

WAYS OF HUMAN RESOURCE BRANDING IN CZECH AGRICULTURAL COMPANIES*

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Current demographic and economic conditions in individual countries lead to a significant increase in competition in the labour market. Every employer from all economic sectors wants to have competent and talented human resources and the fight for such employees becomes still harder. To attract and retain the best employees, it is necessary for the companies to build up a good employer brand that may appeal to talented employees. The article provides a picture of the current situation in employer branding in the agricultural, forestry, and fishing sectors in the Czech Republic and deals with the ways of its improvement. The investigation was conducted by means of a questionnaire survey covering 108 participating companies, and the methods of analysis, synthesis, deduction, and induction. The results have shown that the majority of agricultural companies (75.9%) perceive knowledge continuity management as a trend that contributes to good employer branding. The major benefits arising from the encouragement of employer branding in agricultural companies include acquisition of new talented human resources (57.4%) and retention of key employees (56.4%).

human resources; czech agriculture; chi-square test; employer brand; trends; factors



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INTRODUCTION

Marketing as a discipline focuses on the branding and building of identity primarily towards suppliers, customers, and other stakeholder groups (Aaker, 2003; Keller, 2007; Kotler, Keller, 2007). However, it serves for other purpose than concentrating on human resource branding (HRB). It is an area in which human resources management combines with marketing and an area of strategic importance in the current competitive environment. Employer branding is as important as company branding; it permeates all spheres of an organization and is presented externally. Bursová (2009) states that the employer branding concept is important in particular when searching for new candidates for key positions in the organization and to motivate and retain current employees. Hučková (2012) adds that each employee is the best recruiter and a good employer brand may become a lure at-

tracting competent people. This generates the effect that capable people want to work with other capable people. It is possible to say that a good employer brand leads to success not only in recruitment and personnel activities, but also improves the overall productivity of the organization. On the other hand, organizations that are forced to dismiss employees need to consider their steps carefully in order to minimize negative impacts on their brand and undertake other personnel activities that help the dismissed and thus reduce the negative effect on the employer brand (e.g. support outplacement).

With respect to the above said, Wilden et al. (2010) emphasise that, as a result of growth of competition in the labour market, strategic investments in the recruitment of suitable qualified human resources are a must and employer branding contributes to that. Employer branding is an issue in all organizations across all economic sectors that wish to preserve

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their position in the market in the future. The same applies to the very specific and broadly discussed agricultural sector in the Czech Republic. Pýcha (2013) stated that according to long-term statistics people working in Czech agriculture are getting older and young people are not very interested in engaging in this sector. Educational institutions specializing in agriculture are being closed since young people are no longer interested in attending them. Therefore we may say that it is just a question of time when the Czech agricultural sector will start to lack qualified labour.

Hence the aim of this study is to evaluate the current situation concerning employer branding in the agricultural, forestry, and fishing sectors in the Czech Republic and provide recommendations leading to its improvement. The first part of the study focuses on the theoretical background, the second presents the results obtained by means of a primary research. The latter tested whether selected factors related to age management and human resources determine the perception of the advantages of building a good employer brand and how they influence the perception of strategic trends that may contribute to employer branding. The analysis was based on the Chi-square test of independency and the data was processed by means of the IBM SPSS 21 statistical software.

Theoretical background

Van Mossevelde (2014) defines employer branding as a process of promotion of the organization targeted at recruiting and retaining talented human resources and fulfilment of its business plan. Konecna (2008) states that an employer brand is the image of the organization directed at the external market. The better its image, the more attractive place of work it becomes in the eyes of current employees, potential employees, and all stakeholder groups.

Backhaus, Tikoo (2004) and Wilden et al. (2010) add that the employer brand is a set of psychological, economic, and functional benefits that the potential employees associate with the employer. According to Hertel et al. (2013), knowledge of these benefits helps the company create an attractive and competitive employer brand. This is confirmed by the results of Urbanová, Hlavsa (2014).

Wally (1989) sees the importance of employer branding primarily in creating an internal spiritual and cultural bond with variable management structures and movable borders that hold the entire company together and embody the reputation for all stakeholders involved. Elving et al. (2013) state that employer branding is determined by the position of the organization in the market and its identity. It is necessary to realize that loyal employees can actively build a good employer brand and contribute to employer's development. The impact of the human factor on the organization as such is enormous (Kacháňáková, Stachová, 2011).

