

CAHRS Working Group Employer Branding and Attracting Talent

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Participating Organizations:

American Express
BAE Systems
Bloomberg
Bristol-Myers Squibb
Colgate Palmolive
Cornell University
Estée Lauder
The Hersey Company
Johnson & Johnson
JPMorgan Chase
Mastercard
Microsoft
Protective Life
Prudential
TIAA
Verizon

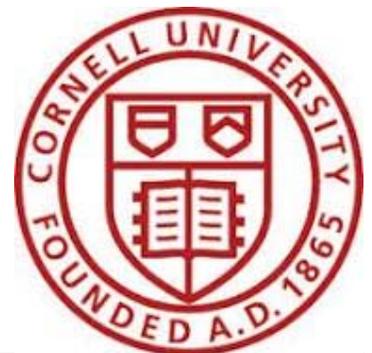
Key Takeaways:

1. Employer brands should be developed around key aspects of the company, work environment, culture, etc. that are unique to the organization and that will resonate with key talent the company is trying to attract.
2. When done well, a company's employer brand and the process of identifying the employer brand should have positive spillover on the engagement and retention of existing employees.
3. Because of the complexity of organizations in which there are different roles, divisions, and locations, companies should consider developing both an overarching brand that connects to all employees and sub-brands that add additional information, and highlights key aspects unique to specific roles.
4. It is important to connect the work done on employer brands with the communications and marketing efforts of the large product/service brand of the organization.

Developing an Employer Brand

The first part of the morning focused on how participants were formulating and developing their employer brand and/or employee value proposition. While there were different approaches and processes across companies, there seemed to be a few common threads or best practices in how to work on developing an employer brand.

- *Develop a deep understanding of what makes the company special as an employer.* Participants consistently noted that it is important to identify the factors that can potentially differentiate the company from labor market competitors. Also, remember to also identify factors that make the organization competitive (that is, what factors are table stakes for attracting the kinds of talent the organization needs?)
- *Key Aspects of Employer Brand.* While specific factors may differ across organizations, companies should be looking to identify the aspects of work, the company, or culture that engages the current population of employees. Examples



ranged across engagement factors from leadership, to the job itself, to peers, to the mission/purpose/values of the company. For the overarching employer brand for the company, it is important to identify the factors that resonate across different population groups.

- *Bring in the voice of employees to the process.* This is one area of HR that is particularly suited to enhancement by bringing in “the voice of the customer” by getting direct input from existing employees. Companies can then match this information from employees against external research on key needs and wants of target population of employees — finding the match between what engages current employees and what the target population is looking for is the sweet spot for identifying employer brand and employee-value proposition.
- *Specific stories and examples make the point better than corporate speak.* Capturing examples of attributes or key factors in the form of stories of experiences of current employees may be particularly powerful as this can feel more authentic to target population compared to company-created marketing materials. External candidates are more likely to believe or resonate with these stories particularly when they have been captured in a way that doesn’t seem overproduced.

Aspirational Versus Realistic

As the group shared examples of their processes and actions for identifying and building their employer brand, the group had a good discussion on whether the employer brand should be about the current state (realistic) or future oriented (aspiration of what the company is moving towards). What comes first (aspirations or driving the changes needed to compete for talent?) Several companies shared examples of where they needed to make changes to work space design, culture, or HR practices (e.g, pay, feedback) to create an environment that would be more attractive to target labor pools. They couldn’t really build strong employer brand to attract the talent they needed until they drove changes to enhance the experiences or environment.

The risks of building employer brands or employee value propositions on the future or aspirational goals include:

1. disappointing candidates when the real experience doesn’t live up to marketing and branding efforts, and
2. turning off current employees who don’t feel that the branding/recruitment materials live up to their own experiences leading to disengagement and potentially turnover.

This question seems particularly relevant for companies that are looking to build a new employee experience to attract a new set of employees that they may not have recruited in the past. The frequent example cited in the group was trying to attract digital or Millennial talent to companies that have not had a strong digital presence in the past or that has been a more traditional employer that doesn’t have the kinds of work-life balance, flexibility or other factors that play strongly to the expectations of Millennial employees. The overwhelming belief based on the experience of participants was that it is better to work to build out a new environment that matches to the expectations of the target audience rather than to tell them about the aspirational goals and hope to change to meet their expectations after they join the company.

One-Size-Fits-All Versus Creating Sub-Brands

Closely following the discussion on aspiration brands versus realistic brands was a conversation on how to manage employer brands when the company may have very different employee experiences across job types, locations, divisions, etc. For example, a few companies noted that they had created new offices or work environments for digital, Research & Development, or corporate center roles compared to front-line manufacturing or service locations. In this case, it may be useful to think about creating both a higher order brand that speaks to the cultural values or other aspects that cut across all jobs and locations and then to develop separate sub-brands or employee value propositions that speak to the uniqueness of the experiences in employees in separate locations, jobs, or

divisions. The sub-brands should match the valued experiences of the roles, locations, etc. and expectations of key talent pools needed to fill these different roles. One complexity of modern organizations is that while a few factors may hold across locations, divisions and job types, there are probably more differences than commonalities. For example, key needs/expectations and aspects of the environment may differ widely between digital/technology talent, front-line service employees, and sales. Trying to create a one-size-fits-all brand that speaks equally well to each of these audiences may be impossible and may in fact make it difficult to accurately market to the talent needed to fill these different roles.

Value of Employer Brands Internally

Participants generally agreed that their employer brands/employee value propositions also can play a strong role internally. Several participants noted that they have used internal communications to share employer brand messaging internally and that it seems to have a positive effect on employee engagement — reminding employees of key reasons of what is special about their employer. In contrast, the employer brand could have negative spillover effects on employee engagement if the brand messaging does not match with the reality of the day-to-day work environment.

Using employer brands and employee value propositions to engage current employees requires the development of good internal communications. Several participants noted the use of internal intranets or internal social media tools as means to convey stories and examples from current employees to share with others as a good way to build and communicate the brand in an authentic way internally.

A few participants noted that the exercise of using employees as sources of information to help shape their brand had positive effects on employee engagement as those employees who participated in the brand identification work seemed to exhibit strong positive feelings about the company, noted how their participation reminded them of great aspects of the work environment, and reminded them why they were proud to work for their company. Similarly, several participants noted that employees felt engaged by the process of participation in brainstorming, data collection, or design thinking efforts tied to developing an employer brand or employee value proposition statements as they felt the process itself was engaging and empowering and helped them to crystalize key aspects of what makes their company a great place to work.

Structural Position of Employer Brand

Where does ownership of employer brand reside in the organizational structure?

Most identified that employer branding team/leader resides in Human Resources — typically in the Talent function or Talent Centers of Excellence. A few identified that the leadership role or ownership of the employer brand sat with the Leader of the HR/internal communications team reporting into the Chief Human Resource Officer. For a few, the employer brand development and ownership team/leader reports into marketing and/or company communications. Those that followed the latter model suggested that it sit outside of HR in order to enhance the connection with product/company brand building efforts and other external communications.

In either case, there needs to be a strong partnership between HR/marketing/communications to ensure that employer brand and employer branding materials fit into the larger brand of the organization, provide additional creative help in developing the employer brand, and share resources to drive both.

This Summary Report was prepared by Chris Collins for use by participants of the Employer Branding and Attracting Talent Working Group.

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