

## EMPLOYER BRAND BUILDING FROM THE INSIDE-OUT: HOW EMPLOYER VALUES CONTRIBUTE TO EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

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### ABSTRACT

Employer Branding is a concept that is gaining importance within the Human Resources field mainly due to its potential for retaining and attracting talent to boost organisations capabilities and competitiveness. According to the brand management literature, building a brand must start from within, and the employer brand should also function as a reference for a company's current employees. Thus, taking this assumption into account, the main goal of this paper is to understand how employer branding contributes towards employee engagement. In order to address this research problem the authors based the research on a leading manufacturing company in cosmetics, personal care, beauty, homecare and healthcare products and a major supplier of tinplate and plastic packaging, that is going through a process of employer brand building. Field research developed in two steps. First, the HR department and some members of the Board defined the main attributes of the brand as an employer. Second, a survey was administered to senior managers to assess the level of engagement and how they perceive the employer brand attributes. Data dimensionality was reduced using factor analysis and regression analysis tested the relation of employer brand attributes and employee engagement. Factor analysis revealed three main groups of employer brand attributes: Innovation & Growth, Work Environment and Socially Responsible Practices. Employee engagement is mainly explained by Innovation & Growth attributes. The least relevant group of attributes is Socially Responsible Practices. These results contribute to better understand the relation between employer brand and employee outcomes and the importance of defining and managing employer brand attributes to foster employee engagement.

*Keywords: Employer Branding, Employee Engagement, Employer Values, Employer Brand Attributes*

### INTRODUCTION

Companies have sought ever since to fill their human resources needs with the most fit to the job. Taylor and scientific management already stated the need to put the right person in the right job. Nevertheless, the task of attracting candidates has been treated in different ways across the last century.

More recently a new perspective, coined as employer branding, has emerged based on the assumption that a company should approach the labour market in the same way, or based in the same principles, as it approaches the consumer market. Inheriting some basic concepts from marketing, companies should make efforts to build a brand not only for consumers but also for their employees and candidates. Within this context building a strong brand as an employer is at the core of a strategic approach to human resources management.

Employer branding can be viewed from an inner perspective (i.e. how organizations retain talent) and an outer perspective (i.e. how organizations attract talent) (Ferreira and Real de Oliveira, 2013). Most of the research on employer branding follows an outer perspective approach (e.g. (Elving et al., 2012; Van Hoye et al., 2013; Jain and Bhatt, 2015; Knox and Freeman, 2006; Kucherov and Zamulin, 2016; Reis et al., 2017; Wilden et al., 2010; Xie et al., 2014)), by examining issues related with brand image or organizational attractiveness and focused on potential employees. Only a few examples are based on investigating the effects of employer brand on employees' outcomes and behaviours (e.g. (Christie et al., 2015; Maxwell and Knox, 2009; Schlager et al., 2011; Tanwar and Prasad, 2016)).

The present research contributes to the less examined perspective on employer branding – the inner perspective –, and tries to understand how employer branding attributes influence employee outcomes, namely employee engagement. It is commonly accepted that a brand should be built from the inside-out, that is, its main attributes should be found at the core of the company and the way employees live and feel their own employer brand (Maxwell and Knox, 2009). Thus, it should be expected that perceptions of brand attributes might have some impact on employees' behaviours.

The relationship between brand attributes and the impact on employees assumes particular relevance. Specifically, brand attributes should be a source of employee engagement with the company, since those attributes should reflect organizational culture and values, reinforcing its identity and fostering employee engagement (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004).

Social Identity Approach to Organisational Identification (SIA), an application of the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and the social categorization (Turner, 1987) to the organizational context (Maxwell and Knox, 2009), frames the approach developed in this research paper. The main assumption of SIA is that the organization, as a social group, offers the means and context for individuals to develop a sense of self-identification with organizational characteristics (organizational identity), which in turn can predict individual and collective behaviours.

