

SPECIAL REPORT

# From Internal Communication to Employer Branding

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**d+i** LLORENTE & CUENCA

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

“The real crisis in Spain is the leadership vacuum”. This was the recent headline of an article in *The New York Times* written by journalist Raphael Minder in which he analyzed the loss of credibility on the part of the political class. It is a situation that has also transcended the business world, because, beyond the financial crisis during the last six years we have seen changes in companies that have not only been structural or organizational, but also social, bypassing the professional field to permeate staff and dealing with the company-employee relationship.

Now that the economic outlook has begun to look positive, the labour market is expected to reactivate immediately, by fueling the aspirations of the most qualified and valued professionals, who for more than five years have seen, to a greater or lesser extent, a lull in their careers. This proposes a crucial challenge for businesses: it is time to mobilize so as not to lose this talent which, over the most difficult years, has brought them a competitive advantage over their competitors.

But are they really prepared to face this challenge? Assuming that financial security, innovation and business insight are essential elements of any business plan, **so too is the availability of talent with the necessary training and experience in order to ensure the sustainability of an enterprise.** And in the same way, if the selection and management of talent is not planned on a long term basis, it will inevitably have a negative impact on results as there will be no one to lead the companies towards their objectives. This argument is particularly relevant in a future in which dramatic declines in the population, globalization and changing values and expectations of the new generation can jeopardize the availability of talent. We must take action in order to adapt to this reality.

The reality is that while committing to (and not only retaining) the best of the best depends on many factors, the most important being the emotional bond, which reminds us that everything regarding the employee takes us to the personal and social relations playing field, after all, **in order for an employee to become a loyal member of the company, they must first identify with it, professionally and personally.** This is where brand value comes into play, how a company is judged as being a good place to work.

We are talking about **employer branding**, a concept that is anything but new and which has existed in the English-speaking world as

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a transversal lever for the entire organization for decades. Nowadays, in this new business and social environment, it has been proposed as a term to define the sector that deals with communication between a company and its employees, as well as everything that encompasses talent selection and management. Like communication and human resources, employer branding is a business tool designed to bring about tangible results.

As discovered in a recent meeting organized by LLORENTE & CUENCA, LinkedIn, Communication and Human Resources responsible from the leading companies in the country, and moderated by Almudena Rodríguez Tarodo, expert in brand value and talent, there is already an awareness of the different aspects of employer branding in Spain. However, the meeting revealed that there are still some doubts in the business world that lead to question the need to create a function or department within the company that is dedicated to this discipline, for what purpose and in what way. The answers to these questions and the result of discussion and consensus, are summarized below.

## 2. WHY UNDERTAKING A PROJECT OF EMPLOYER BRANDING?

At first glance, there are three types of direct benefits in an employer branding project: facilitating selection techniques, helping to retain and engage the best professionals, and helping attract others who may be potentially interested in the company. In terms of image and reputation, these benefits justify the implementation

of an employer branding project, not to mention the fact that it has demonstrated a reduction in costs, especially for the HR department.

But from a business perspective, we have found other advantages to undertaking such initiatives which are based on necessity rather than justification:

- Improved productivity and efficiency due to a greater commitment of each person to their job.
- Better customer satisfaction derived from the positive self-image that employees give to the company.
- Business protection as the employees themselves become “brand advocates” in times of crisis.
- Improved brand as well as the company’s reputation in general, as a result of the sum of all of the above.

Since all of these benefits are general and are relevant to any organization, we should not forget that employer branding projects may include other purposes, tailored to the needs of each company, such as fostering a culture change, facilitating the integration of two companies domestically, etc.

## 3. WHO SHOULD TAKE THE LEAD ON A PROJECT LIKE THIS?

As mentioned above, these initiatives should be cut across the entire organization. But it is the departments of Communication

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and Human Resources who must lead these projects together, precisely for their internal and external characteristics. This does not mean that the participation and cooperation of others departments such as Marketing, Legal, Information Technology, etc. should not be admitted as they also contribute with their ideas for the proper planning and implementation of the project.

An employer branding project requires a global vision to really make it a tool with a positive impact for both the business and the reputation of a company.

#### **4. WHY INVOLVING SENIOR MANAGEMENT?**

Employer branding projects only achieve sufficient magnitude in an organization when they are accompanied by other substantial changes (problems or strategic opportunities). For them to successfully culminate in the actual contribution to the needs of the strategic plan in effect, they must be assimilated by top management. In the words of Simon Barrow, an employer branding project is not merely buying something tangible such as machinery or a patent, but "requires leadership, commitment and courage to face internal resistance that may arise". And only senior management can meet these requirements in full.

But besides its momentum, nothing is more credible for an employee than seeing the directors of their company convinced by a project and

supporting it from the beginning, precisely because communication has ceased to be a mix of channels and contents and has become a conversation between people. This, which is as true for an employer branding initiative as it is for any other initiative, is more essential than ever since the president of a company may be the most powerful tool in attracting and retaining talent when he or she engages in a relationship and conversation directly with another person.

