

Gender Aware Employer Branding: How to Become Authentic, Unique and Attractive

Hans Lundkvist¹

¹ Department of Business Administration, Technology and Social Sciences, Human Work Science, Gender and Technology, Lulea University of Technology and Jernkontoret, Sweden

Correspondence: Hans Lundkvist, Department of Business Administration, Technology and Social Sciences, Human Work Science, Gender and Technology, Lulea University of Technology and Jernkontoret, Sweden.
E-mail: hans@stegvis.com

Received: August 10, 2015

Accepted: September 30, 2015

Online Published: October 28, 2015

doi:10.5539/ijbm.v10n11p62

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v10n11p62>

Abstract

Despite a global financial crisis, the concept Employer Branding became the point of departure for an interactive collaboration between an engineering company and a research team. When reviewing academic literature the conclusion was that very few articles combine the concepts of employer brand and gender equality. This article contributes theoretically to promote and examine arguments for the potential of adopting a gender perspective when developing an employer brand and when compiling the employer value proposition. The article intends to inspire organizations to use a gender perspective when developing the employer value proposition in order to promote propositions reflecting the organization. It will also open avenues for further research by synthesizing the two fields.

Keywords: development program, employer brand, employer value proposition, gender equality, gender perspective

1. Introduction and Background

Due to demographic changes, it has become more challenging for companies and organizations to recruit motivated and skilled employees. This applies for many companies and organizations around the globe trying to retain and attract talent for sustainable development.

In the spring of 2008, a project proposal to promote gender equality was developed in dialogue between a project team of researchers and some small and middle-size companies in the field of engineering based in the middle of Sweden. When the project proposal was granted funding (Note 1) later the same year, we reconnected with all the companies that had previously expressed an interest in collaborating. However, due to the global financial crisis during the fall of 2008, the companies' motivation to participate had reduced significantly. The breakthrough, a collaborating enterprise, came at a meeting where companies and organizations came together to jointly raise awareness of the concept of employer brand. A human resource manager from an engineering company, operating on a global market, wanted to launch a process aiming to make the company more attractive as an employer. This became the point of departure for the project: "A gender perspective for attractive work." The method for the collaboration was based on action research, and as researchers we followed an inductive approach focusing on mutual planning and action. Our collaboration lasted for about one year and was considered successful both by the enterprise and the project. The enterprise gained considerable knowledge about gender and collected many suggestions from the employees regarding measures on how to become a more attractive employer, an "employer of choice" (e.g. Sutherland, Torricelli, & Karg 2002; Berthon, Michael, & Hah, 2005).

The fact that the notion of employer brand helped us to find a collaborating enterprise, and that the topic of gender equality caused both resistance and appreciation during our collaboration, peaked my interest in delving deeper into the academic literature regarding employer brand, and in particular, articles using gender perspective as a tool for analyzing the present situation in an organization (West & Fenstermaker, 1995; Acker, 1999; Abrahamsson, 2000; Wahl, 2010).

When reviewing literature covering the notion of employer brand, the first reaction was that employer brand and

employer branding encompass almost everything a department for human resources is expected to handle, a conclusion Edwards (2010) makes in “An integrative review of employer branding and OB (Note 2) theory.” However, although a diversity of scholars in the fields of business, marketing, and psychology, for example, have contributed to different interpretations and perspectives, it was difficult to find articles with the combination of gender equality and employer brand. Both Google Scholar and Scopus were used as tools to find scientific articles merging and connecting the two notions. The search on employer brand and gender equality resulted in a very low number of articles. A number of related concepts were tried thereafter: “Employer Branding,” “Employer Attractiveness,” “Attractive Work,” “Talent Management,” or “A good place to work,” in combination with the words gender, equality, or gender equality. Still, the list of results came out short. Some articles were found, however, pointing out that career, flexible hours, work-life balance, and relations (culture) are appreciated attributes for the employer value propositions (EVP) (see for example Shapiro, Ingols, O’Neill, & Blake-Beard, 2009; Bellou, 2010; Stahl et al., 2012; Normann, Bayat, & Indermun, 2013). Other articles discussed diversity and employer branding (i.e., Edwards & Kenal, 2011; Guerrier & Wilson, 2011; Cooke & Saini, 2012). The conclusion was that very few articles explicitly combine the concepts of employer brand and gender equality, a combination we had accomplished during the collaboration and found beneficial for the company since it led both the employer and employees to become more conscious of the importance of gender equality issues, a factor they believed to be an important prerequisite for sustainable growth (for more information see Lundkvist, 2011).

This article contributes by promoting and examining arguments for adopting a gender perspective when developing an employer brand and compiling the EVP. The epistemological approach holds that increased awareness concerning how organizations are gendered and how gender is reproduced in organizations (e.g., Acker, 1990, Britton, 2000; Amundsdotter 2009; Wahl, 2010) will aid companies in overcoming counterproductive preconceptions when pursuing the best talent for the organization. Hence, the purpose of this article is to discuss the benefits of applying a gender perspective in a process of change to create a stronger employer brand. Hopefully, this will inspire other researchers to study the theoretical and practical outcomes of synthesizing the two concepts, gender equality and employer brand, and perhaps produce verifiable evidence of a presumed causality as well as methods that are beneficial for enterprises and organizations entering the process of enhancing their competitiveness in “The War for Talent” (Michaels et al., 2001).

2. Method and Results from Searching Articles

Since the primary objective of the collaborating project was to increase awareness of gender equality based on the presumption that a more gender equal workplace will be perceived as more attractive regardless of sex, the search for articles was limited to the use of the terms gender equality and employer branding.

