Captivating company: dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding

Pierre Berthon
Bentley College
Michael Ewing
Monash University
Li Lian Hah
MPH, Malaysia

The internal marketing concept specifies that an organisation's employees are its first market. Themes such as 'internal advertising' and 'internal branding' have recently entered the marketing lexicon. One component of internal marketing that is still under-developed is 'employer branding' and specifically 'employer attractiveness'. Employer attractiveness is defined as the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organisation. It constitutes an important concept in knowledge-intensive contexts where attracting employees with superior skills and knowledge comprises a primary source of competitive advantage. In this paper, we identify and operationalise the components of employer attractiveness from the perspective of potential employees. Specifically we develop a scale for the measurement of employer attractiveness. Implications of the research are discussed, limitations noted and future research directions suggested.

Introduction

Until fairly recently, customers were seen to be only those external to the organisation. Indeed, many managers would argue that externally oriented marketing is difficult enough without introducing the notion of 'internal customers' (Ewing & Caruana 1999). The internal marketing concept argues that the organisation's personnel are the first market of any company (George & Gronroos 1989; George 1990), the rationale being that

employees are internal customers and jobs are internal products. Job products must attract, develop and motivate employees, thereby satisfying the needs and wants of these internal customers, while addressing the overall objectives of the organisation (Berry & Parasuraman 1991). In fact, Kotler (1994) defines internal marketing as 'the task of successfully hiring, training and motivating able employees to serve the customer well'. The present study is concerned primarily with the successful 'hiring of employees' in Kotler's (1994) definition. It examines how astute employers can embrace the principles and practices associated with external brand management and marketing communication, internally. In other words, it extends beyond the HRM notion of recruitment advertising (Gatewood *et al.* 1993) and considers how firms might assess the degree to which they are considered to be 'employers of choice' and in the process, attract the highest-calibre employees. It is generally recognised that intellectual and human capital is the foundation of competitive advantage in the modern economy. Accordingly, the contest among employers to attract and retain talented workers takes place in a world where technological advances and global competition are driving widespread change in employment patterns (Osborn-Jones 2001). This paper begins by considering the effect of an organisation's advertising on its own employees. Next, we broaden the focus to internal branding and employer branding. We then introduce and define the concept of employer attractiveness and develop a reliable and valid scale to assess the construct. Implications of the approach are then considered, limitations noted and future research direction outlined.

Internal advertising

Berry (1981) appears to have been the first to recognise the potential impact of advertising on (current) employees, yet, as Gilly and Wolfinbarger (1998) note, marketers today are still overlooking an important internal or 'second audience' for their advertisements: their own employees. They conclude that advertising decision-makers may underestimate the importance of the employee audience for advertisements. Given that employees will be influenced by advertisements, it is important that companies make every effort to ensure that this influence is positive. Consequently advertising decision-makers need to understand the effect that advertising has on current and potential employees – for example, the

fact that current employees enjoy an 'insider' role and want information in advance of marketing communications (Gilly & Wolfinbarger 1998) and that future employees can be influenced by mainstream advertising (Ewing *et al*. 2002).

Internal branding

Employees are becoming central to the process of brand building and their behaviour can either reinforce a brand's advertised values or, if inconsistent with these values, undermine the credibility of advertised messages. It is therefore important to consider how employees' values and behaviour can be aligned with a brand's desired values (Harris & de Chernatony 2001). Internal branding, according to Bergstrom *et al*. (2002), refers to three things: communicating the brand effectively to the employees; convincing them of its relevance and worth; and successfully linking every job in the organisation to delivery of the 'brand essence'. Coca-Cola's renowned former chief marketing officer, Sergio Zyman (2002, p. 204) concurs: 'Before you can even think of selling your brand to consumers, you have to sell it to your employees.' He goes on to argue that how a brand is positioned in the minds of consumers is heavily dependent on a company's employees. It is worth noting that the first conference on 'internal branding' was recently held in Chicago.[1]

Employer branding

Employer branding has been described as the 'sum of a company's efforts to communicate to existing and prospective staff that it is a desirable place to work' (Lloyd 2002). Advertising may become a critical tool in the efforts that firms make to identify, acquire and retain skilled employees. Increasingly, it is likely to also be used to create what has in the popular business press recently been referred to as 'employment brands' (Sherry 2000) – building and sustaining employment propositions that are compelling and different. The moniker 'employer brand' appears to have first been coined by Ambler and Barrow (1996), who defined it as 'the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by

