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## **THE ROLE OF EMPLOYER BRANDING PRACTICES ON MANAGEMENT OF EMPLOYEE ATTRACTION AND RETENTION**

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**Introduction.** An employer brand includes everything practiced to position an organization as a preferred employer. Nowadays, business companies are having more difficulty procuring qualified employees who are vital for company success under keenly competitive business conditions. To cope with this difficulty, companies carry out different practices to attract and retain talent, and the employer brand concept has become one of the tools that business companies use to attract and retain talent.

**Aim and tasks.** The aim of the study is to investigate, determine and describe how business companies are efficacious in their employer brand management practices to meet the expectations of current and potential employees. It is also aimed to determine which activities are carried out by the business companies for employer branding. In this context, a literature review is carried out within the scope of employer branding to brief the concepts of organizational attractiveness and to ensure organizational commitment.

**Results.** Within the scope of the research, the semi-structured in-depth interviews with the human resources professionals of seven large-scale, domestic, and foreign companies operating in the Izmir, Istanbul, and Manisa provinces were examined. The findings of the interviews are evaluated by the qualitative analysis method according to the research methodology. The result of the research conducted and the references to the definition of the employer brand were compiled under five nodes. These are the work environment, economic benefits, work-life balance, career development opportunities, and social activities. On the other hand, the economic benefits node was compiled under two different sub-nodes, namely wages and fringe benefits. The characteristics and contributions of the employer branding were investigated, and the effects of the employer brand on retention within the scope of talent management were investigated.

**Conclusions.** It has been observed that the organizations' awareness level of the employer brand concept is high, and it has been discovered that they have many practices for both potential candidates and current employees. These practices have revealed that they differentiate themselves from their competitors in terms of business characteristics, working environment, and global opportunities. All these efforts provide many benefits such as increases in the number of applications, increases in attractive employer rankings, increases in employee motivation, and decreases in employee turnover rates.

**Keywords:** employer brand, organizational attractiveness, organizational commitment, talent management, employee value proposition.

## **1. Introduction.**

In this study, the role of employer brands in the job preferences of talented employees is discussed and the approaches of business companies to promote employer brands are examined. In the situation of increasing competition because of globalization, the importance of attracting and retaining talent is more important today. To be the primary choice of talents, their changing needs and expectations must be satisfied by the companies, which can increase their organizational attractiveness by maintaining their position in the market.

Talent and a talented workforce are not only at the top of the agenda of human resources management but also considered by the top management. The various methods used to attract a talented workforce and employ them in critical company positions constitute a complete talent management process. The first step of the talent management process is attracting and recruiting talented candidates. The recruiting procedures, which have evolved from the simple personnel management view to human resources management, later on, recent transformation resulted in the strategic human resources management philosophy. Therefore, the new viewpoint, objectives, methods, and fields of activity of strategic human resources management have created an advanced employment policy and strategy (Chambers et al., 1998).

Business companies use different methods to attract talented people. The most common activities aimed at creating an employer brand start from internal customers and reaches to branding. Today, customers are willing to buy goods and services with a good quality-price ratio and when they are giving buying decisions, the impact of the brand is very encouraging. Customers want to minimize the risk regarding their purchasing preferences by focusing on the brand.

The situation is similar for the employer brand case. The most important difference here is that the subjects are both internal customers and external customers. In the case of the employer brand, business companies aim to become the primary choice of current and potential employees by differentiating themselves from their competitors.

In the context of employer brand, business companies are working to be the primary choice of talented employees by promising economic, functional, and psychological benefits such as physical working conditions, wages, fringe benefits, social opportunities, and prestige to their internal customers. That distinguishing promise offered by companies to talents, within the scope of the employer brand is called the "employee value proposition". When the employee value proposition and employee experience overlap, the strength of the brand can be improved. With a strong employer brand, the recruitment of the right and talented employees and the formation of employee loyalty become easier.

## **2. Literature review.**

In the literature review, which constitutes the first part of this study, the employer brand issue was examined based on the concept of employer brand, talent, and talent management, and the characteristics and benefits of the employer brand were discussed. Then, talent management is explained through the concept of talent, and the benefits of talent management to business companies are emphasized. Afterward, the effect of employer brand on attracting and retaining talent was explained and the practices of business companies to create value propositions specific to employees in response to changing needs and expectations were explained.

The concept of brand has been defined in different ways over the years, from different perspectives. The most common definition; a brand is defined as the differentiation of a product from its competitors depending on the use of name, logo, design, or other visual signs and symbols (Heding et al., 2009). The American Marketing Association (2022) defined a brand as a name, term, sign, symbol, design, or combination of all, that identifies the products or services of a vendor or group of vendors and aims to differentiate them from their competitors. It is aimed at creating a brand image for the consumers by creating a brand identity with all these names, terms, signs, symbols, and designs. When buying a product or service, using shortcuts and focusing on the brand can be a symbol of a believable image in perceptions.

