Designing brands and managing organizational politics: A qualitative case study of employer brand creation

Andreas Mölk [a], Manfred Auer [b], *

[a] UMIT, Private University of Health Sciences, Medical Informatics and Technology, GmbH, Division for Management in Health and Sport Tourism, Eduard-Wallnöfer-Zentrum 1, A-6060, Hall in Tirol, Austria
[b] University of Innsbruck, Department of Organization and Learning, Universitätsstraße 15, 6020, Innsbruck, Austria

ABSTRACT

This study explores intra-organizational processes and structures within the creation of an employer brand. Drawing on a practice perspective that analytically differentiates between practitioners, praxis, and practices, we present a qualitative case study of an employer branding project in a large industrial company. Our theorized account of the case demonstrates the managerial complexities and dynamics of employer brand creation. Based on a detailed content analysis, we identify three distinct sets of activities of employer brand creation: (1) defining and demarcating employer branding, (2) developing and maintaining cooperation within employer brand creation, and (3) confirming and contesting management ideas and structures beyond employer branding. Our study contributes to employer branding research by highlighting how employer brand creation is entangled within strategic, functional design of an employer brand and managing organizational power relations and differing interests. Furthermore, this study particularly emphasizes the emerging character of employer branding and the impact of an established social infrastructure within employer brand creation.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Given existing and expected shortages of qualified workers (e.g. Dögl & Holtbrügge, 2014) and, as a result, increasingly competitive recruitment strategies of organizations (e.g. Baum & Kabst, 2013), employer branding has become an important and widespread human resource management (HRM) tool (e.g. M. R. Edwards, 2010; Martin, Gollan, & Grigg, 2011). Differing from employee branding, which aims to ensure employees deliver corporate brand promises (e.g. Brannan, Parsons, & Priola, 2011; King & Grace, 2008), employer branding comprises management processes to create, implement and communicate an attractive employer image and identity (e.g. Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Employer branding research mainly concentrates on empirical studies investigating perceptions of employer brands of (potential) employees (e.g. M. R. Edwards & Edwards, 2013; King & Grace, 2012; Lievens, 2007; Van Hoye, Turker, Cromheecke, & Lievens, 2013) and conceptual work on the understanding and management of employer brands (e.g.

Aggerholm, Andersen, & Thomsen, 2011; Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Employer brand management is usually conceptualized as a strategic activity of creating, implementing, and communicating a distinct employment experience that motivates and retains current employees, and places employers in a strong position to attract high-quality applicants on relevant labour markets (e.g. Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; M. R.; Edwards, 2010). This interpretation usually refers to the idea of a straightforward and widely controlled top-down process of designing an effective employer brand (e.g. Chhabra & Sharma, 2014; Elving, Westhoff, Meeusen, & Schoonderbeek, 2013; Foster, Punjaisri, & Cheng, 2010; Moroko & Uncles, 2008). The literature on employer branding aims to offer human resource (or brand) managers analytical frameworks, empirical knowledge, and practical tools to establish and communicate employer brands successfully. It largely theorizes employer branding as a controllable management process rather than as a social phenomenon. Consequently, complexities of everyday organizational practice, such as unintended and ambiguous transformations, translations, and reconfigurations occurring along processes and practices of employer branding are widely neglected. Particularly little attention has been paid to struggles within employer branding practices in organizations, which arise

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: andreas.moelk@umit.at (A. Mölk), Manfred.Auer@uibk.ac.at (M. Auer).

from involved agents' different interests and dynamics of power and influence. With a few exceptions (Edlinger, 2015; Martin et al., 2011; Russell & Brannan, 2016), empirical and theoretical explorations of intra-organizational practices of undertaking employer branding are rare and thus, we know relatively little about the actual processes of managing employer brands, particularly employer brand creation.

To contribute to this research, we draw on a practice perspective to explore intra-organizational activities, processes, and structures of creating an employer brand. Practice studies explore details and complexities of organizational life and stress human and non-human agency as constitutive elements of the social phenomena studied (e.g. Reckwitz, 2002; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2003). We concentrate on the social constitution of employer branding and the ways in which agents shape and use this managerial field. Therefore, this study contributes to employer branding theory by stressing the roles and power relations of involved employer branding practitioners, the relevance of established structures of cooperation and decision making, the influence of pre-existing management concepts and routines, as well as the actual doing of employer branding within the intra-organizational making of an employer brand. We emphasize the interplay of strategic, functional processes of creating an employer brand and the political dimensions of such an undertaking, characterized by different interests, power relations, organizational interdependence, and questions of legitimation (e.g. Carter, Clegg, & Kornberger, 2008; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2003). Our study explains the emerging character of employer branding within an established structural framework and the role of forming and organizing a powerful social infrastructure of creating an employer brand. In addition, we introduce employer brand management as a political instrument for agents to improve their social and political standing within the organization.

To investigate employer branding practice, we report and discuss findings from a qualitative case study of an employer brand-creation project in a large multinational company. The presented empirical study focuses on the early stages of the creation of an employer brand in a company affected by limited employer attractiveness. This restricted capacity to attract qualified employees is due to all subsidiaries of this company being in rural areas, the existence of partly physically challenging workplaces, and the lack of a strong corporate brand or well-known product brand. The last reason makes the case particularly interesting for branding research, because this manufacturer does not produce for consumers and, thus, branding does not have a strong tradition within this firm. Russell and Brannan (2016) encourage researchers to explore processes of (employer) branding within these contexts, which are hardly the subject of branding research. Therefore, this study contributes to empirical employer branding research by examining an organizational context in which a real sense of branding is relatively absent. Moreover, our study provides a detailed case study based on perspectives of different involved agents, (participant) observations, and documents, which is valuable on its own terms. We explore how employer brand creation was performed and enacted in the multinational company and how its managerial complexities and dynamics evolved through individual activities as well as trans-subjective practices.