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[1] See http://www.aliconferences.com/conferences/internal_branding_aug03.html

employment, and identified with the employing company' (p. 187). The authors go on to suggest that, just like a traditional brand, an employer brand has both personality and positioning. Employment branding is therefore concerned with building an image in the minds of the potential labour market that the company, above all others, is a 'great place to work' (Ewing *et al*. 2002). According to human resources consultants Hewitt Associates,[2] there are five steps to developing a strong employer brand: (i) understand your organisation, (ii) create a 'compelling brand promise' for employees that mirrors the brand promise for customers, (iii) develop standards to measure the fulfilment of the brand promise, (iv) 'ruthlessly align' all people practices to support and reinforce the brand promise, and (v) execute and measure. Moreover, it is posited that companies with strong employer brands can potentially reduce the cost of employee acquisition, improve employee relations, increase employee retention and even offer lower salaries for comparable staff to firms with weaker employer brands (Ritson 2002).

Collins and Stevens (2002), confirming prior research, suggest that early recruitment activities are indirectly related to intentions and decisions through two dimensions of employer brand image: general attitudes towards the company and perceived job attributes. Examples of employer brands, and indeed employer advertising, are becoming increasingly common. Ewing *et al*. (2002) classify existing approaches to employment branding by identifying three basic types of employment advertising strategy, and provide numerous examples of each. Lloyd (2002) cites the example of an Australian bank's TV commercial, clearly aimed at existing and potential employees. While there are numerous examples of 'employer advertising', few are as explicit as a recent DaimlerChrysler ad, which appears to target potential employees as the *primary* audience. The double-page spread advertisement in Figure 1 shows a number of DaimlerChrysler vehicles, positioning them not as consumer products but as company cars (i.e. a potential benefit for prospective employees). The copy is even more direct: 'As a successful car company there are many things that make working for us an attractive prospect. In addition to a diverse range of career possibilities …'.

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[2] See http://www.hewittasia.com/hewitt/ap/australia/index.htm

Figure 1: DaimlerChrysler advertisement in *The Economist*

Employer attractiveness

A closely related concept to 'employer branding' is the notion of 'employer attractiveness'. This concept has been broadly discussed in the areas of vocational behaviour (Soutar & Clarke 1983), management (Gatewood *et al.* 1993), applied psychology (Jurgensen 1978; Collins & Stevens 2002), communication (Bergstrom *et al.* 2002) and marketing (Ambler & Barrow 1996; Gilly & Wolfinbarger 1998; Ambler 2000; Ewing *et al.* 2002). It has also become an increasingly 'hot topic' in the contemporary business press (see, for example, Sherry 2000; Lloyd 2002; Ritson 2002), and 'Best Employer' status is something that more and more organisations are striving for, as attention is drawn to this mantle in both the contemporary electronic[3] and print media (e.g. *The Economist* 2003).

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[3] See www.greatplacetowork.com and www.bestemployeraustralia.com

We define 'employer attractiveness' as *the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organisation*. The construct may be thought of as an antecedent of the more general concept of employer brand equity. In other words, the more attractive an employer is perceived to be by potential employees, the stronger that particular organisation's employer brand equity. This study seeks to contribute by identifying and operationalising dimensions of employer attractiveness.

The study

Our research objective centres on developing and validating a scale to assess employer attractiveness. Researchers can generate scale items using either a deductive or an inductive approach (Hinkin 1995). The former entails the development of a classification schema or typology prior to data collection and following a thorough review of the literature. This enables researchers to develop a theoretical definition of a construct, which is then used to guide the development of scale items (Schwab 1980; Rossiter 2002). Such an approach has been used in the development of various marketing scales, including measures of consumer-based brand equity (Yoo & Donthu 2001), market orientation (Narver & Slater 1990) and many others. These researchers have noted that based on information generated from prior studies, a pool of items related to each construct can readily be formulated. In contrast, an inductive approach involves identifying constructs and possible scale items based on qualitative insights gleaned from respondents (Hinkin 1995). This approach is often used when there is limited theory or knowledge in relation to a topic. Our initial work essentially combined the two approaches discussed above. We had a strong deductive foundation to build on, courtesy of Ambler and Barrow's (1996) inductive delineation of three dimensions (functional, psychological and economic). Thus, as the ensuing description of the survey will reveal, we essentially confirmed Ambler and Barrow's (1996) three dimensions (i.e. deductive) and uncovered an additional two (i.e. inductive).

