

## Motivating employees to “live the brand”: a comparative case study of employer brand attractiveness within the firm

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**Abstract** Employer branding has been advocated as an effective strategy for motivating employees to “live the brand” however, previous research has tended to focus on recruitment. As a result, little is known about what makes an organisation’s employer brand attractive to its current employees.

The objective of our study is to address this question through the lens of Social Identity Theory (SIT) which we do by conducting a comparative case study across four organisations.

We found that the specific attributes considered most attractive by employees were different in each organisation. However the *categories* of attribute were almost identical; these were employment, organisational successes, and product or service characteristics.

We also argue that managers need to identify the attributes of their own organisation that employees find most attractive within these categories in order to link the employer brand with the identity of the organisation, and the interests of employees.

**Keywords** Corporate brand, Employer brand, Case study, Social Identity Theory, Employee behaviour

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, academics and practitioners alike have extolled the potential benefits of having a well-managed corporate brand (Hulberg 2006; Balmer and Gray 2003; Knox and Maklan 1998). However they have also acknowledged that corporate branding brings new challenges that cannot be readily addressed within a traditional marketing framework, including a need to ensure that employee behaviour is consistently aligned with the company's brand promise (Hulberg 2006; Balmer and Gray 2003).

Employer branding has been advocated as an effective strategy for achieving this objective (Uncles and Moroko 2005; Ambler and Barrow 1996), but previous research has tended to focus on issues related to recruitment. As a result, little is known about how employer branding can actually be used to support the corporate brand. More specifically, researchers have yet to explain what makes an organisation's employer brand attractive to current employees. This represents a critical gap in the literature because an employer brand can only produce the desired behaviours if it is considered attractive by current employees.

In this paper we argue that the question may be effectively addressed through the lens of Social Identity Theory, and we report the results of a comparative case study that did exactly that. We conclude by discussing the practical implications of our findings, their limitations and highlighting areas for future research.

### *Corporate branding and the employee*

While product brands can be "contrived" by marketers to meet the needs of their customers, effective corporate branding begins within the organisation (Balmer and Greyser 2006; Hatch and Schultz 2003; Balmer and Gray 2003; van Rekom 1997). More specifically, theorists argue that a corporate brand should be closely aligned with the identity of the organisation (Hulberg 2006; Harris and de Chernatony 2001). This is defined by Harris and de Chernatony (2001) as the organisation's "*ethos, aims and values that create a sense of individuality.*" It is developed through the "*actions of corporate founders and leaders, by tradition and the environment*" (Balmer 2001), and may provide a source of sustainable, competitive advantage (Balmer and Gray 2003) when communicated to the relevant stakeholder groups (Harris and de Chernatony 2001).

Corporate brand communications may include symbolism and conventional communications such as advertising and PR (Hulberg 2006; van Riel and Balmer 1997), much like communications for a consumer brand. However, corporate branding also involves "*multiple stakeholders interacting with numerous staff in multiple departments across an organisation*" (Harris and de Chernatony 2001). As a result, the behaviour of employees is an important component of the corporate marketing mix (Hulberg 2006); it provides external stakeholders with information about the identity of the organisation (Hulberg 2006) and if this information is not consistent with the advertised values of the corporate brand, the credibility of that brand may be undermined (Harris and de Chernatony 2001). In order to successfully manage a corporate brand, managers must therefore understand "*how employees' values and behaviour can be aligned with a brand's desired values*" (Harris and de Chernatony 2001).

This aspect of corporate branding presents a particular challenge for marketers, who have traditionally focused on the behaviour of their customers and left the

management of employees to HR. However it also presents new challenges for those working in HR. As explained by Henkel et al. (2007), it is not sufficient to focus on generic measures such as friendliness or competence; employees must be motivated to “*personify and deliver the brand promise*” (Schultz and de Chernatony 2002) and to act as ambassadors for the brand (Hulberg 2006). As a result, many authors advocate a multi-disciplinary, cross-functional approach to corporate branding (Brexendorf and Kernstock 2007; Balmer 1995; King 1991) More specifically, they argue that corporate brand theory should encompass both marketing and organisation theory (Schultz and de Chernatony 2002) and that, in practice, marketing and HR “*should be more fully integrated in order to recruit, train and develop people who are accordant with the brand*” (Hulberg 2006)