First, Google Scholar was used to get a general idea of the number of articles. The result of a search using only “Employer Branding” was about 4050 hits. The next step was to search using the combination “Employer Branding” AND “Gender Equality”: the result was 55 hits. Among these, 31 files were available to download and 16 were scientific articles, four of which were related to the evidence from our own project. The same measure was also performed in Scopus in January 2015; ((Employer Brand) OR (Employer Branding)) AND ((Gender Equal) OR (Gender Equality)) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, “ar”) OR (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, “re”) OR (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, “cp”))) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, “English”)), (Scopus). The result was 44 hits, and with the limitation of articles within Human Resources, the result was 28 documents. When searching for the words gender, equality, brand/ing, and employer in the articles, the search function provided in the reading program was used in order to get an indication of the contexts in which the words were used.

2.1 Result

None of the downloaded and reviewed documents explicitly examined the possibility of weaving the issue of gender equality into the process of employer branding. The articles had a variety of purposes and perspectives, and the terms employer branding and gender equality appeared most often without any correlations in the same paper. However some of the articles found covered the combination of diversity and employer brand or “talent,” and many stressed the value of work-life balance and equal career advancement (cf. Shapiro, Ingols, O’Neill, & Blake-Beard, 2009; Bellou, 2010; Stahl et al., 2012; Normann et al., 2013), while others discussed fairness, diversity, and employer branding (i.e., Edwards & Kenal, 2011; Guerrier & Wilson, 2011; Cooke & Saini, 2012; Matuska & Sałek-imińska, 2014). Some of the downloaded articles highlight the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the fact that it can have an important influence on perceived attractiveness. Nyborg and Zhang (2011) conclude that companies associated with CSR have a cost advantage due to lower wage payments as compared with other firms. Here, action for gender equality can be seen as a part of a company’s CSR policy

program.

Many of the authors stressed that more gender equal workplaces would be perceived as more attractive, and that gender equality can be an important tool in “The War for Talent.” Consequently, this constitutes an opportunity for more methodical investigation and practical measures.

3. Theoretical Framework

Before discussing the merging of the two concepts, employer branding and gender equality will each be briefly presented below.

3.1 The Concept of Employer Branding

Employer branding has been defined as “the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity, and the employer brand as a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors” (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Compared with many other concepts related to human management and organizational behavior, the concept of employer brand is a relatively young notion, originating in the mid 1990s. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) highlight the growing interest in employer branding and refer to Internet searches using Google and Yahoo, each yielding over 3000 hits. In 2012, the same search using Google showed roughly 176 000, and in 2015, 4 750 000 hits. Therefore, we can conclude that the number of published articles has increased rapidly over the years and that contemporary research is spread all over the world, albeit with nuances regarding purpose and motives for addressing the notion. Articles are found from all continents focusing on the issue of finding the right talent: employees. In an article by Xia and Yang (2010), the authors stress that the issue of finding the right talent is relevant even in China, despite the fact that the country has a large population.

When the concept “employer brand” was introduced by Ambler and Barrow (1996), they suggested that “there is considerable synergy between the processes of nurturing brands on the one hand and human resources on the other” (p. 1). In the beginning, in many aspects, employer branding was considered a task for the communication department in an organization, and thus it was first found in the marketing sphere and discussed by marketing academics (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). However, the concept was captured by human resources (HR) academics after some time (ibid.). The application of EB thinking has changed significantly over the past five years, with the role of employer brand management increasingly extending beyond the confines of recruitment communication (Kunerth & Mosley, 2011).

When reviewing this new, growing, interdisciplinary field, synthesizing theory from a range of academic disciplines, we will predominantly find arguments for why the HR department is best suited to manage the process even though there are many similarities with the consumer marketing sphere regarding both strategy and tactics (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Martin, Beaumont, Doig, & Pate, 2005; Moroko & Uncles 2005, 2009; Rampl & Kenning, 2013; Khan & Naseem, 2015). This notion has become a more integrated and predominant feature of human resource strategy planning and implementation (Kunerth & Mosley, 2011). Edwards (2010) concludes that within a few decades, employer branding has come to encompass almost everything an HR department is expected to handle, and that the notion has become an “umbrella program” providing structure to previously separated HR policies and practices.

When Ambler and Barrow (1996) introduced the concept, they described it as “the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company” (p. 8). This package can be seen as proposals or propositions, a value proposition providing the central message conveyed by the employer brand (Lievens, 2007) to the employees and potential employees: an EVP. The principles regarding how to succeed with the employer branding process are mostly pedagogically described as sequential and linear measures. The process can be described as a journey, a long-term development work aiming for sustainable effects, a desire to stay and contribute as an employee, and a wish to be employed from among a pool of potential candidates with the right skill set (Rosethorn, 2009). Parment and Dyhre (2009) suggest a five-step model: research (the present situation), develop the EVP, make a communication strategy, produce communication material, and finally, action. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) describe it similarly, but with a three-step process, starting with developing the “value proposition,” followed by marketing “the value proposition to its targeted potential employees, recruiting agencies, placement counselors and the like,” and finally, “internal marketing of the employer brand” (ibid. p. 502). These examples and many others focus on the development of EVP and stress that determining the EVP for the organization is a fundamental measure (see for example Berthon et al., 2005; Botha, Bussin, & De Swardt, 2011).

When building a brand, employees play a crucial role (Harris & de Chernatony, 2001; Sutherland et al., 2002), and since the employer brand and the corporate brand are interconnected (e.g., Rosethorn, 2009; Rampl &

Kenning, 2013), the participation of the employees in the EB development process must also be seen as a crucial measure (Berthon et al., 2005; Edwards & Kenal, 2011). Edwards and Kelan (2011) assert that because "...employees can be considered important stakeholders of employer branding, their participation in the employer branding process is therefore a very important part of the process" (p. 178). A successful EVP has to be true and attractive to the target groups and stand out in comparison to competitors. In order to succeed, the organization must do its identity homework before it can present itself in a way that appeals to current and future employees, authentically, consistently, and effectively (Berthon et al., 2005; Parment & Dyhre, 2009).