A total of six focus groups were conducted in all, using final-year (final-semester) graduate and undergraduate students at a large Australian university. Participants were recruited using a transparency 'advertisement' in lectures and offered a $20 gratuity for taking part. Each group lasted approximately 90 minutes. Our moderator guide contained questions

about participants' 'ideal' employers (i.e. organisations the respondents would most like to work for, and why), what factors they considered important when considering potential employers, organisations they would least like to work for (and why) and, finally, how they go about looking for employment (i.e. internet, classifieds, recruitment agencies, word of mouth, networking, etc.). All groups were tape-recorded and later transcribed. In addition, while one author moderated, another took copious notes. Both authors than compared notes after each group. Of course, the purpose of the focus groups was to develop a set of items that tap each of the dimensions of the employer attractiveness construct. The focus groups culminated in the generation of 32 potential scale items. These items where then edited to ensure wording was as precise as possible (Churchill 1979). This led to the next stage in the procedure: data collection and scale purification.

Having inductively developed a 32-item Employer Attractiveness scale (EmpAt), we administered it to a convenience sample of 683 university students. It has of course been suggested (e.g. Wells 1993) that the use of student subjects in measurement development research threatens the external validity and generalisability of findings due to the non-representativeness and unique characteristics of the population. On the other hand, Calder *et al.* (1981) argue that students are acceptable theory-testing research subjects when the multivariate relationships among constructs rather than the univariate differences between samples are being examined. In our case, however, the students *were* in fact the subjects of measurement (and not 'surrogates' for other members of the population at large). Being less than six months away from entering the job market themselves, they are prime candidates for employer advertising and recruitment campaigns. In addition, our focus is on multivariate relationships among constructs rather than the univariate differences between samples.

Purification and reliability

The first stage of scale purification involved the entire 32-item instrument undergoing the computation of coefficient alpha (Cronbach 1951), in accordance with Churchill's (1979) recommendation. For all 32 items, the alpha was 0.91. From the results of this first phase of the reliability analysis,

all items with a corrected item-to-total correlation of less than 0.40 were eliminated, resulting in the removal of three items: items 2, 13 and 23. In the second phase of scale purification, items with a corrected item–total correlation of less than 0.50 were eliminated, resulting in the purging of a further four items: 3, 9, 21 and 22. This left a total of 25 items that form the final Employer Attractiveness (EmpAt) scale. Table 1 shows the reliability analysis of the final 25 items. The alpha for the final 25-item EmpAt scale = 0.96. From the table it is evident that all the items contribute to the

Table 1: Reliability analysis of purified 25-item Employer Attractiveness (EmpAt) scale

Item	Item mean (seven-point Likert scale)	Corrected item–total correlation	Alpha if item deleted
How important are the following to you when considering potential employers?			
1. Recognition/appreciation from management	5.58	0.63	0.95
4. A fun working environment	5.75	0.64	0.95
5. A springboard for future employment	5.62	0.63	0.95
6. Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular organisation	5.69	0.70	0.95
7. Feeling more self-confident as a result of working for a particular organisation	5.72	0.68	0.95
8. Gaining career-enhancing experience	5.83	0.68	0.95
10. Having a good relationship with your superiors	5.66	0.67	0.95
11. Having a good relationship with your colleagues	5.92	0.71	0.95
12. Supportive and encouraging colleagues	5.65	0.71	0.95
14. Working in an exciting environment	5.37	0.65	0.95
15. Innovative employer – novel work practices/forward-thinking	5.31	0.67	0.95
16. The organisation both values and makes use of your creativity	5.45	0.69	0.95
17. The organisation produces high-quality products and services	5.41	0.70	0.95
18. The organisation produces innovative products and services	5.22	0.66	0.95
19. Good promotion opportunities within the organisation	5.82	0.70	0.95
20. Humanitarian organisation – gives back to society	5.00	0.59	0.95
24. Opportunity to *apply* what was learned at a tertiary institution	5.19	0.61	0.95
25. Opportunity to teach others what you have learned	4.85	0.59	0.95
26. Acceptance and belonging	5.63	0.72	0.95
27. The organisation is customer-orientated	5.24	0.62	0.95
28. Job security within the organisation	5.75	0.67	0.95
29. Hands-on inter-departmental experience	5.43	0.64	0.95
30. Happy work environment	6.01	0.73	0.95
31. An above average basic salary	5.97	0.66	0.95
32. An attractive *overall* compensation package	5.94	0.69	0.95