Accordingly, the employer brand attributes can function as elements of organisational identity with which employees may, or may not, develop a sense of self-identification. The right employer brand attributes will strengthen the organization-employee relation, which in turn will promote specific attitudes and behaviours, such as employee engagement.

This research paper aims to understand what employer brand attributes are more valued and how they relate with employee engagement. Data collection was made in a specific company that is going through an employer brand building process, thus making the research more contextualized and relevant by providing a practitioner context.

In order to address the research problem, the literature review starts by discussing employer brand, with an emphasis on the inner directed perspective, and goes on to present the concept of employee engagement. Methods are described, namely the way the attributes were defined and selected and the data analysis procedures of data reduction and hypothesis testing. Finally, results are presented and discussed.

Since the paper is based on a specific case, it is expected that the example and experience taken out from this specific company, may illustrate the application of some of the employer brand theoretical assumptions. These include the process of defining the most relevant employer brand attributes, and setting out a strategy that makes the most of the employer brand building by leading to better employee outcomes. Also, it is expected that this results can serve as a benchmark for other companies in order to develop employer brand attributes capable of fostering employees' engagement, thus contributing to companies' outcomes.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Employer Brand*

The "employer brand" concept was defined by (Ambler and Barrow, 1996) as "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company", with the primary role of "provide a coherent framework for management to simplify and focus priorities, increase productivity and improve recruitment, retention and commitment".

Although employer branding is a concept related with employees and potential employees, its origins can be traced to the notion of corporate brand. More importantly, corporate brand is an important element of a company strategy (Balmer and Gray, 2003) and represents a senior management concern. Another field of study that initially addressed this concept was internal marketing, which gradually shifted towards internal branding. This concept takes more of an "inside-out", value-based approach and seeks to develop and reinforce a common value-based ethos, typically attached to some form of corporate mission or vision (Mosley, 2007).

Since the search for good employees is as fierce as the search for customers, organizations have to be able to differentiate themselves in order to attract and retain the best (Berthon et al., 2005). The notion of employer attractiveness, according to the same authors, is closely related to employer branding. This

could be considered as an outer directed perspective of employer branding (Ferreira and Real de Oliveira, 2013) concerned with aspects such as possible factors affecting the attractiveness of an organization (Lievens et al., 2005), the employer brand as a package of instrumental and symbolic attributes (Lievens, 2007), and a set of characteristics that applicants as well as employees associate with a given employer (Lievens et al., 2007).

Nevertheless for the purpose of this paper we are more interested to look at how employer branding is used towards existing employees. This inner directed perspective of employer branding is characterized by looking at developing a brand from the within, in order to retain talent and to develop a corporate reputation, linking values to employees' behaviours and motivations (Ferreira and Real de Oliveira, 2013).

Studies undertaken within this perspective look at how to retain best workers in order to sustain competitive advantage and to improve business performance (Cardy and Lengnick-Hall, 2011). What are the employees' role in reputation management (Helm, 2011) and how corporate reputations and good governance are built from the inside-out (Martin and Hetrick, 2009). Another emerging field is looking at how employees relate to organizational values. It's not enough to project authenticity to customers – employees must personally subscribe to the brand's values (Wallace, de Chernatony, and Buil, 2011; Weinberger, 2008). Values are communicated to employees via overt internal communications, the ripple effect, senior management example/involvement, HR activities and external communications (Chernatony and Cottam, 2006), and as such a number of failure factors could occur which could hinder the communication of values to employees. Corporate values can motivate employees, but handled incorrectly they can do just the opposite (Edmondson and Cha, 2002).

### *Employee Engagement*

Employee engagement has emerged in recent years either in the practitioner and academic perspectives. Seen as a positive psychological state with behavioural consequences, research shows that employee engagement can have a positive impact on several organizational and individual outcomes, such as discretionary effort and turnover (Shuck and Wollard, 2010), or job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behaviour (Saks, 2006), justifying its raising popularity.

