

## The role of employer brand practices in human resources management in job applications on company preference



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### ABSTRACT

*Employer branding is an important issue that businesses cannot neglect, as it is the process of creating a brand for employees and potential candidates. Especially with the development of technology, it has become easier to reach many resources. However, it has always been more difficult to reach talented human resources. At this point, discovering, attracting and working with talented employees for a long time has attributed a key role to the employer brand. In this direction, the aim of the study is to investigate the roles of employer branding practices in attracting talents to the company in job applications. Content analysis, which is a qualitative analysis method, was used in the study. Maxqda 20 software program was used to access the findings of this analysis. In the research findings, it was seen that concepts such as reputation, communication, awareness and the concept of Employer Brand were used together intensively. As a result of the research; It has been understood that businesses that want to attract talented employees to the company use the employer brand and communicate effectively with the external environment. It has been seen that this interaction supports the corporate reputation and this has played an important role in increasing the awareness of the company and in the preference and reliability.*

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## Introduction

The need of businesses to manage the existing employer image has increased the importance of employer branding. Employer branding practices contribute to increasing employer attractiveness specifically among potential qualified candidates by effectively communicating the unique and positive aspects of an employer and the corresponding employment value proposition (Backaus and Tikoo, 2004; Edwards & Edwards, 2013; Pingle & Sharma, 2013). At this point, employer branding practices play a key role in terms of retaining existing employees, effective communication with stakeholders and corporate reputation. The specific aspect of this research is that it deals with the employer brand through the preference of the potential candidates. For this purpose, semi-structured interviews were held with the human resources managers who applied the employer brand for the study. The study lasted for a total of 5 months, between February and June 2020, and interviews were made with 12 human resources managers. The research asks a number of fundamental questions to reveal the latent web of relationships. These; Do employer branding practices have a role in company preference in job applications? If so, what are these roles? Also, which role or roles are more effective in this relationship? The answers to these questions are considered very important. The purpose of human resources management, which basically includes many functions such as planning, recruitment and selection placement, performance management, training and development, career management, reward and wage management; to ensure optimum harmony between the employee and the organization.

Today, human resources management, which is considered in a strategic dimension, is shown among the basic capabilities that will add competitive advantage to businesses. In particular, a new competition subject, at least of the same intensity, has been added to the races of businesses competing for greater market share. The subject of this competition is; skilled employees (Berthon, Ewing,

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& Hah, 2005). Therefore, businesses must be seen as attractive employers for potential candidates as well as their current employees (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003). When evaluated from this perspective, it is understood that employer branding practices are the process of influencing potential candidates. Especially businesses that aim to stand out with their employees have to achieve this with an increase in their internal productivity capacity. At this point, determining the role of employer brand through correct and up-to-date variables can create a different perspective for businesses.

As a matter of fact, it has been understood in the studies that the motivations behind the work-related preferences differ for each generation. Therefore, it has been emphasized that different adjustments may need to be made in human resource management practices (Amaral, 2004; Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). For the conceptual framework of the study, the functional structure of human resources management has been introduced. In this section, business responsibility for finding potential candidates is mentioned in particular. In the next stage, employer brand implementation processes will be discussed. In the last stage, the relationship between the human resources management employer brand will be transferred and the working methodology and the result will be passed.

## **Literature Review**

### **Human Resources Management**

When looking at the literature, although some theorists claim that human resources management started in England in the 1800s, officially human resource management activities are thought to have started in the United States during the industrial revolution (Richman, 2015). Human resources management, which assumed more static tasks until it reached the modern operating period, maintains a structure with a more personnel management perspective for that period. It takes on a traditional and ineffective role by dealing with personnel, filing and recording processes, which can be considered as follow-up of more employees on documents.

Today, human resources management carries out an innovative, change-oriented and conscious modernization process that raises awareness aimed at adapting old-style personnel management to new conditions (Reilly & Williams, 2006). From this point of view, there are many definitions that indicate that human resources management is an element of value in modern business administration.

Definition of human resources management (HRM) by Dessler (2007); It is defined as the realization of the principles and practices of recruitment, measurement, training and evaluation by human or human resources. In addition, the strategic positioning of highly motivated and talented workforce with the aim of providing competitive advantage by blending a series of cultural, structural and employee management techniques is called human resources management (Osibanjo & Adenji, 2012).