Employer brands can be evaluated as one of the most valuable assets in the company portfolio and therefore brand management is one of the main fields of activity for successful companies (Fig. 1). Branding can also be used in the field of human resources management, as well as in product and corporate brand development where most business companies focus. The application of branding principles in human resources management is called "employer brand" (Sharma et al., 2019). One of the most important factors that differentiate

institutions from their competitors is human capital because it is unique to the company. For this reason, business companies should focus on their internal customers, attract talented new and existing employees and ensure their organizational commitment through employer brand activities. Companies should be capable of the correct position and present the values they have created to reach both their internal and external customers while fostering and sustaining them in the corporate culture values (Ahmad et al., 2020).

Consumer Brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Target Audience:</b> Current and potential customers</li> <li>• <b>Purpose :</b> Retain existing customers while attracting new customers</li> </ul>
Employer Brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Target Audience:</b> Current and potential employees</li> <li>• <b>Purpose :</b> Attracting new customers while retaining existing employees</li> </ul>

**Fig. 1. Comparison of Consumer Brand and Employer Brand.**

Source: based on Baş (2011).

The employer brand plays a key role in creating and supporting the customer brand to attract the right employees and reveal high performance (Aldousari et al., 2017). The power of the customer brand plays an important role in attracting the right people to the institution (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). Although the effect of employer brand on attracting talent for companies starts with the company's perception of potential candidates before the recruitment process. Since the first contact between the company and the candidate starts during the recruitment process, the detailed planning of the process is also an essential requirement that will support the employer brand. The correct arrangement of the stages such as finding the candidate, selection procedures, and post-selection activities will have a positive impact on desired employer brand before contacting the candidate.

The benefits that an employer brand offers to employees are harmonized with the benefits delivered to the consumer by the products and services; developmental and/or beneficial activities (functional), material or monetary rewards (economic), sense of belonging, direction, and goals (psychological).

Factors such as, physical working conditions, wages, fringe benefits, social opportunities, self-identity protection, personal image development, and self-expression constitute functional, economic, and psychological characteristics (Baş, 2011).

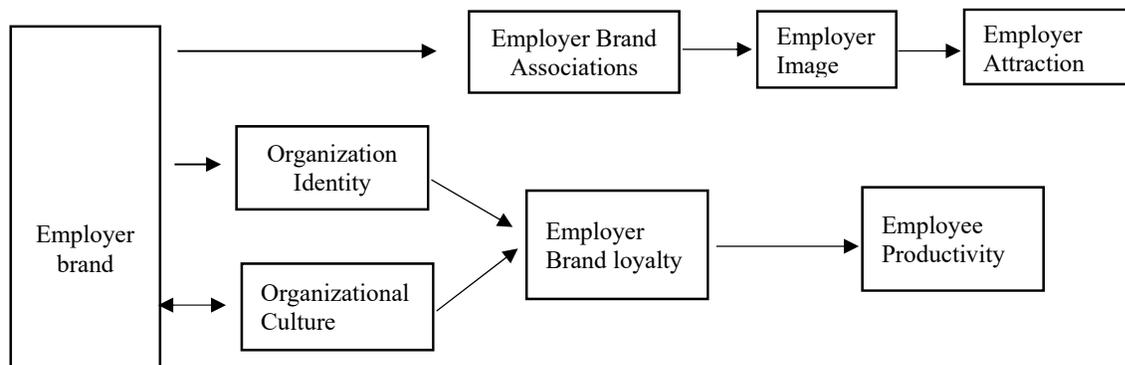
On the other hand, the functional benefits of the employer brand describe objectively desired employment elements such as salary, social benefits, and leave allowance, while the symbolic benefits are related to the perceptions of the corporate reputation. Candidates will enjoy working for the company with expected social appreciation and economic provisions.

As shown in Figure 2, potential employees build their employer brand image from employer brand associations' generated by employer branding (Backhaus & Tiko, 2004).

Employer branding is a long-term strategy to manage the perceptions and awareness of employees, potential candidates, and stakeholders towards a particular company. This strategy can be used in recruitment, retention, and product management processes (Yıldırım, & Şimşek, 2015).

It creates an image surrounding management and business practices that make the organization attractive and a "great place to work" (Sullivan, 2004). Brand identity is created by the organization using colors, symbols, logos, and designs and conveys brand messages to its customers. As a result, a brand image is formed in the minds of customers. While business companies can interfere with brand identity, they cannot interfere with the brand image formed in the minds of their

customers. For this reason, the perceptions of current and potential employees towards the employer brand should be well managed. The organization should be positioned as a "great place to work" in the eyes of internal customers. For employer brand positioning, the points that differentiate the organization from its competitors should be revealed and the employee value proposition and promises should be presented.