2. Practice-based perspectives on employer branding

Martin et al. (2011) relate employer branding to a practice perspective, emphasizing the influence of power relations, different perspectives, and values of involved agents in employer branding. The authors refer to the proposed analytical distinction between praxis, practices, and practitioners (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007; Whittington, 2006). Jarzabkowski et al. (2007, p. 9) define praxis as 'the interconnection between the actions of different, dispersed individuals and groups and those, socially, politically, and economically embedded institutions within which individuals act and to which they contribute'. Employer branding praxis emphasizes the 'doing' of employer branding, particularly interconnected situated activities. In this context, Martin et al. (2011) stress the problem of participation of line managers and local human resource (HR) managers in developing and implementing employer branding strategies. Praxis is essentially connected to practices, which provide cognitive, behavioural, procedural, discursive, and physical resources that allow multiple actors to interact in order to achieve collective activity (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). Practices capture routines, norms, analytical frameworks, procedures, and tools of employer branding practice. Routines and behavioural patterns might play a limited role in the situation of creating a formal employer brand from scratch. Nevertheless, praxis of employer branding refers to cognitive, procedural, and discursive resources deriving from the specific organization and the larger socio-cultural and economic context in which a specific organization is embedded (Whittington, 2006). Employer branding practices particularly include constructions of core concepts, like strategic marketing (Foster et al., 2010), brand co-creation (Aggerholm et al., 2011), and talent (Martin et al., 2011), and refer to the routines of recruitment, selection, and integration (Russell & Brannan, 2016). Practitioners are actors 'who draw upon practices to act' (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007, p. 10) and, thus, are interconnected to practices and praxis. Employer branding includes activities of practitioners from different departments, HR people from diverse countries, line managers, and top-managers who can use their formal and social positions, their knowledge, and their experience to influence employer brand management. Their relative and contextual power, their different values and experiences, and partially existing physical distance make the creation and implementation of employer brands a contested terrain (Martin et al., 2011). Edlinger (2015) empirically analyses the employer branding work of one group of practitioners, that is, employer brand managers, and discusses their views from the perspective of boundary work. Boundary work refers to struggles for cultural authority and in the context of employer branding, answers questions about constructions and concepts that are acknowledged as valid and appropriate (Edlinger, 2015).

This literature on employer branding practice provides valuable insights into intra-organizational management of employer brands, particularly taking into account questions of legitimation, demarcation, organizational context, and multi-functional as well as transnational cooperation (Russell & Brannan, 2016; Edlinger, 2015; M. R.; Edwards, 2005; Martin et al., 2011). However, the work of Martin et al. (2011) largely remains conceptual and includes only anecdotal evidence on employer branding practice. Russell and Brannan (2016) include a variety of empirical data and explore employer branding embedded in organizational HR practices but do not investigate the management processes of employer brand creation. The latter topic forms part of Edlinger's (2015) study but her empirical material is based solely on interview accounts of employer brand managers and does not explore actual activities of designing employer brands. Thus, we conducted a qualitative case study that concentrates on management processes of creating an employer brand and allows us to include the views of different

practitioners as well as to study in detail the praxis and practices of the creation of an employer brand.

3. Case study organization and research methodology

3.1. The case of LIC

The research site of this case study is a large industrial company (LIC) with subsidiaries in 10 countries. All subsidiaries have their own business units (e.g. accounting, HRM, and sales), which are directly accountable to their associated international units in the headquarters. Departments for controlling and marketing exist only in the headquarters. The executive board includes three top managers: the CEO with responsibility for administration and logistics is also in charge of HRM. About 70% of the approximately 6000 employees work in production and have either a technical background (completed apprenticeship) or no specific educational background.

This case study focused on a top-down management process to build an employer brand that took place from February 2012 to August 2014. The LIC conducted an employer branding project that included formal workshops to develop project-related models and strategies (e.g. positioning models, concept test, and action plans) and strategy-formation meetings to discuss outcomes of the different stages and further procedures. In addition, one strategy formation meeting was conducted during the project initiation. The employer branding project was initiated by the CEO and the international HR manager (IHRM) responsible for HR strategies of all subsidiaries, and the latter was in charge of the project. The main practitioners in the project were six internal agents (CEO, IHRM, assistant to IHRM, and three local HRMs of different countries: LHR1, LHR2, and LHR2) and two external project agents (marketing consultant and academic consultant). The involved internal agents not only were located at different hierarchical levels (top and middle management), but also had diverse professional backgrounds (however, mainly HR) and varying lengths of organizational affiliation. With the employer branding project, the LIC pursued two official objectives, namely, to increase employer attractiveness in the external labour market and motivation of current employees. The involved agents wanted to achieve these aims by relying on current strengths as an employer, thereby presenting the company as a reliable, stable employer that offers challenging, interesting jobs, solid vocational training, and exciting career opportunities. However, the significance of the project moved beyond these official goals, because it represented one of the major managerial activities to change the company's tradition of not actively influencing its corporate reputation.

We gathered the empirical results through fieldwork engagements with the LIC during the time of the employer branding project. The LIC offered an interesting and beneficial opportunity to investigate intra-organizational management processes of employer branding for several reasons. First, the LIC created a formal employer brand from scratch, which allowed us to focus on management activities of creating a formal employer brand and to investigate how different agents shaped this new organizational field and how they positioned themselves within this field. Second, the LIC expected labour shortages in specific labour market segments, which means that employer branding represents a relevant managerial field for this organization. Moreover, due to past cooperation (e.g. guest lectures within university courses), Author 1 was asked to participate in the LIC's employer branding project as an academic consultant. These consulting activities mainly comprised preparing and moderating formal project meetings, like employer brand workshops, to identify the main target groups and develop an employer brand vision and strategy. In return, the

company agreed to the authors' using the empirical data for scientific purposes. Active participation of scholars in research assignments can be advantageous, as it might enable view on hidden aspects to unfold (Stoecker, 1999) or it might help ascertain (informal) boundary conditions (Hodgkinson & Wright, 2002) of social phenomena, like employer branding projects. Author 2 took part in the project as a non-participating observer. This position enabled him to follow the project with a focus on research, and in particular, to observe and document the course and content of project meetings.

3.2. Data collection

Data collection included (1) participant and non-participant observation, (2) interviews, and (3) documentary material. During the pre-project stage and within the actual employer branding project, we attended and observed three formal workshops (WS1—3) that lasted between ½ day and 3 days, and we joined four strategy formation meetings (SFM1—4) with a length of about 1—4 h. In addition, we were able to rely on data from informal meetings, that is, an undefined number of lunch and coffee talks (CT) during the formal meetings.

Author 2 conducted seven one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with involved project agents after the project's completion.[1] All interviews lasted approximately 30—80 min. Importantly, no interviews were conducted with existing or potential employees (the target audiences of the LIC employer's branding project), as they were not actively involved in decision-making processes within the employer branding project. These interviews dealt with interviewees' individual perspectives on the project, particularly emphasizing their own roles and activities within it. Author 2 asked follow-up questions regarding organizational and individual objectives, interests, motivations, and beliefs about the project, formal and informal social networks within the project, planned and unplanned project activities, and the effects of these activities.

The interviews as well as the participant and non-participant observations were conducted in real organizational contexts (conference and seminar rooms, and offices). Workshops, strategy formation meetings, and interviews were all audiotaped and transcribed; informal meetings were documented for observation protocols and were partially transcribed.

In addition, we obtained access to documentary material that supplemented the research. This selection included two internal reports (R1—2), four action plans (AP1—4), and three internal presentations (P1—3), all produced in the course of the project by involved agents. These documents illustrated how involved agents used reports, plans, and presentations to influence and legitimize decision-making processes within the employer branding project.

