booklets Company Newsletter Magazines TV Channel	Orientation sessions Story Telling Staff Conferences Town Halls Company Mentors	Company Intranet Realistic Job Previews Open door Policy Regular Staff Socials & Meetings

It appears that the company's internal employer branding initiatives have resulted in

employer brand resonance as manifested in the longevity of service of their employees,

the willingness of these employees to go above and beyond, proudly representing the

company in the community and actively referring new employees. Two companies even

mentioned creating brand centric team names to demonstrate their employees'

camaraderie. The main drivers of this internal employer brand resonance are shown in

figure 9 below.

Figure 9: Drivers of Internal Employer Brand Resonance

	Policies, Procedures & Work standards	
Nature of Work		Communication of company history, core values,
	Employer Manager of the Employer Brand	
Resource Allocations		Performance Feedback & Rewards
	Training & Development Opportunities	

Drawing from the data collected, it can be seen that internally, the employer brand was

managed, controlled and maintained by the employers with their main audience being the

existing employees. While all of these activities discerned from the interviews and categorized in table 10 and figure 9 contributed to the internal development of the employer brand, the participants did not classify these activities as such. They instead regarded these activities as a part of the overall employment function of the company, hence the limited reference to an employer brand and the predominant reference to the company in the interview transcripts.

Table 11: External Employer Brand Resonance Chart

Brand Resonance Yet to be determined as this is not currently measured and tracked by most companies
Judgements and Feelings Evaluated by only one company in the sample Reflection of opinions of current employees, clients, communities, recruiters
Brand Consideration Co-operative Education Placements Social Media Consideration is influenced by current employees, clients, communities, recruiters
Brand Awareness Recruitment Advertising Look and feel of websites and marketing material Career Fairs & Info Sessions

Externally, the companies left the management of their employer brand to their current employees, clients, communities in which they operated and for more specialized positions, recruiters.

All of the companies believed that relationship building, networking, employee referrals and word-of-mouth advertising were the main activities necessary for generating a viable applicant pool from which potential employees were selected. However, no coordinated effort was identified to ensure that the current employees, clients, community and recruiters delivered a unified, consistent impression of the employer brand.

Figure 10: Current Process of External Employer Brand Management
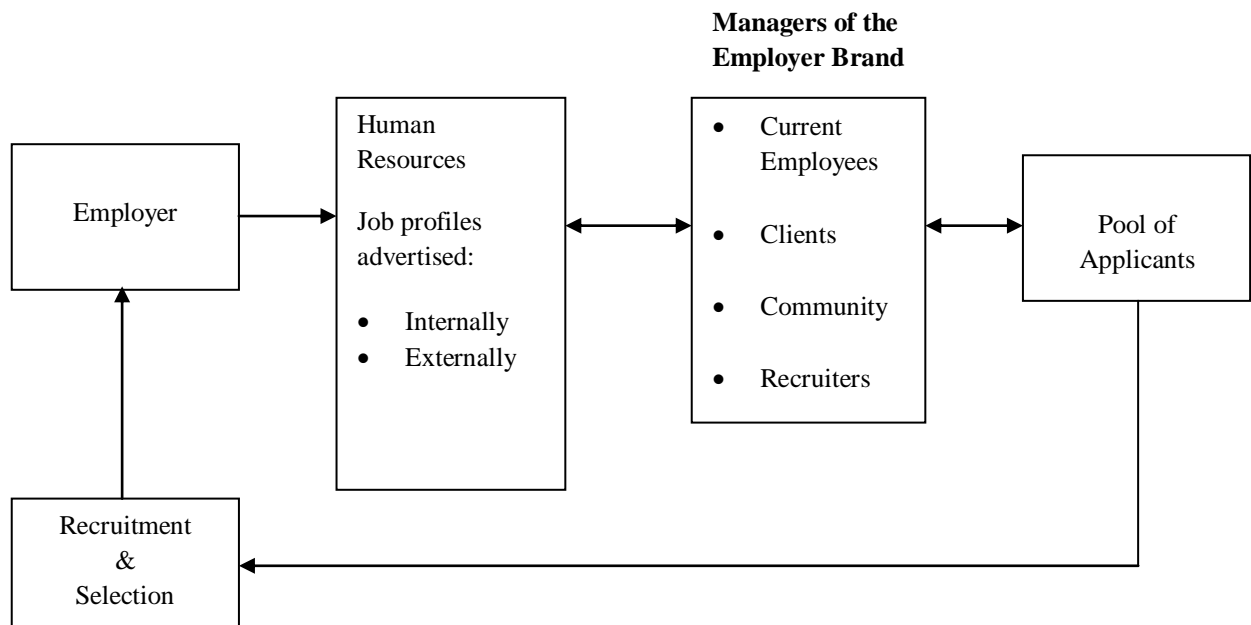
The presentation of the employer brand to potential applicants was left to the sole discretion of whoever the potential applicant contacted before applying or interviewing for the position. None of the companies had a mechanism in place to determine what questions potential applicants were asking about their company and what answers were provided to them to guide them in making their decision to apply for a job with the

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company. In addition, only one company had a feedback mechanism to find out from applicants who had been selected for an interview why they had chosen to apply to the company and what other companies they were also looking at. This reveals that the companies were really not thinking about their potential competitors for talent and as these competitors were not a consideration, there was no direct effort in place to distinguish the employer from others in the market.