**Fig. 2. Employer Brand Structure.**

*Source: based on Reis et al. (2021).*

In more general terms, organizational attractiveness is the structure that can be considered a precursor to the concept of employer brand equity. In other words, it can be understood that an employer is evaluated as more attractive by the potential employees when especially the employer brand value of the organization is stronger (Berthon et al., 2015). Employer branding is about creating an image in the minds of the potential employees, it implies that the company is a "great place to work". Employer branding is no longer a minor activity, but rather comes into prominence as a primary action for attracting both new and retaining existing employees (Ewing et al., 2002; Kashive et al., 2020).

### 3. Theoretical framework.

The concept of employer branding can be managed in two different ways in terms of external and internal marketing. External marketing of the employer brand positions the organization as a preferred employer, thus making it easier to attract the best available employees.

Different characteristics of brand differentiation ensure that highly qualified human capital will be attracted to the company. Moreover, after the employees are attracted by the brand, they will convey some values about the employment circumstances of the company where they will work. Thus, they will support the corporate values and increase their loyalty to the company. Internal marketing, on the other hand, helps create a unique workforce that other companies are missing. By systematically enlightening the value proposition of the employer brand to the employees, the corporate culture is shaped around the goals of the company and provides a unique corporate culture focused on doing the right job (Backhaus & Tiko, 2004). One of the most important factors that can affect the activities of the company is to strengthen and maintain the employer brand in the views and minds of its employees. With their productive employee experience, they can create a positive perception of the company by sharing their positive experiences with the outside to stimulate external talents to be part of the company.

In the employer branding process, providing a suitable working environment for the employee, creating value as a social, physiological, and psychological partner, and motivating the employees according to company goals, strategy, culture, and values will help to strengthen the employer brand (Aygün, 2013).

Regardless of the size of the organization and field of business, certain features are meaningful for current and potential employees. These features make the institution preferable and create a brand perception in people's minds about the organization. This perception is constantly changing and updated according to the experiences of the employees in the institution.

The main features of the employer brand can be listed as follows (Baş, 2011):

- The brand appeals to people's emotions.
- Brand experiences simplify opportunities and expectations.
- Brand facilitates the interaction between employees and the company.
- Brand interrelates employees with "Big Ideas".
- The brand is sticky.
- Brand perception improves with experiences at touchpoints.
- Strong brands can survive for a long time.
- Loyalty is the most important result of the relationship between the employer brand and employees.

All these features can be achieved with a good brand-positioning model. According to Barrow and Mosley (2005), first of all, the positioning of the employer brand within the organization should be maintained. It is possible to talk about three main types of employer brands, which can be placed within a company's brand identity hierarchy. "Whole brand" is the unique brand name and identity used in all fields of activity. The framework of the relationship between the whole brand and the consumer brand, and other key aspects such as corporate brand vision, goals, values, and public relations should be clearly defined. "Main Brand" has two interpretations. One of them is the brand of the parent company and the other one is the brand of the affiliated and other companies. At this point, it should be planned according to which parameters of the main employer brand and affiliated employer brands will be directed.

"Affiliate Brand" is very similar to the main brand at the level of the affiliated company. The employer brand is often understood as the same as the customer brand. The relationship of the employer brand of the subsidiary company with both the parent brand and the customer brand must be revealed (Yıldırım, & Şimşek, 2015).

It would be true to consider the benefits of the employer brand from two different perspectives such as for the business and the employee. As Ambler and Barrow (1996) said, the benefits of the employer brand for the employee seem functional and economic, as well as psychological and social. These benefits are tangible benefits for current and potential employees (Atlı, 2017). Psychological and social benefits provide benefits for people's needs such as expressing themselves and creating a sense of belonging, feeling, or reputation (Atlı, 2017).

In case of employer brand, candidates give their decisions for taking part in that organization, by paying attention to many psychological factors such as the purpose of the organization, its values, the prestige that the work will provide, the discourses of the employees about the business, the name of the business in social responsibility projects, apart from the needs of food, drink, and shelter. (Arasanmi & Krishna, 2019).

The employer brand affects the overall business performance with benefits such as cost reduction, increased customer satisfaction, and financial performance (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). On the other hand, the benefits it provides are an increase in levels of employee commitment, motivation and performance levels, in the number and qualifications of applications received, in acceptance rate, in manager satisfaction for employee references, in a strong organizational culture but a decrease in recruitment costs and competitive power (Bas, 2011).

The creation of a sustainable employer brand within the framework of a strategic plan is important for both employees and business companies to obtain all those benefits. The expectations about the stability of the employer brand concept are clarified by Barrow and Mosley (2005) within the framework of three main explanations.