3.3. Content structure of the analysis

The processing of the empirical material was based on a qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2014). Using a common procedure for qualitative content analysis, we ran through the diverse empirical material iteratively by moving back and forth between data and theory, thereby developing thematic units and categories inductively. Due to author 1's active involvement in the project, we specially emphasized reliability issues to weaken (counter) bias (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, p. 72). Therefore, our research included two forms of reliability checks to ensure trustworthiness of the findings. First, the two authors conducted case analysis

---

[1] It is important to note that the academic consultant (Author 1) was not interviewed.

independently and the individual findings were compared and coordinated at the end of each phase (intra-coder reliability check). Second, within the last phase of the analysis, we included fellow scholars to verify the courses and results of the analytical procedure (inter-coder reliability check) (Mayring, 2014).

We carried out the analysis of the empirical material in the language of origin (German and English) and included the following phases.[2] In the *first phase*, we paid particular attention to the category construction and substantiation relevant for understanding employer branding projects. From a practice perspective and within the logic of content analysis, we defined thematic units prior to analysing the empirical material. This deductive element within inductive category formation (Mayring, 2014) drew upon the introduced literature review on employer brand management research and the theoretical context of this study. Hence, we developed seven thematic units, such as 'Organizational importance of the employer brands/branding', 'Employer branding agents', and 'Employer branding project activities'. Subsequently, we started to analyse the first data unit (participant and non-participant observations) by working through the transcripts line by line. As soon as the empirical evidence fitted the developed thematic units, we constructed a category. In pursuit of this logic, we created categories, for instance 'Understanding and defining employer branding'. After working through the entire observation material, we revised our developed categories with respect to the research purpose of this study. Due to changes and concretizations in the category system (e.g. from focusing on results to social processes), we worked through the complete observation material once again and included parts that had been overlooked previously.

In the *second phase*, we ran through the rest of the empirical material, verified if revised categories were relevant and consistent within the second data unit (interviews) and third data unit (documentary material). Within this phase, we adapted, refined, and re-positioned categories. Due to a large number of categories (22 main categories and 61 categories), we organized sets of categories by formulating main categories. This step was processed inductively by enhancing the level of abstraction in the sense of summarizing. For example, we summarized the categories 'Allocating the project team: decision matrix', 'Obtaining intra-organizational guidance and extra-organizational assistance', and 'Excluding other agents from the project' to the main category, 'Building the project team'.

In the *third phase* of our analysis, we systematized developed categories in terms of the aims of the analysis and the theoretical background of the study. Consequently, we derived sets of practices of employer brand creation by connecting main categories with each other. For instance, we grouped 'Establishing general frameworks within project initiation', 'Forming specific frameworks in the course of the project', and 'Communicating employer branding frameworks' to the practice 'Defining and demarcating employer branding'. In addition, we separated main categories, for instance, 'Beliefs, ideologies, management concepts/tools in the context of the project' seemed overly general and heterogeneous in the context of our theoretical perspective and, consequently, we generated two main categories, namely, 'Confirming dominant management logics and structures' and 'Contesting existing management philosophy and informal hierarchy' within the practice 'Confirming and contesting management ideas and structures beyond employer branding'. Following this logic, we identified three main sets of practices of employer brand creation of the LIC (see Table 1).

Once our findings were derived, we checked the empirical material again to determine if our interpretations were salient throughout the entire case study and were not dominated by single pieces of empirical evidence. Simultaneously, we gave excerpts of the empirical material, employed category system, and derived sets of activities for colleagues of our employer branding research platform for evaluation purposes. Comments were taken into account and, consequently, considered in the case presentation reported in the following Section 4.

4. Results

The aim of this case study is to explore the creation of a formal employer brand of a multinational company. We analytically distinguish three different sets of activities directly aimed at employer brand creation: (1) defining and demarcating employer branding, (2) developing and maintaining cooperation within employer brand creation, and (3) confirming and contesting management ideas and structures beyond employer branding.

4.1. Defining and demarcating employer branding

In the LIC, employer branding represented a relatively new managerial domain that was not occupied and determined by specific agents, structures, and processes. Consequently, the content, objectives, and strategic approach toward employer branding were not pre-defined and different actors had the potential to involve themselves and define as well as structure this managerial domain. The involved actors set up frameworks for understanding and managing employer branding at different stages of the project and specific occasions. General frameworks were already established prior to the official project start. In particular, they comprised interpretations of problems of the LIC as employer, relevant understanding of employer branding, and a preliminary outline of the employer branding project.

In addition to perceived first signs of labour shortages, the initiative for an employer branding project drew on negative feedback of students attending job fairs about the employer image and the attractiveness of the LIC. The following excerpt of a discussion between the CEO, IHRM, and the academic consultant within the project initiation (SFM 2) highlights this situation.

Academic consultant: Your awareness as an employer covers a radius of 30 km from the company premises. (…)

CEO: This is impossible! Just through the (physical) size of our company here in LOCATION, we create awareness.

Academic consultant: I hate to say you are wrong. Feedback of visitors at career fairs reveals a different picture. (…) Hardly any visitors from relevant educational institutions recognize the LIC as an employer. Not to speak of attraction!

CEO: This is bad and (…)

IHRM: (Interrupts) That's why we are here!

CEO: This needs to be changed immediately.

In addition, agents in favour of and involved in the employer branding project highlighted challenges and trends in the labour market, in particular 'demographic changes, shortages of specific qualifications, and the digitalization of workplaces' (P2). However, these problems were mainly regarded as upcoming challenges, which were 'alarming for the future prosperity of the LIC' (IHRM) but not as dominant present issues. Therefore, employer branding was considered a strategy that prepared the LIC 'for the future'

Table 1
Practice of employer brand creation at LIC.

Sets of activities of employer brand creation	Main categories	Categories
Defining and demarcating employer branding	Establishing general frameworks within project initiation	Interpreting problems of the LIC as employer Defining employer branding Specifying a preliminary project outline
	Creating and refining specific frameworks in the course of the project	Using and adapting existing management tools and techniques Developing tools and techniques for employer brand creation
Developing and maintaining cooperation within employer brand creation	Building the project team	Selecting local HR heads Including organizational authorities and external consultants Excluding marketing agents and other board members
	Building and maintaining cooperation outside the project	Informing board members and line managers using reports Incorporating local HR managers with internal presentations
Confirming and contesting management ideas and structures beyond employer branding	Confirming dominant management logic and structures	Confirming hierarchical control and decision making Using and underpinning numbers-driven management culture Proving the dominant psychological contract
	Contesting organizational ideals and informal management hierarchies	Changing inward-oriented corporate culture and identity of the LIC Increasing status of HRM within the LIC Shifting power relationships within HRM

(LHR2). This point is illustrated by the following IHRM speaker notes for a presentation (P1) in front of the executive board, by relating the depopulation of the countryside to the rural positioning of all company premises.