internal consistency of the scale. Generally, scales are regarded as reliable for commercial purposes if the alpha coefficient exceeds 0.7 (e.g. Carman 1990), so it can be accepted that EmpAt is a reliable scale for the measurement of employer attractiveness.

The structure of EmpAt

The underlying structure of EmpAt was investigated in the following sequence. As a first stage, the 683 sample was split into two approximately equally sized sub-samples: Sample 1 (n = 340) and Sample 2 (n = 343). This was achieved by randomly selecting ~50% of the cases using the SPSS filter algorithm. In the second stage, using Sample 1, the underlying structure of the EmpAt instrument was explored through principal components analysis. In the third stage, the factor structure revealed in stage *2* was then confirmed on Sample 2 using confirmatory factor analysis.

Exploratory factor analysis

As stipulated above, once the data had been split into two sub-samples, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted on Sample 1. Principal component analysis with Varimax rotation and a factor extraction according to the MINEIGEN criterion (i.e. all factors with eigenvalues of greater than 1) was employed. The results of this procedure are reported in Table 2. The five factors account for a cumulative 74% of the variation in the data.

From the rotated factor matrix in Table *2* it can be seen that items 14–18 load on factor 1, items 4, 10–12 and 30 load on factor *2*, items 19 and *29–31* load on factor 3, items 1 and 5–8 load on factor 4, and finally items 20 and 24–27 load on factor 5.

Factor 1, labelled 'Interest value', assesses the extent to which an individual is attracted to an employer that provides an exciting work environment, novel work practices and that makes use of its employee's creativity to produce high-quality, innovative products and services. Factor 2, labelled 'Social value', assesses the extent to which an individual is attracted to an employer that provides a working environment that is fun, happy, provides good collegial relationships and a team atmosphere. Factor 3, labelled 'Economic value', assesses the extent to which an individual is attracted to an employer that provides above-average salary,

Table 2: Factor analysis of EmpAt items

Component	Initial eigenvalues			Extraction sums of squared loadings			Rotation sums of squared loadings		
	Total	% variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %	Total	% variance	Cumulative %
1	12.18	48.72	48.72	12.18	48.72	48.72	3.74	14.95	14.95
2	2.02	8.08	56.80	2.02	8.08	56.80	3.72	14.86	29.81
3	1.44	5.77	62.58	1.44	5.77	62.58	3.71	14.83	44.64
4	1.42	5.68	68.26	1.42	5.68	68.26	3.70	14.80	59.45
5	1.35	5.41	73.69	1.35	5.41	73.67	3.56	14.22	73.69

Rotated component matrix[a]

	Factor				
	1	2	3	4	5
Q18. The organisation produces innovative products and services	0.80				
Q15. Innovative employer – novel work practices/forward-thinking	0.79				
Q16. The organisation both values and makes use of your creativity	0.78				
Q17. The organisation produces high-quality products and services	0.76				
Q14. Working in an exciting environment	0.67				
Q11. Having a good relationship with your colleagues		0.81			
Q10. Having a good relationship with your superiors		0.76			
Q12. Supportive and encouraging colleagues		0.76			
Q04. A fun working environment		0.73			
Q30. Happy work environment		0.70			
Q32. An attractive *overall* compensation package				0.81	
Q31. An above average basic salary				0.81	
Q28. Job security within the organisation				0.73	

(continued)

Table 2: Factor analysis of EmpAt items (continued)