### ***The role of Employer Branding***

The notion of Employer Branding, as described by Ambler and Barrow (1996), addresses both the challenges outlined above. It provides a strategic framework that incorporates both marketing and HR (Moroko and Uncles 2008; Ambler and Barrow 1996) so that an organisation can attract, retain, and motivate those employees “*who can add value to the company and are able to deliver on the company’s brand promise*” (Uncles and Moroko 2005) It also synthesises theory from a range of academic disciplines (Uncles and Moroko 2005; Ambler and Barrow 1996), and has been described as a “*significant evolution in the quest for corporate brand integrity*” (Mosley 2007) However, it is not clear whether current practice is actually helping firms to achieve these objectives.

Theorists agree that in order to achieve all the objectives described above, an employer brand should meet three criteria: it should be consistent with the realities of the organisation, different from those of competing employers, and attractive to members of the target audience. (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004; Ambler and Barrow 1996) Since the first two criteria are self-evident, researchers have focused their attention on understanding what makes an employer brand attractive. For example there have been several academic studies of employer brand attractiveness (e.g. Berthon et al. 2005; Lievens and Highhouse 2003) and Best Employer Studies are regularly published in the business press.

Based on the results of these studies, many organisations are now striving to conform to an “*ideal blueprint of employment*” (Mosley 2007), benchmarking their own practices against those of firms that have already been recognised as Best Employers. In fact Martin et al. (2005) argue that benchmarking is now seen as a “*central HR and business imperative.*” However this strategy is problematic for two reasons. First, an employer brand that conforms to an “*ideal blueprint*” cannot reflect the distinct the identity of a particular organisation. As a result, it provides no obvious basis for aligning the behaviour of employees with the values of the corporate brand. Second, the research on which this blueprint is based has focused almost exclusively on the attributes sought by *potential employees*. Since the objectives of corporate branding can only be realised through the behaviour of *current employees*, marketers also need to understand what makes an employer brand attractive to people in this group, but all too often this crucial question is overlooked.

### ***Previous research on the perspective of current employees***

Within the academic literature on employer branding, only three studies have directly addressed the perspective of current employees.

Knox and Freeman (2006) and Lievens et al. (2007) focus on perceptions of the employer brand, using a framework developed by Dutton and Dukerich (1991). The premise of this framework is that an organisation's identity can be seen from three perspectives: internal (the perceptions of employees), external (the perceptions of outsiders), and construed external (employees' perceptions of the perceptions of outsiders). Knox and Freeman (2006) adapt this framework to the study of employer branding by focusing on perceptions of an organisation "*uniquely in its role as an employer*", and by limiting the external perspective to include only the perceptions of potential employees. Lievens et al. (2007) adopt a similar approach. Both studies find that there are significant differences between the three perspectives, and Lievens et al. (2007) finds that employees tended to identify more strongly with their organisation when its external image was construed as attractive.

Lievens et al. (2007) measures the impact of instrumental and symbolic attributes on organisational attraction among potential employees and organisational identification among current employees. With respect to potential employees, they find that both components of the employer brand are significantly correlated with organisational attraction. With respect to current employees, they find that the symbolic component was significantly correlated with organisational identification, but the instrumental component is not.

Together, these studies suggest that there are important differences between current and potential employees. Results of the first two studies indicate that current and potential employees tend to perceive an organisation's employer brand in different ways. Results of the third study indicate that the two groups tend to value different attributes. Therefore it is reasonable to surmise that the results of employer brand research involving potential employees may not be generalisable to current employees; in order to determine what makes an employer brand attractive to current employees, it is necessary to conduct further research that accounts for the unique perspective of people in this group. However this requires some understanding of the way in which the employment relationship may change an individual's evaluation of his or her organisation's employer brand, and one area of literature that addresses this issue is the Social Identity Approach to Organisational Identification.