The brand is created and dynamically shaped by it. On the other hand, it is a factor that may be shaped and used for the purposes of the organization through branding and strengthening its position in the market. Ambler, Barrow (1996) state that organizational brands communicate the benefits of using a product or service to potential consumers, employer brands communicate the benefits of employment to potential employees, and it is important nowadays. According to Barrow, Mosley (2006) the main role of the employer brand is to provide a coherent framework for management to simplify and focus priorities, increase productivity, and improve recruitment, retention, and commitment.

Employer branding is a process consisting of several steps. Bursová (2009) and also Hučková (2012) and Van Mossevelde (2014) define four basic phases of employer branding:

Understanding – this is the first phase of employer branding; its goal is to find out how the brand is perceived by top management and all stakeholder groups, including potential external candidates (future employees). In order to obtain valid information it is possible to use an analysis of stakeholder groups, moderated workshops, focus groups, employee surveys, interviews with selected external partners or to use specific indicators, for example, from the recruitment or selection processes. This phase is to be viewed as a long-term activity.

Planning – this is the second phase during which the information collected is analyzed to create a clear picture of the initial position, i.e. the offer and the requirements. Based on the information collected, it is possible to determine individual attributes of the employer brand relating to its current or future strategy. In this phase, the basic attributes of the brand are defined and the “employment value proposition” developed, i.e. specific examples of behaviour expected in the context of the set brand values. This is followed by activities relating to the expression of the brand as such.

Execution – the third phase is a realization phase; it is necessary to communicate what can be really offered. This is the kind of information that employees may appreciate and trust in. It is also necessary to take into account applicants since promises and communication should comply with what they have experienced in the process of recruitment and selection. New values and other attributes are first implemented in the recruitment and adaptation processes. As regards current employees, it is more suitable to focus on internal communication. These values also need to be shared by the management.

Taking measures – the final phase aimed at ensuring the shift of the brand or its intensification and at collecting information on the necessary corrective measures. This may be done through, for example, internal opinion polls or external expectation surveys.

This is based on data relating to the recruitment and selection process as well as the employment process as such.

Keeping in mind the above said, it may be summarized that employer branding is currently very important. Elving et al. (2013) and Saini et al. (2014) agree that employer brand is an efficient marketing tool in the process of human resources management that helps companies to strengthen the positive relation of potential applicants for work and the company, which the human resources in the labour market consider to be an attractive employer. Currently the organizations consider human resource branding a precious value and a crucial success factor. Through it, organizations support the interest of potential candidates on the labour market and increase the loyalty of current employees to remain in the organization. It is, however, a long-term systematic activity (Understanding, Planning, Execution, Taking measures). Apart from these activities, Stahl et al. (2012) define six key principles adhered to by successful companies (IBM, General Electric, Procter & Gamble, Shell, Siemens, IKEA, Infosys, and Samsung) that set the direction for other organizations. The principles are as follows: alignment of strategies within the company (alignment of strategic trends), internal consistency of the company, cultural embeddedness, involvement of the company's management, balance between global and local needs, and branding through differentiation.

Stahl et al. (2012) also state that the adoption and implementation of the above-mentioned principles is much better than the application of the so-called best practice. They justify this by the fact that these principles have a more general character and are more easily applicable across different organizations, which cannot be said about best practice. What is good for one organization does not necessarily suit others. It is possible to agree with them in this respect since there are a number of factors (number of employees, economical sector, number of more experienced employees, etc.) that differentiate individual entities in the market. With respect to the fact that agriculture, forestry, and fishery are specific branches in the Czech Republic, special aspects of employer branding in these sectors were examined taking into account the theoretical background. Another reason for targeting the article at the primary sector is the finding of the National Training Fund (2014) which says that agriculture in the Czech Republic is one of the sectors with the highest average age and is affected, in the long run, by the lack of interest on the part of young people who are not motivated to work in agriculture. At present, potential employees view agriculture as a branch with relatively lower career perspectives. Thus the overall employment in this sector is expected to drop, compared to the year 2008, by one quarter by 2020 (Czech Statistical Office, 2014) and its share with respect to overall employment will be at