> 'Recent studies estimate that economic growth in Europe has slowed by about 1% since 2010 due to demographic factors. This will intensify from 2025 onwards. (…) There will be a shift of geographic population distribution from the periphery towards urban areas and their surrounding communities. (…) As you all know, our offices are located mainly in the countryside, far from cities and conurbations'.

In addition to highlighting the limited employer attractiveness of the LIC in the external labour market and expected labour shortages in the future, involved HR managers articulated their impression that current and former employees perceived the LIC as a 'not very appealing employer' (LHR2). This perception was based mainly on first-hand feedback from employees and exit interviews. The following conversation (WS1) between the IHRM and a local HR manager illustrates this impression and also shows their belief that the LIC's moderate attractiveness as an employer was derived from its failures in internal and external communication but not from poor HR work.

> LHR1: We currently offer people so much. For instance, healthcare, continuing education and training programs, staff events, (…). But they (employees) don't see it; they don't have any appreciation of the many benefits offered to them!

> IHRM: And do we show it? Are we communicating this to the outside? No!

> LHR1: But that is not what we want!

> IHRM: We don't want to make us bigger, nicer, and better, but we want to be here for our employees and to show that each and every one is dear to our hearts, that is something we want to show.

Agents directly involved in the project defined communication problems as the main issue of employer branding at the LIC. Therefore, the dominant definition of employer branding focused on a communication tool for HR managers to attract potential employees and motivate existing employees. Consequently, the project was considered mainly as a way 'to learn how to present a workplace in an attractive way' (LHR2). At the same time, the involved agents wanted to obtain a clearer picture on what (potential) employees expect from the LIC as an employer. Based on this understanding of the role of employer branding for the LIC, the core project team structured employer branding along a three-step model. This model included a more coherent stage of systematically analysing perceptions of the LIC in the external and internal labour markets as well as the phases of positioning (clarifying the main target groups and intended brand positioning statement) and expressing (creating and using employer brand instruments) (R1).

In addition to this rough design of the project, involved agents produced specific frameworks to structure upcoming situations. These frameworks were deeply rooted in management tools and techniques that have already been applied to other projects and thus, are part of their managerial routines. This included, for example, creating workshop outlines to structure courses and contents of these meetings, strategy papers to develop 'career patterns' (P2) or to determine the 'long-term orientation of the employer brand' (P3). Moreover, involved agents developed action plans within workshops and strategy formation meetings that specified aims, responsibilities, and timelines of concrete actions.

Involved agents related their activities to these management tools because they were 'common practice' (LHR2) and this increased acceptance of the employer branding project within the LIC. The following excerpt from an interview with LHR2 demonstrates this context.

> LHR2: If you want to achieve something here, you have to follow certain rules.

> Interviewer: What kind of rules?

LHR2: Yes, for example, after each workshop, we prepare a strategy paper followed by an action plan (…) These things must be observed, otherwise nothing will happen (…) no action without an action plan and no action plan without a strategy paper, etc.; this is our rule.

However, involved agents also created new management frameworks with more explicit and specific roots in employer branding. Hence, as the project represented an area 'that has never been discussed before at the LIC' (IHRM), new approaches, strategies, or practices were developed. For example, agents set up employer branding concepts to operationalize established strategies that addressed 'improving our recruiting, especially initial contact and processing applications' (CEO) and that 'communicate positive aspects of the brand' (P3). In addition, agents defined 'Employer branding policies and practices' for designated 'Employer branding head' and 'Local employer brand' managers (Fig. 1):

To summarize, the beginning of the project was characterized by a relatively loose understanding of employer branding based on organization-specific recruitment problems and existing employer branding knowledge of involved agents. In the course of the project, the activities of defining and demarcating employer branding let to the development of a refined practical understanding of employer branding, applied existing management concepts, and yet further developed employer branding specific management tools and techniques.

4.2. Developing and maintaining cooperation and social support

Apart from structuring and demarcating the field of employer branding, building a project team that 'responds to the requirements and challenges of this project' (IHRM) was another core issue for creating employer branding at the LIC. The CEO and IHRM agreed on a project team that mainly consisted of 'local HR managers with a first-rate knowledge of the domestic job market' (AP1) and of representatives of subsidiaries 'that need employer branding the most' (CEO). The IHRM suggested three subsidiaries and legitimized his choice with a decision matrix (Fig. 2), which he presented to the CEO, who confirmed this selection.

However, to ensure project success, the IHRM also considered informal, social criteria. He included local HR managers who did not question the general idea of employer branding and had a record of cooperating well and efficiently with the HR department at group level. The IHRM wanted to form a project team consisting of members with 'strong social and communicative competences' (IHRM), committed to creating and introducing a companywide employer brand.

'But other factors also played a role with the eventual choice of branch (…) the cooperation ability of the project participants, for example, (…) because what is the advantage if we include the branch that needs it the most from their figures (Employer Branding) but the associated HR managers are simply not convinced of the Employer Branding idea?' (IHRM)

Hence, the employed matrix served as some kind of 'decision-making aid' (CEO), which is a formal justification, although informal factors had a strong impact on the team-building process. In addition, qualification and competence of involved HR managers were an important issue. Local HR managers had relatively limited specific knowledge in the area of employer branding. However, they had intense practical experience in HRM, mainly in recruiting, and they stressed their understanding of domestic labour markets, which was crucial for strategically positioning the LIC as an employer:

'No-one knows the culture and society and labour market over here (in LHR2) like me (…) I have worked in and with this market now for over 15 years (…)'. (LHR2)

'In my opinion, the reason that the IHRM has chosen us as partners in this project is because of, in particular, the existing shortage of skilled labour, strong competition with other employers, as well as the high level of migration from the region'. (LHR2)

In addition to the IHRM and local HR managers, the CEO joined the project team. Involving intra-organizational agents at the top management level should underline the importance of the planned initiatives and ensure that 'project results correspond with our authorities' (LHR1). Furthermore, an external marketing consultant was included to compensate for lacking competencies in the fields of marketing and corporate communication. The involved consultant was chosen because of the management consultancy's 'more than 20 years of experience' (marketing consultant), its reputation of 'being the best when it comes to marketing' (IHRM assistant), and the long-term business engagement.

'We have been working with the consultant for over 10 years and haven't been disappointed yet (…). They always satisfied our expectations, no, they exceeded our expectations. In this respect, it was always clear, if we were to achieve such an employer branding project that the consultant was going to be our partner'. (CEO)

Employer Brand Head Focus: Management	Local Employer Brand Focus: Recruitment
• Developing a contact plan for schools/universities • Developing an overall communication strategy with consultant • Developing an apprenticeship program for graduates with an international outline • Ensure local employer brand initiatives have equal style and tonality	• Contacting students of selected schools/universities • Creating contact points (presentations, topics for final thesis, walk-ins, fair presence) • Searching for consultants for external presentations ('local employer branding')

Fig. 1. Employer Branding Policies and Practices (AP2: extract).