### ***A social identity perspective***

Ashforth and Mael (1989) argued that Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979), and the more recent Self-Categorization Theory (Turner 1987), could be applied to the study of organisations. They argue that the organisation could be seen as a social group, that organisational identity is analogous to group identity, and that organisational identification occurs when an individual incorporated that identity within his own self-concept. This theory has come to be known as the Social Identity Approach to Organisational Identification (SIA).

SIA offers a particularly useful lens through which to study employer brand attractiveness because organisational identification has been found to enhance a range of behaviours that may support the corporate brand; it motivates employees to engage in organisational citizenship behaviour (van Dick et al. 2005; Dukerich et al. 2002; Tyler and Blader 2000), to project a positive image of the organisation to external stakeholders (Dutton and Dukerich 1991), and to think and behave in ways that reflect the organisation's unique identity (Haslam et al. 2000; Dutton et al. 1994). When seen through the lens of SIA, organisational identity is also conceptually identical to employer brand image, and the strength of employees' identification with

**FIGURE 1** Illustration of the relationship between a unique and attractive employer brand and the brand related behaviour of employees, as seen through the lens of SIA



their organisation has been found to increase when they perceive its identity to be attractive and unique (Dutton et al. 1994; Oakes and Turner 1986; Mael 1988; Tajfel and Turner 1979) Therefore organisational identification may be treated as the intervening variable between an organisation’s employer brand and the behaviour of its employees. It is then possible to provide extensive evidence that a unique and attractive employer brand, as defined in the context of SIA, can motivate employees to “live the brand.” (See Figure 1).

However, the principles of SIA suggest that current employees do not evaluate the attractiveness of their own organisation’s employer brand in the same way as potential employees. More specifically, they suggest that employees will seek to frame the comparison with other organisations in such a way that their own organisation may be construed as “different from” and “better than” the rest. They can do this by strategically selecting the attributes on which organisations are compared, as well as by adjusting the importance and value (positive or negative) assigned to each attribute (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Elsbach and Kramer 1996) As a result, the attributes that employees consider most attractive are likely to be different in each organisation. From a practical standpoint this implies that efforts to become an “employer of choice” are unlikely to have the desired effect on employee behaviour or on their willingness to support the corporate brand. From a research standpoint it suggests that methods used to study employer brand attractiveness in the context of recruitment may not be appropriate when studying the perspective of current employees.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

The objective of this research was to identify the categories of attribute that make an organisation’s employer brand more or less attractive to current employees, and therefore to explain what motivates employees to “live the brand” when interacting with external stakeholders.

Because the attributes that employees considered most attractive were expected to be different in each organisation, we decided to conduct a comparative case study. The study included five organisations, as recommended by Yin (1994) and Eisenhardt (1989) to validate the results through replication. More specifically, the study included a non-profit sports organisation (Sports Inc), a television production company (TV Inc), a film distribution company (Film Inc), a data analysis company (IT Inc), and a specialist school within a post-graduate university (Uni School).

Managers from each organisation were asked to select at least twelve employees who would be willing to spend twenty to thirty minutes completing a questionnaire. This questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part included four open-

ended questions about the attributes of the organisation as whole, all of which were copied directly from Brickson's (2005) organisational identity questionnaire. The second part included three open-ended questions related to employment. These questions were rooted in the employer brand literature and they focused specifically on the employment experience and person-organisation fit.

The questionnaire was sent out by email to the selected employees and returned to us the same way once completed. (The only exception was Film Inc, where managers asked that the questionnaires be administered in person, in the format of a clearly structured interview.) Individual responses were then analysed in accordance with the principles laid out by Strauss and Corbin (1990) to produce a list of specific attributes that each respondent associated with his or her organisation. A note was also made of whether the respondent considered each attribute to be attractive, unattractive, or purely descriptive. Any attribute that was considered purely descriptive by every person who mentioned it was excluded from the list. Results were then aggregated within each organisation to produce a list of attributes that employees considered important, whether attractive or unattractive. Finally, each list of attributes was coded by theme, in order to identify the categories and sub-categories of attribute that were considered important by employees.