			Factor		
	1	2	3	4	5
Q19. Good promotion opportunities within the organisation			0.72		
Q29. Hands-on inter-departmental experience			0.69		
Q07. Feeling more self-confident as a result of working for a particular organisation				0.78	
Q06. Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular organisation				0.78	
Q08. Gaining career-enhancing experience				0.77	
Q05. A springboard for future employment				0.73	
Q01. Recognition/appreciation from management				0.70	
Q25. Opportunity to teach others what you have learned					0.81
Q24. Opportunity to *apply* what was learned at a tertiary institution					0.76
Q27. The organisation is customer-orientated					0.74
Q20. Humanitarian organisation – gives back to society					0.70
Q26. Acceptance and belonging					0.67

Extraction method: principal component analysis.
Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalisation.
Rotation converged in 7 iterations. (For clarity of interpretation, factor loadings <0.6 are suppressed.)
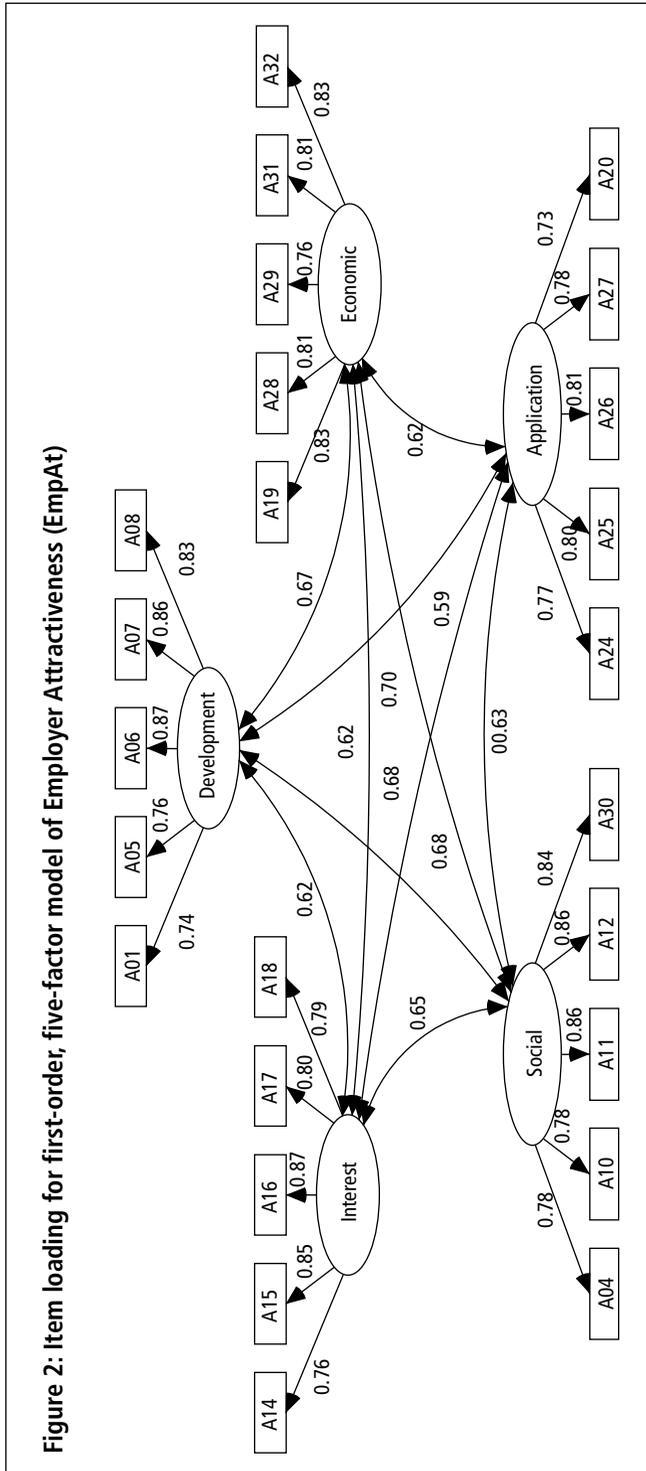Items sorted by loading.

compensation package, job security and promotional opportunities. Factor 4, labelled 'Development value', assesses the extent to which an individual is attracted to an employer that provides recognition, self-worth and confidence, coupled with a career-enhancing experience and a springboard to future employment. Finally, factor 5, labelled 'Application value', assesses the extent to which an individual is attracted to an employer that provides an opportunity for the employee to apply what they have learned and to teach others, in an environment that is both customer orientated and humanitarian.