Although there is no widely accepted definition, employee engagement can be understood as “an individual employee's cognitive, emotional, and behavioural state directed toward desired organizational outcomes” (Shuck & Wollard, 2010, p. 103), thus enclosing itself the notion of a kind of motivation clearly expressed in positive behaviours that contribute to the organization as whole.

Work engagement can be defined as a positive, fulfilling, and affective-motivational state of work-related wellbeing. In fact, engagement has emanated from the positive psychology that stresses the need to investigate and find effective applications of positive traits, states and behaviours of employees

within organizations (Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008). As such, engagement can be considered the antipode of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). Employee engagement is sometimes mistaken with commitment and involvement, mainly due to interchangeable use of the expressions, especially by the practitioners approach (Shuck, 2011).

The measurement of employee engagement is also bone of contention among scholars. (Viljevac et al., 2012) investigated the validity of two measures of work engagement (the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) and the (May et al., 2004) scale) that have emerged in the academic literature. They found some evidence for convergent, discriminant and predictive validity for both scales, although neither showed discriminant validity with regard to job satisfaction. They contend that important differences in measuring engagement raises questions on how to measure the construct and the results will be specific to the measures used, limiting generalization.

However, the UWES is one of the most used construct to measure engagement. (Schaufeli, Martinez, et al., 2002), p. 74) defines work engagement as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption”. The construct has been used in several contexts and countries (e.g. (Bakker et al., 2007; Chung and Angeline, 2010; Ouweneel, 2012; Petrou et al., 2012; Salanova et al., 2005; Salanova and Schaufeli, 2008; Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002).

## METHODS

Perceptions of employer brand formed by employees and their work engagement are at the centre of this research paper. The construction of an employer brand can be understood as a reflection of several factors, namely the perceptions that employees have of their own employer, which can be translated into brand attributes. Within this framework, the goal of this research paper is to test the relation that Employer Brand Attributes may have with Employee Engagement.

To test this general assumption the research was conducted within a specific organization that is involved in the process of building a strategic approach to their brand as an employer. Colep is part of the RAR Group, and is a leading manufacturing company in the European and Brazilian markets of cosmetics, personal care, beauty, homecare and healthcare products and a major supplier of tinsplate and plastic packaging. Colep is present in several countries, namely Portugal, Brazil, Germany, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom and employs around 3.600 people. Colep’s mission is “working with customers to deliver comfort to consumers”, and their stated values include “customer focus”, “ethical and socially responsible”, “learning organization”, “openness, trust and fairness”, “creativity”, and “value creation”.

### *Measures*

The employer brand attributes were specifically formulated for the project under development in the company. The HR team and top management participated in a brainstorm meeting to list the main characteristics of Colep's brand as an employer. For this brainstorm participants were invited to think and discuss the company's employer brand, based on the main distinguishing organizational culture and values and how they could be translated into real practices and be reflected in work environment. The agreed list was then discussed and validated with the CEO and other members of the Board. The final list comprised 19 items (see appendix), and was included in the questionnaire; respondents were asked if the company provided employees with the attribute, rating each item on a 5-point Likert scale (1=totally disagree to 5=totally agree).

Employee engagement was measured using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002). The construct comprises three dimensions. Vigour refers to the levels of energy (e.g. "At my work, I feel bursting with energy"), mental resilience and persistence. Dedication is about the mental and emotional state that reflects on experience a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration and pride (e.g. "I am enthusiastic about my job"). Finally, absorption means being completely concentrated in ones work (e.g. "I feel happy when I am working intensely"). The original scale is made of 17 items measured in a 7-point Likert scale (1=Not probable; 7=Most probable), but was reduced to 9 items maintaining the original dimensions and good psychometric properties (Schaufeli et al., 2006). For the short version scale, see Appendix.

### *Participants*

For the purpose of this study the target population was line managers from the three higher report levels with leadership functions, according to the company's organizational structure. This option is based on the fact that it would be almost impossible to collect data from lower level employees, since employees are dispersed in several countries and the questionnaire was made available online. The survey was sent by email to all the targeted population and data was collected in June and July 2013.