## RESULTS

### *Response rates*

Response rates varied significantly across cases, from 20 out of 22 at Film Inc to 6 out of 20 at TV Inc. Nonetheless, almost every organisation was able to provide at least 12 responses; the exact numbers were 20 (Film Inc), 16 (IT Inc), 15 (Sports Inc), and 12 (Uni School). The only exception was TV Inc, where just 6 employees completed the questionnaire. However, these 6 responses were exceptionally detailed, and together they provided a clear picture of the organisation's employer brand. Therefore, we concluded that it would still be appropriate to include TV Inc in the analysis.

### *Findings*

#### **Variation across cases**

As predicted by SIA, the employer brand attributes that employees considered most attractive were different in each organisation. This was partly because each organisation possessed unique attributes that employees found very attractive; examples included "*makes programmes that no one else can make*" (TV Inc), "*is the leader in its field*" (IT Inc), and "*offers the opportunity of a lifetime*" (Sports Inc). In addition, the importance assigned to shared attributes often varied between organisations. For example, high salaries were considered very important at Film Inc, but far less so at Sports Inc. The value assigned to shared attributes also varied – for example strict rules and protocols were seen as attractive by employees of Film Inc but unattractive by employees of Sports Inc - but differences of this kind were relatively rare.

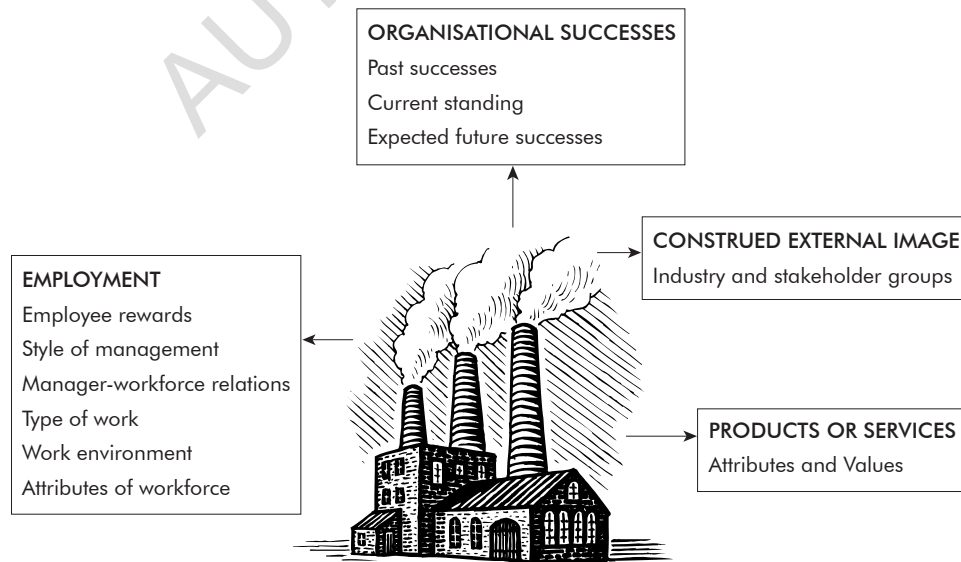
#### **Attribute categories**

The attributes that employees considered important, whether attractive or unattractive, fell into four categories: employment, organisational success, construed

external image, and attributes of the product or service as shown in Figure 2. Employment-related attributes could be further divided into the six sub-categories described below. The relative importance of these categories and sub-categories varied significantly across organisations, as did the specific attributes included in them. Nonetheless, every category and sub-category was considered important in at least four of the five organisations. Therefore, even though the specific attributes that employees found most attractive were different in each organisation, the kinds of issues that they considered important were reasonably consistent. (Table 1, overleaf, illustrates the characteristics of the focal organisations and captures salient views of their attractiveness in the words of employees.)