First, a big number of companies have seen that employee engagement and loyalty are not assigned rights (Verčič, 2021). Leading business companies are beginning to understand that respected employees behave just like significant customers, and they are free to commit or not. Another consideration is about a more focused, consistent, and benefit-based approach requirement to attract the right people and encourage them to remain loyal and perform at their best. Second, the employer brand is an effective commercial bridge between human resources, internal communication, and marketing. Most companies understand that employee engagement plays an important role in ensuring customer satisfaction and loyalty. Third, the employer brand must be based on a discipline that has long lasting value in the market. The permanence of the employer brand is directly related to successful brand management by creating and sustaining genuine employee loyalty.

According to the various definitions, talent is the sum of the certain and distinctive qualifications that make it possible to gain superiority (Turan, 2015). The current stage of that discipline is called "talent management" after developments in personnel management and strategic human resources management. The effect of globalization and demographic changes experienced today; it is evident that high success, performance, and effectiveness are necessary for business companies to gain competitive advantage and satisfy sustainability requirements (Akar, 2015). At senior executive levels of an organization, adaptability, rapid decision making under uncertainty and adapting changing conditions without difficulty is a critical issue. However, while the need for superior talent is increasing, large US companies emphasize that they have difficulty in attracting and retaining good employees (Chambers et al., 1998). This is true not only for US companies but also for companies throughout the world. With the recent developments in digitalization, information and communication technologies working environments and working conditions have changed and especially flexibility in location brings an advantage for the employment of talents.

To be successful in talent management, organizational leaders must first understand the drivers of talent management: (a) workforce pool

(b) retention (c) risk of self-selection, and (d) impact of recruitment on retention (Oladapo, 2014). In fact, talent management encompasses many human resources functions focused on attracting, retaining, managing and developing a highly qualified workforce. Performance management includes recruitment, compensation, workforce planning, training, and development management. The main reason for increasing interest in talent management is the impact of talent management practices on growth, profitability, and contribution of talent management to overcome the shortage of skilled labor problem (Sireesha & Ganapavarapu: 2014). Though, the purpose of talent management is to identify individual and corporate talents for personal, institutional, investor and stakeholder benefits and maximizing their potential (Joubert, 2007). Therefore, to reveal the potential of human capital, which is among the important factors of competitive advantage, organizational attractiveness, and organizational commitment should be created with a well-designed talent management system. However, this should not be seen only as a responsibility of human resources management but also the awareness and commitment of top management are essential. The talents, competencies, and skills in today's conditions will not be the same in the future. For example, employees with creative thinking skills may become more critical in the future therefore; senior managers should analyze the current situation carefully and build their talent management strategies for the future in a creative way.

Talent management is the integration of various initiatives or structures in the comprehensive operating framework. To understand talent management, it is necessary to evaluate some keywords, which are related to the components and model of the concept (Abdullah et al., 2017).

Values and belief system – embedded values and behaviors are known as "talent sense" – supporting the view that everyone is potentially worthy of development:

– Focus – knowing the jobs that make a difference and making sure they are done by the right people at the right time.

– Positioning – doing this management gradually, starting from the top levels of the organization.

– Structure – creating the tools, processes, and techniques to get things done with defined responsibility.

– System – creating change with a long-term and holistic approach.

Just as Ashton and Morton (2005) and Akar (2015) stated, managing complex and integrated talent management processes according to a well-designed plan is crucial to have a competitive advantage in the market.

Then, the advantages of talent management for business companies can be listed as follows (Chowdhury, 2001):

- Higher profitability.
- Competitive advantage in the market.
- Opportunity to work with the best in the labor market.
- Increase in employee engagement and motivation.
- Employees with high creativity.
- Increase in employee performance.
- Transparency about high-potential people.
- Transparency about backups of critical positions.
- High insider promotion rate and consequent satisfaction.
- Early recognition of future leaders.
- Elimination of uncertainty in case of vacancies by backing up strategic positions.
- Increase in the success rate of people who will rise to higher positions.
- Reduction in layoffs.
- Improved performance due to the motivation of talented employees on less skilled employees.
- Being an attractive company for potential employees.
- Customer-oriented approach to employees with internal customer awareness.

All these expose the importance of talent management's "employees as talents" approach. Moreover, it has many influences on profitability and organizational commitment, creating a good working environment, and attracting the most successful people in the labor market to the organization.

Since there are employees with various characteristics, it is necessary to offer different personalized packages with rich content to attract them. These personalized packages are known as "Employee Value Propositions".

Besides the financial benefits that meet the primary needs of the individual, packages must also include specific benefits that are prepared explicitly for different target groups and accepted as promises. (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). Employee value propositions are an effective tool that can be used by managers who want to create a highly attractive, strong employer brand and build mutual trust relationships with their employees (Baş, 2011). Companies with a high-quality employee value proposition must reply the question that, "Why would talented people want to work here?" It is not very difficult to answer the question (Chambers et al., 1998) since business companies can define different types of talents and create a specific package for their interests. To be the preferred employer, the expectations of current and potential employees can be listed as follows (Armstrong, 2006):

- A job that engages and rewards.
- Learning, development, and career opportunities.
- An appropriate level of job security.
- Being proud of the reputation and workplace of the workplace.
- Convenience and opportunities for knowledge workers such as R&D specialists or engineers.
- The working environment that cares about work-daily life balance.
- Providing competitive wages and fringe benefits with a reward and incentive system.