Human resources management is a sub-system that contributes to business activities with an internal motivation based on the harmonious relationship of many functions to the organizational level. From this point of view, human resources management, which has very different duties in internal processes, is a complex system depending on the fact that the people who find, direct and carry out these activities are human. (Huselid 1995).

The purpose of human resources management, which focuses on employee abilities, especially in terms of guiding corporate strategies, is to achieve goal harmonization between employees and the organization for high performance of corporate processes. The purpose of attracting potential candidates and retaining talented candidates in harmonization has important output goals. Human resource management can set and change these goals and directly influence the behavior of individuals within the organization. (Ledzion, 2015). It acts as a bridge by helping employees to design their work, to recruit and select the right person for the right job, to train and develop employees as an important component of the work environment (Therit, 2009). From this point of view, the main purpose of human resources management is to employ manpower in this system in the most effective and efficient way to achieve the targeted goals (Armstrong, 2006). Stone (2007) In addition, increasing the effectiveness of organizations and the satisfaction of employees from business life is also considered within the scope of this purpose. Of course, the action direction of the goals is possible by performing a series of tasks.

It includes motivating tasks such as defining the workforce needed to increase the added value provided by human resources management to the organization, supplying the necessary workforce, and developing the workforce (Collings et al., 2018). At the same time, meeting all the needs of employees and helping the department they serve in the most beneficial way are among the areas of interest of human resources management (Palmer & Winters, 1993). Of course, revealing these benefits places great responsibilities on managers within human resources management. In this respect, while many human resources professionals serve as business partners within the business, they take an active role in order to gain a competitive advantage for the business they work for. (Ulrich et.al., 1995).

Today, organizations aiming competitive power and high performance adopt high performance human resources management practices in order to maintain the existence and continuity (Klaas et al., 2012). High performance-based human resources management is a set of relationships that are in line with the organization's strategy, increase motivation with high knowledge, skills and abilities, ensure the continuity of qualified employees and increase organizational performance (Mikhaylov et.al., 2014). Businesses that adopt high performance-based human resources practices prefer to hire people who are talented, who can meet the expectations of the business in terms of performance, who comply with the culture and values of the business (Beer, 2009).

### ***Employer Brand***

Ambler and Barrow (1996), who were the first researchers to adopt the concept of employer branding, stated that the benefits provided during employment by attracting potential employees and retaining existing employees are all related to the employer brand. According to Sullivan (2004), employer branding is a strategy for managing stakeholder awareness, perceptions, opinions and beliefs regarding a particular organization.

Accordingly, transformed human resources want to be in a long-term trust-based relationship with the talented employees at hand. The corporate strategic responsibility of human resources management on behalf of the employer brand includes discovering potential talented candidates and attracting them for the values they can reveal. Firms also take part in a system with their rival suppliers, customers in the market where they continue their activities. At this stage, employer branding also has a significant impact on stakeholders. This means that businesses also care about how they look from the outside.

Employer branding consists of a process consisting of three stages. In the first step - creating a concrete brand proposal, awakening the idea that it is the best place to work. In the second step - external marketing efforts to attract the sought-after talents to the institution. In the third step, it consists of increasing loyalty and believing in the brand as an internal marketing study (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004). Employer branding is about the perceptions of potential candidates and current candidates about the organization. In order to scale these perceptions, employer branding is examined in three dimensions.

- First dimension-being a well-known company: the preference of well-known and well-known companies has been higher than unrecognized companies.

- Second dimension - positive reputation about the company: Companies with a positive reputation are preferred over a company with a negative reputation.

- Third dimension - employer image: In this dimension defined as the beliefs of job seekers, it should be known and should not be confused that there are two separate images as employer image and corporate image (Collins, 2006). Using these dimensions to make a brand effort, creating a correct communication channel, creating trust through this channel, using this perception of trust, can provide an effective image promotion in order to be preferred by candidates in job applications.

The employer brand "represents organizations", and represents the efforts as an employer to communicate what makes it both preferred and different to internal and external audiences" (Jenner & Taylor, 2007). In other words, employer branding is the totality of the efforts of the organization to convey to existing and potential employees that it is an "attractive place to work" (Lloyd, 2002). In summary, the image of the business clearly affects the activities of attracting potential candidates and searching and finding (Breugh & Starke, 2000). One of the important factors in the attractiveness of the employer brand is the harmony between the person and the organization. This is also among the ultimate goals of human resource management. When people with different qualifications identify these qualities with the corporate image of the business they apply for, those businesses are more attractive to those people.