*Employment.* Employment related attributes fell into six sub-categories: work environment, workforce, type of work, style of management, employee rewards, and management-workforce relations (see section 1 of Table 1). Attributes of the work environment included pace of work, office location, and social dynamics. Attributes of the workforce included diversity of the workforce as a whole and characteristics of the typical employee. Type of work included variety and level of challenge. Employee rewards included tangible rewards, such as salary and benefits, and intangible rewards, such as skills training and opportunities for career advancement. Style of management included the basis for rewards (for example merit versus politics), managers’ expectations of employees, (for example using their own initiative versus towing the line), managers’ responsiveness to the needs and ideas of employees, and level of bureaucracy. Management-workforce relationship included managers’ attitude toward employees and employees’ attitude towards managers (for example the levels of trust and respect).

**FIGURE 2** Categories and sub-categories of attribute that influence the perceived attractiveness of an organisation’s employer brand, from the perspective of current employees



**TABLE 1** Table of attribute categories that were considered important by employees in each organisation, with illustrative quotes

	Uni School	Sports Inc	IT Inc	Film Inc	TV Inc
<b>Employment</b>					
Work environment	"a fairly relaxed atmosphere, peaceful and no unnecessary chaos"	"Demanding work environment"	"It is a positive environment"	"it is fun, it is informal, you can put your feet up while you're having a meeting"	"Very creative environment"
Workforce	"colleagues are supportive and friendly"	"a community of passionate people"	"IT Inc people care about each other"	"we have some very dynamic individuals working here"	"Very clever and eloquent people who are not afraid to speak out"
Type of work	"the job is challenging and rewarding"	"The work is very varied and very exciting"	"The projects are interesting"	"Challenging; you're working with twelve different countries"	"the work is varied which keeps it interesting"
Style of management		"Visionary... we challenge the norm"	"Entrepreneurial; there is a willingness to take risks to grow the business"	"pro-active in just about everything"	"we are always pushing barriers and taking risks"
Employee rewards	"you will be paid well with excellent benefits"	"Good remuneration"	"Competitive salary and good rewards in general"	"Monetary-wise I think they're probably a bit below where people's expectations are"	"A lot of money is invested in employees both with remuneration and with extra things such as parties"

	Uni School	Sports Inc	IT Inc	Film Inc	TV Inc
Management-workforce relations	“managers are usually approachable and sympathetic/empathetic”	“you’re listened to whether you an 18 year old school leaver, a PA, or a director... I don’t feel there is any hierarchy”	“Generally, the employee base has a huge amount of respect for those that have been with us from the beginning.” (referring to senior management team)	“very focused on employees... you don’t feel that you can’t talk about something that you’re unhappy about”	
<b>Organisational Success</b>	“one of the top schools in the UK”		“is the number one company” (in its market)	“we have grown by 49% in the last two years”	“a track record of global hits”
<b>Product or Service</b>	“we teach application as well as theory”	“a truly inspirational end product”	“the underlying value is loyalty”	“the product is cool and the brand is cool”	“our formats do court controversy”
<b>Construed external image</b>	“has a worldwide reputation for excellence”	“is thought of as a cool place to work”	“is well-respected”	“is such a well known and respected brand”	“is criticized for making lowest common denominator programming”

*Organisational success.* Four out of five organisations were perceived to be highly successful, and in all four cases employees considered this to be a very attractive attribute. (In the fifth organisation, Sports Inc, employees were so focused on potential future success that actual organisational success was not a relevant measure.) However success was defined differently within each organisation: employees of TV Inc focused on the popularity and profitability of their programmes, employees of Sports Inc focused on the organisation's ability to deliver on brand values, employees of Film Inc focused on sales figures, employees of IT Inc focused on their company's position in the market, and employees of Uni School focused on the quality and practical relevance of their teaching and research. Within each organisation, employees also talked about past, present, and future success. For example, one employee who described IT Inc as "successful" explained his answer as follows: "*building (the product) has been an amazing achievement and creating a company valued at £ 360 million after 5 or so years is very impressive*" (past success). Another employee explained that IT Inc "*have established their place in the industry and continue to thrive with new ideas*" (past and present success). Still another employee explained that "*recent events have set us up as the number one player. Upcoming developments will set us even further ahead in the next year*" (past and future success). Therefore the notion of organisational success was found to be highly attractive, but inherently subjective and complex