Considering all these expectations, special value proposition packages are prepared for employees. These value propositions should not be designed to focus solely on functional benefits because nowadays they consider emotional benefit propositions too. On the other hand, functional benefit packages are easily copied by competitors and during the process of creating an employer value proposition, special attention should be paid to the benefits package that will differentiate the business company from the competition, as well as the realistic emotional benefits appropriate to the needs of the target audience groups (Ötken & Okan, 2015). However, with new generations, there will be changes in all these needs and expectations, and the necessity of re-analyzing and redesigning the content of the employee value proposition from time to time should not be ignored by the managers.

The employer brand should be able to offer a different value proposition to its current and potential employees. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the differences between the target audience groups and the effect of these differences on business life, and then it can be possible to offer an employee value proposition that meets their expectations and characteristics (Ötken & Okan, 2015). The employee value proposition, company culture, values, and operational activities should not conflict with the value judgments of future generations. Although it is not always possible to achieve full harmony, different generations should be able to understand each other through various practices such as mentoring and reverse mentoring.

#### **4. Methodology.**

In this part of the study, explanatory information about the purpose and scope, method and constraints of the research, the research model, the universe/sample group, the collection and analysis of the data, as well as the hypotheses and findings of the research are presented.

In this study, the companies developing an employer brand to attract and retain talents are investigated by in-depth interviews, which is one of the widely used qualitative research methods. Thus, it is aimed to determine and explain how business companies are successful in their employer brand management practices to meet the expectations of current and potential employees. In addition, it is also aimed to determine which of the following dimensions is within the scope of the activities carried out by the business companies for employer branding:

- Those who are not aware of the existence of the employer brand
- Those who deal with employer brand activities limited to advertising/promotional dimensions only
- Those who shape the process of building a strong employer brand according to a systematic framework

A qualitative research method was utilized and data are collected by observation and interview techniques. The collected data were systematically analyzed and structured with an unbiased approach. Since collected data mostly consist of "terms", the type of research must be a qualitative method (Baş, 2011).

In addition, the research was based on the phenomenology approach with a qualitative research perspective. Phenomenology, which is dating back to old times, can be defined as a method of examining and defining the existence of events. Phenomenology, while seeking an answer to the question of "What is truth?" focuses on the individual universe. In other words, this approach is concerned with the personal experiences of the participants (Baş & Akturan, 2017).

According to the selected qualitative research methodology, the "semi-structured" in-depth interview method was used within the framework of the phenomenological approach. In the context of phenomenological research, data are collected in three stages: semi-structured interviews, written documents, and observations (Baş & Akturan, 2017), and the same stages have been adapted in this research. In-depth interviewing is an open-ended and exploratory method. The purpose of the interview is to explore the interviewer's point of view, feelings, and perspective in depth. It is tried to reach the reasons underlying people's attitudes and behaviors (Baş & Akturan, 2017).

The samples of the study were determined as human resources employees of seven large-scale business companies operating in Turkey, one in Izmir, three in Manisa, one in Izmir, and one in Istanbul. The sample group the study agreed to participate in the study but the company and employee names are not shared. In this direction, eight in-depth interview questions about employer branding and talent management were directed. Since common themes started to emerge during the interviews, the application ended with a total of seven interviews. The questions used in the in-depth interview were created by Dođru and Çakır (2015) based on the questionnaire used in their study.

The findings obtained from the interviews were briefly interpreted and detailed discussions and comments were included in the "results and recommendations" section. Increasing competition with globalization has confronted businesses with the problem of talent shortage. It has been observed that employer branding studies have come to the forefront in recent years to attract and retain talent in large-scale business companies.

Employer brand studies are in a strategic position in terms of the sustainability of business companies. In this study, the following hypotheses were determined based on the general hypothesis that "Employer brand is important in attracting and retaining talent":

H0: There is a negative relationship between attracting talent and talent.

H1: There is a positive relationship between attracting talent and talent.

H2: There is a negative relationship between talent retention and retention.

H3: There is a positive relationship between retention and talent retention.

## **5. Results.**

According to the results of the interviews, the following findings were achieved. In-depth interviews, the awareness levels of human resources employees on employer branding were discussed, and the research questions of the study have been investigated to obtain facts and for hypothesis testing. In this context, eight questions were asked to the participants during the semi-structured interviews. Questions are as follows:

1. First meeting with the concept of employer brand and defining the concept of employer brand.

2. The concept of employer branding from the perspective of human resources management.

3. The practices of business companies for current and potential employees within the framework of employer brand management.