A powerful EVP includes tangible and intangible elements (Martin et al., 2005; Edwards, 2010; Stahl et al., 2012), comparable with Lievens' (2007) division of attributes into instrumental (objective, physical, and tangible) and symbolic (subjective, abstract, and intangible) traits. Significant parts of what the target group perceives as attractive will be ignored if employers only focus on job and organizational attributes when forming the EVP (ibid.). Examples of attractive characteristics given by, for example, Stahl et al. (2012) are: "an inspiring mission, an appealing culture in which talent flourishes, exciting challenges, a high degree of freedom and autonomy, career advancement and growth opportunities, and a great boss or mentor" (p. 17). Comparable findings — appreciated colleagues, career growth, and a challenging work environment — are found in different studies (cf. Sutherland et al., 2002; Åteg & Hedlund, 2011; Kahn et al., 2015). When a truthful, unique, and attractive EVP is formulated, the EVP must then be communicated to selected target groups in accordance with general market strategic theories (Moroko & Uncle, 2009).

This short, step-based, description can give the impression of an easy game, but one has to keep in mind that most long-term change programs are difficult to plan, sometimes hard to manage, and it is impossible to guarantee the achievement of desired effects (Brulin & Svensson, 2012). Corporate branding requires a holistic approach (Harris & de Chernatony, 2001; Melin, 1999), and the same should logically be required of employer branding since it is a partial set of the corporate brand. Building a brand must be seen as an ongoing process with follow-ups, adjustments, and a refueling of the process, and it is important to have a systematic program and to work with a cross-functional team when managing the organizational reputation (Martin et al., 2005). Brulin and Svensson (2012) state that essential components for an effective organizational process are active ownership (with the ability to create required long-term conditions), professional steering (with the capacity to make strategic decisions), and competent management (managing the action and involved participants). The latter is essential in a process of change, for example, when formulating the EVP, since the employees have experiences and tacit knowledge regarding work conditions, organizational culture, and the qualities that make them motivated for the job. If their work experiences are not consistent with the proposal, this may lead to dissatisfaction, turnover, and negative word of mouth (Wilden, Gudergan, & Lings, 2010).

3.2 Gender and "Doing Gender"

Being gender equal is widely seen as positive and as an achievement that many organizations and businesses want to bring forward. Both enterprises and individuals often believe that they are complying with the expected level of gender equality (Lundkvist, 2011; Heiskanen, Otonkorpi-Lehtoranta, Leinonen, & Ylöstalo, 2015). However, when considering labor as comprising both men and women, work life historically rests on a gender-blind perception of the actual work, which affects contemporary work situations (Holth, Jordansson, & Gonäs, 2012). Moreover, work is generally organized around the image of a white man with the privilege (or expectation) to be dedicated to the work and to being a good "breadwinner" (Acker, 2006). Women more often have to adjust to a labor market and a work life that has been shaped by these male prerequisites (Powell, 2009; Holth et al., 2012).

As soon as a human being is born, the child is categorized as a boy or a girl and immediately evaluated within a normative "two-sex model" (Honkanen, 2008). This categorization will directly and indirectly affect the person during his or her life. Depending on others' perception of the person's sex, expectations will be placed regarding skills, interests, and behaviors (cf. Gunnarsson, 1994; Bruckmüller, Ryan, Rink, & Haslam, 2014). This division affects the individual's self-perception and view of his or her abilities, capacities, choice of education, and career path (Westberg 1998). This has influenced both society and workplaces to be gendered, meaning that there are external and internal expectations upon each and every person based on his or her sex (Bloksgaard, 2011; SOU 2014:30).

The term gender refers to this social construction of sex, and the "doing of gender" involves a complex guiding of perceptual, interactional, and micro-political activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine "nature" (West & Fenstermaker, 1995). Doing gender can be seen as an ongoing activity, an interactive action performed by and between men and women, between men, and between women (Acker, 1999;

Gunnarsson Westberg, Andersson, & Balkmar, 2007b). The production and reproduction of gender-stereotypical expectations contribute to the creation of the variant cultures that are prevalent in different professions and labor organizations (SOU, 2014, p. 30). This construction is, however, not only related to sex since age, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and religion (diversity) also create expectations. Acker (2006) concludes: "... theory and research on inequality, dominance, and oppression must pay attention to the intersections of, at least, race/ethnicity, gender, and class." (p. 442). As a result of doing gender at the workplace, many professional roles are gender-marked, as are many situated labor tasks, commonly those related to services and machines (Westberg-Wohlgemuth 1996; Abrahamsson, 2000; Bloksgaard, 2011; Holth et al., 2012).

The labor market is highly sex-segregated both horizontally and vertically. Reasons for the existing labor segregation can be found in the early exclusion of women from the labor market and from different social restrictions that made it difficult for women to achieve equal possibilities and rights compared to men (SOU, 2004, p. 43; Wajcman, 2004; SOU, 2014, p. 30). Men's interpretative prerogative when defining qualifications is also used for keeping women from technical work (Gunnarsson, 1994; Abrahamsson & Gunnarsson, 2002; Powell, 2009). The phenomenon is described as men being "doorkeepers," that is, advocating biological and/or socialized differences as arguments for not accepting women as co-workers. Despite the fact that men are often doorkeepers to gender equality in different ways, men are also adversely affected by a gendered workplace (Mellström, 2006). One common issue in the global gender equality discourse, which can also be identified in some articles about employer brand, is the conflict between production and reproduction, the balance between family life and work life (Mellström, 2006; Burnett, Gatrell, Cooper, & Sparrow, 2010). However, the effect of implementing work-life balance policies is not gender neutral. Eikhof (2012) stressed that women who adopt such policies tend to be seen as less committed to their work than their colleagues, and Burnett et al. (2010) remarked that men who seek to work flexibly appear even more anxious than women that their choice to stray from the full-time norm makes them seem uncommitted to their paid work. Thus, within the contemporary gender system and the gender equality discourse, being stuck in organizations with traditional masculine norms can cause conflict between the private and production spheres (Mellström, 2006).