Criteria	Weight ing	Austria			Germany					France		UK		RO	RU	
		A	B	C	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	A	B	A	A	B
Recruiting problems	25%	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	5	3	3	3	3	3	4	5
Representative for other subsidiaries	30%	5	2	1	4	1	1	1	4	3	3	3	1	4	1	1
Future orientation	20%	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	1	4	4	4
Access to information	15%	5	5	5	4	2	2	2	4	4	4	4	2	3	2	2
Fluctuation	10%	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	3	5
Sum	100%	3,25	2,35	1,85	3,05	1,65	1,65	1,65	3,55	2,75	2,75	2,95	1,65	3,4	2,7	3,15

Evaluation of subsidiaries ranging from 1 to 5 (1 = does not apply, 5 = applies)

Fig. 2. Decision matrix (AP2).
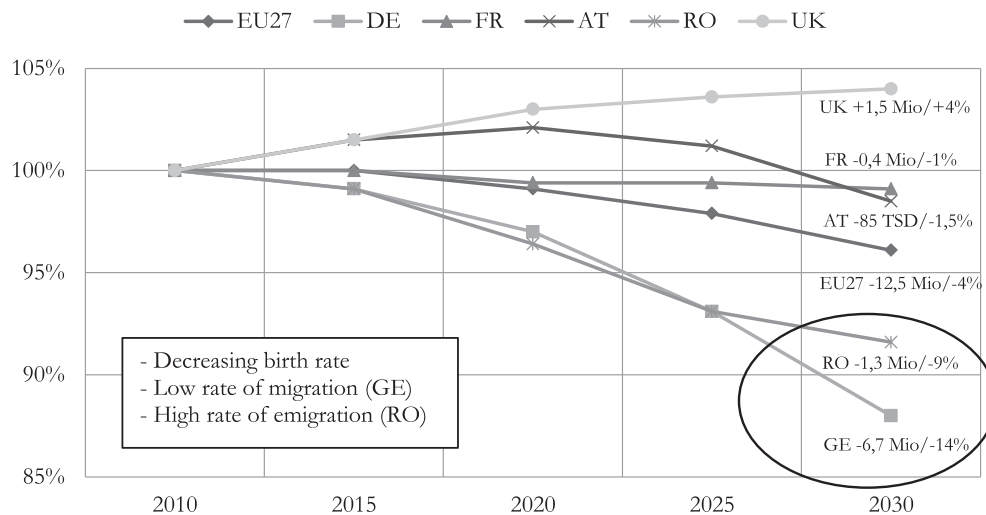
Shrinking employable population of GE and RO

Fig. 3. Challenges and trends (P1).

Although the involved agents did not have extensive and specific employer branding experiences and knowledge, they were able to bring in strong qualifications and skills in related but larger fields, like HRM, product marketing, and corporate branding. Therefore, project participants had 'an extensive store of professional experience' (IHRM) along with organization-specific know-how.

In addition to including important organizational players, organizing the project team also meant excluding significant intra-organizational agents. In this respect, the role of two groups of agents was particularly remarkable. First, the marketing department was not involved in the project due to its 'rather insignificant role within the LIC' (IHRM). The following conversation (CT) illustrates the organizational standing of marketing (agents) within the LIC.

Marketing consultant: Would it not be advantageous to at least include the head of marketing next time?

LHR1: Theoretically, it does make sense, since the project has a strong marketing connection. However, realistically, the people in marketing don't stay with us for very long. They join but realize that they cannot accomplish much and then they leave.

Marketing consultant: They leave?

LHR1: Yes, the head of marketing has already quit the job. (…) In the last 4 years, we have had three heads of marketing.

Moreover, the two remaining members of the executive board were not actively involved, and simply were informed of the outcomes of the project. Important decisions, like 'outlining the positioning statement' (AP3) of the employer brand and 'defining the

core values of the LIC as an employer' (AP2) were made without these intra-organizational agents. The lack of active involvement of these agents was a result of the intention to ease decision-making processes and to avoid potential conflicts. The following conversation of the IHRM assistant and the CEO during a strategy formation meeting (SFM3) demonstrates this.

IHRM assistant: Should we include the remaining executive board members in the positioning workshop?

CEO: That is not effective! (…) On the one hand, two are currently involved in other projects (…) on the other hand, we will never achieve a common denominator this way.

IHRM assistant: When should we include the two board members?

CEO: I think it is sufficient if they are involved in the final stage.

However, the project team was aware of the importance of building and maintaining cooperation with relevant agents who had no active role within the project. Thus, directly involved agents communicated the approach, aim, methods, and results of the employer branding project to intra-organizational actors who were perceived as important for the success of the project (explicitly, the remaining local HR managers and executive board members and on some occasions, also line managers). Regularly informing these agents was aimed at gaining and increasing social acceptance for the project, improving involved agents' understanding of employer branding, and increasing support for involved activities and measures. The main information tools applied were written reports and presentations. The former was used to 'illustrate, document, and simply update others' (LHR2) about project courses and outcomes. This communication tool mainly was employed to keep board members and, to some extent, line managers informed. Even more important, internal presentations enabled the informing of strategically important intra-organizational agents about the employer branding project in the form of communicative exchange. This offered 'a more effective way' (CEO) to promote definitions, designs, and methods of employer branding within the organization. This form of two-way communication played a particularly strong role in incorporating local HR managers who were not selected for the project. For instance, the IHRM conducted a presentation for all local HR managers on the first results of the project in which he emphasized that the major aim of employer branding was to position 'the LIC as a strong employer in the wider region' (P1) for every subsidiary. This presentation stressed the 'urgency and relevance of employer branding' (IHRM) for the company and was intended to convince local HR managers of the intended concept of employer branding at the LIC.

In summary, the activities of developing and maintaining cooperation and social support shaped the social environment of the project, defined the personnel configuration of the employer branding team, included supportive agents, and excluded agents that could put the project success at risk.

4.3. Confirming and contesting management ideas and structures beyond employer branding

The employer branding project did not only affect the management of the employer image and identity but also had a wider impact on existing management logic and structures at the LIC. Involved agents reinforced or contested established management logic, ideas, and structures.

First, the project emphasized the relevance of hierarchical control and decision making. The following conversation (CT) of the IHRM and the marketing consultant during the last workshop (WS3) illustrates the significant influence of organizational authorities on the employer branding project.

IHRM: I personally think that your concept proposal is very good. (…) it includes everything that is important, what is important to me personally!

Marketing consultant: That's nice to hear. Thank you!