When evaluated from this perspective, potential candidates prefer the businesses they will work with to have a good image. Business size, corporate social responsibility, effective use of social networks have a positive effect on increasing the attractiveness of businesses (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Some researchers have stated that businesses with a well-established employer brand will be preferred by more talented people for job applications (Cable & Graham 2000; Cable & Turban, 2003; Turban & Greening, 1996). At the same time, well-planned employer branding practices can reduce recruitment costs by affecting firm performance (Knox & Freeman, 2006).

As a result; Employer branding practices play an important role in attracting and attracting people to business by creating a good image and reputation on the social masses in the talent market (Chunping & Xi, 2011). It should not be forgotten that the purpose of employer branding is; To show that business as a great place to work in the minds of potential candidates (Adler & Ghiselli, 2015).

### ***The Relationship Between Employer Brand in Human Resources Management***

The department that undertakes the task of creating a brand in the talent market in enterprises is the human resources department (Chunping & Xi, 2011). The human resources department is the driving force to identify talents, build human resources processes, systems, structures and incentives to promote the employer brand (Pengfei, 2002).

Suikkanen (2010) stated that Employer Branding affects the whole employment experience and encourages the perception of a good place to work. Kickul (2001) argues that the process of attracting candidates for recruitment has recently attracted considerable attention and is seen as a competitive advantage for organizations. The employer brand fulfills an important task in achieving its goal of attracting candidates to the institution, in terms of placing businesses at a different point in the minds of the candidates.

Especially the task of implementing employer branding practices, which is under the responsibility of the human resources department, is very important for the sustainability of the internal organization of the enterprise as well as providing a suitable and correct image from the outside. From this point of view, it seems valuable to reveal the relationship between human resources management and employer branding practices Thus; relationship between human resources and employer brand; Planning the workforce according to work intensity, developing successful recruitment strategy, controlling employee turnover, supporting top management policies, creating the best business environment, effective social network and public relations management, creating

new working areas, integration with the brand. (Gaddam, 2008). In this respect, we can say that employer branding and human resources practices complement and support each other.

Businesses can gain a strategic advantage in talent battles if they convey the importance of their pre-recruitment human resources practices and the job opportunities they offer through a strong and permanent employer brand. In this respect, the close cooperation of the human resources department with the marketing department is considered important in terms of a positive and unique brand image in the minds of potential candidates (Collins & Stevens, 2002). In this case, using the employee value proposition as an employer branding tool will serve the purpose of attracting well-talented potential candidates to the business (Goswami, 2015).

According to the survey conducted by Jobvite (2016) with one thousand six hundred human resources employees from various sectors, the employer brand is at the top of the new methods to invest in reaching talented employees. According to human resources management, employer brand covers and combines areas such as recruiting and recruiting talented people, development, motivation and flexibility in relation to target groups (Christiaans, 2012).

According to Ployhart (2006), "Organizations should be more effective in attracting, selecting and retaining these talents, as talents are rare, valuable, difficult to imitate and difficult to substitute". The three main benefits identified in the studies of 23 employer brands by The Conference Board and The Economist were identified as better recruitment, retention, and attractiveness (Barrow & Mosley 2005).

## **Research and Methodology**

This study attempted to explore how the human resource talent to be attracted to a business considers what criteria, in terms of employer branding. The process of attracting human resources of employer branding was handled as a case study and qualitative analysis technique was used.

This exploratory and descriptive research was conducted with in-depth interviews with 12 human resources managers from human resources consulting firms. Many different studies have been used to evaluate the premises of enterprises in attracting potential candidates to the institution with employer branding practices and the evaluations of these studies have been taken into consideration. After the evaluation, in order not to deviate from the main question of the research during the interview, Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) Berthon et al. (2005), Ambler and Barrow (1996), Knox & Freeman (2006) and the expressions in their studies were also used. In this direction, within the scope of the research;

- (i) Is Employer Branding work done by companies really useful in bringing good talent into the organization?*
- (ii) Do employer branding and recruitment of new graduates affect the job application part positively?*
- (iii) How is the process started while setting up employer branding work? What stages does this process consist of?*
- (iv) Do you think employer branding activities play a role in talent discovery and employee communication?*
- (v) What are the critical topics of a good Employer Branding study? Their questions were answered.*