One might argue that "we have no problems getting applications for job postings. We receive over a hundred for each job that we advertise for. We have excellent external brand resonance."   However brand resonance can only be claimed when there is an increase in the quality not quantity of applicants who would have a higher tendency of being loyal, attached and engaged with the company in the long run.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

All of the companies in the sample were applying employer branding strategies internally. However they did not refer to those strategies as such. Proactively creating awareness of the employer brand and managing employee judgements and feelings is targeted internally at current employees. These strategies as summarised in table 10 have successfully resulted in brand resonance among existing employees.

Although well-defined and managed internally, there currently isn't a focused strategy at managing the employer brand externally. Companies instead rely heavily on their networks of current staff, clients, community and recruiters to define and sell their employer brand outside the company to attract potential candidates.

The results of their internal employer branding efforts are regularly measured and tracked through employer satisfaction and engagement surveys and employee responses on external surveys such as 'Great Place to Work' surveys. Any negative trends or themes in these surveys are follow-up on and corrected. The companies take this very seriously.

One challenge identified with projecting the employer branding strategy externally is the absence of a collaborative working relationship between the Human Resources and Marketing. Two of the key reasons identified for this are the historically divergent nature of the two jobs and the marketing department being centralized in a different geographic location.

Limitations of the study

There are three noteworthy limitations of this study. The first is while valuable information has been generated from this exploratory study, as a result of the small sample size and the number of persons interviewed, the results cannot be generalized to include all companies in Canada.

Secondly, while the use of the telephone interview was convenient, it lacked the non-verbal cues available in face to face communications. Also, technical difficulties may have distorted the quality and richness of communications. Furthermore interviews were restricted to a one hour time frame so the amount of information provided was limited to short simple explanations. While the interviewees spoke clearly and at a pace conducive to taking good notes, it is possible that the researcher did not capture all the key points mentioned.

Future Research

There are several opportunities for further research to follow up on this exploratory study of employer branding in Canada. Specifically, a larger sample of companies can be surveyed to get results that can be generalized. The results can be compared to that of this study to see whether there are any significant differences between this small sample and the larger one.

In addition to the points of view of top management, the employees' perspective can be researched. Comparison can be drawn to determine points of parity and points of

differences in the opinions of the two groups. This would provide an interesting perspective on the degree of alignment of the Employer Brand.

This sample was made up of small, medium and large companies whose perspectives on the topic were not significantly different. Further research could be conducted using a larger sample of large and medium or medium and small companies to determine whether there were any significant differences between their philosophies and approaches to employer branding.

Another interesting area to explore would be antecedents and consequences of employer branding, using a causal modeling approach based on a survey. This type of quantitative research will require further development of constructs and measures or scales relevant to employer branding.

  It would also be interesting to research the before and after effects of an employer branding strategy possibly though the development of an employer brand measurement scale.

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Appendix A

Primary Research: The Structured Interview

Company Details

Number of employees in company:

Type of company (individual, national, multinational):

1. Why do your employees say they like working for your company?

2. As an employer, how are you:
    (a) Like your closest competitor?
    (b) Different from your closest competitor?

3. What practices do you currently have in place to ensure that talented people consider your company first when looking for a job? How do you ensure that the best staff know about you?

4. Where does your company promote your employment opportunities in order to get people to think of your company as a place to work? How often is this done?

5. What external awards and recognition have been received by your company in the last five years?

6. How do you ensure that the promises made during the recruitment process remain consistent with the actual working experience of the employee?

7. How do you know that you are meeting your employees' expectations?   How often are employee satisfaction surveys or employee engagement surveys done?

8. If your company could be a celebrity, sports figure, Movie/TV character, historical figure, superhero or fictional character, which one would it be and why? Who would your competitor be and why?

9. How do you communicate your company's personality internally and externally?

10. How do your employees express pride and a strong sense of commitment to your company? Can you give some anecdotal examples?

11. Do your hiring practices include employee referrals? If so how are employees rewarded for the referral?

12. How do you introduce new employees to your company personality and culture during the onboarding/orientation process?

13. Does the Marketing department work with Human Resources to ensure that the brand message communicated externally is also communicated to internal company employees?

14. What is your company's approximate employee turnover?

Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM – STUDY 1

Marketing Meets Human Resources: A Study of Employer Branding Practices
in Canada

Saint Mary's University REB File Number: 14-049

Tamara Adlain

Marketing Department, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, NS, B3H 3C3
Phone: 902-240-2009, Email:tamara.adlain@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH

I am a current Master of Business Administration student at Saint Mary's University. As part of my master's thesis requirements, I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Ramesh Venkat and I am inviting you to participate in my study.