IHRM: But the CEO has to like it.

Marketing consultant: I hope not only the CEO but also the selected target group, the apprentices because …

IHRM: (interrupts) Certainly, but the CEO makes the final decision about whether it will be implemented or not.

Although the CEO was a formal member of the project, he did not participate in all project meetings and activities like the other project members. Rather, he was included in 'key decision making and events' (R2), such as, the 'identification of the key target audience' (AP1) or 'defining the core values of the LIC as an employer' (AP2). Operational work and details of employer branding were left to the other members of the project team but the CEO made the key strategic decisions on employer brand creation.

Another aspect of the dominant management logic at the LIC that had a strong impact on the employer branding project was the numbers-driven management culture. The involved HR managers in particular attempted to underpin and use this by transforming problems and solutions, questions and answers into numerical values, for instance, via key performance indicators, diagrams, or charts. For example, Fig. 3 shows a chart that illustrates the 'shrinking employable population of DE and RO'.

Moreover, the employer branding project supported the dominant implicit employment contract between production workers and the employer, which stressed job security, fair and reliable payment, and necessary training in exchange for accepting physically demanding working conditions, working overtime and nightshifts, and requirements for high-quality work.

'Even during the latest financial crisis, no workers were laid off. None of our competitors can claim this and our people appreciate that a lot'. (LHR2)

'Many of our employees are here because they perceive the job as a chance to earn good money. I mean they have to work hard (…) to work at night, to work physically hard, but they get paid good money as a result'. (LHR2)

The relatively distant relationship between the employer and workers was accompanied by a low level of identification of workers with their company. Becoming aware of this instrumental relationship between workers and the employer generated irritation and debate within the project team. However, this debate resulted in accepting and partly embracing this approach, and consequently, making it part of the employer branding strategy, as the following conversation between the marketing consultant and the CEO in the first workshop (WS1) illustrates.

Marketing consultant: The results suggest that the majority of the production workers have an instrumental attitude towards the LIC.

CEO: Instrumental attitude? What do you mean by that?

Marketing consultant: The people we interviewed said that they mainly work at the LIC due to the good remuneration and job security.

(…)

CEO: When I listen to all the arguments, then our staff's attitude is totally understandable and in a certain way, even desirable.

At the same time, the project in general and related activities within the employer brand creation did not confirm — but rather contested — organizational ideals and informal management hierarchies. These challenges were not derived from pre-set objectives but rather, they emerged during the ongoing course of the project. The LIC's lack of a strong corporate reputation as one of the findings of the analysis stage represents the most prominent example. This encouraged the CEO to add a focus on improving the overall corporate visibility of the LIC to the agenda of the employer branding project.

'It just can't be that a company of our size with NUMBER branches enjoys little or no awareness in the immediate vicinity. (….) I'm talking about a radius of 50 km. (…) these results scare me (…) Something must be done immediately. We also need to tackle this in this project, or at least broach this subject'. (CEO).

From that moment, the employer branding project also aimed to change the dominant inward-oriented culture and identity of the company. The project team discussed policies to achieve a more expressive orientation of the company and 'this project should represent the first step' (CEO) toward this aim. The following conversation during the positioning workshop (WS2) illustrates perceived problem areas and planned changes.

CEO: One of the main reasons for our obscurity is that we are anchored in the business-to-business segment.

Marketing consultant: That certainly plays a role.

IHRM assistant: But COMPANY XY is also known and they manufacture PRODUCT.

CEO: That may be, however, the product itself is more interesting for the mass (…) We manufacture only PRODUCT.

IHRM: We won't be able to change this (…).

CEO: (interrupts): Yes, but COMPANY XY markets in a large, powerful, and technically perfect manner (…) everything that is associated with the product. (…) We have to do the same; we have to focus more on natural commodities, modern lifestyles, etc., everything one associates with RESOURCES.

Marketing consultant: That is also our idea, to move away from — excuse me — the unattractive PRODUCT.

The CEO strongly promoted changing the corporate reputation of the LIC. HR managers, on the other hand, attempted to use the employer branding project as an opportunity to change the relatively insignificant role of HRM within the LIC and thereby to increase its social and economic status. They used this project to generate more understanding for and acceptance of the importance of HRM among intra-organizational stakeholders. Consequently, these stakeholders should link HRM not to administrative work mainly but to recruiting and developing a particularly important strategic resource for the company.

'At the LIC, the personnel departments were never seen as particularly important (…) they were just those, who wrote the contracts and paid the wages. (…) This employer branding project now gives us the opportunity to improve our reputation in the organization (…) to show that we also do many other things, such as, continued education and training of our employees, deployment, and much more … ' (IHRM)

However, the IHRM regarded employer brand creation at the LIC as an opportunity to strengthen the supremacy of the HR department at group level within HRM. The IHRM had a higher degree of influence on the formal decision making of the project than other (included) HR managers. The IHRM used this position within the project to promote specific ideas about employer branding in the different subsidiaries and related his activities to necessary centralization of HR policies in general.

IHRM: In the coming years, we will experience rough times (…) we will be faced with a variety of major challenges (…) I only say shortage of skilled labour, demographic change, older employees (…)

LHR2: We can only make it if we work intensively and closely together (…)

IHRM: (interrupts) … and if we all pull together and above all, maintain a certain standard, for example, in recruiting. When I think of the often unprofessional conduct with applicants.

In summary, confirming and contesting management ideas and structures beyond employer branding became an important activity, especially in the advanced stage of the project. Consequently, working within the project was no longer limited to employer brand creation in itself but has become interlinked with involved agents' intention to influence other areas of the organization.

5. Discussion

The aim of this study has been to shed light on management processes of creating an employer brand. The empirical results of this case study show employer brand creation is entangled within the strategic, functional design of an employer brand and dealing with organizational politics through the exercise of power relations, handling of differing interests, and utilization of human and non-human resources. In this section, we discuss in particular the emerging character of employer branding within an established structural framework as well as the managerial and political complexity of multifunctional and transnational cooperation within employer brand creation.

Creating a formal employer brand always means being confronted with an existing informal external and internal employer reputation, which agents want to manage actively via employer branding activities and measures (Edlinger, 2015). However, in this situation of designing an employer brand, employer branding as a field of management usually is not determined and managed by specific practitioners and routines and thus, is structured only weakly. Therefore, in our case study, employer branding practitioners with formal, hierarchical authority (CEO) and functional responsibility (IHRM) demarcated this field by establishing a structural framework of employer brand creation that particularly included a closed group of participants as the responsible project team, as well as a structure of cooperation and decision making. This step of forming a controlled, even protected, and temporary

managerial context was also observed by Edlinger (2015, p. 448) in her analysis of employer brand managers' work: 'The formal creation of an ideal, desirable employer brand is preceded and accompanied by the creation and maintenance of a sheltered organizational environment (controlled processes and selected participants), within which the definition of the employer brand's aims and contents takes place'. This framework of creating an employer brand has strong political implications. It determines the prevailing definition of the background and problems behind an employer branding initiative, the principal understanding of employer branding, the role of different practitioners, and the results of decision making in employer branding (Martin et al., 2011).