Content analysis, one of the qualitative analysis methods, was used in this study. In sampling, focus group interviews (Kitzinger, 1995), which provide the opportunity to establish a solid basis with detailed one-to-one interviews with the data, are preferred due to their systematic structure. By adhering to the previously prepared interview flow, a semi-structured in-depth interview technique was used for this research. The reason for using the semi-structured interview technique in collecting the data of the research; It is a more systematic progress of human resources managers by continuing with pre-prepared interview forms while expressing their opinions about the employer brand process. This technique has been beneficial in terms of providing a certain level of standard and flexibility to the conductor of the interview (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011; Ekiz, 2003). The interviews took place between January and July 2020. In order not to lose data, interview forms were created and recorded over documents due to the covid-19 process. The data obtained were analyzed with Maxqda 20, one of the computers aided qualitative data analysis software. Thanks to the program, it was ensured that the interview texts were put into a certain systematic. With Maxqda 20 program, content analysis is systematized and ease of analyzing texts together is achieved. In addition, the program was preferred because of its usefulness, detailed analysis of the texts, in terms of sound data management, detailed content analysis and the comprehensive relationship between concepts. Analysis tables and figures were obtained by coding on the interviews made with human resources managers. Coding in the program is a tool used to systematically analyze and classify texts (MAXQDA, 2020).

## **Implications**

It was loaded into the Maxqda 20 program to encode the data obtained from the audio recordings collected as a result of interviews with human resources managers, to find themes, to organize themes, to define and interpret the findings. In line with expert opinions, coding was made using the code key and defined in the program. Interview results were arranged in texts and read one by one in order to be able to code, and the meanings of each interview text, such as word, sentence or paragraph were analyzed and coded. Then, considering the relationships between codes, it was determined how the same code differs from person to person or from sector to sector. Based on the identified partnerships, first the code categories and then the figures were reached. As a result of the readings,

"trust," reputation "," exploring "," communication "" effect "," preference "," awareness "codes were created. Interviews with human resources managers were transferred to Maxqda 20 package program. In each interview, the codes containing the factors were analyzed at the level of words, sentences, and paragraphs in the interviews.

**Table 1:** Code Relationship Browser

Code System	trust	reputation	exploring	communication	effect	preference	awareness
trust							
reputation							
exploring							
communication							
effect							
preference							
awareness							

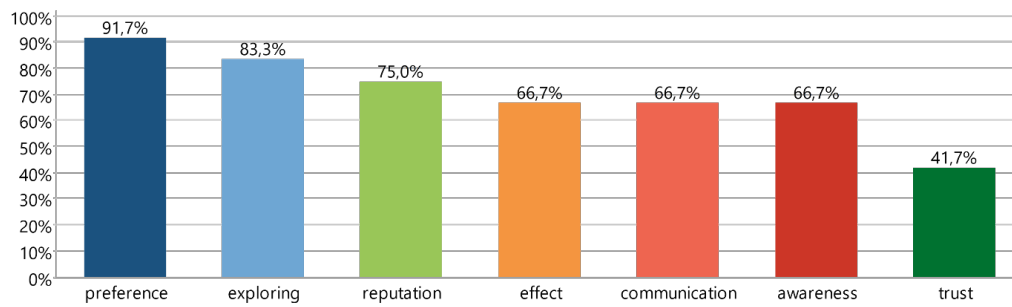
First, the relationships between the codes were analyzed and the matrix in Table 1 was obtained. According to this analysis, the number of interactions between the various codes was quantitatively evaluated; showed strong and weak relationship ties. These ties revealed the elements that the managers who participated in the study used in their evaluations. According to this matrix; Trust to the institution and reputation of the institution 5 times, corporate reputation 4 times, corporate reputation and awareness 4 times, attractiveness's corporate reputation and awareness relationship 3 times, preference and awareness 4 times and corporate trust 3 times. From this point on, it is possible to mention that highly interactive codes create common patterns for human resources managers. Accordingly, a manager who talks about corporate reputation crosses it with a high rate of trust in the company. Again, the rate of coincidence of corporate reputation with awareness was found to be high. Likewise, a manager who talked about corporate communication associated the relationship with the discovery of candidates at a higher rate. In addition, an intense relationship was found between the awareness code and being preferred. Based on these results, it seems a correct determination to mention that these codes are common patterns for human resources managers.