The total population accounted for 303 senior managers distributed across Portugal, Germany, Poland, UK and Spain. From the total target population, we obtained 170 responses (a 56.1% response rate). The majority of respondents are from Portugal (61%), followed by Germany (20%) and Poland (11%). The United Kingdom (5%) and Spain (3%) are the less represented. Although the company origin is Portuguese, respondents are natives from each of the countries in the sample.

### *Data analysis*

Since employee engagement is measured using a tested scale, exploratory factor analysis was performed to check if the construct's dimensions could be confirmed, followed by reliability analysis and mean scores calculation. Also, the employer brand attributes were subjected to dimensionality

reduction through exploratory factor analysis in order to check if and how the attributes could be grouped in major core brand attributes, thus reflecting main core-values. Finally, and since the main goal is to assess the relationship between the attributes and employee work engagement, a set of regression analysis were performed to assess the relation between the groups of attributes, the general employee engagement and each of the three dimensions.

## RESULTS

Employer brand attributes are presented in the following figure. According to respondents the most important attributes of the company's brand are "multicultural environment" (M=4.09; S.D.=.837), "opportunity to belong to a company with an interesting portfolio of products" (M=3.96; S.D.=.763), "openness for proactivity actions" (M=3.88; S.D.=.737) and "informal & healthy relationships" (M=3.86; S.D.=.688). On the opposite, the least relevant attributes are "compensation attractiveness" (M=3.10; S.D.=.841), "recognition/rewards for performance" (M=3.19; S.D.=1.004) and "attractive benefits' package" (M=3.25; S.D.=.934).

Employer Brand Attributes	M	S.D.
EBA01 [Multicultural environment]	4.09	.837
EBA02 [Work / life balance respect]	3.75	.740
EBA03 [Informal & healthy relationships]	3.86	.688
EBA04 [Long term sustainable practices]	3.64	.762
EBA05 [Freedom to innovate]	3.66	.812
EBA06 [Openness for proactivity actions]	3.88	.737
EBA07 [Recognition / rewards for performance]	3.19	1.004
EBA08 [Respect for differences]	3.74	.719
EBA09 [Opportunities for career growth]	3.42	.925
EBA10 [Good work environment]	3.72	.806
EBA11 [Opportunity to belong to a company with an interesting portfolio of products]	3.96	.763
EBA12 [Attractive benefits' package]	3.25	.934
EBA13 [Opportunities for skills development]	3.63	.830
EBA14 [Compensation attractiveness]	3.10	.841
EBA15 [Healthy and safety conditions]	4.01	.799
EBA16 [Meaningful and interesting functions]	3.83	.718
EBA17 [Social and environmental responsibility]	3.79	.775
EBA18 [Job security]	3.74	.845
EBA19 [Openness, trust and fairness in the relation with others]	3.66	.854

Figure 1. *Descriptive Statistics for Employer Brand Attributes*

In order to reduce data dimension of the Employer Brand Attributes, the 19 items were computed into an exploratory factor analysis. The first attempt reduced data to three components (PVAF=57.3%; KMO=.903;  $\chi^2=1429.224$ , Sig.=.000). However, items EBA09 and EBA11 were withdrawn since they

loaded less than .500 (.491 and .340, respectively). Also, items EBA08, EBA10, EBA14, EBA15 and EBA16 were also withdrawn since they did not clearly loaded on one factor.

A new factor analysis was performed with the remaining items. Three factors were extracted (PVAF=63.6%; KMO=.875;  $\chi^2=751.210$ , Sig.=.000).