4. The characteristics/features that set you apart from your competitors as an employer brand management; its effect on the company's current and future existence.

5. The status of employer branding activities around the world.

6. The awareness levels of the participants about the concept of talent management.

7. The effects of these activities, which they carry out within the scope of employer branding and talent management, on attracting and retaining talent.

1. According to the answers about the concept of employer brand, five of the seven participants used the expression "desired workplace" to define the employer brand.

Elements such as a place of work and an attractive company were the concepts expressed by the participants during their definitions, and all these discourses were compiled under the same node. All of the participants mentioned that the concept of employer brand is an element that provides "attractiveness for potential candidates". When their views are examined in depth, it is understood that an employer brand is a tool used to attract potential candidates to the organization. Six of the participants referred to "the organizational commitment" of existing employees in the definition of the employer brand. When the statements were examined in depth, they stated that the activities they carried out within the scope of the employer brand ensure the organizational commitment of the existing employees.

These statements about current employees are grouped under the organizational commitment node. Four of the participants referred to the expressions of "creating the perception" in their explanations about the concept of the employer brand. When the statements are examined in depth, it is understood that the concept of employer brand is intended to create a perception of the organization from the internal and external customer's point of view. Four of the participants have indicated the relationship between the concept of employer brand and the concept of "reputation". They referred to concepts such as being proud, feeling prestigious, and providing status for existing or potential employees to be working in that institution, and all opinions were gathered under the reputation node.

2. Opinions about the department responsible for employer branding within the organization are examined in this section. At this point, most of the participants stated that especially corporate communication and marketing departments are responsible for employer branding processes along with human resources. Likewise, the importance of the roles of all employees in the employer branding processes has been mentioned. The concept will become meaningful as long as current employees can transfer employer branding processes in different areas. One of the elements that the participants emphasized in the previous section was the idea of a good place to work.

It is also indicated that the support of the top management. The support of the top management is another factor in creating the employer brand and keeping it alive within the organization. Four of the participants stated that they carry out the employer brand processes together with the "corporate communication" function of the human resources department. Three of the interviewees stated that the "marketing department" should be included in the process besides the human resources and corporate communication departments and that they carried out their work with the marketing department during the creation of the process for the employer brand in their organization. Two of the participants mentioned that "all employees have responsibilities in the employer branding process. These statements were compiled under the all-employees node.

3. The importance of the employer brand to attract potential candidates is another issue under investigation. Thus, organizations are engaged in some activities to attract talents within the scope of the employer brand. The answers of the participants in the organizations were gathered under four nodes. All of the participants indicated that they cooperated with universities to attract talented candidates to their organizations. All expressions of participation in career days, activities of university clubs, case studies at universities, assessment centers, conducting interviews at universities, and inviting university students to meetings are all gathered under the node of "university collaborations".

All of the participants stated that they offer internship opportunities to potential candidates in their organizations. All of the concepts of project internship, high school internship, and long-term internship offered to talented students by the participants were grouped under the "internship opportunity" node. Two of the participants stated that they organized company trips among the activities they carried out for potential candidates. These trips are important for potential candidates to observe the organization, working conditions, and opportunities offered by the organization.

4. As important as attracting potential candidates to the organization in employer brand management, it is also critical to ensure the loyalty of existing employees.

According to the answers, five nodes were determined about the current employee practices, while two sub-nodes were reached. Participants referred to the physical conditions, ergonomics, a healthy environment, innovative, agile, dynamic, and free working conditions in the practices they presented to their current employees in the context of employer branding. When the interviews were examined, all these citations were compiled under the work environment.

When the employer brand practices of the participants for their current employees were examined, it was seen that six participants emphasized: "the economic conditions" such as wages and fringe benefits. In addition, some participants referred to the flexible fringe benefit schemes they offer. The answers of the participants were compiled under two sub-nodes "salary" and "benefits". Six of the participants stated that they offer satisfactory wage packages to employees within the scope of the employer brand. The fringe benefits and flexible fringe benefits schemes are offered to their employees. "Employee value propositions" can be evaluated as personal benefit packages offered to employees.

According to the answers of the participants, organizations promote their employment efforts by offering flexible fringe benefits in the fringe benefits package they offer to their employees. During the interviews, six participants referred to remote working and flexible working hours for work-life balance. The answers of the participants were compiled under "the work-life balance node".

While some of the participants were offered flexible working hours and the opportunity to work at home, it was indicated that usual practice was projected for the future. In the interviews, all seven of the participants referred to the fact that they offer "career development opportunities" to their employees in the context of employer branding.

All references to provide the opportunity to work abroad, ensuring transitions between holding companies, and providing training in the classroom and through digital training platforms are gathered under the node of career and development opportunities.