Our five-factor structure is essentially a refinement and extension of the three dimensions proposed by Ambler and Barrow (1996). Our factors 1 (Interest value) and 2 (Social value) capture their 'psychological benefits'; our factors 4 (Development value) and 5 (Application value) expand on their 'functional benefits'; and, not surprisingly, both operationalisations have an economic dimension (our factor 3).

Confirmatory factor analysis

Having identified five clear factors through principal components analysis, the next step is to confirm the factor structure on Sample 2. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to perform a confirmatory factor analysis on the proposed model depicted in Figure 2. As can be seen, the model consists of a first-order five-factor structure. Specifically it comprises five latent variables (social value, development value, application value, interest value and economic value), with the observed variables (EmpAt items) loading in accordance with the pattern revealed in the exploratory factor analysis on Sample 1.

There are a number of tests to ascertain whether an SEM model fits the observed data. The chi-square (χ^2) test provides a statistical test of the null hypothesis that the model fits the data, and generally a χ^2 divided by the degree of freedom (df) <5 is deemed appropriate. In addition, three fit indices are typically used to identify overall goodness of fit: (i) root mean residual (RMR), where a figure <0.10 is advised; (ii) adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), where a score of >0.80 is preferred; and (iii) comparative fit index (CFI), where >0.90 is stipulated (Bentler 1990). In this research, the χ^2 associated with the five-factor EA model was 685.04 ($df = 265, p < 0.01$), while the RMR = 0.06, AGFI = 0.91 and CFI = 0.96. Thus, the χ^2/df is <5,

Figure 2: Item loading for first-order, five-factor model of Employer Attractiveness (EmpAt)

and the RMR, AGFI and CFI figures suggest that the model fits the data reasonably well. Moreover, all item loading produced significant *t*-values. In short, the SEM model confirms the proposed five-factor structure of the EmpAt instrument.

Psychometric properties of the five-factor employer attractiveness model

The reliability of EmpAt

Further evidence of the reliability of the 25-item EmpAt scale is provided in Table 3, which shows composite reliability and variance-extracted scores (Fornell & Larcker 1981; Hair *et al*. 1995). The variance extracted score is recommended to be >0.50. However, this is a conservative test and the score may often drop below 0.50 when other reliability measures are adequate (Fornell & Larcker 1981). For the composite reliability statistic, scores of >0.70 are recommended (Carmines & Zeller 1988). Values were calculated for each of the factors included in the five-factor EmpAt model. The results presented in Table 4 attest further to the internal consistency of the instrument.

The validity of EmpAt

For a scale to be used with confidence it must possess validity; in simple terms, it must measure what it purports to measure. In this section, a

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Table 3: Reliability and validity assessment for Employer Attractiveness (EmpAt)

	CR	AVE		CV	DV
Social value	0.91	0.68	(Corr.)^2 0.46, 0.49, 0.40, 0.42, 0.46	Yes	Yes
Development value	0.91	0.66			
Application value	0.89	0.61			
Interest value	0.91	0.67			
Economic value	0.91	0.65			

CR = composite reliability = (Σ of std loading)^2/(Σ of std loading)^2 + Σ of ε_i; AVE = average variance extracted = Σ of (std loading)^2/Σ of (std loading)^2 + Σ of ε_i; CV = convergent validity (AVE >0.50); DV = discriminant validity = AVE/(corr.)^2 >1; (corr.)^2 = highest (corr.)^2 between factors of interest and remaining factors.

Table 4: Multiple regression – EmpAt (x) against attractiveness of working for Sony (y)

Model summary

Model	1.00
R	0.48
R^2	0.23
Adjusted R^2	0.22
Std error of the estimate	1.49

[a] Predictors: (Intercept), Application, Development, Economic, Interest, Social.