*Construed external image.* In four of the five organisations, employees attached considerable importance to their organisation's construed external image. This has been broadly defined as the attributes that "*members believe people outside the organisation use to distinguish it*" (Dutton and Dukerich 1991) However, employees did not always refer to the perceptions of outsiders in general; instead they often focused their attention on the perceptions of specific stakeholder groups. For example one employee described TV Inc as "*a brand that consumers, employees, and broadcasters have to buy into.*"

The specific groups referenced by employees varied across organisations, but tended to fall into two categories. The first category included people in their own industry or sector. For example an employee of TV Inc explained that "*the industry respects the work we do and the people who work here*" and an employee of Uni School described his organisation as "*well-known in engineering and aerospace.*" The second category included groups that were perceived to have some influence on the success of the organisation, and the groups included in this category were largely determined by employees' definition of organisational success. For example, employees of Uni School measured their school's success according to its performance in two arenas: academia and industry. As a result, they focused particular attention on the perceptions of academic groups (such as current and potential students) and practitioners. For example one employee stated that "*The School's reputation is world renowned and degrees from (Uni School) are highly sought after*", and another employee referred to the School's "*great reputation with industry*". On the other hand, employees of Sports Inc felt that until they actually delivered the product, the success of their organisation would be determined by its ability to build and maintain the support of the public. As a result, they expressed frustration with inaccurate media coverage that threatened to damage the perceptions and sentiments of the general public, and they argued that individual employees had a responsibility to promote a more accurate picture of the organisation: "*when there's negative press coverage of (the product) you'll need to be able to tell friends and family what it is really like*". In fact some employees considered public perception to be so important

that promoting a positive image was simply seen part of the job:

*You have to be prepared to be scrutinized by your friends, family, stakeholders and communities – people will ask lots of questions and you have to be someone who is prepared to answer these. Whether you’re in the pub on a Saturday night, in a taxi, or at a family dinner you are still carrying out your role of working for (Sports Inc) and can never truly switch off.*

*Product or service.* In all five organisations, employees referred to the perceived attributes of their organisation’s product or service. For example an employee of Sports Inc described the product as “*something the world finds very exciting*” and an employee of TV Inc stated that their programmes “*do court controversy*”. This attention to the product was unexpected because the questionnaire was specifically worded to elicit employees’ perceptions of the organisation’s identity and of the employment experience; it made no reference to the product or service. However the results suggest that employees considered their organisation’s product or service to be an integral part of its identity, and therefore its employer brand. For example Film Inc was described as “*Fun - because of the product*” and TV Inc was described as “*Fun – because of the programmes we make*”.

In addition, the attributes of each organisation’s product or service were often described in terms of the underlying values. For example employees of TV Inc described the product as “*creative*”, “*commercial*”, and “*controversial*”, while employees of Sports Inc used the words “*innovative*”, “*challenging*”, and “*inspiring*”. In four of the five cases, employees used the same words to describe their organisation as a whole, suggesting that the values associated with the product were aligned with the identity of the organisation. In the third case, this was not true; several employees complained that the “*formal*” dress code, “*posh*” office location, and strict organisational hierarchy all contributed to a “*corporate*” work environment that was not compatible with the “*edgy*”, “*inspirational*”, “*inclusive*” nature of the product. However, they considered the misalignment to be both unattractive and ultimately unsustainable.

## DISCUSSION

### *Theoretical implications*

The results of this study suggest that current conceptualisations of the employer brand which focus solely on attributes related to employment may be overly restrictive. More specifically, we found that employees considered their organisation’s employer brand to be more attractive when the organisation as a whole was perceived to be successful; when they valued the attributes of the organisation’s product or service; when they construed its external image as being attractive. Therefore, when researching employer brand attractiveness and its impact on employee behaviour, it may be useful to adopt a broader perspective that encompasses all these categories of attribute.