2.45%. Having in mind the above, the article concentrates on employer branding specifically in this sector.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Primary data was obtained by an anonymous electronic survey targeted at Czech organizations. To obtain data, a quantitative type of survey was conducted using the questionnaire technique of data collection. The sampling frame was based on Albertina database. By June 30, 2014 a total of 549 randomly selected companies (out of which 108 operate in the agricultural, forestry, and fishing sectors) took part in the survey. They were contacted by e-mail and the response rate was 65%. The questionnaire survey was completed by persons responsible for human resources in a company, mostly by director of the company or human resources department director.

The questionnaire consisted of four parts including 48 questions in total. The first part was focused on Age management, the second on Diversity management, the third on Human resources branding, and the last part was focused on Classification questions. Most of the questions were closed-ended.

The agricultural companies, which were in the focus of this research, were structured according to their size (number of employees) as follows: 68.5% small companies (up to 50 employees), 25.9% middle-sized companies (51–249 employees), and 5.6% large agricultural companies (250 employees and over).

To evaluate the results, descriptive statistics and the Chi-square test were applied. The validity of the null hypothesis on the independence between the features monitored was verified at the 5% level of significance. The decision on the rejection or acceptance of the null hypothesis was based on the comparison of the *P*-value and the level of significance. Where the *P*-value was lower than the set level of significance, the dependency was considered statistically significant. The dependencies were assessed between individual qualitative features through benefits contributing to the building of a good employer brand in agricultural companies and selected identification questions. The following identification questions were considered: the men to women ratio in agricultural companies (options: more males, more females, equal proportion of males and females), the percentage of employees over 55 years of age (options (%): 0–5, 6–10, 11–15, 16–20, 21–30, 31–40, 41–50, 51 and over), the turnover rate (options (%): up to 5, 6–10, 11–15, 16–20, 21 and over), the turnover according to the age structure of employees in the organization (options (years): 18–30, 31–44, 45–56, 57 and over), and the size of the organization (options (employees): up to 50, 51–249, 250 and over). The considered trends which help supporting human resource branding were (with YES and NO option in all): The advantage of perception to gain a new

Table 1. The advantage of how the organization is perceived in gaining a new talent

Factor	Chi-square test criterion	Degrees of freedom	<i>P</i> -value	Factor significance
Men to women ratio	3.761	2	0.152	No
Share of employees over 55 years	6.762	5	0.239	No
Turnover rate	2.742	2	0.291	No
Turnover according to age structure	2.740	3	0.433	No
Size of organization	3.526	1	0.060	No

source: own survey, responded by 108 companies

Table 2. The advantage of retaining key employees

Factor	Chi-square test criterion	Degrees of freedom	<i>P</i> -value	Factor significance
Men to women ratio	3.449	2	0.178	No
Share of employees over 55 years	1.942	5	0.857	No
Turnover rate	0.238	2	0.888	No
Turnover according to age structure	7.411	3	0.060	No
Size of organization	0.847	1	0.357	No

source: own survey, responded by 108 companies

Table 3. The advantage of increasing the motivation of current employees

Factor	Chi-square test criterion	Degrees of freedom	<i>P</i> -value	Factor significance
Men to women ratio	1.811	2	0.404	No
Share of employees over 55 years	8.434	5	0.134	No
Turnover rate	4.431	2	0.109	No
Turnover according to age structure	4.999	3	0.172	No
Size of organization	0.457	1	0.499	No

source: own survey, responded by 108 companies

Table 4. The advantage of improving public awareness of the existence of the company