The purpose of this study is to review existing literature on the concept of Employer Branding and to compare the ideals identified in the literature to what is actually happening in a sample of Human Resource departments in the Canada. The preliminary finding of this exploratory study will seeks to identify any gaps that exist and recommend areas for further research

WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO TAKE PART?

Current Human Resource Managers in small, medium and large organizations in Canada are eligible to take part in this study.

WHAT DOES PARTICIPATING MEAN?

This study would involve a one-on-one telephone interview with the researcher. It is anticipated that the interview would last no longer than one hour.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THIS RESEARCH?

The benefits of this study include the promotion of our understanding of the behaviours and actions currently being taken to deliver on the employer brand promise in Canada. This understanding is a crucial first step in defining the employer brand in the Canadian context and identifying the level and commitment and alignment across business functions.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS FOR PARTICIPANTS?

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this study.

HOW CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY?

Your participation is completely voluntary. You can decline to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time during the interview without any consequences. All information collected up to the point of your withdrawal from the interview will be retained for analysis ONLY if you give consent to this. If you are not comfortable with having your data used, it will be destroyed and will not be included in the research.

However, once the interview has been completed and the data collated (within 24 hours), it will not be possible to identify and remove your data from the rest of the anonymous data collected.

WHAT WILL BE DONE WITH MY INFORMATION? WHO WILL HAVE ACCESS TO IT?

All personally identifying information obtained in this study will be kept strictly confidential. Confidentially will be maintained by acting according to section 3 – Privacy and Confidentiality of the Tri-Council Policy Statement. In addition, the results of this study will be presented in summary form and no individual participants will be identified.

WOULD I BE ABLE TO RECEIVE A COPY OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS?

The summarized findings of this research will be made available to interested participants via email following the completion of the research. You may indicate your interest in receiving this information at any time before or after your interview.

HOW CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION OR FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions, please contact the student researcher:
 Tamara Adlain at (902) 240-2009 or tamara.adlain@gmail.com .
You may also contact the research supervisor, Dr. Ramesh Venkat, at
ramesh.venkat@smu.ca .

CERTIFICATION

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions or concerns, about ethical matters, you may contact Dr Jim Cameron, Chair of the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board at ethics@smu.ca or (902) 420-5728

By continuing this conversation, you are demonstrating that you are offering your informed consent demonstrating you are comfortable with the risks and benefits of the study. Do you wish for me to continue?

Participant

Signature_____Name(Printed) :_____Date :_____
<div align="right">(Day/Month/Year)</div>

Principal Investigator

Signature_____Name(Printed) :_____Date :_____
<div align="right">(Day/Month/Year)</div>

Please keep one copy of this form for your own records.

Saint Mary's University REB File Number: 14-049

Email Invitation to Participants

Dear [HR Manager]

I am a current Master of Business Administration student at Saint Mary's University. As part of my master's thesis requirements, I am conducting a research study to find out the current Employer Branding Practices being used in Canada and I am sending you this invitation to participate in the research.

Your participation in this study will involve a telephone interview that will take place during the period of November 15th to December 16th 2013. The interview will take about one hour and will include twenty structured interview questions.

Your responses will be strictly confidential and will be used to develop a better understanding of how you and your peers make use of employer branding practices here in Canada

Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time without consequence.

You may demonstrate your consent to participate in the study by emailing the information requested below to the researcher at email address: tamara.adlain@gmail.com

Company Details

Number of employees in company:

Type of company (individual, national, multinational):

Appendix D

FEEDBACK LETTER
Saint Mary's University REB File Number: 14-049

Marketing Meets Human Resources: A Study of Employer Branding Practices in

Canada

Tamara Adlain
Phone: 902-240-2009, Email:tamara.adlain@gmail.com

Research Supervisor, Dr. Ramesh Venkat, at ramesh.venkat@smu.ca .

Marketing Department, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, NS, B3H 3C3

Date

Dear *[HR Manager]*

I would like to thank you for your participation in this study.

As a reminder, the purpose of this study is to find out the current Employer Branding Practices being used by a sample of Human Resource Departments in Canada. The preliminary finding of this exploratory study will seeks to identify any gaps that exist and recommend areas for further research.

The data collected during interviews will contribute to a better understanding of employer branding practices in Canada.

Please remember that any data pertaining to you as an individual participant will be kept confidential. Once all the data are collected and analyzed for this project, I plan to possibly share this information with through seminars, conferences and presentations.

If you are interested in receiving more information regarding the results of this study, or if you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at either the phone number or email address listed at the top of the page.

If you would like a summary of the results, please let me know by providing me with your email address. When the study is completed, I will send you the summarized findings. The study is expected to be completed by December 23, 2013.

As with all Saint Mary's University projects involving human participants, this project was reviewed by the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns about ethical matters or would like to discuss your rights as a research participant, please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at 902-420-5728 or ethics@smu.ca.

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One University. One World. Yours.

Research Ethics Board Certificate Notice

The Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board has issued an REB certificate related to this thesis. The certificate number is: ___14-049___ .

A copy of the certificate is on file at:

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Patrick Power Library
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