In short, attaining the support from a Steering Committee is basic, but even more important is their enthusiasm to transform the idea into something real and to go "outside the office," to talk to people in their organization.

#### **5. WHAT KEY FACTORS MUST BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT ONCE THE DECISION HAS BEEN MADE?**

Not forgetting the peculiarities that each company has, every employer branding project implies an emotional component, similar to those generated by other areas such as marketing and consumer engagement. To achieve this emotional bond, which will then lead to establishing a mutual commitment between the company and the employee, there must be a solid rational that is perceived as coherent and credible by the employees as well as other stakeholders in the company. The focus should be external and global, rather than national and local.

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Additionally, communication tools 2.0 have provided multiple ways to increase interaction between people in a company and, above all, to encourage participation and collaboration. The visibility that tools like collaborative corporate Intranet or blogs provide anyone, whatever their position may be, are key in employer branding projects. But we should not ignore the potential of interpersonal communication. The consistency of a message as it is passed along is as important as it is to be received in person and through the management team, at least during the first presentation and explanation of a project.

Finally, you must activate **internal motors or brand ambassadors** who become the catalysts of the project for the rest of their peers, and who provide qualified feedback on the various initiatives being implemented. These employees, who have a lot in common with the company, are essential to ensure the success of a project in keeping track of said success. On top of that, they constitute the most effective resources such as promotion and protection, internal and external, in terms of managing corporate reputation.

## 6. HOW CAN THE BENEFITS OF THIS TYPE OF PROJECT BE MEASURED?

Traditionally, the survey criteria for work environment have been oriented towards finding out the degree of an

employee’s satisfaction in many different areas without giving sufficient importance to internal communication. If the concept of “satisfaction” is ambiguous when evaluating general aspect, in the field of employer branding, it is even more so as the feeling of belonging to a company and the reasons why an employee becomes a prescriber of said company vary from person to person, precisely for the high emotional component that the company-employee relationship entails.

Even so, it is possible to measure an employer branding project (despite being intangible priori) provided the parameters to be considered are focused on **determining an employee’s level of commitment and engagement**. However, it should be noted that engagement is a relatively temporary, changeable and adjustable variable, while commitment is a long term link between the employee and the resistant but demanding company.

In this regard, there are a number of attributes for measuring the level of employee engagement, adaptable to any company, among which are remuneration, stability, business ethics, professional development, etc. But the epitome is undoubtedly the prescription - the percentage of employees who recommend their company as a good place to work. There is no other proof of success of an employer branding project; after all, implicit in this recommendation we find all emotional and material parameters that a company-employee relationship covers.

**“As we have seen, the effectiveness of an employer branding initiative is highly influenced by the ability to measure its results. This effect increases significantly if the company conducts a prior measurement of what employees value most in each circumstance”**

## 7. THE IMPORTANCE OF MEASURING BEFORE. EMPLOYEE VALUE PROPOSAL (EVP)

As we have seen, the effectiveness of an employer branding initiative is highly influenced by the ability to measure its results. This effect increases significantly if the company conducts a prior measurement of what employees value most in each circumstance. This way, companies can adapt their value proposition, emphasizing the areas most valued by the employee.

Working from there, LinkedIn in 2013 conducted a global survey of its members to discover what they valued most when considering a job. From that survey, results are derived according to different countries, depending on participants' experience and professional sector. In the

following graphs the data for Spain and all Latin American countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and Honduras) are respectively shown.

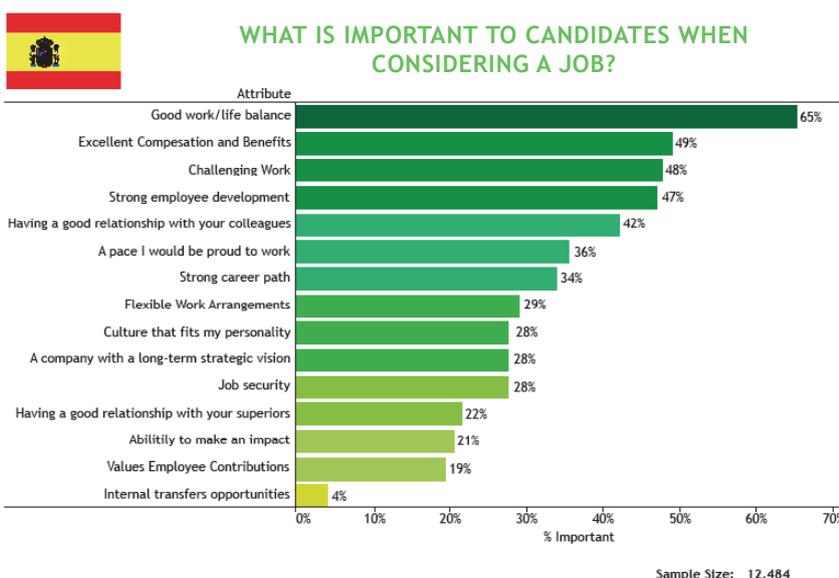
From that sample, it is inferred that Spanish workers prefer that the company focus its improvements in reconciling work and family life, while in Latin America emphasis is put on the compensation package and benefits.