Factor	Chi-square test criterion	Degrees of freedom	<i>P</i> -value	Factor significance
Men to women ratio	1.764	2	0.414	No
Share of employees over 55 years	2.320	5	0.803	No
Turnover rate	2.237	2	0.322	No
Turnover according to age structure	1.998	3	0.573	No
Size of organization	0.687	1	0.407	No

source: own survey, responded by 108 companies

Table 5. The advantage of the improved financial situation

Factor	Chi-square test criterion	Degrees of freedom	<i>P</i> -value	Factor significance
Men to women ratio	0.858	2	0.651	No
Share of employees over 55 years	7.030	5	0.218	No
Turnover rate	5.532	2	0.063	No
Turnover according to age structure	1.344	3	0.719	No
Size of organization	0.057	1	0.811	No

source: own survey, responded by 108 companies

talent, The advantage of retaining key employees, The advantage of increasing the motivation of current employees, The advantage of improving public awareness of the existence of the company, The advantage of the improved financial situation, Trend in knowledge continuity, Trend in talent management, Trends in age management, Trends in diversity management, Trends in career management. Dependencies between trends that support employer branding and identification variables were tested, too. In total, 50 null hypotheses were tested (see the results and tables in the Results chapter).

Other theoretical methods used were the analysis of secondary sources (from the Theoretical Background), data analysis (Results), finding synthesis (Theoretical Background, Results), deduction and induction (Results, Discussion).

RESULTS

The agricultural companies involved in the survey ($n = 108$) were asked about the advantages resulting from a good employer brand building. The respondents were allowed to mark more possibilities. A total of 57.4% of organizations stated that the main advantage is the acquisition of new talented human resources, 56.4% of organizations mentioned the advantage of retaining key employees, and 48.1% marked the increase in the motivation of current employees. A broader public awareness of the existence of the organization was indicated by 50% of organizations and 45.4% of agricultural companies mentioned the improvement of financial situation.

Factors that impact the perception of advantages arising from employer branding in the agricultural companies are tested below. The following factors were verified: size of the organization (number of employees), men to women ratio in the organization, percentage of employees over 55 years of age, employee turnover rate in the organization, and the employee age group with the highest turnover.

Tables 1–5 bring the results on testing the five advantages (see Methods).

No statistically significant dependency was proven in agricultural companies between the advantage of acquiring new talented employees and any of the set factors (men to women ratio, percentage of employees aged 55+, employee turnover rate, turnover according to the age structure or company size) (Table 1).

No statistically significant dependency was proven for the advantage of retaining key employees in agricultural companies (Table 2).

Neither was any statistically significant dependency proven as regards the increase in motivation of current staff (Table 3).

Furthermore, no statistically significant dependency was proven with respect to the improvement of

public awareness on the existence of the company or improvement of its financial situation (Tables 4 and 5).

The following part of the survey was dedicated to the trends in the area of human resources management and their contribution to employer branding in agricultural companies. Respondents were allowed to mark more possibilities. The results showed that employer branding in the agricultural and forestry sectors is positively influenced by the application of knowledge continuity management (75.9%), talent management (48.1%), as well as age management (22.2% of respondents), diversity management (25.9%) and career management (22.2%).

Tables 6–10 present the results of statistical testing of dependencies between the perception of trends in the area of human resources management and selected factors.

No statistically significant dependency was proven between knowledge continuity as one of the trends in human resources management and the support of employer branding in agricultural companies (Table 6).

Neither was any statistically significant dependency proven in relation to talent management (Table 7).

The concept of age management and employer branding in agricultural companies did not show any statistically significant dependency, too (Table 8).

The similar applies to diversity management; no statistically significant dependency was proven between the qualitative features examined (Table 9).

As regards the trend of career management and the sex structure of employees in agricultural companies, a statistically significant dependency was proven (P -value = 0.037). The possibility of career management support (career planning and management) was mentioned by agricultural companies with a majority of male employees. On the contrary, in the companies, where female employees represented the majority, career management was not perceived as a trend that might contribute to employer branding (Table 10).

DISCUSSION

Building a strong employer brand is not an easy task in any sector, including agriculture, forestry, and fishery, however, it is essential for companies if they wish to succeed in the labour market and to attract talented human resources into the industry. To build a good employer brand, companies across all sectors need to focus on the following:

- Clear and efficient specification of the given employer distinguishing it from competitors and helping the public remember this employer easily; this is done through the brand as such (from the marketing point of view).
- Offering recognition, i.e. what the company offers to the human resources in the labour market and its