Many studies describe both spontaneous and organized resistance in various forms: open protest, questioning, or concealed opposition from groups and individuals when gender issues are investigated and questioned at a workplace (for a discussion, see "Promoting Innovation", Andersson, Berglund, Gunnarsson, & Sundin, 2012; e.g., Andersson & Amundsdotter, 2012; Charlesworth & Baird, 2007; Amundsdotter 2009; Lundkvist, 2011). Both women and men often argue that gender equality is a "non-issue" since it is not articulated as being a problem, and there is a strong belief that gender equality has been achieved (Heiskanen et al., 2015); nor is the gender issue acknowledged as an innovative possibility or seen as an opportunity for a more thorough and creative strategy when examining an organization (Danilda & Granath Thorslund, 2011). However, the level of resistance can be seen as a measure for revealing innovative potential when analyzing an organization.

Andersson and Amundsdotter (2012) highlight the difficulty for an organization to have a truthful and realistic image of gender equality when it describes itself as gender equal. Examining an organization in more detail, a different picture would often emerge (ibid.). Therefore, in order to understand the reproduction of these patterns, it is vital to examine an organization and its internal processes (Acker, 1999; Amundsdotter, 2009; Andersson et al., 2012). If a workgroup has the opportunity to reflect together, the members can obtain a different perspective on their own practices (Andersson & Amundsdotter, 2012; Heiskanen, 2015).

According to Martin (2006), "One step toward improving work contexts is to make gender stereotypes and their associated practices more visible and to challenge their inaccuracy" (p. 270). Among many different procedures to understand how a workplace or organization is gendered is the one based on Acker's model, with four different "points of entry," in which the real structure of the organization is more likely to emerge. The first entry consists of things people do to keep the organization going, for example, setting salaries, evaluating performance, and enforcing rules about hours, breaks, and workplace behaviors. These are activities that often involve routine decisions made by employees as well as managers. The second entry is to observe images, symbols, and forms of consciousness that justify any gender division within the organization. The third entry encompasses the interaction between individuals and groups in the organization as well as with other stakeholders, customer, consultants, and so on. Finally, the fourth point of entry, suggested by Acker to understand gendered organizing processes, is through the internal mental work of individuals as they come to understand the gendered expectations and opportunities (Acker, 1999).

In the anthology "Promoting Innovation" (Andersson et al., 2012), many contributions describe the combination of gender research and action research and how this has increased situated awareness and established change. Empirical research has shown that a combination of feminist and action research will increase the possibility of

more robust knowledge (Gunnarsson, 2007a). Thus, adding a gender perspective when scrutinizing an organization with regards to sustainable *value propositions* can not only contribute to increased knowledge and awareness about the inherent gender system but also function as a lever when striving to position the organization as an “employer of choice.”

If one is to find the essence of the above descriptions of the two fields—employer branding and gender equality — and name the common denominators, these could be said to be: relations, interaction, career opportunities, and work-life balance. We can also conclude that both employer branding and the process of becoming an unbiased, gender aware organization are complex long-term development programs. The following section will therefore discuss the logic of merging these two streams when an organization takes action to develop their EVP.

4. Merging Employer Branding and Gender Equality When Developing the EVP

Many parallels can be found with consumer brand when exploring the field of employer brand. In fact, Moroko and Uncle (2005) make an analogue between strategies used for consumer and employer brands (for a discussion, see Berthon et al., 2005; Moseley, 2007). Transferring this association and then reflecting upon how companies constantly adjust and re-develop their products and try to attain new markets, it is logical to reflect on how much effort is invested in ongoing adjustments of the organizational proposals to employees and future employees, that is, measures to secure retention, attraction, loyalty, and motivation. Likewise, is it logical to discuss how the attractiveness will be effected if old traditions and stereotypical gender perceptions are maintained, neglected or are left without critical reflection and adjustments. Considering the “brand analogy,” it is puzzling to see the general absence of articles covering the processes, including efforts to challenge the gender norms that are taken for granted when an EVP is developed.

Many of the qualities highlighted as being perceived to be attractive and useful for an EVP, such as an appealing culture, exciting challenges, freedom and autonomy, career opportunities, leadership, appreciated colleagues, and foremost, the possibility for work-life balance (cf. Sutherland et al., 2002; Lievens, 2007; Bellou, 2009; Åteg & Hedlund, 2011; Stahl et al., 2012; Kahn et al., 2015), can be categorized as intangible or symbolic attributes. These attributes are often created by interactional activities between peer employees, between managers, and between employees and management or due to policies and management. Likewise, “doing gender” is an ongoing activity involving interaction between individuals (cf. West & Fenstermaker, 1995; Acker, 1999; Gunnarsson et al., 2007b), an interaction that creates cultural and intangible features that can be difficult to identify and externalize for evaluation (e.g. Acker, 1999; Andersson & Amundsdotter, 2012). Martin (2003) claims “that women and men routinely practice gender-as masculinities and femininities-in embodied interactions that are emergent and fluid, grounded in practical knowledge and skills, and informed by liminal awareness and reflexivity” (p. 359). The issue is raised further by Ackers (2006) observation, that all organizations “have inequality regimes, defined as loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular organizations” (p. 443). Therefore, it is of great importance to elucidate and consider these qualities in the process of formulating a proposal that can withstand doubt and critical examination, consequently being authentic, unique, and attractive in the eyes of current and potential employees. Individuals experiencing unexpected and irrational behaviors in an organization that diverge from the communicated proposal or clash with personal values will more likely look for new job opportunities (Behrend et al., 2009; Edwards, 2010). Lawler (2005, p. 11) states: “And when they do not get what they want, today’s workers are quick to move on to more attractive employment situations.” (However, this is a statement that can vary due to time and is dependent on the business cycle, labor market, and business sector). Hence, if policies and promises consist only of “lip service,” and if a proposition does not meet the expected standards, the consequences can be counterproductive for the organization, making the long-term development process (investment) worthless. “For while practice without policy is hapless, policy without practice is worthless” (Bruckmüller et al., 2014, p. 228).