Coefficients[a]

Model	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients		
	Beta	Std error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Intercept)	−1.05	0.50	—	−2.11	0.04
Social	0.24	0.11	0.11	2.15	0.03
Interest	0.18	0.1	0.09	1.87	0.06
Development	0.32	0.1	0.15	3.2	0.001
Economic	0.19	0.1	0.09	1.89	0.06
Application	0.25	0.09	0.14	2.92	0.004

[b] Dependent variable: Sony.

number of aspects of the validity of EmpAt are considered, namely: nomological, convergent, discriminant, criterion and content validity.

Nomological validity
Nomological validity of an instrument is established if items that are expected to load together in a factor analysis do so. The first-order, five-factor model of EmpAt confirmed the factor structure found in the exploratory factor analysis. The loadings of the model are shown in Figure 2. All loadings yielded significant *t*-values, and each item loads on the predicted factor, thus providing evidence of nomological validity.

Convergent and discriminant validity
Convergent and discriminant validity were evaluated by calculating the average variance extracted (AVE) for each of the five factors. Convergent validity is established if the shared variance accounts for 0.50 or more of

the total variance. Discriminant validity is evident when the AVE for each construct is greater than the squared correlation between that construct and any other construct in the model (Fornell & Larcker 1981). The results presented in Table 3 confirm both the convergent and discriminant validity of the five-factor EmpAt model.

Overall, the results presented in the above sections offer support for the psychometric soundness of the EmpAt instrument at a five-factor level. On the evidence of the above results, we suggest that the structure of EmpAt is best represented by five unique dimensions (i.e. Social value, Development value, Application value, Interest value and Economic value).

Criterion validity

The criterion validity of an instrument is indicated if a scale performs as expected in relation to other variables selected as meaningful criteria. To assess the criterion validity of the EmpAt a multiple regression of the five dimensions of Employer Attractiveness was conducted against an independent global measure of the employer attractiveness of the company, Sony. In a separate study of ten well-known organisations, Sony was rated the most attractive company to work for by a sample of graduating students.

Respondents were asked to evaluate the attractiveness of working for Sony, on a seven-point scale (anchored on 'to a very little extent' and 'to a very great extent'). The results of this procedure are reported in Table 4, where the criterion variable is labelled 'Sony', and the five dimensions of EmpAt 'Social', 'Development', 'Application', 'Interest' and 'Economic'. The independent variables were formed by averaging the items that constitute the relevant factor.

As can be seen from Table 4, the regression model is significant ($p < 0.01$) with an adjusted R^2 of 0.23. Three of the five factors had a significant ($p < 0.05$) impact on the criterion variable, with the standardised beta for each factor being 0.11 for Social value, 0.15 for Development value and 0.14 for Application value. The factors of 'Interest value' and 'Economic value' were significant at the 10% level.

The relationship between three of the EmpAt factors and the overall measure of intranet success can be taken as evidence of criterion validity. Strictly speaking, we have demonstrated concurrent-criterion validity as

Table 5: Content validity of EmpAt: cross-tabulation of the five EmpAt factors against attractiveness of working for Sony

Attractiveness of working for Sony	N	Social	Development	Application	Interest	Economic
1 To a very little extent	13	5.23	5.17	4.86	4.97	5.31
2	14	5.54	5.46	4.93	5.02	5.41
3	31	5.80	5.61	5.48	5.22	5.62
4	106	5.74	5.64	4.99	5.34	5.74
5	185	5.78	5.68	5.19	5.57	5.76
6	181	5.99	5.83	5.40	5.67	6.00
7 To a very great extent	153	6.12	6.05	5.44	5.68	6.17

the EmpAt data and the overall evaluations of the attractiveness of working for Sony were collected at the same point in time.

Content validity

Finally, we turn to content validity, which refers to the extent to which an instrument covers the range of meanings included in the concept (Babbie 1992, p. 133). Following the factor analysis, and the identifying and labelling of the five factors, the mean score on each of the five EmpAt dimensions was computed. A table was created that enabled examination of the mean scores by the overall success of the EmpAt item referred to. Table 5 provides the outcome of this examination of mean scores. It is apparent that there is a strong positive relationship between the attractiveness of working for Sony and the evaluation of the factors – in other words, the higher respondents rated the attractiveness of Sony, the higher was their average rating on the five dimensions of employer attractiveness. EmpAt can thus be accepted to possess content validity.