Table 6. Trend in knowledge continuity

Factor	Chi-square test criterion	Degrees of freedom	<i>P</i> -value	Factor significance
Men to women ratio	1.440	2	0.487	No
Share of employees over 55 years	4.084	5	0.537	No
Turnover rate	0.612	2	0.736	No
Turnover according to age structure	1.131	2	0.568	No
Size of organization	0.156	1	0.693	No

source: own survey, responded by 108 companies

Table 7. Trend: Talent management

Factor	Chi-square test criterion	Degrees of freedom	<i>P</i> -value	Factor significance
Men to women ratio	1.811	2	0.404	No
Share of employees over 55 years	2.196	5	0.821	No
Turnover rate	1.558	2	0.459	No
Turnover according to age structure	2.139	2	0.343	No
Size of organization	1.189	1	0.276	No

source: own survey, responded by 108 companies

Table 8. Trend: Age management

Factor	Chi-square test criterion	Degrees of freedom	<i>P</i> -value	Factor significance
Men to women ratio	0.739	2	0.691	No
Share of employees over 55 years	2.149	5	0.828	No
Turnover rate	0.982	2	0.612	No
Turnover according to age structure	2.697	2	0.260	No
Size of organization	0.077	1	0.782	No

source: own survey, responded by 108 companies

Table 9. Trend: Diversity management

Factor	Chi-square test criterion	Degrees of freedom	<i>P</i> -value	Factor significance
Men to women ratio	1.296	2	0.523	No
Share of employees over 55 years	2.058	5	0.841	No
Turnover rate	0.091	2	0.955	No
Turnover according to age structure	2.400	2	0.301	No
Size of organization	0.148	1	0.700	No

source: own survey, responded by 108 companies

Table 10. Trend: Career management

Factor	Chi-square test criterion	Degrees of freedom	<i>P</i> -value	Factor significance
Men to women ratio	6.612	2	0.037	Yes
Share of employees over 55 years	7.773	5	0.169	No
Turnover rate	4.410	2	0.110	No
Turnover according to age structure	0.631	2	0.730	No
Size of organization	0.049	1	0.825	No

source: own survey, responded by 108 companies

current employees, so that the value of the employer brand could be determined.

- An efficient communication programme on the website, participation in competitions, fairs, etc.
- Organization's own communication strategy with a precise action plan in order to unanimously support its identity and strengthen the position of the employer brand in the strongly competitive environment, head-hunting for talented employees.
- Consistency over time to enable the customer to build long-term trust in the employer, which also means increasing the value of its brand. It is important to work with employees to avoid damage to the employer brand by disloyal employees.
- Employer brand monitoring in time and follow-up evaluation and adjustment to the results; this means continuous care of the employer brand. It is very easy to lose good reputation, but winning it back and retaining it is much more difficult and time-consuming.
- Liability for the employer brand; it is important to support the credibility of information and trust in the employer both within the internal and external (labour market) environment.
- Continuous investment in strategic trends that contribute to good employer brand building in the current turbulent environment is absolutely necessary. The underestimation of such investment may have a negative impact on the perception of the employer by current and future employees and the entire public.

It is necessary to realize that the more attractive the employer and its presentation is for stakeholder groups (i.e. efficient provision of interesting tangible and intangible employee benefits, maintaining of cultural and working environment, engagement of employees in management, support of brand management, image and reputation), the more interest the employer will evoke in the labour market. Such an organization will not only have the possibility to select candidates from a larger group, but will also gain access to talented human resources, as confirmed by Pop (2008). Research by Helm (2011), conducted in companies belonging to the US Fortune index, i.e. the so-called most admired companies with a good employer brand, proved a narrow link between the quality of the employer brand and employee pride and the quality of their work. Based on the above said, it may be concluded that employee pride and satisfaction arising from the work performed has an impact on the brand strength.

In the competitive environment, when building their brand, organizations in all sectors need to pay attention to the following:

- Importance of the organization and its successfulness (organization's financial results).
- Organization's reputation (trustworthiness and politeness towards workers and employees) => to support Czech agricultural organizations in human resource branding.