5. The American Marketing Association (2022) defined a brand as a name, term, sign, symbol, design, or combination of all of the characteristics that identify the products or services of a company or group of companies to differentiate them from their competitors. The same reasoning is true for the employer brand. The participants were asked what the differences from their competitors are, and their answers were compiled under three nodes. The answers about the "business characteristics" that distinguish them from their competitors were being a leader in the sector, being a known company, having the power of the name, long-term work commitment, and being a local company. All these statements were analyzed in depth and gathered under the operational characteristics node. Three of the participants indicated differences in the "working environment" as, a free working environment, a dynamic and agile working environment, and an environment that credits people.

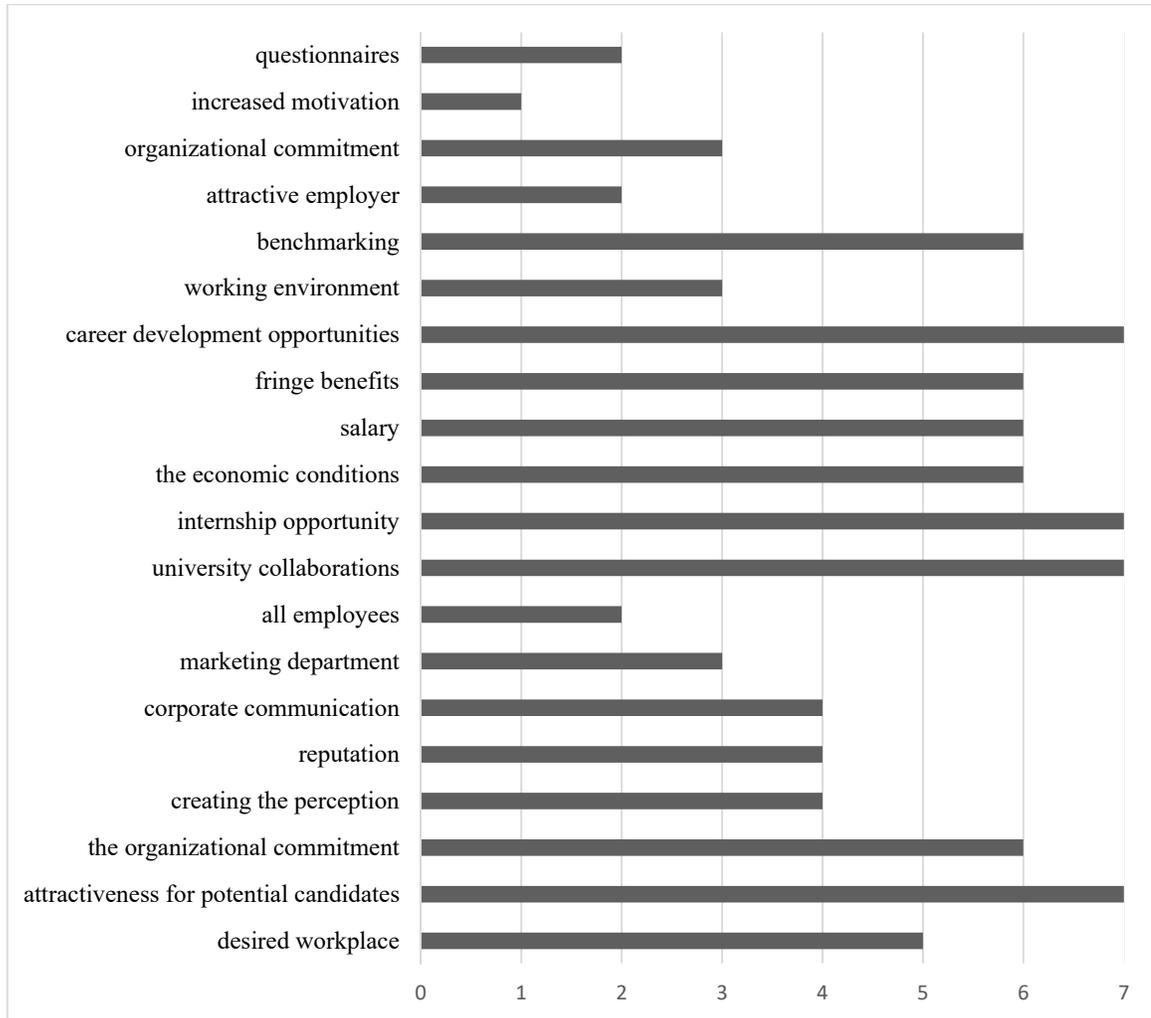
6. The source of the support organizations received during the creation of their strategic plans was examined too. The vast majority of the participants stated that they adopted the best practices expressed as "best practice" in their organizations by "benchmarking" with other companies. International companies, on the other hand, stated that they carry out this process together with global competitors. Two foreign companies have received "consultancy" through this process and have planned to continue to receive it. Six of the participants stated that they frequently use the benchmarking method in the employer brand management process.