At the LIC, the involved practitioners used their scope of action within this structural framework to refine existing and/or prescribed meanings and relevance of employer branding, to develop employer brand-related concepts, and to adapt management tools and methods. The established project team served as processual and social infrastructure in which conventional management practices as well as conceptual knowledge of employer branding constituted the practice of employer brand creation. Consequently, strategic practices of employer brand creation, which hardly existed prior to the project, emerged in the context of the established infrastructure. In this sense, ambiguous, indeterminate praxis of employer brand creation dominated pre-fabricated conceptual definitions, aims, and procedures. This process was deeply embedded within organizational politics. The most powerful organizational employer branding practitioners (the CEO and, to some extent, the IHRM) remained the most relevant formal decision makers. However, the selected HR managers also actively influenced specific ideas of employer branding, struggled for favourable decisions, and aimed to strengthen their cognitive and cultural credibility. In so doing, they related to established managerial practices and thus, to organizationally accepted and comprehensible ways of managing, such as putting problems and solutions into numerical terms, emphasizing the expertise of external consultants and, in particular, going along with general decisions made by the top management. The latter included accepting the dominant psychological contract (Rousseau, 1990) within the LIC and focusing on employer branding strategies and measures to attract the main target groups. This political process of gaining credibility within the employer branding project was supplemented by boundary work (Edlinger, 2015) of these employer brand practitioners to promote and protect the suggested outcomes of strategic decision making in employer branding.

The emerging character of the employer brand creation at the LIC gave involved practitioners a strong role owing to their former professional relationships and actual cooperation capabilities inside and outside the project. Therefore, the praxis of forming and enforcing social infrastructure of employer brand creation was accompanied by the dynamics of power relations between involved practitioners. Creating a formal employer brand in large transnational corporations is characterized by a complex network of involved agents with rather diverse national/regional as well as functional backgrounds and varying relative power and influence (Martin et al., 2011). Hence, the employer brand creation practice particularly comprises coordination activities between different management functions and locations that are driven by inherent necessities, efficiency claims, as well as diverse values, interests, and capabilities to influence the process. In this respect, the case of the LIC highlights the importance of practitioners' negotiation skills and bargaining power to create common ground among the various stakeholders of the emerging employer brand.

Employer branding combines elements of HRM, marketing, and corporate communication and thus, multi-functional cooperation is considered essential (Martin et al., 2011). In this context, HR managers play a key role (Martin, Beaumont, Doig, & Pate, 2005) by 'building bridges to other functions within the organization' (Russell & Brannan, 2016, p. 115). Paradoxically, in our case study, branding, marketing, and corporate communication became the main issues the project dealt with but HR departments, particularly the HR department at group level, institutionally dominated the management process of employer brand creation. This was mainly due to the neglected role and weak organizational position of marketing and corporate communications at the LIC and the evolving understanding of employer branding as a communication tool for local HR managers. In addition, involved HR managers used the project to increase their social positioning within the organization and thereby employer branding as a political instrument. Consequently, they emphasized HRM's strategic relevance for the future success of the company and, thereby claimed more acceptance, resources, and influence in the organization. This was also based on the upcoming intra-organizational discourse of corporate reputation and branding at the LIC. This reasoning is in line with employer branding literature, which assumes that HR managers can politically benefit from creating an employer brand because it offers an opportunity for them to strategically use the high status of branding and corporate reputation for organizations to increase their own relevance and legitimation (M. R. Edwards, 2005; Martin et al., 2005). Similar political benefits have been found and discussed in internal branding research (e.g. King & Grace, 2008), which regards brand creation as an opportunity for involved practitioners to develop knowledge and skills 'that would open more doors for them professionally' (King & Grace, 2008, p. 368) both inside and outside the organization.

In addition to multifunctional cooperation, research on employer branding in multinational companies advocates transnational collaboration of HR managers to successfully create and implement an employer brand (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). However, the case under scrutiny shows a rather ambivalent relationship between local HR managers and IHRM, which included high potential for structural and personal conflict within managerial praxis of employer branding. Therefore, the IHRM made intense efforts to prevent conflicts by carefully selecting project participants and promoting courses and outcomes of the project to practitioners who were not involved, mainly local HR managers. At the same time, the IHRM aimed to increase the relevance and influence of centralized HR policy guidelines and structures using the commitment and dynamics of change within the employer branding project. A 'convincing discourse of change' (Martin & Beaumont, 2001, p. 1243) can in fact support and legitimize the introduction of global HR policies and at the same time promote the interests of a particular organizational group, like the IHRM department in the headquarters.

6. Conclusions

This study provides insights into the practice of designing an employer brand in a large multinational company. Our study characterizes employer brand creation as a functional management process that is deeply embedded in organizational politics. First, employer branding provides an organizational platform for dealing with politics. This includes creating, promoting, and defending a common understanding of employer branding, building a social infrastructure that supports the process of designing an employer brand, adapting and transforming existing managerial practices to employer branding, forming and developing specific employer branding concepts, and creating legitimacy and credibility for the involved agents and employer branding results. However, employer branding also serves as a political instrument, a source of power that involved agents use to enforce their own interests, expand

their scope of action and influence, and thereby control other organizational agents. The multidisciplinary and transnational character of employer branding opens up spheres of influence for involved practitioners, which stretch beyond the formal creation of an employer brand and raise important questions for corporate reputation or HR practices.

From a practical viewpoint, we emphasize the problem of not actively including all/more relevant stakeholders in the employer branding project at the LIC in this case study. Successful implementation of employer branding strategies and policies depends on the cooperation and, to some extent, the flexible handling of employer branding standards, norms, and procedures by local HR managers and line managers. In other words, although the majority of local HR managers and line managers did not have substantial influence in conceptualizing employer branding at the LIC, they did have a say in the actual realization of employer branding at the local level and in everyday practice. Therefore, open or covert resistance and claims might still arise when these managers have to implement directives of employer branding that they regard as not functional, culturally problematic, too costly, or too complex. More generally, we consider that employer brand creation has to be understood and conceptualized as political but even more importantly, as a participative, co-creative undertaking (Aggerholm et al., 2011). These perspectives regard employer branding practitioners as political agents with partly conflicting interests and values and thus, offer a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of employer branding. Employer brand creation has the potential to create winners and losers, for example, specific departments and employees. Thus, creating zones for critical dialogue and areas for negotiation enables the involvement of relevant stakeholders within and outside management and thus, makes the design of an employer brand a more participative process that also increases acceptance of decisions and outcomes of employer branding creation.