Discussion

Organisations are increasingly competing to attract highly skilled personnel in various professional areas (Mahroum 2000). There is a possibility that, in future, competition for the best employees will be as fierce as competition for customers. Organisations that can attract the best minds will have a distinct edge in the marketplace (Harari 1998). Thus, just as marketing is seen as being too important to be left only to marketers, so too

human resources is seen to be too important to be left solely to the HR function (Ambler & Barrow 1996; Ritson 2002). As organisations seek both to attract new employees and retain existing staff, employment advertising and employment branding will grow in importance. This can only be done effectively once organisations understand the factors contributing towards 'employer attractiveness'. Only when organisations work towards integrating these factors into the employment brand can they hope to successfully compete globally in attracting new employees. A word of caution, though: there are likely to be cross-cultural differences in employer attractiveness, so EmpAt cannot necessarily be extended cross-nationally without further psychometric testing. The present study identifies the dimensions of employer attractiveness, which in turn are likely to contribute to employment brand value.

For practising managers, EmpAt can be applied in various contexts and situations. For example, it might be used as a checklist among current employees – to track changes in their perceptions towards the firm longitudinally. Or it could be administered to various 'target audiences' of potential employees (e.g. students, graduates, professionals). Finally, it might find use as part of an 'employer brand template' used by both marketing/advertising and HR in formulating and executing recruitment strategy. EmpAt also provides exciting opportunities for academic researchers from a wide variety of disciplines (e.g. advertising, marketing, management, OB, HR, organisational psychology, economics and finance – to name but a few). The scale provides a foundation to further identify and refine antecedents and consequences of employer brand equity. Of course, EmpAt is but one initial operationalisation of the construct. There is therefore scope for other researchers to further develop and refine the scale.

Limitations

The external validity and generalisability of the scale depended on the subjects on which the scale was based. Strictly speaking, EmpAt can only be generalised towards students in their final year of studies. Of course, undergraduate students are likely to have had limited relevant employment experience compared to 'typical' job seekers (Rynes *et al*. 1980) with a lack of expertise in job search activities (Oswick *et al*. 1994). Another limitation

of this study is that it was carried out only in Western Australia. Cultural differences in an organisation might have important implications for international brand building as well as brand personality measurement (Biel 1999). Furthermore, the study was carried out only within the business school and the organisations used were ones that were familiar to business school students. Therefore, the organisations used might not be applicable if the study were duplicated for, say, engineering, medical or journalism students. Also, the business school students are relatively highly skilled and are confronted with markets where demand is large, relative to supply (Rynes *et al.* 1980).

Future research

In today's increasingly globalised economy, organisations are constantly attempting to recruit the best talent from all over the world. Thus, they need to understand the impact of different cultures and nationalities on the perceptions of potential employees with regard to their employer brand. An allied avenue for future inquiry is that of country-of-origin (COO) employer brands (EB). So-called 'brain drains' (diasporas) are seriously affecting many countries around the world, particularly in the antipodes (Australia, New Zealand, South Africa). For example, Australia is experiencing a mass exodus of mainly young, professional or graduate workers of about 120,000 per year (from a population of almost 19 million). In fact, more than 5% of the Australian population work overseas, compared with 20% of New Zealanders and only 2% of Americans (Fray 2003).

Another direction researchers might consider is how the so-called 'employment brand' affects post-employment dissonance. For product purchases, the brand is used to assure consumers that they have made the right product or service choice to increase consumer satisfaction and decrease post-purchase dissonance. Similarly, there is a need to determine whether the employer brand can increase job choice satisfaction and decrease post-employment dissonance once an employee begins his/her job. A longitudinal study of the perceptions of final-year students before and after entering the workforce would assist in gauging whether their perceptions of importance with regard to job attributes would change over time. Final-year students may have more naive perspectives of job attributes, as they have not yet experienced 'real' working life. Finally, the

relatively underexplored (at least by marketers) area of *employee* branding
may hold some research potential. Recent attention in the business press
to 'pitching oneself' (Faust & Faust 2003; O'Reilly 2003) builds on Bolles
(1997) best-selling job-hunters' guide, *What Color is your Parachute?*. Nobel
Prize-winning economist Michael Spence's (1973) work on signalling the-
ory could provide a rich theoretical foundation to explore the notion of
'employee branding' in a contemporary marketing context.

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