- The level and fairness of remuneration in comparison with other organizations. The figures should always be stated truthfully; otherwise organizations will lose their employee loyalty. Without internal trust it is impossible to win good employees, as mentioned by Aaker (2003), Berthon et al. (2005), and Pop (2008). The majority of employees would give preference to a renowned employer where they expect more interesting financial conditions and a variety of benefits rather than to an unknown company with e.g. just five employees.
- The level of employee care (including care of working environment) and employee benefits compared to other organizations => to use qualitative and quantitative surveys, databases (AMADEUS etc.) to identify of employee benefits (interviews, etc.), responsibility by human resource department and line managers or owner, time period by every year.
- The possibility of corporate training and personal development of employees in general – primarily in the area of employee training, talent management, and knowledge sharing, supporting of innovations, etc. => to add knowledge sharing and supporting of innovations to Key Performance Indicators for employees' assessment.
- Interpersonal relationships and the social climate in the organization to support social development.
- Organization's location, living conditions, the surrounding environment, etc.

These internal factors are in the hands of the organization and their active improvement will determine how the organization is perceived by potential employees. On the other hand, as stated by Koubek (2007) or Stojanová, Tomšík (2014), there are factors that are very difficult for the organizations to control, often referred to as external, and they are of great importance in agriculture. These factors are as follows: demographic (employment, education, and age structure), economic (the growth of the country or regional GDP, average wages, economic cycle, etc.), social (population migration, value scale, style of living, and other factors), technological (technological development in the given area, innovation potential, and other factors), settlement (type of settlement – urban or rural), political and legislative (political situation in the country in question, frequent legislative changes, etc.). In agriculture, the biggest role is attributed to demographic and economic factors, as confirmed by the CSO (2014). Zacher (2013) confirms the same for all economic sectors.

It is also necessary to realize that efficiently organized communication of the employer towards its current employees (internal resources) and the human resources in the labour market (external resources) is an essential part of the entire recruitment strategy, in particular in the initial phase of searching for a job. Not all organizations, however, have sufficient budget to be able to launch such promotion. This is often the

situation in small agricultural companies in the Czech Republic. Nevertheless, Bursová (2009) states that branding is always desirable and adds that the final effect for the organization is the improvement of performance through employee commitment and loyalty and supplementing of current teams. According to Klementová (2008), candidates for positions in agricultural companies may be specifically addressed by means of targeted presentations, participation in job fairs, organization of competitions for students (not only those specializing in agriculture), co-operation with cultural, branch, and student organizations, regular posting of newsletters/mailings, database search of candidates, publishing offers on the Internet, personal ads in branch or regional periodicals, etc.

While internal characteristics controllable by organizations have an impact primarily on individual decision-making of potential candidates whether or not they will respond to an organization's offer, external factors are objective and not controllable by organizations and therefore have to be accepted and projected into subjective factors in a way to avoid a negative effect on the employer branding process.

The above-described factors may represent both an opportunity and a threat for the organization in question. It is important how the organization views them and how intensely it responds to them. Love, Singh (2011) mention that building a strong employer brand does not impact only a broader group of potential candidates and their work commitment. They confirm the words of Bursová (2009) that a well-managed employer brand has a direct link to an organization's performance. Love, Singh (2011) prove this by saying that a long-term monitoring of twenty 'Best Employers' in the USA revealed that the increase in sales and the cash flow of these employers was by 8 and 8.2% higher compared to organizations not included in the category of 'Best Employers'.

CONCLUSION

The results have shown that the application of knowledge continuity management (75.9%), talent management (48.1%), age management (22.2%), diversity management (25.9%), and career management (22.2%) contributes to the building of a good employer brand in agriculture and forestry. A statistical dependency has been proven (P -value = 0.037) between the trend of career management and the sex structure of employees in agricultural companies. Otherwise it may be summarized that agricultural companies have a similar opinion on employer branding regardless of their size, employee age structure or turnover. With respect to the demographic development of the population, employer branding through the application of new strategic trends may be considered crucial. By focus-

ing on this area, employers will gain the opportunity of better presentation towards potential employees in agriculture, which has been long considered a sector in which it is difficult to attract and retain employees.

The theoretical contribution of the study is the identification of approaches to employer branding. Its practical contribution is the presentation and evaluation of the results of the survey conducted in the Czech Republic which underlines the importance of employer branding in specific sectors, such as agriculture, forestry, and fishery. With respect to the fact that the survey (both qualitative and quantitative) is still in progress, companies in these sectors will be provided with recommendations in their particular field.

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