4.1 Gender Aware Employer Branding

A crucial factor for any development process is having a truthful picture of the present situation before taking measures to create a new situation (Brulin & Svensson, 2012) to do the “homework” (Berthon et al., 2005; Parment & Dyhre, 2009). The investigation will probably be more comprehensive if a gender perspective is integrated in the search for representative attributes for the target groups. Thus adding a competent gender perspective, such as methods based on the concept “doing gender,” will vitalize and leverage the process of finding attributes for the EVP (Lundkvist, 2011). This can be achieved by using any of the existing methods for increasing gender awareness and knowledge in the organization, for example, one based on Acker’s “point of entry”, questionnaires (Berthon et al., 2005; Bellou, 2009) or in workshops (Lundkvist, 2011) with the aim to

ensure progress from a quantitative point to a more qualitative one. Old traditions, power structures, and former perspectives defining competence and preconceptions will be challenged (Gunnarsson, 1994; Andersson & Amundsdotter, 2012). Thus, the process will most likely become more holistic, inclusive, innovative, and attractive. Mental blinders will be loosened, and the likelihood of developing an authentic, unique, and attractive EVP will increase. To succeed is it important for the organization to have a clear and honest desire, based on active ownership and professional management (Brulin & Svensson, 2012) and the willingness to learn more about the gender system in order to counteract the effects of old gender-stereotypical patterns and beliefs — intangible attributes that can be negatively perceived by some of the desired individuals within the target group. Below, gender equality is interlinked with what I have found to be the fundamental qualities in an EVP: authenticity, uniqueness, and attractiveness.

4.2 Gender Equality Contributes to a More Authentic EVP

The proposals offered to potential employees will be evaluated from at least two perspectives: trustworthiness and correspondence with the applicant's own values and expectations. There are a variety of channels, such as social media, the rumor mill, and personal networks, to scrutinize whether or not a proposition is authentic, and these channels can be used by prospective employees to obtain an authentic image of the employer before investing time, dreams, and ambition in a new workplace (Berthon et al., 2005). An organization that has an ongoing critical gender equality evaluation and takes measures to correct any discrimination so discovered would minimize the risk of disappointing its current and potential employees.

4.3 Increased Uniqueness with Gender Equality Processes

Acker (2006) points out that white men are still in a privileged position in many organizations; changing this situation to one with a larger diversity may contribute to a unique proposal. In the War for Talent, an organization becoming more gender aware than its competitors is, in most contexts, undertaking a unique action (Normann et al., 2013). Gender awareness, if successfully managed, would be conducive to cultural change, a heightened level of innovation, and the injection of a diversity of experiences, competence, and knowledge about the surrounding world (e.g., Danilda & Granath Thorslund, 2011; Andersson & Amundsdotter, 2012; Matuska & Salek-Imińska, 2014). These are valuable assets for any business or organization exposed to competition.

4.4 A Gender Aware Workplace will Attract a Larger Target Group

Different scholars argue for different qualities that lead to a job being perceived as attractive, and the issue gets even more complicated due to different individual priorities and life situations when assessing employment proposals (Åteg, Hedlund, & Pontén, 2004). The qualities perceived as attractive for a young and single person are perhaps not the same as those for a person in a family situation or for older persons. Disparity will also be found between countries (Alnaçık et al., 2014).

A non-reflecting management that disregards contemporary expectations from both women and men of more gender equality within the family, and which ignores measures for increased work-life balance, takes the risk of not being perceived as an “employer of choice” for well-educated and talented individuals, who are underrepresented in the organization (Mellström, 2006; Eikhof, 2012). Contributing with a gender perspective in the employer branding process is a first step to becoming attractive to a more diversified and thereby larger target group.

5. Concluding Remarks

The origin of this article was my curiosity regarding the notion that became the point of departure for a collaborative gender project: employer brand. Based on marketing experiences from work life, a pragmatic approach, and theories reviewed within the two fields of employer branding and gender equality, I argue that it is logical and beneficial to synthesize the two fields. Both gender issues and employer branding should be viewed as co-operating processes since activities to develop either area will affect the other. Understanding gender and how gender is reproduced within an organization can be seen as an analytical tool decentering from the “normativity” in the organization (Danilda & Granath Thorslund, 2011; Andersson & Amundsdotter, 2012; Matuska & Salek-Imińska, 2014). Initiatives for increased gender equality can potentially challenge the dominant culture (Wahl, 2010), a culture that may be perceived negatively by the target group. Thus, existing normativity can be perceived as a burden for some of the existing employees and a barrier for potential employees (Wajcman, 2004, Normann et al., 2013; SOU, 2014, p. 30). With a gender perspective, power structures will be disclosed and interventions for increased attractiveness can be undertaken efficiently, providing competitive advantages for the organization.

Furthermore, it is emphasized that the development of an EVP is crucial (cf. Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus

& Tikoo, 2004; Parment & Dyhre, 2009) and it must be authentic, unique, and attractive. For this reason, is it beneficial to integrate a gender perspective to reveal discrimination or the exclusion of competence due to sexual categorization when developing the EVP. In addition, arguments are presented that employer branding must be seen as more than a recruitment strategy (Kunerth & Mosley, 2011); it is a long-term process of change, a strategy primarily targeting existing employees and, subsequently, the potential labor force and other stakeholders (Edwards & Kenal, 2011). Moreover, it is an action process that needs constant fueling, knowledge, and alertness (Brulin & Svensson, 2012), in conformity with the consumer marketing sphere, in order to sustain itself.

If an organization strives to achieve gender equality, the sophisticated exclusion of females must be revealed and deconstructed (Fisher & Kinsey, 2013), and if the ambition is to achieve an attractive and unique proposal for the best talent, regardless of sex, it is important to challenge the norms and place gender issues on the agenda to unearth an attractive EVP.