With regard to the relationship between an organisation’s construed external image and the attractiveness of its employer brand, our findings are essentially consistent with those of Lievens et al. (2007). However, while Lievens et al. (2007) focused specifically on the construed perceptions of potential employees, this study has shown that employees may also assign considerable importance to the perceptions

of other stakeholder groups, including the people working in their own industry and other groups that are perceived to influence the success of their organisation. Therefore, it would be useful to conduct further research to identify the sources of information that employees use to construe their organisation's external image, to determine how they interpret and evaluate this information, and to explain how the construed perceptions of different groups may influence the perceived attractiveness of the employer brand. For example, Social Identity Theory suggests that employees may seek to align their own views with other people who are in some way similar to themselves, such as members of their own race, religion, or gender (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Therefore, if employees feel that members of a particular stakeholder group are in some way similar to themselves, the construed perceptions of people in that group may have a greater impact on the perceived attractiveness of the organisation's employer brand.

In the context of corporate branding, it may also be useful to study the relationship between the importance that employees assign to the perceptions of a particular group and their willingness to live the brand when interacting with group members. For example employees of Sports Inc assigned particular importance to the perceptions of the general public and they expressed a willingness to actively manage the perceptions of people in this group. Moreover their responses suggest that there was a direct causal relationship between the two. However, it is not known whether this relationship can be replicated in other organisations, or in relation to other stakeholder groups. Therefore, further research is needed to determine whether employees' willingness to live the brand is likely to vary with respect to different stakeholder groups, whether this variation can be at least partly explained by the importance they assign to the perceptions of each group, and which other factors may influence the relationship.

Finally, the results of this study support our initial supposition that different methods will be needed to study employer brand attractiveness from the perspective of current versus potential employees. More specifically, methods used to study the perspective of current employees will need to be sensitive to the unique attributes of each organisation and to the biased manner in which employees evaluate their own organisation's employer brand. This means that qualitative methods, such as those used in this study, are likely to play an ongoing role in future research. However there are many important questions that are likely to require a more quantitative approach. For example, it would be particularly useful to develop techniques for measuring the relative importance that employees assign to individual attributes and the attractiveness of the employer brand as a whole. This would allow researchers to further investigate the antecedents and consequences of employer brand attractiveness, including the alignment of employee behaviour with the values of the corporate brand.

### ***Managerial implications***

The results of this study support Mosley's (2007) claim that the strategy of becoming an employer of choice is "*unlikely to deliver on the more distinctive fit for purpose requirements of the brand and business strategy.*" More specifically, we show that the attributes employees consider most attractive can be different in each organisation. When developing their organisation's employer brand, managers should begin by understanding what employees find attractive about their own organisation. This will help to ensure that the employer brand reflects the interests of employees as well as the distinctive identity of the organisation, thereby helping to align the behaviour of

employees with the values of the corporate brand.

This inside-out approach to employer branding is likely to require firm-specific research and may, therefore, be more costly than simply copying best practice from others. However, this study has shown that the categories of attribute that employees consider important are reasonably consistent, and therefore predictable, across organisations. Rather than conducting extensive research into every aspect of their organisation’s employer brand, managers can focus specifically on these categories; this will allow them to minimise research costs while paying more attention to the issues that really matter to employees. In order to help managers target their research efforts even more precisely, further research could also be conducted to identify the conditions in which each attribute category is likely to be most important, and to determine whether each category could be further divided into more specific sub-categories.

### *Limitations of the case study design*

The most significant limitation of this study is the small number of organisations included; results from five cases provide a useful basis for developing theory (Yin 2003), which is an appropriate objective in a new field of study, but further research is needed to determine whether these results are generalisable to different types of organisations. For example the five cases included in this study represent just four industries – media, higher education, data analysis and sports. Since organisations in a particular industry tend to possess attributes that are distinctive to that industry, and since the employer brand attributes that employees consider most attractive are dependent on the perceived attributes of their organisation, it may be useful to extend the study to include organisations from a broader range of industries. Further research of this kind may lead to refinements or modifications of the employer brand constructs discussed above. Nonetheless, the level of consistency that we found among the five organisations studied indicates that the results of this study have important implications for theory and practice in the area of employer branding.

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