For an overall positive assessment by employees, it is important to focus on those areas that have greater weight in their scale of values. Otherwise you may fall into the trap of focusing efforts on business attributes that have zero impact on employees or potential candidates.

## 8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The expected end to the crisis implies a business challenge that was predicted years ago but has yet to be addressed in all its dimensions. Engaging the best professional company to ensure its long-term survival is possible, but requires a new way of understanding the company-employee relationship, which is nothing other than to understand it as a relationship between people and, as such, enhance this interaction.

In addition to all the suggestions provided in this article about why and how to undertake an employer branding project, professionals in communication and human resources who attended the meeting organized by LLORENTE



Survey Employee Value Proposition in Spain . LinkedIn 2013

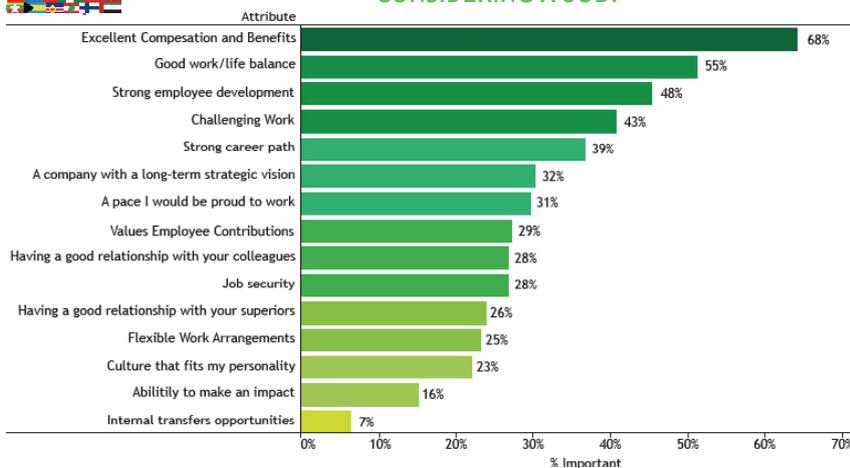
**“Engaging the best professional company to ensure its long-term survival is possible, but requires a new way of understanding the company-employee relationship, which is nothing other than to understand it as a relationship between people and, as such, enhance this interaction”**

& CUENCA and LinkedIn agree on the importance of four final points, common to all companies regardless of the stage they are at in implementing a project of this nature.

1. The corporate culture must be well defined, supported by senior management and properly passed along to all employees. It is the foundation of an employer branding project and, therefore, should be updated as progress is made.
2. The mutual commitment (of the company to its employees and vice versa) is the first step to achieve the desired status of being considered a good company to work for.
3. The intermediate team leaders or managers hold a key role in motivating employees, they can become the main reason for an employee to either stay or go at a company.
4. And finally, the brand is already in itself a recruiting factor, but the employer brand supports and enhances all business.



**WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO CANDIDATES WHEN CONSIDERING A JOB?**



Sample Size: 69.525

Survey What is important when considering a job? Latin America. LinkedIn 2013.

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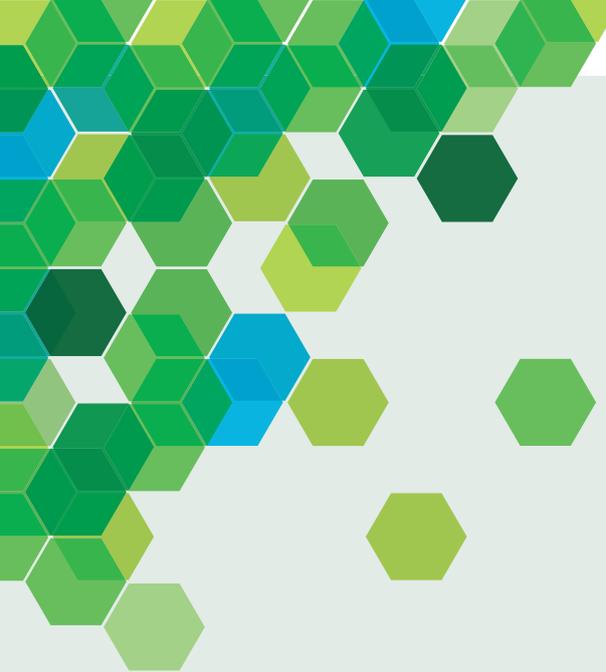
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