5.1 Limitations and Further Research

This article has a number of conscious limitations since it only focuses on gender and “doing gender” and excludes wider perspectives such as diversity or “doing intersectionality” (Jordan-Zachery, 2007). Nor does the article discuss reasons for the fast emergence of the employer brand concept and whether it is due to rational arguments or is simply a management trend distributed, copied, and adopted in organizations and underpinned by consultants, business media, and academia (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009). Furthermore, the required investments for a long-term development program are not stressed, nor are the supposed losses in financial and human resources that can be the result of an organization with a poor reputation, recruitment problems, and staff with a lack of loyalty, motivation, or commitment stemming from perceived subordination, restrained career opportunities, or work-life imbalances caused by heedless discrimination and an inherent gender system.

Moreover, the proposed fusion and intervention could be debated among enterprises since long-term participatory development programs often cause production losses and other extraordinary expenditures. Another risk when unveiling actual power and segregation structures is that new perspectives and insights can fuel discontent that leads to the resignation of key employees, who find alternative employers more attractive. Further, some organizations do not experience the need or have the ambition to become gender aware or attractive.

Consequently, there are many questions for an organization to reflect upon before making the decision to challenge the present condition and pursue a different reality. However, the most important factor is that the decision must come from within the organization, based on the perceived situation and future capacity.

In this article, the benefits of applying a gender perspective in a process of change for a stronger employer brand are discussed. Hopefully, this will inspire further academic research, practical interventions, and investigations analyzing the outcomes when the two fields, employer branding and gender equality, are synthesized. I conclude that these two fields are connected since an organization free from bias based on gender, ethnicity, or other subdivision has greater potential to be perceived as attractive.

References

- Abrahamsson, L. (2000). *Att återställa ordningen: könsmönster och förändring i arbetsorganisationer* [To restore the order: Gender pattern and development in work organizations]. Umeå: Boréa Bokförlag
- Abrahamsson, L., & Gunnarsson, E. (2002). Arbetsorganisation, kompetens och kön. [Work organization, competence and gender]. In K. Abrahamsson (Ed.), *Utbildning, kompetens och arbete* (pp. 225-254). Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Acker, J. (1999). Gender and Organization. In J. Saltzman Chafetz (Ed.), *Handbook of the Sociology* (pp. 177-194). New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.
- Acker, J. (2006). Inequality regimes gender, class, and race in organizations. *Gender & Society*, 20(4), 441-464. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0891243206289499>
- Almaçık, E., Almaçık, Ü., Erat, S., & Akçin, K. (2014). Attracting Talented Employees to the Company: Do We Need Different Employer Branding Strategies in Different Cultures? *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 150, 336-344. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.09.074>
- Ambler, T., & Barrow, S. (1996). The employer brand. *Journal of Brand Management*, 4, 185-206.
- Amundsdotter, E. (2009). *Att framkalla och förändra ordningen-aktionsorienterad genusforskning för jämställda organisationer*. [To develop and alter the order-action-oriented gender research for gender equal organizations]. Luleå: Luleå University of Technology.

- Andersson, S., & Amundsdotter, E. (2012). Developing Innovative Organisations - Using Action-orientated Gender Research. In S. Andersson et al. (Eds.), *Promoting Innovation-Policies, practices and procedures*. Stockholm: VINNOVA Report. Received from http://www.vinnova.se/upload/EPiStorePDF/vr_12_08.pdf
- Andersson, S., Berglund, K., Gunnarsson, E., & Sundin, E. (2012). *Promoting Innovation-Policies, practices and procedures*. Stockholm: VINNOVA Report 2012:08
- Åteg, M., & Hedlund, A. (2011). Researching attractive work: Analyzing a model of attractive work using theories on applicant attraction, retention and commitment. *Arbetsliv i omvandling*, 2. Linnéuniversitetet, Växjö
- Åteg, M., Hedlund, A., & Pontén, B. (2004). *Attraktivt Arbete: Från Anställdas Uttalanden Till Skapandet Av En Modell*, [Attractive Work: From Employee Statements to Forming a Model]. Arbetsliv i omvandling Stockholm, Arbetslivsinstitutet
- Backhaus, K., & Tikoo, S. (2004). Conceptualizing and researching employer branding. *Career Development International*, 9, 501-517. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/13620430410550754>
- Bathmann, N., Cornelißen, W., & Müller, D. (2011). Recommendations for action to advance womens careers and promote dual careers. *Deutsches Jugendinstitut e. V.*. Munich, Germany. Received from http://www.dji.de/fileadmin/user_upload/bibs/664_13410_FrauenandieSpitze_englisch.pdf
- Behrend, T. S., Baker, B. A., & Thompson, L. F. (2009). Effects of pro-environmental recruiting messages: The role of organizational reputation. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 24(3), 341-350. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10869-009-9112-6>
- Bellou, V. (2010). Organizational culture as a predictor of job satisfaction: The role of gender and age. *Career Development International*, 15(1), 4-19. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/13620431011020862>
- Berthon, P., Michael, E., & Li, L. H. (2005). Captivating company: Dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding. *International Journal of Advertising*, 24(2), 151-172. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10869-009-9112-6>
- Bloksgaard, L. (2011). Masculinities, Femininities and Work—The Horizontal Gender Segregation in the Danish Labour Market. *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, 1(2), 5-21. Received from <http://rossy.ruc.dk/ojs/index.php/njwls/article/view/2342>
- Botha, A., Bussin, M., & De Swardt, L. (2011). An employer brand predictive model for talent attraction and retention: original research. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 9(1), 1-12. Retrieved from http://reference.sabinet.co.za/sa_epublication_article/sajhrm_v9_n1_a26
- Britton Britton, D. M. (2000). The epistemology of the gendered organization. *Gender & Society*, 14(3), 418-434. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/089124300014003004>
- Bruckmüller, S., Ryan, M. K., Rink, F., & Haslam, S. A. (2014). Beyond the glass ceiling: The glass cliff and its lessons for organizational policy. *Social Issues Policy Review*, 8, 202-232. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/sipr.12006>
- Brulin G., & Svensson L. (2012) *Managing sustainable development programmes: A learning approach to change*. Farnham Surrey UK: Gower Publishing Company.
- Burnett, S. B., Gatrell, C. J., Cooper, C. L., & Sparrow, P. (2010). Well-balanced families?: A gendered analysis of work-life balance policies and work family practices. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 25(7), 534-549. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/17542411011081356>
- Charlesworth S., & Baird, M. (2007). Getting gender on the agenda: The tale of two organisations. *Women in Management Review*, 22, 391-404. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09649420710761455>
- Cooke, F. L., & Saini, D. S. (2012). Managing diversity in Chinese and Indian organizations: A qualitative study. *Journal of Chinese Human Resources Management*, 3(1), 16-32. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/20408001211220548>
- Danilda, I., & Granath, T. J. (2011). *Innovation & Gender*, Stockholm: Vinnova, Tillväxtverket & Innovation Norway. Received from <http://www.vinnova.se/upload/EPiStorePDF/vi-11-03.pdf>
- Edwards, M. R. (2010). An integrative review of employer branding and OB theory. *Personnel Review*, 39, 5-23. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/00483481011012809>