Rotated Component Matrixa			
	Component		
	1	2	3
EBA01 [Multicultural environment]		,775	
EBA02 [Work-life balance respect]		,692	
EBA03 [Informal & healthy relationships]		,717	
EBA05 [Freedom to innovate]	,762		
EBA06 [Openness for proactive actions]	,797		
EBA07 [Recognition / rewards for performance]	,632		
EBA13 [Opportunities for skills development]	,715		
EBA19 [Openness, trust and fairness in the relation with others]	,682		
EBA04 [Long term sustainable practices]			,557
EBA12 [Attractive benefits' package]			,703
EBA17 [Social and environmental responsibility]			,614
EBA18 [Job security]			,816

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.  
a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

Figure 2. *Factor Analysis of Employer Brand Attributes*

Following the description of items grouped in each component, and since this an exploratory analysis with no reference to a specific theory, we decided to name components as follows. All components have considerable internal reliability.

Component 1: Innovation & Growth ( $\alpha=.827$ )

Component 2: Work Environment ( $\alpha=.695$ )

Component 3: Socially Responsible Practices ( $\alpha=.774$ )

Figure 3 presents the mean, standard deviation and correlations for all the employee engagement items. It is worth to note that correlation values range from .332 to .711 and all items show significant moderate intercorrelations ( $p<0.01$ ).

	M	S.D.	EE VI1	EE VI2	EE DE2	EE DE3	EE VI3	EE AB3	EE DE4	EE AB4	EE AB5
EE VI1 [At my work, I feel bursting with energy]	5,40	1,278	1								
EE VI2 [At my job, I feel strong and vigorous]	5,54	1,185	,613*	1							
EE DE2 [I am enthusiastic about my job]	5,75	1,233	,490*	,711*	1						
EE DE3 [My job inspires me]	5,37	1,285	,451*	,644*	,760*	1					
EE VI3 [When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work]	5,38	1,332	,389*	,600*	,617*	,641*	1				
EE AB3 [I feel happy when I am working intensely]	5,92	1,002	,370*	,454*	,373*	,430*	,465*	1			
EE DE4 [I am proud of the work that I do]	6,06	1,127	,397*	,591*	,670*	,667*	,544*	,405*	1		
EE AB4 [I am immersed in my work]	5,80	1,100	,332*	,454*	,459*	,449*	,456*	,433*	,533*	1	
EE AB5 [I get carried away when I am working]	5,41	1,213	,339*	,465*	,511*	,551*	,524*	,474*	,531*	,536*	1

Note: \* $p < 0.01$

Figure 3. *Descriptive statistics for Employee Work Engagement*

The 9-items of the short version of UWES were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis in order to check the construct robustness and also the three dimensions' structure suggested by the literature. Data is suitable for factor analysis (KMO=.915; Barlett Test Sig.= .000) and all items group in only one factor with PVAF of 56.9%, with factor loadings above .400. Thus the 9-item UWES short version scale seems to be robust since the one factor result shows that items reflect the construct of work engagement, which is confirmed by the Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha=.903$ ).

After computing the mean for the constructs of Employee Engagement (and respective dimensions) and the three components of Employer Brand Attributes, the following figure presents the mean, standard deviation and correlations for all the variables. The items of employee engagement and employer brand core attributes present a significant moderate intercorrelation ranging from  $r=.304$  to  $r=.498$  ( $p < .01$ ). Also, employer brand attributes show a significant moderate intercorrelation ranging from  $r=.526$  to  $r=.609$  ( $p < .01$ ). A paired samples t-test indicated significant differences between EBA1 and EBA2,  $t(167)=-6.451$ ,  $p < .0005$ , and between EBA2 and EBA3,  $t(167)=-6.399$ ,  $p < .0005$ . However, the differences between EBA1 and EBA3 are not significant. Work Environment (EBA2) has a higher mean score ( $M=3.9$ ;  $S.D.=.594$ ) than Innovation & Growth (EBA1) ( $M=3.6$ ;  $S.D.=.654$ ) and Socially Responsible Practices (EBA3) ( $M=3.6$ ;  $S.D.=.640$ ).