Based on the same analysis, it is stated that the codes of awareness and trust, recognition and communication, communication and reputation, communication and preference are rarely associated with each other. It would be correct to include some comments in the evaluation here. As a matter of fact, it should be mentioned that some of the codes with low interaction are avoided by the managers in real life by alienating the terms, and some especially avoid putting the two terms side by side or in case of using these terms interchangeably. For example, it can be attributed to the communication skills of a brand with high recognition. The reason for this may be the distance of people working in the sector to academic terms, as well as avoiding the use of words that are close to each other, which are associated with each other, in the same sentence. Another evaluation obtained in the analysis with Maxqda is the word cloud. Word Cloud; The more frequently used words are higher, according to the frequency of use of all the words used in the interviews; common words map. The word cloud created in this interview is shown in Figure 1.



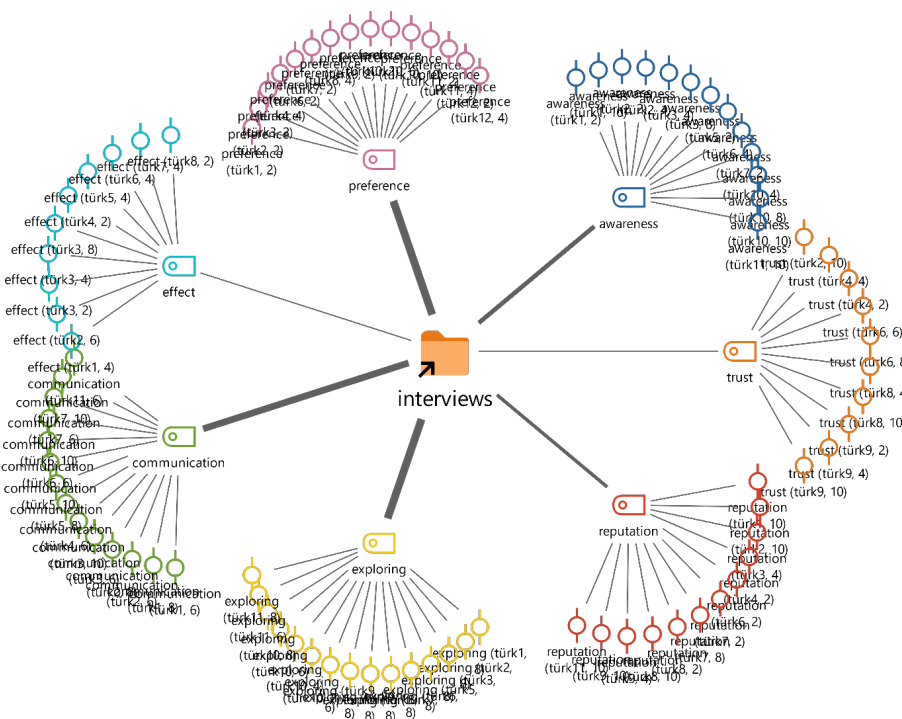
**Figure 1:** Word Cloud

When the interviews in figure 2 were evaluated on code basis, striking situations were experienced in the general distribution over 7 codes. 91.7% of the managers stated the preference code among the answers given to the questions. Again, 83% mentioned discovery code, 75% reputation, 66.7% communication, awareness and attraction code, and finally 41.7% mentioned trust code



### Figure 2: Code Frequencies

The Maxqda single case model map regarding the coding has been formed as shown in Figure 2. The codes were formed by evaluating the interview forms obtained as a result of the interviews. After the codes and interview forms were uploaded to the MAXQDA qualitative research package program, a single case model map was created by marking whatever basic code the word, sentence and paragraphs in the text were related to during reading. As a result of the interviews conducted according to the single case model map shown in Figure 3, it is seen that "preference" and "discovering" coding are predominant. These codes are followed by "Communication", "Reputation", "Attract" and "Trust" codes respectively. The distribution order of the codes is shown in figure 3.



**Figure 3: Single Case Model Map**

When looking at the economic objectives of the business, priorities such as profit generation and growth are seen. While businesses struggle with their competitors in the market for these purposes, they do this with resources that are close to the average on a sectoral basis. At this point, although financial resources are close to each other, some businesses stand out more than others. Some businesses, on the other hand, are able to compete economically and cease their activities. Although businesses have the same sectoral knowledge in such close organizational structures and use similar resources, finding out the premises that distinguish them from each other is a key point in terms of sustainability.