- Edwards, M. R., & Kelan, E. K. (2011). Employer branding and diversity: foes or friends? In M. J. E. Brannan, Parsons, & V. Priola, (Eds.), *Branded Lives: The Production and Consumption of Meaning at Work*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.
- Eikhof, D. R. (2012). A double-edged sword: Twenty-first century workplace trends and gender equality. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 27(1), 7-22. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/17542411211199246>
- Eriksson-Zetterquist, U. (2009). *Institutionell teori - idéer, moden, förändring* [Institutional theory - ideas, fashions, change]. Malmö: Liber.
- Fisher, V., & Kinsey, S. (2013). Behind closed doors! Homosocial desire and the academic boys club. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 29(1), 3-3. <http://dx.doi.org/www.bibproxy.du.se/10.1108/GM-10-2012-0080>
- Goldin, C. (2014). A grand gender convergence: Its last chapter. *The American Economic Review*, 104(4), 1091-1119. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1257/aer.104.4.1091>
- Gonäs, L. (2005). *På gränsen till genombrott? Om det könsuppdelade arbetslivet* [On the verge of breakthrough? About the gender-segregated labor market.]. Stockholm: Agora.
- Guerrier, Y., & Wilson, C. (2011). Representing diversity on UK company web sites. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 30(3), 183-195. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/02610151111124932>
- Gunnarsson, E. (1994). *Att våga väga jämt!—Om kvalifikationer och kvinnliga förhållningssätt i ett tekniskt industriarbete*, [Daring to weight even—Qualifications and female attitudes in a technical industrial work]. Luleå: Luleå University of Technology.
- Gunnarsson, E. (2007a). Other Sides of the Coin. A Feminist Perspective on Robustness in Science and Knowledge Production. *International Journal of Action Research*, 3(3). <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-356423>
- Gunnarsson, E., Westberg, H., Andersson, S., & Balkmar, D. (2007b). Learning by fighting ? - jämställdhet och genusvetenskap i VINNOVAs organisation och verksamhetsområde [Equality and Gender science in VINNOVAs organization]. *Arbetsliv i omvandling 14*. Stockholm: Växjö universitet. Received from http://www.satinproject.se/sites/default/files/Learning_by_fighting_0.pdf
- Harris, F., & De Chernatony, L. (2001). Corporate branding and corporate brand performance. *European Journal of marketing*, 35, 441-456. <http://dx.doi.org/0.1108/03090560110382101>
- Heiskanen, O. L., Leinonen, & Ylöstalo. (2015). Gender Issues on Change Agenda—Practising Intersectionality in Action Research. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12072>
- Heiskanen, T. (2006). Gender issues in action research: Implications for adult education. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 25(5), 519-533. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02601370600912147>
- Holth, L., Jordansson, B., & Gonäs, L. (2012) Gender and the Division of Labour in a Swedish Context. In M. Jansdotter Samuelsson, C. Krekula, & M. Åberg (Eds.), *Gender and Change: Power, Politics and Everyday Practices*. Karlstad University Press
- Honkanen, K. (2008). Equality politics out of the subaltern. In E. agnusson, M. Rönnblom, & H. Silius (Eds.), *Critical Studies of Gender Equality Nordic Dislocations, Dilemmas and Contradictions* (pp. 205-219). Stockholm, Göteborg: Makadam.
- Jordan-Zachery, J. S. (2007). Am I a black woman or a woman who is black? A few thoughts on the meaning of intersectionality. *Politics & Gender*, 3(02), 254-263. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X07000074>
- Khan, M. K., & Naseem, I. (2015). Investigating the Power of Employer Branding Attributes. *American Journal of Business and Management*, 4(1), 49-60. Received from <http://www.worldscholars.org/index.php/ajbm/article/view/622>
- Kunerth, B., & Mosley, R. (2011) Applying employer brand management to employee engagement. *Strategic HR Review*, 10, 19-26. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/14754391111121874>
- Lawler, E. E. (2005). Creating high performance organizations., *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 43, 10-17. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1038411105050304>