	UWES_9	UWES9_VI	UWES9_DE	UWES9_AB	EBA_1	EBA_2	EBA_3
UWES_9	1						
UWES9_VI	,907***	1					
UWES9_DE	,915***	,762***	1				
UWES9_AB	,843***	,639***	,654***	1			
EBA_1	,498***	,404***	,488***	,439***	1		
EBA_2	,406***	,335***	,436***	,304***	,535***	1	
EBA_3	,397***	,305***	,353***	,412***	,609***	,526***	1

Note: \*\*\*p<.01

Figure 4. *Intercorrelations of study variables*

To test the hypotheses for the relationship between Employer Brand Attributes and Employee Engagement, multiple regression analyses were conducted where the general employee engagement, vigour, absorption and dedication dimensions were the dependent variables and the three core Employer Brand Attributes the independent variables. As shown in the following table, Innovation and Growth (EBA1) explains a significant amount of variance of the general employee engagement ( $\beta=.350$ ;  $p<.0005$ ), but also of vigour ( $\beta=.296$ ;  $p<.005$ ), absorption ( $\beta=.284$ ;  $p<.005$ ) and dedication ( $\beta=.350$ ;  $p<.0005$ ). On the other hand, Work Environment (EBA2) attribute explains a part of the variance of the general employee engagement ( $\beta=.171$ ;  $p<.05$ ) and of the dedication dimension ( $\beta=.245$ ;  $p<.01$ ). Finally, Socially Responsible Practices (EBA3) only explain a part of variance of the absorption dimension ( $\beta=.216$ ;  $p<.05$ ).

		R Square	Standardized Coefficients		
			Beta	t	Sig.
UWES9	EBA_1	,281	,350***	3,972	,000
	EBA_2		,171**	2,080	,039
	EBA_3		,094	1,077	,283
UWES9_VI	EBA_1	,183	,296***	3,158	,002
	EBA_2		,149	1,697	,092
	EBA_3		,046	,494	,622
UWES9_AB	EBA_1	,227	,284***	3,108	,002
	EBA_2		,044	,516	,606
	EBA_3		,216**	2,385	,018
UWES9_DE	EBA_1	,282	,350***	3,972	,000
	EBA_2		,245***	2,985	,003
	EBA_3		,011	,131	,896

Note: \*p<.10; \*\*p<.05; \*\*\*p<.01

Figure 5. *Regression Analysis predicting Employee Engagement*

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this research was to understand the relation between employer brand attributes and employee engagement. Based on the assumption that a brand must consider the inner dynamics of the company, namely its shared core values and the impact that those values may have on employees' behaviours, this study examined the contribution employees may have in building the employer brand, but also on the potential effect that the employer brand can have on positive employees' outcomes.

The study subject was based on a company that went through the process of strategically building their brand as an employer. This choice was based on two assumptions: first, the need to bridge theory and practice, the academic and practitioner views; second, because this specific company is implementing their employer brand, allowing to follow closely a real case.

After conducting the dimension reduction of data, regression analysis revealed that the core attribute most relevant for explaining employee engagement is "Innovation & Growth". This group presents two interconnected facets of the company. On the one hand, employees recognize that they work in a company where openness to innovate and the challenge to do new things are at the core of company's brand attributes. On the other hand, employees perceive that the company promotes a rewarding environment, through recognition for performance and development opportunities. Thus it can be said that employees tend to feel more engaged if their work is challenging, enriching and rewarding.

Being able to take proactive actions and to innovate is related with job characteristics, since they imply autonomy and problem solving. Some literature supports that job characteristics are related with employee engagement. For example, job characteristics such as autonomy, task variety and significance, or job complexity have a positive influence on engagement (Bakker et al., 2007; Christian et al., 2011).

Learning also plays a pivotal role in this core employer brand attribute. Having opportunities for skills development contributes to employees' engagement. In fact, human resources development practices are considered to be related with higher levels of employee engagement, which is supported by the literature (Fairlie, 2011; Rana et al., 2014; Shuck et al., 2011).