7. Limitations and future research

Our work has several limitations that need to be addressed in future research. First, we provide a single case study of a large, multinational, which is strongly hierarchically controlled and production driven. Future research should focus on employer brand creation in other settings (e.g. small and medium-sized companies, branding-driven corporations, and participative-structured organizations). Analogies of other organizations creating employer brands can help to point out common or different managerial challenges and political dynamics; however, comparative studies are needed to refine developed understanding of the interplay of designing brands and managing organizational politics in employer brand creation presented in this study.

In addition, the employer branding project team in our case study did not include experienced employer brand professionals or consultants. Participation by more knowledgeable practitioners could have a strong effect on creating an employer brand and in particular, could change the social infrastructure and power relations within the project. Therefore, future research should pay more attention to the strategic role of external employer brand professionals, like management consultants. Finally, in our empirical study, we did not include the views of organizational agents with no active participation in employer branding creation. Future studies could consider the perspectives of other stakeholders of the emerging employer brand, for instance, employees, local HR managers, and line managers that have to live with the created employer brand.

References

Aggerholm, H. K., Andersen, S. E., & Thomsen, C. (2011). Conceptualising employer branding in sustainable organisations. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal, 16*(2), 105—123.

Alvesson, M., & Sköldberg, K. (2009). *Reflexive methodology. New vistas for qualitative research*. London: Sage.

Ambler, T., & Barrow, S. (1996). The employer brand. *Journal of Brand Management, 4*(3), 185—206.

Backhaus, K., & Tikoo, S. (2004). Conceptualizing and researching employer branding. *Career Development International, 9*(5), 501—517.

Baum, M., & Kabst, R. (2013). Conjoint implications on job preferences: The moderating role of involvement. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 24*(7), 1393—1417.

Brannan, M. J., Parsons, E., & Priola, V. (2011). *Branded lives: The production and consumption of meaning at work*. Cheldenham: Edward Elgar.

Carter, C., Clegg, S. R., & Kornberger, M. (2008). Strategy as practice? *Strategic Organization, 6*(1), 83—99.

Chhabra, N., & Sharma, S. (2014). Employer branding: Strategy for improving employer attractiveness. *International Journal of Organisational Analysis, 22*(1), 48—60.

Dögl, C., & Holtbrügge, D. (2014). Corporate environmental responsibility, employer reputation and employee commitment: An empirical study in developed and emerging economies. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 25*(12), 1739—1762.

Edlinger, G. (2015). Employer brand management as boundary-work: A grounded theory analysis of employer brand managers' narrative accounts. *Human Resource Management Journal, 25*(4), 443—457.

Edwards, M. R. (2005). Employer and employee branding. HR or PR. In S. Bach, & M. Edwards (Eds.), *Managing human resources: Personnel management in transition* (pp. 266—286). Oxford: Blackwell.

Edwards, M. R. (2010). An integrative review of employer branding and OB theory. *Personnel Review, 39*(1), 5—23.

Edwards, M. R., & Edwards, T. (2013). Employee responses to changing aspects of employer branding following a multinational acquisition: A longitudinal study. *Human Resource Management, 52*(1), 27—54.

Elving, W. J. L., Westhoff, J. J. C., Meeusen, K., & Schoonderbeek, J. W. (2013). The war for talent? The relevance of employer branding in job advertisements for becoming an employer of choice. *Journal of Brand Management, 20*, 355—373.

Foster, C., Punjaisri, K., & Cheng, R. (2010). Exploring the relationship between corporate, internal and employer branding. *Journal of Product & Brand Management, 19*(6), 401—409.

Hodgkinson, G. P., & Wright, G. (2002). Confronting strategic inertia in a top management team: Learning from failure. *Organization Studies, 23*(6), 949—976.

Jarzabkowski, P., Balogun, J., & Seidl, D. (2007). Strategizing: The challenges of a practice perspective. *Human Relations, 60*(1), 5—27.

King, C., & Grace, D. (2008). Internal branding: Exploring the employee's perspective. *Journal of Brand Management, 15*(5), 358—372.

King, C., & Grace, D. (2012). Examining the antecedents of positive employee brand-related attitudes and behaviours. *European Journal of Marketing, 46*(3/4), 469—488.

Lievens, F. (2007). Employer branding in the belgian army: The importance of instrumental and symbolic beliefs for potential applicants, actual applicants, and military employees. *Human Resource Management, 46*, 51—69.

Maitlis, S., & Lawrence, T. B. (2003). Orchestral manoeuvres in the dark: Understanding failure in organizational strategizing. *Journal of Management Studies, 40*(1), 109—140.

Martin, G., & Beaumont, P. (2001). Transforming multinational enterprises: Towards a process model of strategic HRM change. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 12*(8), 1234—1250.

Martin, G., Beaumont, P., Doig, R., & Pate, J. (2005). Branding: A new performance discourse for HR. *European Management Journal, 23*(1), 76—88.

Martin, G., Gollan, P. J., & Grigg, K. (2011). Is there a bigger and better future for employer branding? Facing up to innovation, corporate reputations and wicked problems in SHRM. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 22*(17), 3618—3637.

Mayring, P. (2014). *Qualitative content analysis. Theoretical foundation, basic procedures and software solution*. Free download via Social Science Open Access Repository SSOAR, URN http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de0168-ssoar-395173.

Moroko, L., & Uncles, M. D. (2008). Characteristics of successful employer brands. *Journal of Brand Management, 16*(3), 160–175.

Reckwitz, A. (2002). Toward a theory of social practices. A development in culturalist theorizing. *European Journal of Social Theory, 5*(2), 243–263.

Rousseau, D. M. (1990). Psychological and implied contracts in organizations: A study of psychological contracts. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour, 11*, 389–400.

Russell, S., & Brannan, M. J. (2016). 'Getting the right people on the bus': Recruitment, selection and integration for the branded organization. *European Management Journal, 34*, 114–124.

Stoecker, R. (1999). Are academics irrelevant? Roles for scholars in participatory research. *American Behavioral Scientist, 42*(5), 840–854.

Vaara, E., & Whittington, R. (2012). Strategy-as-practice. Taking social practices seriously. *Academy of Management Annals, 6*(1), 285–336.

Van Hoye, G. V., Turker, B., Cromheecke, S., & Lievens, F. (2013). The instrumental and symbolic dimensions of organizations' image as an employer: A large-scale field study on employer branding in Turkey. *Applied Psychology: An International Review, 62*(4), 543–557.

Whittington, R. (2003). The work of strategizing and organizing: For a practice perspective. *Strategic Organization, 1*, 117–125.

Whittington, R. (2006). Completing the practice turn in strategy research. *Organization Studies, 27*(5), 613–634.