- Lievens, F. (2007). Employer branding in the Belgian Army: The importance of instrumental and symbolic beliefs for potential applicants, actual applicants, and military employees. *Human Resource Management*, 46, 51-69. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/hrm.20145>
- Lundkvist, H. (2011). Employer brand opens up for a gender process model. *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, 1(2), 99-115. Received from <http://ojs.ruc.dk/index.php/njwls/article/view/2347>
- Martin, G., Beaumont, P., Doig, R., & Pate, J. (2005). Branding: A New Performance Discourse for HR? *European Management Journal*, 23(1), 76-88. <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1016/j.emj.2004.12.011>
- Martin, P. Y. (2003). "Said and done" versus "saying and doing": Gendering practices, practicing gender at work. *Gender & Society*, 17(3), 342. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0891243203017003002>
- Martin, P. Y. (2006). Practising Gender at Work: Further Thoughts on Reflexivity, Gender, Work & Organization. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0432.2006.00307.x>
- Matuska, E., & Salek-Imińska, A. (2014). Diversity Management as Employer Branding Strategy—Theory and Practice. *Human Resources Management & Ergonomics*, 8(2). Received from http://frcatel.fri.uniza.sk/hrme/files/2014/2014_2_06.pdf
- Melin, F. (1999). *Varumärkesstrategi: om konsten att utveckla starka varumärken* [Brand strategy: the art of developing strong brands]. Malmö: Liber ekonomi.
- Mellström, U. (2006). Nytt faderskap i skärningspunkten mellan produktion och reproduktion? [New paternity in the intersection between production and reproduction?] *Socialvetenskaplig tidskrift* 2.
- Michaels, E., Handfield-Jones, H., & Axelrod, B. (2001). *The war for talent*. Harvard Business Press.
- Moroko L., & Uncles M. (2005). *Employer Branding—The Case For A Multidisciplinary Process Related Empirical Investigation*. Proceedings of ANZMAC Conference. Received from http://anzmac.org/conference_archive/2005/cd-site/pdfs/2-Branding/2-Moroko.pdf
- Moroko, L., & Uncles, M. D. (2008). Characteristics of successful employer brands. *Journal of Brand Management*, 16(3), 160-175. Received from <http://www.palgrave-journals.com/bm/journal/v16/n3/abs/bm20084a.html>
- Mosley, R. W. (2007). Customer experience, organisational culture and the employer brand. *Journal of Brand Management*, 15(2), 123-134. Received from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.bm.2550124>
- Normann, J., Bayat, M. S., & Indermun, V. (2013). The glass ceiling effect – Barriers to change for appointing women into more senior positions. *Asian Journal of Business and Management Sciences*, 3(5), 72-90. Received from http://www.ajbms.org/journal_abstract.php?c_id=245
- Nyborg K., & Zhang, T. (2011). Is corporate social responsibility associated with lower wages? *Environmental and Resource Economics*, 1-11. Received from <https://www.sv.uio.no/econ/english/research/unpublished-works/working-papers/pdf-files/2011/Memo-01-2011.pdf>
- Parment, A., & Dyhre, A. (2009). *Sustainable Employer Branding: Guidelines*. Woorktools and Best Practices, Malmö: Liber.
- Rampl, L. V., & Kenning, P. (2014). Employer brand trust and affect: Linking brand personality to employer brand attractiveness. *European Journal of Marketing*, 48(1/2), 218-236. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/EJM-02-2012-0113>
- Rosethorn, H. E. E. (2009). *The employer brand: keeping faith with the deal*. Gower Publishing Company.
- Shapiro, M., Ingols, C., O'Neill, R., & Blake-Beard, S. (2009). Making sense of women as career self-agents: Implications for human resource development. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 20(4), 477-501. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.20030>
- Sjögren, F. (2011). Kan man särskilja kompetens från personlighet? En genusvetenskaplig studie av kompetens och ideal i fyra IKT-forskningsorganisationer. [Can you distinguish competence from personality: A gender scientific study of skills and ideals in four ICT research organizations]. Luleå University of Technology
- SOU (2014). *Jämställt arbete? Organisatoriska ramar och villkor i arbetslivet* [Equal work? Organizational frames and conditions in the working life]. Stockholm: Fritzes.
- SOU. (2004). *Den könsuppdelade arbetsmarknaden* [The gender segregated labor market]. Stockholm: Fritzes.

- Stahl, G., Björkman, I., Farndale, E., Morris, S. S., Paauwe, J., Stiles, P., Trevor, J., & Wright, P. (2012). Six principles of effective global talent management. *Sloan Management Review*, 53(2), 25-42. Received from <http://epub.wu.ac.at/id/eprint/3616>
- Sutherland, M. M., Torricelli, D. G., & Karg, R. F. (2002). Employer-of-choice branding for knowledge workers. *South African Journal of Business Management*, 33(4), 13-20. Received from <http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/10029035/employer-of-choice-branding-knowledge-workers>
- Wahl, A. (2010). The Impact of Gender Equality on the Management and Leadership: Reflections on change and resistance. In L.Husu, J. Hearn, A. M. Lämsä, & S. Vanhala, (Eds.), *Leadership through the Gender Lens: Women and Men in Organisations*. Hanken School of Economics, Helsinki, Finland. Received from <http://hdl.handle.net/10227/753>
- Wajcman, J. (2004). *Technofeminism*. Cambridge: Polity.
- West, C., & Fenstermaker, S. (1995). Doing difference. *Gender & Society*, 9, 8-37.
- Westberg, H. (1998). Where are women in today's workplace? In Å. Kilbom, K. Messing, & C. Bildt Thorbjörnsson (Eds.), *Women's health at work*. Stockholm: National Institute for Working Life.
- Westberg-Wohlgemuth, H. (1996). *Kvinnor och män märks. Könsmärkning av arbete—en dold lärandeprocess*, [Gendering of work and knowledge. Sexmarking—a hidden learning process]. Department of Education, University of Stockholm Ped. Inst., Arbetslivsinstitutet, 1996:1.
- Wilden, R., Gudergan, S., & Lings, I. (2010). Employer branding: Strategic implications for staff recruitment. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 26(1-2), 56-73. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02672570903577091>
- Xia, H., & Yang, L. (2010). The Employer Branding and Employee Performance. *Information Management, Innovation Management and Industrial Engineering (ICIII), 2010 International Conference on IEEE*, 536-538. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1109/ICIII.2010.609>

Notes

Note 1. From VINNOVA, The Swedish Governmental Agency for Innovation Systems.

Note 2. Organizational Behavior.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).