The final component of the "Innovation & Growth" core employer brand attribute is the existence of recognition and rewards for performance. The literature presents mixed results regarding the impact of rewards on engagement (Yalabik et al., 2017). Some literature suggests that extrinsic rewards may damage engagement (Bakker et al., 2006), while others (Gorter et al., 2008) have found a positive link between them. Crawford, based on a meta-analytic study of the antecedents and drivers of employee engagement suggests that the influence of extrinsic rewards on engagement depends on the presence of intrinsic motivation, since the former can have a negative impact on the latter.

“Work Environment” also contributes to explain general engagement. Promoting work-life balance and healthy relationships reveals a concern with well-being, which is valued by this company’s employees. The importance of well-being for employee engagement is documented in the literature (Shimazu et al., 2014; Shimazu and Schaufeli, 2009; Shuck and Reio, 2014), showing that work engagement is an enhancer of several well-being indicators such as life satisfaction, health (reducing psychological distress and physical complaints), psychological well-being, either as an antecedent or as a moderator. In some research work engagement can even be considered a dimension of work-related wellbeing (Robertson and Cooper, 2010; Rothmann, 2008).

Two dimensions underlying wellbeing at work are activation (ranging from exhaustion to vigour) and identification (ranging from cynicism to dedication) (Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002). Accordingly, “Work Environment” also contributes to explain the dedication dimension of employee engagement. Dedication is about significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge (Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002) and work environment includes aspects such as the respect for work-life balance and healthy and informal relationships, which may foster employees’ dedication.

Finally, the “Socially Responsible Practices” core attribute, specially connected with internal CSR (Oliveira et al., 2013), is not so relevant when it comes to promote engagement, just contributing to explain one dimension of employee engagement. Most research tends to relate socially responsible practices with higher levels of employee engagement (Chaudhary, 2017; Mirvis, 2012; Tsourvakas and Yfantidou, 2018). However, when it comes to link internal social responsible practices with employee engagement, some research does not clearly demonstrates this relation (Ferreira and de Oliveira, 2014). The social responsible practices core attribute also included “job security”. The literature also supports the relation of job security (or insecurity) with work engagement. For example, in a study about job insecurity and job performance, (Wang et al., 2015) found that job insecurity was negatively associated with job performance through work engagement when organizational justice was low. Also, (Bosman et al., 2005) examined the relation of job insecurity with work engagement and burnout when mediated by affectivity (either positive or negative). The results showed that higher levels of either cognitive or affective job insecurity were associated with lower levels of work engagement.

Thus, since aspects of socially responsible practices, either internal or external are present (such as job security or Social and environmental responsibility), it would be expected that this core brand attribute would have more impact on employee engagement. However, it just contributes to explain absorption. This dimension of employee engagement is characterized by being fully concentrated in one’s work but with an intrinsic enjoyment. On the one hand, taking into account that this group includes aspects such as job security and attractive benefits package, employees feel a sense of security, which may free them to concentrate on their own job. On the other hand, this group includes long-term sustainable practices

and social and environmental responsibility which may contribute to the intrinsic enjoyment attached to absorption.

These results present some implications. Theoretical implications include the contribution to the understanding of employer brand, namely its contribution to employee and organizational outcomes. These results support the idea that employer branding may be the (new) strategic tool for managing human resources. In terms of practical implications, this research contributes to the importance of managing employer brand as companies manage consumer brand, since understanding the attributes of the employer brand can help companies not only to reflect on their own brand identity, but also manage that identity in order to foster employees' behaviours and performance.

Nevertheless, there are some limitations to be pointed out. This research was based on a single company with its own specificities, making impossible to generalize the results and conclusions; however, it offers some insights to other companies wishing to build a strong employer brand. Despite its widely use, another limitation regards the use of UWES scale to measure engagement since it does not allow isolate job engagement and organization engagement (Saks, 2006). Finally, the procedures to choose the employer brand attributes to be included in the survey may have been biased by the insider perspective of the participants.

Despite the limitation pointed out, this paper makes a specific contribution in linking employer brand attributes to employees' outcomes, namely employee engagement.

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