It was stated by the participants that they use benchmarking to evaluate the social opportunities, wages, and fringe benefit policies.

7. The impact of all these practices and efforts on attracting and retaining talented candidates was questioned. The answers given by the participants are compiled under four different nodes. Two of the participants stated that they participated in "attractive employer" surveys to measure the work they carried out on behalf of the employer brand. They stated that their ranking increased after they started to carry out employer brand studies. Attractive employee ranking, increase in the number of followers on social media, increase in the number of applications, and entering the list of companies desired to work for were all examined in detail and gathered under the attractive employer node.

In the interviews, three of the participants associated employer branding practices with ensuring "organizational commitment" and they emphasized that they were effective in reducing employee turnover rates. One of the participants associated the effect of these practices with "increased motivation". He stated that there is an increase in the motivation of the employees with the employer brand activities.

Two of the participants stated that there were improvements in the results of the "questionnaires" they organized for the employees and that there were increases in their scores. Likewise, they stated that they started a project to improve the employee experience in line with the results of the loyalty survey. When the interviews were examined, the employee loyalty survey and satisfaction survey statements stated by two participants were gathered under the survey node (Fig. 3).



**Fig. 3. Stated expressions and terms.**

## 6. Conclusions.

The opinions and evaluations of the participants on "employer brand management" were analyzed and the conclusion, in brief, is as follows. All participants have a high level of awareness of this issue and they carry out activities in their institutions. The reason for such a high level of awareness may be that all participants participating in the research have undergraduate and graduate levels, as well as working in large-scale and leading institutions in their sectors. When the findings are examined in depth, "employer brand" has been described as a concept that we convey to external customers, by creating a perception with the work we carry out to attract potential candidates, provide an organizational commitment to existing employees, and be a workplace that is desired to work and to feel respected.

When the views of the participants are compared with the views on the employer brand in the literature, there is consistency. They defined the concept by referring to the fact that, the employee's only concern is not salary, but the increased prestige, psychological and physical attractiveness, providing job satisfaction, the benefits promised to the candidates, and being happy and proud to work in the company. In the literature, the concept of employer brand was first introduced by Ambler and Barrow in 1996 and defined as "the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by the institution defined as the employer" (Ambler, Barrow, 1996). It is seen that the expressions of prestige, job satisfaction, pride, and happiness in the definitions of the participants are intended to provide psychological benefits.

Many institutions already provide economic and functional benefits to their employees, and along with the increase in awareness of the employer brand concept, psychological benefit packages have started to be in current practice.

One of the conclusions is that the employer brand has a big impact on attracting and retaining talent. The participants indicated an increase in application rates of the target university graduates, increases in employee engagement survey results, and decreases in employee turnover rates. Another conclusion is about the improvement in employee experience which is emphasized by the participants during the interviews. Organizations have started to create employee value propositions to offer their employees according to the changing needs and expectations.

Employees are the most important representatives of the organization outside the organization. Therefore the packages offered and promised to attract talents in the context of employer brand management are important in creating an employer brand perception and brand image outside.

Participants stated that relations and cooperation with universities to attract potential candidates, offering internship opportunities to talented candidates, organizing company trips, and being in contact with campus representatives and talented candidates are very effective methods.

The conclusions regarding the activities carried out for the current employees in the organizations are as follows, work environment, economic benefits, work-life balance, career development opportunities, and social activities. Participants stated that they shape these practices according to their wishes, needs, and expectations by conducting one-to-one interviews with their employees. Offering packages for the employee value proposition and personal needs and demands within the scope of the employer brand are more experienced.

It can be recommended that organizations must increase and use of communication channels with their employees, investigate their changing needs and expectations well, and create employee value propositions in this context. In this way, they will be able to win the talent wars, while ensuring the loyalty of their employees under increasing competitive conditions.

Another conclusion is that the employer brand is under the umbrella of the human resources department within the organization and is closely related to the corporate communication and marketing departments too. Corporate communication and marketing departments also play a major role in the creation of the strategy and the execution of activities related to brand management. Corporate communication creates channels to be used in transferring the brand image to employees and cooperates with the human resources department to ensure communication with internal and external customers. Apart from this, it has been observed that marketing principles are frequently used in positioning the employer brand. It was stated by the participants that employer brand strategies were created by making use of different perspectives within the organization. In addition to all these, references to the support of the top management and all employees were emphasized.

As a result, it has been observed that the awareness level of the organizations on the employer brand concept is high, and it has been discovered that they have many practices for both potential candidates and current employees. With these practices, it has been revealed that they differentiate themselves from their competitors in terms of business characteristics, working environment, and global opportunities. All these efforts provide many benefits such as increases in the number of applications, increases in attractive employer rankings, increases in employee motivation, and decreases in employee turnover rates.

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