According to Ülgen and Mirze (2016); The ability to use the assets owned by the enterprise constitutes its capabilities. Many businesses have similar tangible assets but they are still different, it's the business-specific abilities that make that difference. The same is true for intangible assets. These capabilities are related to the capacity and capabilities of the human resources of the enterprise. For example, owned flour, sugar, oil are the tangible assets of the enterprise. Making halva by using these assets at certain proportions is about talents. As a result, the halvahs made have different tastes, the knowledge of the masters who can give those

flavors is an intangible skill and is related to the skill of the human resources of the enterprise. In fact, the impact of human resources on competition is also emphasized here.

Therefore, businesses that want to achieve their economic goals have realized that they should give priority to people. According to the conclusion from the studies and evaluations, employer branding is a holistic process designed for the image of the company as employees and possible future candidates.

According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), the employer brand stands out as a targeted long-term strategy to achieve employee perception and awareness. Human resources managers aim to manage existing employees and integrate them with the organization through employer branding practices (Balmer & Gray, 2003). The knowledge, skills and abilities of the employees have become the most important source of competition in the business.

Every business should focus on the employer brand and continue and develop its products and services, as well as its internal and external customers. This requirement arises especially as one of the main features of the competitive structure for businesses. For this reason, it is considered very important to bring talented potential candidates to the institution with the right employer branding practices.

The biggest concern of businesses is to find talented employees in the future. It is considered essential for businesses that do not want to experience this problem to implement the right employer branding practices in attracting talented candidates with potential. Talking about corporate reputation as a result of the evaluation, a manager crosses this with a high level of trust in the company. Again, the rate of coincidence of corporate reputation with awareness was found to be high. Likewise, a manager who talked about corporate communication associated the relationship with candidate discovery at a higher rate. In addition, an intense relationship was found between the awareness code and being preferred.

Among the working methods that the human resources management approach emphasizes, efficiency and productivity are at the forefront. Considering the resources owned by businesses; The ability of an enterprise to compete with intangible resources may be possible with a good image promotion. At this point, the stronger the image of the employer brand, the more this company awareness contributes to the establishment of trust and reputation in the company, thus attracting potential talented candidates to the company. The business, which does not care about the employer brand, has difficulties with low motivated and unwilling employees in terms of achieving the goals of the business, productivity, job quality and competing with other businesses. In this respect, in order to increase productivity, which is the main purpose of human resources management; It is necessary to manage the changing internal and external environmental conditions by harmonizing them with new management techniques.

## Conclusion

According to the findings obtained in this study, it can be said that there is a significant relationship between employer branding of enterprises and attracting potential talents to the institution. One of the most important issues to be considered in human resources practices is that employer branding practices play an important role in company selection in human resources management. As a result of the research; It has been understood that businesses that want to attract talented employees to the company use the employer brand and communicate effectively with the external environment. It has been seen that this interaction supports the corporate reputation and this has played an important role in increasing the awareness of the company and in the preference and reliability. Along with this important information, the emphasis on attracting the employer brand to talented personnel is seen as an important result in terms of providing long-term high corporate performance of enterprises. The fact that the research is a qualitative research can be considered within its limitations in terms of generalization. At the same time, the fact that the research covers a certain period can be seen as another limitation of the research. This study creates a serious prediction about which premises potential candidates will pay attention to when choosing a company, which can provide a competitive advantage to businesses that want to compete with human resources.

Although companies generally use the internal promotion method as a human resources policy, they are obliged to hire outside staff for specialized units. These cadres are generally units that require expertise at the management level and where strategic decisions are made. An important gap that may occur in this and similar positions should be filled quickly. At this point, they have to use the external assignment method. In order to ensure the effectiveness of the decisions taken at the strategic level, to affect the economic growth and to ensure the continuity of the process, businesses can continue to maintain their competitive advantages by rapidly attracting important managerial job deficits to the institution with effective employer branding practices. As a result of this study, it is recommended that real sector organizations pay attention to employer branding practices in order to attract talented human resources to the institution. In terms of academic studies; In order for the research to be generalizable, it is recommended to support it with quantitative methods to fill possible gaps.

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